

P12

NADAL, ALCARAZ AND AUGER-ALIASSIME TO MISS MONTE CARLO MASTERS



P13

MDO SET TO BECOME SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTOR TO NATIONAL ECONOMY



P19

BARCODE TURNS 50 BUT ITS DAYS MIGHT BE NUMBERED



■ MUSCAT

NEW E-SERVICES ON INVEST EASY

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has launched new electronic services through Invest Easy portal in the private education sector and the municipal sector. The aim is to accelerate the finalisation of services and streamline business practice in order to improve Oman's competitiveness in the Business Climate Index. **SEE P13**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$85.11 A BARREL

Oman oil price for June delivery on Tuesday reached \$85.11, comprising a rise by \$1 from the price of Monday, which was \$84.11. The average price of Oman oil for April delivery has stabilised at \$82.23 per barrel, thus \$1.31 per barrel higher than March delivery. Brent crude was last up 0.8 per cent at \$85.57 a barrel, set for its biggest two-day rally since last April, with a gain of 7.5 per cent over Monday and Tuesday.



■ **A GLIMPSE INTO ISLAMIC FAITH**



Nestled in the heart of Oman, Nizwa is a city that exudes a sense of timelessness. It is a place where ancient traditions merge seamlessly with modernity, and where the architecture is a testament to Oman's rich cultural heritage. The city's stunning architecture draws inspiration from the country's varied history, from its days as a prosperous trading hub to its time as a powerful Islamic empire. **DETAILS ON P20**

Trump turns himself in to face charges

NEW YORK: Donald Trump turned himself in on Tuesday for a historic New York court hearing held amid tight security and a global media frenzy, as the Republican billionaire becomes the first American president in history to face criminal charges. In a spectacle playing out on live television - with rival protesters rallying outside - the hearing marks a watershed moment for the US criminal and political system, with the potential to upend the 2024 White House race in which Trump is currently the presumptive Republican nominee. The 76-year-old is expected to plead not guilty to a host of charges related to hush money paid to a star ahead of the 2016 election that brought him to power. "Seems so SURREAL - WOW, they are going to ARREST ME," Trump posted on his Truth Social app as he headed to the courthouse from Trump Tower, where he spent the night after flying from Florida. - **AFP**

Muscat chosen as city for sustainable learning

UNESCO GLOBAL NETWORK OF LEARNING CITIES

MUSCAT: Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, on Tuesday discussed with the walis of the governorate and specialists from the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, a project to include one of the wilayats of Muscat Governorate in the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities for the year 2023.

During the meeting, a visual presentation was screened highlighting the global network of learning cities, its objectives and strategy, how the basic learning city is being built, the gains that the Sultanate of Oman will achieve by joining the network, and how to join this project, in preparation for the next stage.

At the end of the meeting, the Wilayat of Muscat was chosen as a city for sustainable learning. The step aims to join the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities.

This project comes in line with the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman to upgrade national indicators in

WHAT IS A LEARNING CITY

EFFECTIVELY MOBILISES ITS RESOURCES

REVITALISES LEARNING IN FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES

FACILITATES LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

EXTENDS THE USE OF MODERN LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

ENHANCES QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING

FOSTERS A CULTURE OF LEARNING THROUGHOUT LIFE

The project is concerned with highlighting efforts related to sustainable development; such as empowering youth, promoting a culture of lifelong learning, and the economic and cultural prosperity of cities.

The Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities supports and improves the practice of lifelong learning in the world's cities by promoting policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities; forging links; fostering partnerships; providing capacity development; and developing instruments to encourage and recognise progress made in building learning cities.

The Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities is an international network consisting of cities that successfully promote lifelong learning across their communities. It includes 294 cities from all around the world that share inspiration, know-how and best practice among each other. — **ONA**

education to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all).

SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT SECURED WITH OVER HALF OF AL MOUJ MUSCAT’S JINAN ISLAND VILLAS SOLD WITHIN A WEEK

A private collection of stylish Jinan Island homes on a serene island within Oman’s word-class lifestyle destination has attracted exceptional interest from buyers

Following Al Mouj Muscat’s launch of Jinan Island last week, the private collection of 43 five and six-bedroom luxury villas in a serene island setting surrounded by a lake and centred around lush parkland has proved hugely popular and over half of the homes have sold.

Situated at the heart of Oman’s premier oceanfront lifestyle destination, Jinan Island is a chance for families to Escape the Ordinary in elegant contemporary homes, fully immersed in nature and where they have the freedom to embrace a multitude of renowned leisure amenities nearby.

Linked by a single road to the vibrant Ghadeer District, the verdantly lush Jinan Island is centrally located close to the community’s pristine beach between Al Mouj Muscat’s Gold Anchor Marina and Al Mouj Golf, the region’s leading championship course.

The residents-only neighbourhood offers three styles of villa, each a balance of luxury, style and comfort and a splendid union of indoor and outdoor living which create an oasis of calm. All are superbly appointed with grand entrances, floor to ceiling windows, walk-in wardrobes, guest suites, offices, spa-style ensuite bathrooms, garages, two kitchens and staff accommodation.

Nasser bin Masoud Al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, commented: “At Al Mouj Muscat we pay close attention to buyer aspirations and understand how to create a sense of place and belonging and we are delighted that this has been rewarded with such a positive response.”

“Jinan Island captures the extraordinary through beautiful homes in an exclusive island setting where every detail has been designed to elevate every moment of everyday modern family life.”

“In addition to inspiring the senses, Jinan Island has inspired record buyer interest by offering a unique lifestyle opportunity where every family member can Escape the Ordinary, connected to nature and to a community where life can be enjoyed at its best.”

The collection comprises 18 six-bedroom **Alaya Villas**, offering over 900 sqm of space and mesmerizing views across the lake. Set over three floors, there is an elevator and a stunning top floor penthouse suite plus covered parking for up to four cars. Unique to Alaya is a separate Zen Garden Suite which set overlooking the swimming pool, can be used as an entertainment, exercise or workspace.

The eight **Ayana** style homes have six-bedrooms, set over two floors, and have sublime lake views. They have over 606 sqm of space, and exclusive elements including a gym, parking for up to three cars plus driver’s accommodation.

Completing the collection are 17 five-bedroom **Amara Villas**. Overlooking the island’s verdantly landscaped central park, each offer over 427 sqm of space plus parking for up to three cars and driver’s accommodation.



There is strong demand for homes at Al Mouj Muscat, with over 8,000 residents currently calling the dynamic leisure and lifestyle location home. Established in 2006, Al Mouj Muscat was Oman’s first integrated tourism complex, a joint venture partnership between OMRAN, Tanmia and Majid Al Futtaim and it has redefined urban living in the region. It now attracts 4.9 million visitors a year to its premium sporting, entertainment and tourism amenities, including luxury hotels, 85 shops and restaurants, a World 100 golf course, a marina with a host of waterside eateries and its 2km stretch of sandy beach.



Gen Numani receives ambassadors of Italy, Turkey



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Tuesday Pierluigi D'Elia, Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and areas of joint cooperation between the

two countries. Gen Al Numani wished the ambassador success in his new duties as ambassador of his country to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Italian ambassador commended the advanced relations binding Oman with Italy and then the two sides also exchanged conversations on



various matters of mutual interest.

Gen Al Numani also received in his office Muhammet Hekimoğlu, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Sultanate of Oman.

Gen Al Numani underlined the depth of the historical bilateral relations binding the two countries and the development

they witnessed in many areas, thanks to the interest accorded by the leaderships of the two countries.

He wished the ambassador success in his new duties as ambassador of his country to the Sultanate of Oman. They also touched on several matters of common interest. — ONA

Three arrested for robbery in N Batinah

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Three people have been arrested for stealing from several shops in North Batinah governorate, according to the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

In a statement, ROP said, 'The North Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested three people on charges of stealing from several shops in the wilayat of Suwaiq in North Batinah.'

ROP has called on shop owners and commercial establishments to install monitoring and alarm devices and take preventive measures to secure their properties.



'Community iftars foster social integration'



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

The Hyderabad Community, which has been holding its annual iftar at clock tower for over 2 decades now, is all set to have another popular public event this year on April 7.

Since the formation of the Indian Social Club (ISC) Deccani Wing, the wing has taken the lead and has been organising the event for thousands to attend the gathering. This time around preparations are on to make it

special one as it is returning after three years.

Ismail Baig, Co-Convener of Deccani Wing, said, "The community iftars are great ways to foster social integration amongst various communities fasting in Ramadhan who reside in the Sultanate of Oman. It's a happy feeling to be able to serve as well as create a sense of togetherness and unity amongst community members in Oman."

"ISC Deccani Wing has ensured continuous organisation of the event except for last three years due to the pandemic," he added.

Baig said this year, the gathering expects over 3,500 people. "Over 100 volunteers will be working and serving attendees, ensuring that the event goes well and our guests feel at home and comfortable," he said.

Baig informed that the wing gets all possible support from Muscat Municipality to conduct of the event. "There will also be separate arrangements for ladies and families," he said.

Three students seriously injured in school bus mishap

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Three students were seriously injured and 13 others suffered light injuries when a student bus collided with another vehicle in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen in the Ghubra Tam area.

According to the Royal Oman Police (ROP), passengers in both vehicles were injured. The Directorate General of Education in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate issued a statement saying the accident resulted in three serious injuries and 13 light injuries.

'With regards to the collision that occurred on Tuesday morning, April 4, 2023, between a vehicle and a minibus with students from a school in the Dima W'attayeen, the directorate



would like to clarify that the accident resulted in three serious injuries and 13 light injuries, according to the medical report,' the statement said.

It added that the injured were transferred to the hospital, and their health condition is being monitored. 'In this regard, the Directorate affirms its keenness in following up on everything related to the safety of the children.'

Detailed weather bulletins for governorates

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman Meteorology has started providing special weather bulletins for each governorate.

Starting on Tuesday, the bulletin will include detailed weather forecasts for Wednesday and the next two days.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is currently working on a complete revamp of the early warning system under a three-year plan which will be completed by 2025-26.

Under the new system, CAA will be able to provide accurate and localised advisories, which will save human lives and minimise damages to properties, Naif al Abri, Chairman of CAA, told the Observer.

While a new automatic meteorological station has been established in Barka, the new early warning project

has been supported by the directives of His Majesty the Sultan with RO 8 million.

Upgrades to the early warning system will help in flood forecasting, including drawing the map of flowing wadis seven to eight hours in advance.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Khaduri, Director-General, Oman Meteorology, said the Muzn programme seeks to upgrade the early warning system, train the national human resources technically and scientifically, and raise the efficiency and quality of warnings, alerts, meteorological services and early warning.

The programme includes the upgrading of the satellite system, the numerical forecast system, the wadis flood forecasting project and the installation of the Muscat radar, which is expected to be completed in May.

MUTTRAH SOUQ ALL SET FOR QARANQASHO

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Muttrah Souq is all set to welcome the increasing number of families just before the Qaranqasho, which will be held on Wednesday.

Hundreds of shops inside this historic market are lit in beautiful, Arabic lanterns (fanoos) at night while the colourful home decors and glitters illuminate the premises during the day.

"We are hopeful of receiving more children just prior to the Qaranqasho and we have loaded our shops with the colourful glitters, dresses and other festival decorations aimed predominantly at the children as Qaranqasho is meant for them," Abdulazeez, a shopkeeper spoke to the Observer.

Qaranqasho is a delightful social tradition usually celebrated in the middle of the holy month of Ramadhan as a means of encouraging the children who



have been fasting from the beginning of the holy month. Children go out after iftar and Maghrib prayer in organised groups chanting popular songs related to this beautiful tradition.

"Apart from the days before the two Eid occasions, Qaranqasho is a major attraction for our customers as we get families in large numbers. We know what the children and adults need for

this occasion and we fill our shops with just that days before the Qaranqasho," another expatriate shopper said.

By and large, Qaranqasho is deemed to be an enhancement



to social communication while teaching children good manners as they go out in groups and socialise with each other. "The Qaranqasho is a tradition bequeathed from generations

since times immemorial. Our parents and grandparents took part in it and we are happy to see our children too uphold our traditional values," Badr al Rawahi, a retired official said.



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OCCI debates banking sector’s role in streamlining investments

KHALIL AL KALBANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organised its first Ramadhan evening under the title “The importance of the banking sector in enhancing and facilitating investment through funding,” on Tuesday.

The forum aimed at introducing the role played by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) as a regulator of the banking system and its importance in streamlining investment by providing funding. It also discussed challenges and drawbacks facing business people when they need to fund their investments.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, said, “The OCCI’s first Ramadhan evening aimed to debate the importance of the banking sector and its role in boosting the national economy. During the dialogue session, many initiatives of the Central Bank of Oman were explained and we are sure that it will benefit the financial and private sectors especially with the introduction of new financial tools and digital payment technology which is widely used by the private sector. We are confident that the financial sector is strong and will continue to be



strong.”

Speaking about the many challenges facing the private sector, the OCCI chairman said: “There are many challenges facing the private sector, the most important among them is

the provision of liquidity and meeting the requirements set by some commercial banks. We are involved in discussions with the Central Bank of Oman as well as commercial banks to facilitate procedures and improve the

business environment.”

Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), said: “The evening aimed to explain all that may enable the private sector and listen to different opinions to identify applicable ideas. There are many future aspirations mostly based on technology and financial inclusion and ways of overcoming obstacles and challenges faced by the private sector particularly the small and medium enterprises SMEs. It also aimed to help SMEs to access financing in an easy and better manner.”

The CBO seeks to strike a balance between supply and demand for currency by avoiding an increase in currency in circulation to avoid higher inflation rates and a decrease in money supply to avoid restricting economic growth, the chairman of the CBO said, indicating that the most suitable type of monetary policy is determined according to the circumstances and the objectives of the monetary authority. He stressed that the expansionary monetary policy is applied during economic recession with the aim of stimulating the economy whereas deflationary monetary policy is seen in the event of inflationary pressures to control the prices.

Transport ministry unveils 8 on-demand taxi apps



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced 8 applications for licensed on-demand taxis. Once the apps meet the ministry’s regulations, they can process immediate orders or advance bookings. The step comes as part of the ministry’s efforts to regulate the activity of taxis in Oman.

The licenses are being endorsed for several taxi services, including Otayi, Tasleem, Ubar, Marhaba, TM DONE, Hala Taxi, Tanweel

and Sayidati (for women).

On-demand taxi smart apps provide for tracking and monitoring of the taxi tour at fixed prices determined prior to the start of the trip. They ensure privacy and security for the user and allow for communication with the driver and cancellation of the trip’s order. The apps cover basic trips, economy trips and monthly contracts, as well as an independent system for making taxi orders exclusive to establishments and companies. — ONA

Oman’s telecom sector in for a major leap

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman’s IT infrastructure and telecommunications sectors are in for a major leap by 2026 as the ICT spending in the Sultanate of Oman is set to reach \$3.23 billion in 2023 and \$3.49 billion by 2026.

According to the predictions released by International Data Corporation (IDC), ICT spending in the Sultanate is to grow from \$1.30 billion in 2023 to \$1.42 billion in 2026.

This predictions further aligns Oman’s endeavour to build ICT infrastructure to reduce the digital divide through its National Broadband Strategy, which envisions providing broadband service to more than 90 per cent of urban areas by 2030.

“In order for the organisations in Oman to succeed in new market



environments, they will need to invest in strengthening their digital resiliency so they are better positioned as conditions continue to change and this will help them navigate storms of disruption,” says Jyoti Lalchandani, IDC’s group vice-president and regional managing director for the META region.

International Data Corporation (IDC) is the premier global provider of market intelligence,



advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications and consumer technology markets.

Announcing the regional forecasts, the report further says that regardless of what the economy would be over the coming 12 months, the implementation of further digitalisation in critical areas such as customer experience, operations and financial management, together

with a more rapid shift to a ‘digital business’ approach will be key to separating the thrivers from the survivors.

“To this end, we expect to see digital transformation spending as a share of overall IT spending continue to grow, reaching \$1.42 billion in 2026, up from \$1.30 billion in 2023,” Lalchandani said.

The report further elucidates that spending on Enterprise IT in Oman will reach \$0.55 billion and consumer spending will reach \$0.70 billion in 2023.

“In a digital-first economy, where an enterprise’s competitiveness is tied to its digital business model, leaders will avoid wholesale cutbacks in tech. Further, new tactics will be employed as tech leaders seek to realise maximum business value from their tech investments,” the report substantiates.

Italian military official visits NDC, MSC

MUSCAT: Brigadier General Alessandro Grassano, Deputy Chief of Military Policy and Planning of the Italian Republic, and his accompanying delegation, visited the National Defence College (NDC) in the Academy for Strategic and Defense Studies at Bait Al Falaj on Tuesday.

Upon the guests’ arrival at the NDC, the guest was greeted by Brigadier Abdullah bin Hamad al Harthy, Assistant Commandant of the NDC.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college’s facilities and equipment, as well as its various departments and halls designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with the best educational systems, training aids

and multi-purpose electronic network systems. They also listened to a briefing on the NDC and its academic facilities and equipment according to the latest specifications.

The guest also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

Upon his arrival at the centre, he was greeted by the Acting Head of the MSC.

Vice-President of International Relations of Italy was briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in maintaining the safety of the maritime environment. He also toured the centre’s facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies that are used in carrying out its national duties.

— ONA



Cancer prevention is the focus too: SQCCRC

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCRC) is continuously strengthening its capacity and capability to become the leading centre of fighting cancer in Oman. One of its other objectives is to prevent cancer.

As a step towards prevention, the SQCCRC, which has a multidisciplinary team while dealing with care for each patient, also offers screening of patients for genetic mutations. This is important for the family members of the patient.

“There are some patients who have genetic mutations, which we find during evaluation,” said

Dr Zahid al Mandhari, Senior Consultant, Radiation Oncologist at SQCCRC.

“Their family members are also at risk, for example, of developing colon cancer. So we take good care of these particular families. We have a unique opportunity to prevent cancer completely,” explained Dr Al Mandhari.

“We perform colonoscopy procedures and follow up with the patients when we detect and identify these cancers early. One can prevent them from happening,” noted Dr Al Mandhari.

The centre also has a one stop shop for breast cancer. “If there are any suspicious lumps, they can come here to get a mammogram, examination, biopsy, initial pathology report etc. They go



knowing ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in a single day,” said the radiation oncologist. They coordinate this service with the health centres in various governorates of Oman.

Breast cancer is the leading

cancer amongst women followed by thyroid cancer and amongst men it is prostate cancer. The centre has been treating 4,000 to 5,000 patients each year. Treatment is available for both citizens as well

as residents.

“We also do this for gynaecological malignancy also. They have similar procedures for patients who have suspicious lesions in the cervix. So when patients come to us, we go through the criteria and screen them to detect if it is cancer or not,” he noted.

Dr Al Mandhari said, “There is a referral portal that we have distributed to all the government and private hospitals. All they need to do is go through the portal and a referral is generated and received by our team. We give the appointment immediately.”

However, there is one condition. Cancer needs comprehensive treatment, so there is a need to look at a patient’s previous treatment.

“Some patients are already going through good treatment at the other hospitals. So when we start with that individual we are again starting from the scratch and that could be unfair on other patients who are waiting to start their treatment while others have already begun their process,” he said.

“So we try not to interfere with patients who already have an ongoing treatment. It takes two hours of evaluation for a new patient whereas for follow-up it is 15 to 30 minutes. So generally the centre does not accept patients who are on treatment elsewhere, but at the same time if they need specialised services the centre is ready to accept the patients,” he added.



CHILDREN WAIT TO GO BONKERS WITH ‘QARANQASHO’

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

Qaranqasho, a revered tradition among locals and celebrated by expatriates too, is a special day on the 14th night of the holy month of Ramadhan. This year, the day will be celebrated on Wednesday evening.

On the day, children go out in groups after iftar and Maghrib prayers singing popular songs about this beautiful tradition.

“Qaranqasho is an occasion eagerly awaited by children as well as adults who make the necessary preparations. Preparations start several days prior. Children look forward to wearing new clothes on the day,” said Obaid al Khaldi, 68-year-old Muscat resident, who has seen this tradition since his childhood.

According to Khaldi, the

tradition of Qaranqasho has continued since ancient times. “Our parents and grandparents took part in it and children today are still keen to participate,” he said.

Dressed in newly purchased traditional costumes and carrying baskets, groups of children excitedly visited homes in their neighbourhood on Saturday evening. Adults greeted them with sweets, nuts and money that brought smiles to the faces of the children. Appreciating their generosity, the children sang special songs of Qaranqasho.

“The tradition encourages social communication. It also helps children learn proper conduct and etiquette as they go out and socialise with their peers,” said Shaikha al Touqi, a resident of Al Amerat.

“During the outing, each group has a leader who assigns roles to



members and decides the group’s route etc” she said.

Unlike the last two years when Qaranqasho was limited to the period between iftar and Taraweeh prayers, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year the day will be celebrated throughout the country

in all households continuing until midnight.

Many of the Sultanate of Oman’s governorates celebrate Qaranqasho – the most common name for the event. In some others, including some GCC countries, it is called Garg’e’an.

Qaranqasho is a revered tradition among locals and is celebrated by expatriates too. Seeing their enthusiasm, many parents join the children in the fun too.

On the day, gifts to children vary according to their socio-economic status and wishes. Houses compete with one another to give the best to the children, who are delighted to show their parents the gifts they receive in this beautiful Ramadhan ceremony.

Earlier, Qaranqasho was limited to money and dates, but now the gifts include candy, nuts and small games, in addition to money.

Social institutions, associations and commercial centres have also started participating in the revival of Qaranqasho by hosting the event and contributing to make children and participants happy.



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Amsterdam's Schiphol to go ahead with flight cap

AMSTERDAM: In an about-face, Amsterdam's Schiphol airport will go ahead with a controversial flight cap, the operator announced on Tuesday.

Night flights will be phased out by the end of 2025 at the latest, and private jets are also to be banned, leading to "quieter, cleaner and better aviation," Schiphol said.

Aircraft that make a lot of noise, such as the Boeing 747 jumbo jet, are also to be gradually banned.

Environmental groups and local residents welcomed the announcement. Airlines and tour operators, on the other hand, were critical.

Aviation transcends the boundaries of residents, nature and climate, said Greenpeace's Maarten de Zeeuw. He called the plan to ban private jets a positive step. "This type of traffic is shameless in times of the climate crisis and really doesn't work any more." Dutch flagship carrier KLM, which is based in Schiphol, reacted with surprise. "We would like to come together as a sector with further measures and reduce CO2 emissions and noise pollution," it said in a statement. — dpa

First woman, Black astronaut to make 2024 flight around Moon

HOUSTON: Nasa unveiled the crew on Tuesday for its first human mission to the Moon in more than 50 years — including the first woman and Black man to voyage into deep space.

Christina Koch, a Nasa astronaut who holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, will be a mission specialist on next year's Artemis II flight around the Moon.

Nasa's Victor Glover, a naval aviator, will pilot the Orion spacecraft that circles the Moon in November 2024, becoming the first Black man to take part in a lunar mission.

Rounding out the crew are veteran Nasa astronaut Reid Wiseman, 47, the mission commander, and Jeremy Hansen, also 47, a former fighter pilot now with the Canadian Space Agency.

The three Americans and one Canadian will become the first astronauts to venture that deep into space since the historic Apollo missions ended in 1972.

The Artemis II flight is a prelude to returning humans to the Moon for the first time in a half century and an eventual mission to Mars.

The three American astronauts have all spent time on the International Space Station (ISS) while Hansen, the Canadian mission specialist, will be making



Christina Koch, Victor Glover, Reid Wiseman and Jeremy Hansen.

his first space flight.

The four astronauts, dressed in blue flight suits, were introduced by Nasa administrator Bill Nelson at an event at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"The largest, most powerful rocket in the world is going to propel them onward and upward into the heavens," Nelson said.

Koch, 44, an electrical engineer,

spent a record 11 consecutive months in space and took part in the first all-female spacewalks while on the ISS. "Am I excited?" Koch said. "Absolutely!"

The 46-year-old Glover said Artemis II is "more than a mission to the Moon and back." The first Artemis flight wrapped up in December with an uncrewed Orion capsule returning safely

to Earth after a 25-day journey around the Moon.

During the trip around Earth's orbiting satellite and back, Orion logged well over a million miles (1.6 million kilometres) and went farther from Earth than any previous habitable spacecraft.

Only 12 people — all of them white men — have set foot on the Moon. — AFP

Pakistan court orders provincial vote on May 15

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered on Tuesday that elections in two provinces should go ahead by May 15 despite government reluctance to hold the votes now as it struggles with an economic crisis and a political challenge from the opposition.

Imran Khan has been pushing for assembly elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces as part of a campaign to force an early general election that he has waged since being forced from office a year ago after losing a vote of confidence.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has rejected Khan's call for an early general election and his government had backed an election commission delay in the votes in the two provinces to October 8. The commission cited a lack of resources and the government agreed saying it was not possible to organise the provincial elections while the country was struggling with an economic crisis and with a general election due around early October anyway.

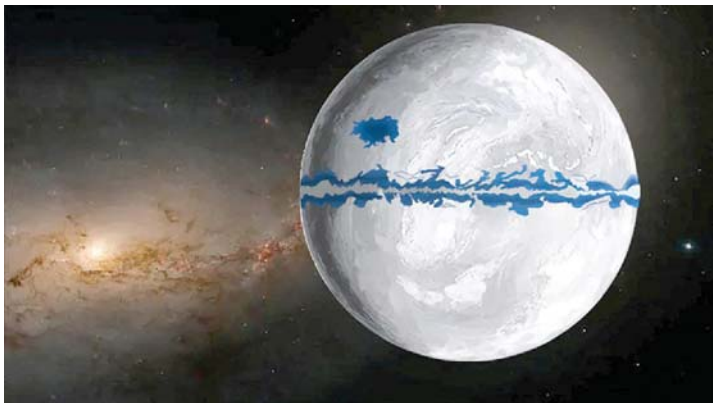
But the Supreme Court ruled that the delay was illegal and voting in the two provinces should be held between April 30 and May 15. — AFP

‘Snowball Earth’ might have been rather slushy: Study

TOKYO: Millions of years ago, the Earth was so cold that most of its surface was covered in ice. But that hard freeze might have been slushier than once thought.

The longstanding "Snowball Earth" theory imagines our world as seen from space, a perfect sphere with ice covering land and sea alike. It draws on clues including deposits made by glaciers near the Equator. For ice to have extended that far from the poles suggests much of our planet was once frozen.

But there has long been speculation about just how complete the cover was, with some convinced that areas of slush or open ocean remained, allowing oxygen to penetrate and creating incubators for life. New research published on Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications



An illustration shows Earth during the Marinoan Ice Age, 651-635 million years ago, when ice sheets covered most of the planet's surface.

adds weight to that theory, and suggests these oases in the tundra might have existed much further north than previously suspected.

The evidence comes from a thin layer of black shale that would have been under the sea during the Marinoan ice age, which began around 650 million years ago.

The shale in the Nantuo

Formation in southern China acts as a sort of archive for the conditions in oceans at the time. By analysing levels of elements such as iron, and the presence of nitrogen, scientists can infer whether oxygen was penetrating the ocean and nitrogen was being produced by lifeforms.

"We found evidence of ice-free conditions at mid-

northern paleolatitudes (locations before continental drift)," Huyue Song, who helped lead the research, said.

"Until now, ice-free areas had been identified only in peri-equatorial regions."

Instead of a "narrow ice-free belt" across the middle of the Earth, "patchy ice-free areas may have existed much more widely," added Song, a professor at the China University of Geosciences, Wuhan.

The findings build on other research at sites ranging from Australia to Brazil that suggest life was able to cling on in pockets while most of Earth was in deep freeze.

These incubators may even have helped spur "a rapid rebound of the biosphere" at the end of the ice age, the research published on Tuesday argues. — AFP

■ CLOSER TO GOD



Boys recite Quran verses from wooden boards in a mosque during Ramadhan, in Tripoli, Libya, on Tuesday. — Reuters



Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos Private School

Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos PVT School is currently seeking teachers to fill the following vacancies for the academic year 2023/2024:

1) Female English Teacher

2) Female Chemistry Teacher

3) Female Math Teacher (5-10)

4) Female Science Teacher for Primary Classes

Requirements: candidates must have

- ❖ B.A. in the subject
- ❖ Bachelor of Education
- ❖ Minimum 3 years of experience
- ❖ Must be resident in Oman
- ❖ Minimum score 6 in IELTS

Please submit your CVs via E-mail:
info@msqps.edu.om or schooolhr@gmail.com

Note: CVs from outside Oman will not be considered



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
34/2022	Building Works - Salalah	First and Above	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	165/- RO
05/2023	Replacement Of Water Distribution Network at Masira Airbase	First and Above	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	250/- RO
07/2023	Maintenance works (Gas turbine) - MAM	Excellent & Specialize in Electromechanical works (Gas turbine)	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	750/- RO
08/2023	Building works - MAM	First and Above	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	330/- RO
09/2023	Electromechanical works - (RO Plant) - WUDAM	First and Above - specialized in Electromechanical works (RO Plant)	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	100/- RO
10/2023	Design and Build of ALMAZYUNAH AIRSTRIP	Excellent	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	1,500/- RO
11/2023	Building works - Shafaa	First and Above	13 April 2023	15 th May 2023	360/- RO

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 1. Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 2. Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 3. Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - A. Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill3**)
 - B. Technical files.
 4. Confirmation of site visit.
 5. All addendums and circulars.
 6. List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 7. List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 8. Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 9. Financial Statement for the last Three years.



New Israeli strike on Syria kills two civilians

DAMASCUS: An Israeli air strike on Tuesday killed two Syrian civilians, state media reported, the fourth such attack on government-held areas of the war-torn country in less than a week.

Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on Syria including army positions.

“The Israeli enemy carried out an air strike” shortly after midnight, resulting “in the death of two civilians”, Syrian state news agency SANA reported, quoting a military source.

The attack came from the direction of “the occupied Syrian Golan, targeting some points in the vicinity of Damascus and the southern region”, it said, adding Syria’s air defences intercepted most of the missiles.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor gave the same civilian death toll, director Rami Abdel Rahman added.

Israel fired “barrages of missiles targeting military areas and regime air defence,” said the Observatory.



Flares of Syrian air defence rockets are seen in the sky of Damascus early on April 4. – AFP

An Israeli missile targeted a radar in the countryside of Sweida, while another hit a glass factory in the Al-Kiswah area of the Damascus countryside, killing the

two civilians, it said.

The monitor had earlier said the missiles also targeted the vicinity of Damascus International Airport and an Iranian complex

near the Sayyida Zeinab area, with Syria’s air defences intercepting at least two missiles. Syria’s foreign ministry condemned the strike.

“Syria warns Israel and its

sponsors once again of the dangers of these aggressive policies which push the region towards total escalation and a new phase of insecurity and instability,” it said in

a statement.

Thousands of Iranians on Tuesday attended a funeral procession in Tehran for two Revolutionary Guards killed in Israeli strikes in Syria last week.

In Friday’s aerial assault, Israeli missiles targeted positions near Damascus, Syrian state media had reported, a day after Israeli strikes near the capital wounded two Syrian soldiers, according to the defence ministry.

On Sunday, two fighters were killed in an Israeli air strike on targets in Syria, according to the Observatory, with SANA reporting five Syrian soldiers wounded in the assault near the western city of Homs. The same day, a rare car bombing rocked Damascus, with no deaths reported and no side claiming responsibility.

Meanwhile, two Israeli soldiers were wounded in a stabbing attack in central Israel on Tuesday and the suspected assailant arrested, police and medics said. A suspect was restrained by civilians and then arrested. — AFP

Sikkim avalanche kills seven in India’s Himalayas

GUWAHATI: An avalanche killed at least seven tourists in India’s Himalayan state of Sikkim near a mountain pass to the Chinese region of Tibet, with several more people feared trapped, the Indian army said.

The army said five to six vehicles carrying up to 30 tourists to the strategically located Nathu La pass between Sikkim and Tibet were feared to have been stuck under the snow when the avalanche hit.

“We are yet to ascertain how many people are still trapped. 17 people have been rescued, out of which 8 are very critical and have been moved to a hospital,” senior police official Tenzing Loden Lepcha said.

The incident took place at 11:30 am the army statement said. Rescue officials earlier said they feared at least 70 people were under the snow at the site, some 40 km from the state capital Gangtok.

Rescue operations were ongoing, Loden Lepcha said, adding that when the avalanche hit, people were taking photographs near a stream. Rescue workers dug with shovels near a waterfall, images released by India’s ministry of defence showed.

Yellow heavy machinery worked to clear the churned up snow left



Rescue team members search for survivors after an avalanche in the northeastern state of Sikkim, India.

– Reuters

by the avalanche.

An additional 350 stranded tourists and 80 vehicles were rescued after the snow was cleared from the road, the army statement said.

Thousands of tourists flock to Sikkim every year, also known as the “Land of Mystic Splendour”, located below Mount Khangchendzonga, also known as Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world.

Nathu La serves as a route for the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in China, considered one of the holiest pilgrimages in Hinduism. — Reuters

Baghdad, Erbil sign deal to restart northern oil exports

BAGHDAD: Iraq’s federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) signed a deal to restart northern oil exports through Turkiye on Tuesday, official sources said.

A formal request has been sent to Turkiye to restart oil exports through an Iraq-Turkiye pipeline and “in the next few hours pumping will resume,” a Baghdad government official said.

Turkiye stopped pumping about 450,000 b/d of Iraqi crude through a pipeline from the Fish-Khabur border area to its Ceyhan port on March 25 after Iraq won an arbitration case.

Although the flows account for about 0.5 per cent of global oil supply, the stoppage forced oil firms in the region to halt output or move production into rapidly-filling storage tanks, and helped boost oil prices last week to



Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani holds a joint news conference with his Kurdish counterpart Masrour Barzani in Baghdad. – Reuters

nearly \$80/bbl.

KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani travelled to Baghdad earlier on Tuesday to finalise the agreement with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al Sudani.

A source familiar with oil exports from the region, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that pipeline operators have yet to receive an indication to restart flows.

Under the deal, Iraq’s state-owned marketing company SOMO will have the authority to market and export KRG oil and the revenues will be deposited in an account at the Iraqi Central Bank under the control of the KRG, two Iraqi officials said.

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Baghdad will have access to audit the account.

Barzani is also set to hold talks with Sudani over a separate oil and gas dispute that has dragged on for nearly two decades. “Everyone must abide by this agreement and implement it,” al Sudani said in a joint news briefing with Barzani.

He said the deal was temporary until the budget law passes in parliament, which he said “will cover all obligations and solve all problems.” — Reuters



Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign : 05/04/2023
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : Welding to the joint of the Fender Apron

Production Period	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
17 Nov ,2020 to 12 Oct ,2021	TOYOTA	RAIZE	MHKAA1BA0NJ014078 to MHKAB1BA5NJ001985	8

Note: Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges, are affected and/or sold in your country.

Description:
We have been reported from Daihatsu that in the fender apron of the subject vehicles (which are OEM from Daihatsu), due to improper welding control in the welding process, there is a possibility that the joining portion may not have a sufficient strength. If the vehicle rides over a step, such as an indented road surface, during highway driving conditions, the welded portion could separate, and in the worst case, the vehicle control could be loss.

Procedure:
As per “Technical instruction” advised by TMC.

For More Information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc from 05/04/2023.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs after 05/04/2023.



Recall/Special Service Campaign



Date of Campaign : 05/04/2023
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign
Product Description : Fr Seat back frame modification

Production Period	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
6 Dec ,2019 through 17Jun ,2021	TOYOTA	HIGHLANDER	5TDLB3CH0LS000186 to 5TDLB3CHXMS050577	267

Note: Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges, are affected and/or sold in your country.

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with front seats which are constructed with a certain seat-back frame. Due to wearing of the forming dies and insufficient inspection instructions, certain specific points on the seat-back frames were not manufactured with the minimum radius criteria. In this condition, these seat-back frames do not comply with ECE UNR17 and certain regulation.

Procedure:
As per “Technical instruction” advised by TMC.

For More Information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc from 05/04/2023.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs after 05/04/2023



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In brief

■ VOORSCHOTEN



DOZENS HURT AS NETHERLANDS TRAIN CRASHES

A Dutch passenger train rammed into a maintenance crane that stood on the railway tracks early on Tuesday near The Hague, killing the equipment operator and injuring dozens of passengers as the train derailed.

The maintenance work was planned and standard, but “we have no idea how the crane got on the track which was still open for traffic,” John Voppen, the CEO of railway infrastructure firm Pro-Rail, told a news conference.

The front carriage of the night train from Leiden city to The Hague — one of the Netherlands’ busiest routes — hit the crane and derailed, ploughing into a field by the village of Voorschoten, emergency services said.

A second carriage lay on its side. The double-decker train’s windows were smashed.

■ MUNICH



GERMANS EAT 10KG OF CHOCOLATE

Despite last year’s high inflation and weaker economy, German chocolate manufacturers increased their production by 1.7 per cent up to 1.2 million tonnes, the German Confectionery Industry Association (BDSI) based in Bonn reported on Tuesday.

Per capita consumption in Germany has slightly increased to an estimated 9.56 kilograms.

Anticipating Easter, each citizen is expected to eat more than one chocolate bunny, with the industry producing 108 million chocolate bunnies for sale in Germany.

But the confectionery industry has also not been exempt from inflation, which is noticeable in the value of chocolate goods produced in Germany rising faster than production, by 4.5 per cent to around \$6.7 billion. Especially exports increased strongly. Debates around healthy diets have not affected the country’s appetite for chocolate.

■ LONDON



UK GOVT SETS OUT NEW WATER PLAN

Britain on Tuesday announced a plan to protect water supplies, amid a long-running scandal over privatised water firms pumping raw sewage into rivers and onto seashores.

The plan comes amid a continuing pollution scandal, which saw waste water discharges spark the closure of a number of UK beaches at the height of the heat-wave last summer. The Conservative government said its proposals would “clean up our waters and ensure a plentiful supply for the future.”

The “Plan for Water” will seek more investment from water companies, stronger regulation and tougher fines for polluters, it added. The initiative includes a consultation on a ban on wet wipes containing plastic, which are blamed for causing sewer blockages when flushed down the toilet.

Trump faces day in court, a first in US

NEW YORK: Donald Trump, the ex-president and front-runner for the Republican nomination in 2024, will appear in court on Tuesday to be fingerprinted, photographed and formally charged in a watershed moment ahead of next year’s presidential election.

Indicted last week, Trump is the first sitting or former president to face criminal charges, over a case involving a 2016 hush-money payment to Stormy Daniels. He has said he is innocent and is due to plead not guilty. Trump, 76, will turn himself in on Tuesday amid tight security and street protests.

“We have to take back our Country and, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” Trump wrote on social media shortly after arriving in New York from Florida on Monday.

The arraignment, where Trump will be in court to hear charges and have a chance to enter a plea, was planned for 2:15 p.m. (1815 GMT) on Tuesday.

The specific charges reached by a grand jury are due to be disclosed on Tuesday. Yahoo News late on Monday said Trump would face 34 felony counts for falsification of business records. Any trial is at least more than a year away, legal experts said.

Judge Juan Merchan late on Monday ruled that five photographers will be admitted before the arraignment starts to take pictures for several minutes. Trump’s lawyers had urged him to keep them out, arguing they would worsen “an already almost circus-like atmosphere.”

The District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, who led the investigation, will give a news conference afterwards. Trump and his allies have portrayed the case as politically motivated.

Trump will return to Florida and deliver remarks from his Mar-a-Lago resort at 8:15 p.m. on Tuesday (0015 GMT on Wednesday), his office said.

Police over the weekend began erecting barricades near Trump Tower — where Trump stayed on Monday — and the Manhattan Criminal Court building, with demonstrations expected at both sites on Tuesday.

Mayor Eric Adams warned potential rabble-rousers to behave.

“Our message is clear and simple: Control yourselves. New York City is our home, not a playground for your misplaced anger,” he told reporters. President Joe Biden, a Democrat who is widely expected to seek re-election and face a potential rematch against Trump, said he had faith in the New York police. — **Reuters**



A supporter of Donald Trump waits outside the Trump Tower in New York City, US, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

Finland becomes 31st Nato member as Russia rages



Finnish Foreign Affairs Minister Pekka Haavisto (L) hands over Finland’s accession to Nato documents to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (R) and Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, during a joining ceremony at the Nato headquarters in Brussels, on Tuesday. — **AFP**

BRUSSELS: Finland becomes the 31st member of Nato on Tuesday, in a historic shift that drew an angry warning of “countermeasures” from the Kremlin.

Moscow’s all-out war on Ukraine last year upended Europe’s security landscape and prompted Finland — and its neighbour Sweden — to drop decades of military non-alignment.

“Not so many years ago we thought it was unthinkable that Finland would become a member. Now they will be a fully-fledged member of our alliance and that is truly historic,” Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

“We are removing the room for miscalculation in Moscow about Nato’s readiness to protect Finland, and that makes Finland safer.”

Finnish Defence Minister Antti Kaikkonen called it “a win-win situation” ahead of the choreographed final formalities before Finland’s blue-and-white flag can be hoisted in front of Nato’s headquarters.

But Moscow decried the move as an “assault” on Russia’s security and national interests.

“This forces us to take countermeasures... in tactical and strategic terms,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Joining Nato places Finland under the alliance’s Article Five, the collective defence pledge that an attack on one member “shall be considered an attack against them all”.

This was the guarantee Finnish leaders decided they needed as they watched Russian President Vladimir

Putin’s assault on Ukraine. “I’m tempted to say this is maybe the one thing we can thank Mr Putin for, because he once again here has precipitated something he claims to want to prevent by Russia’s war,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Invaded by its giant neighbour, the Soviet Union, in 1939, Finland — which has a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia — stayed out of Nato throughout the Cold War.

Now its membership brings a potent military into the alliance with a wartime strength of 280,000 and one of Europe’s largest artillery arsenals.

Its strategic location bolsters Nato’s defences on a border running from the vulnerable Baltic states to the increasingly competitive Arctic.

Senior Nato military commander Admiral Rob Bauer said that Finland had so far not requested its new allies station troops on its soil. Nato officials say the war in Ukraine has sapped Moscow’s forces, but the alliance is monitoring how Russia responds to gauge its future steps.

Allies Turkey and Hungary, for different reasons of their own, delayed Finland’s bid to come under the Nato umbrella — and Stockholm’s progress remains blocked. But last week, the Turkish parliament voted to clear Finland’s final hurdle. Completing the ratification in well under a year still makes this the fastest membership process in the alliance’s recent history.

Nato was created as a

counterweight to the Soviet Union at the onset of the Cold War era that began immediately after the Allies defeated Nazi Germany.

Finland’s arrival nevertheless remains a bittersweet moment for the alliance as the hope had been for Sweden to come on board at the same time.

Budapest and Ankara remain the holdouts after belatedly agreeing to waver through Helsinki’s bid.

Sweden has upset Hungary’s leader Viktor Orban — one of Putin’s closest allies in Europe — by expressing alarm over the rule of law in Hungary.

It has also angered Turkey by refusing to extradite dozens of suspects that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan links to a failed 2016 coup attempt and a decades-long Kurdish independence struggle.

Nato diplomats hope Erdogan will become more amenable if he weathers elections next month and that Sweden will join before a Nato summit in Vilnius this July.

Ukraine is also pushing for eventual Nato membership, but Western diplomats say that still remains a distant prospect.

“There is no better strategic solution to ensuring strategic security in the Euro Atlantic region than the membership of Ukraine in the alliance,” Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said.

Nato members in the meantime insist they are focused on providing Ukraine with the weaponry and support it needs to win the war with Russia. — **AFP**

World making ‘huge mistake’ not funding new TB vaccines: Gates

LONDON: A lack of funding could delay late-stage trials of the first new vaccine against tuberculosis for more than a century, warned Bill Gates, whose foundation is backing the development of the shot.

The Microsoft co-founder turned philanthropist said there were a raft of promising innovations in the fight against TB, the world’s biggest infectious disease killer, but that more funding was essential.

“The failure to fund these things... like we can’t go full speed ahead on these vaccine trials — that’s a huge mistake,” he said in an interview.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest funder of the battle against TB, he said,

and the work on the M72/AS01 vaccine, originally developed by GSK (GSK.L) and the Gates-backed non-profit Aeras, is now being led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Medical Research Institute.

Gates said a plan for phase III trials for the vaccine would likely be announced later this year. But he called on governments and other philanthropists to step up to help fund the trials, as well as other TB innovations.

He estimated that the vaccine trial would cost \$700-800m to “prove it out”.

“So even though we’ll be a big funder of that, we also need partners to come in and do that with us,” he said, adding that vaccine development has a high risk of failure so needs real



Bill Gates

commitment from funders.

TB, a bacterial disease that mostly affects the lungs, is preventable and treatable, but

10 million people still catch it annually, and 1.6 million people died from TB in 2021, almost entirely in low and middle-income

countries. It has long been the world’s deadliest infectious disease, although it was briefly overtaken by Covid-19.

Tools to fight TB, like the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine, are imperfect, but there is “hopeful” innovation in vaccines like M72, simpler treatment regimens, and easier to deploy diagnostic tests, said Gates.

There is also a United Nations high level meeting on TB due in September, but Gates said he feared it may not happen due to other global priorities.

“Even if they do it, it won’t get much visibility,” he said. “It’s always challenging when there’s so many budget priorities. But the world has made a huge mistake not investing more in TB.” — **Reuters**

Is it possible to have too much Picasso?

Why can't the world get enough of Pablo Picasso? On the 50th anniversary of his death, it seems the appetite for the Spanish master is inexhaustible.

Picasso's ceramics, Picasso's sculptures, Picasso and feminism, Picasso's use of white, celebrity photographs of Picasso... the list of exhibitions marking the half-century since his death on April 8, 1973 runs on and on.

"Picasso gobbles everything up, and still we are hungry for more," grandson Olivier Widmaier-Picasso said, adding that he was "fascinated by the number of curators, historians and researchers that continue to find new angles to explore." Explaining his ubiquity is another matter.

The genius of his talent seems largely beyond dispute, and this combined with his emergence at the start of the 20th century, just as the last obstacles to free expression were being dismantled, leaving him free to explore in every direction.

And he simply never stopped, working from his teens right up to his death on the Cote d'Azur at 91.

"He remains above everyone," said Bernard Blistene, a former director of the Pompidou Centre modern art museum in Paris.

"The permanent invention, the journey across all the great currents of modernity, the continuous experimentation for 80 years, the desire to please and displease... all of it is without equal," Blistene said.

The MeToo movement has

THE GENIUS OF HIS TALENT SEEMS LARGELY BEYOND DISPUTE, AND THIS COMBINED WITH HIS EMERGENCE AT THE START OF THE 20TH CENTURY, JUST AS THE LAST OBSTACLES TO FREE EXPRESSION WERE BEING DISMANTLED, LEAVING HIM FREE TO EXPLORE IN EVERY DIRECTION.

slightly rattled the elevated plinth on which Picasso's reputation stands, as accusations that he was an abusive misogynist towards his wives and girlfriends trigger calls for a reappraisal.

"We must stop talking about the women in his life as 'muses'. Some committed suicide, others sank into madness," said Emilie Bouvard, former curator at the Picasso Museum in Paris.

The exception was Françoise Gilot, the only mistress who dumped Picasso and lived to see 50 years pass since the death of "the tyrannical, superstitious and egotistical being" that she denounced in a famous book in the 1960s.

But the damage has been limited. Picasso still regularly tops the list for highest-grossing artists at auction: his paintings generated \$494 million last year alone, according to Artprice.

There is a balance to be found,

said Bouvard.

"Picasso is someone who appropriated things, people," she said. His work often spoke of violence and sexuality -- often with brutal, even courageous honesty -- but he also turned those feelings on the women in his life.

"Dealing with this question means speaking differently but fairly about Picasso," said Bouvard.

That only opens up more ways to prime the pump of the Picasso industry.

An exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum this summer, promising to reevaluate the artist "through a feminist lens", is being curated by comedian Hannah Gadsby, one of Picasso's most outspoken critics.

— AFP

America's ultimate love-hate relationship

NICOLAS REVISE

"I can't get a fair trial in New York!" fumed Donald Trump when he learned he was being indicted by a Manhattan grand jury, as though he knew his hometown — where the former US president built his fortune — would always be hostile to its controversial son.

When Trump was elected to the White House in 2016, his surprise win was received poorly in Manhattan, with protesters chanting "New York hates Trump!" At the time, The New York Times and the BBC reported on Trump's love for the metropolis that did not love him back, saying the real estate magnate "hates being hated" by the city, the economic and multicultural hub of the country.

Arriving on Monday evening at Trump Tower in Manhattan, on the eve of his first court appearance after being indicted in a hush money scheme, the billionaire may have found some reassurance in the handful of supporters gathered outside chanting, "We love Trump!" But he may have been less happy with the signs of opponents demanding to "Lock him up," an echo of the chants he led at rallies in his first campaign against Democratic rival Hillary Clinton.

For Brian Arbour, a professor of political science at City University of New York, "one of the biggest reasons why Trump in particular engenders so much dislike" here is that "New York is a city of immigrants." Many residents among the 8.5 million people living in the multicultural mosaic of New York's five boroughs "are immigrants themselves, or whose parents and our grandparents emigrated, so they're very in touch with their immigrant roots," Arbour said.

So much so that Trump's "anti-immigrant policies" during his 2017-2021 presidential term, along with his "harsh and heated" and "racist rhetoric... plays particularly poorly in a city with so many immigrants," said Arbour.

Politically, New York has been a strongly Democratic city for more than a century, Arbour added. Left-wing former mayor Bill de Blasio was replaced in January 2022 by former policeman Eric Adams, who is more to the right, but still from the Democratic Party. And while Republicans performed better in the city and in the state of New York — which is much more rural and conservative than the city — during the mid-term elections last November, that was "predominantly around the issue of crime," Arbour said.

Born in New York on June 14, 1946 and educated at a military school, Trump joined the family real estate firm after studying business, though he touts a self-made narrative. — AFP



Paul Krugman

AI may change everything, but probably not too quickly

"Artificial intelligence (AI) is already having a significant impact on the economy, and its influence is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.... Overall, the effects of AI on the economy will depend on a variety of factors, including the rate of technological advancement, government policies and the ability of workers to adapt to new technologies."

OK, who said that? Nobody, unless we're ready to start calling large language models people. What I did was ask ChatGPT to describe the economic effects of artificial intelligence; it went on at length, so that was an excerpt.

I think many of us who've played around with large language models — which are being widely discussed under the rubric of AI (although there's an almost metaphysical debate over whether we should call it intelligence) — have been shocked by how much they now manage to sound like people. And it's a good bet that they or their descendants will eventually take over a significant number of tasks that are currently done by humans.

Like previous leaps in technology, this will make the economy more productive but will also probably hurt some workers whose skills have been devalued. Although the term "Luddite" is often used to describe someone who is simply prejudiced against new technology, the original Luddites were skilled artisans who suffered real economic harm from the introduction of power looms and knitting frames.

But this time around, how large will these effects be? And how quickly will they come about? On the first question, the answer is that nobody really knows. Predictions about the economic impact of technology are notoriously unreliable. On the second, history suggests that large economic effects from AI will take longer to materialise than many people seem to expect.

Consider the effects of previous advances in computing. Gordon Moore, a founder of Intel — which introduced the microprocessor in 1971 — died last month. He was famous for his prediction that the number of transistors on a computer chip would

double every two years — a prediction that proved stunningly accurate for half a century. The consequences of Moore's Law are all around us, most obviously in the powerful computers, aka smartphones, that almost everyone carries around these days.

For a long time, however, the economic payoff from this awesome rise in computing power was surprisingly elusive.

Why did a huge, prolonged surge in computing power take so long to pay

result, the big productivity gains from electrification didn't materialise until after World War I.

Sure enough, as David, in effect, predicted, the economic payoff from information technology finally kicked in during the 1990s, as filing cabinets and secretaries taking dictation finally gave way to cubicle farms. (What? You think technological progress is always glamorous?) The lag in this economic payoff even ended up being similar in length to the lagged payoff from electrification.

But this history still presents a few puzzles. One is why the first productivity boom from information technology (there may be another one coming, if the enthusiasm about chatbots is justified) was so short-lived; basically it lasted only around a decade.

And even while it lasted, productivity growth during the IT boom was no higher than it was during the generation-long boom after World War II, which was notable in the fact that it didn't seem to be driven by any radically new technology.

In 1969, celebrated management consultant Peter Drucker published "The Age of Discontinuity," a book that correctly predicted major changes in the economy's structure, yet the book's title implies — correctly, I think — that the preceding period of extraordinary economic growth was actually an age of continuity, an era during which the basic outlines of the economy didn't change much, even as America became vastly richer.

Or to put it another way, the great boom from the 1940s to around 1970 seems to have been largely based on the use of technologies, like the internal combustion engine, that had been around for decades — which should make us even more skeptical about trying to use recent technological developments to predict economic growth.

That's not to say that AI won't have huge economic impacts. But history suggests that they won't come quickly. ChatGPT and whatever follows are probably an economic story for the 2030s, not for the next few years.

— The New York Times.

HISTORY SUGGESTS THAT LARGE ECONOMIC EFFECTS FROM AI WILL TAKE LONGER TO MATERIALISE THAN MANY PEOPLE SEEM TO EXPECT.

off for the economy? In 1990, economic historian Paul David published one of my favourite economics papers of all time, "The Dynamo and the Computer." It drew a parallel between the effects of information technology and those of an earlier tech revolution, the electrification of industry.

As David noted, electric motors became widely available in the 1890s. But having a technology isn't enough. You also have to figure out what to do with it.

To take full advantage of electrification, manufacturers had to rethink the design of factories. Pre-electric factories were multistorey buildings with cramped working spaces, because that was necessary to make efficient use of a steam engine in the basement driving the machines through a system of shafts, gears and pulleys.

It took time to realise that having each machine driven by its own motor made it possible to have sprawling one-story factories with wide aisles allowing easy movement of materials, not to mention assembly lines. As a

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Eradicating poverty through charity

For Muslims worldwide, Ramadhan is the most sacred period for deep reflection, sacrifice, solidarity, and joyous family gatherings. During this month, they observe a strict daily fast from dawn until sunset.

During the holy month, Muslims also unite in acts of kindness and charity and make donations known as zakat with the belief that the giver is purified through the act of transferring wealth to the poor.

Although charitable giving is bedded down on the doctrines of all religions, it holds a great place in Islam, therefore, it is made an obligation on Muslims in the form of zakat. It is mandatory for the wealthy to give zakat to those who are poor.

Charity in all aspects means demonstrating compassion towards the deserving ones. It serves as a reminder to attempt to meet the needs of others for the greater good of the community.

If a Muslim feels the suffering of his or her fellow human being and desires the same happiness and comfort for others that they desire for themselves, it is a natural response for them to donate to charity in order to alleviate the suffering.

Today, the world is filled with people who cannot find food, water, and other basic facilities for their survival. Hunger, thirst, and weakness experienced during the period of fasting remind believers to have a glimpse of the suffering of the impoverished. This, on the other hand, motivates them to aid the needy.

Significantly, experts find zakat as a powerful source for contributing to the United Nations’ goal to alleviate poverty and hunger, improve health, education, and access to water and sanitation, reduce inequality and protect the environment.

According to a study published



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

SIGNIFICANTLY, EXPERTS FIND ZAKAT AS A POWERFUL SOURCE FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE UN’S PIVOTAL GOAL TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND HUNGER

in Palarch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt, there are some striking commonalities between the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and zakat. Both of them stand for what is good for the whole of humanity.

“Since Islam strongly advocates socio-economic balance and justice, the idea that zakat can be aligned and should fit into SDGs”, the study recommends.

Amongst the core joint concerns of zakat and SDGs is poverty. Elimination of poverty and enabling economic growth are among the goals that need to be religiously pursued for achieving SDGs.

“Central to all these efforts is the idea of a holistic well-being for the human race that transcends the generations to come without comprising their rights to the same. This is consistent with the understanding of what is entailed in the ultimate human rights in Islam”, it adds.

To drive home the argument, the study highlights the examples of Malaysia and Indonesia which are actively involved in utilising zakat for the purpose of poverty reduction.

In these two countries, says the study, zakat is recognised as the effective mechanism in tackling social issues such as eradication of poverty. This is further strengthened by the financial inclusion program through Islamic social financing used in Islamic civilisations as crucial components to achieve the objectives of poverty reduction and economic growth.

Thus, we see that the institution of zakat is an important institution in the Islamic framework, which has the potential to play a key socio-economic role in the society.

So by giving charity during Ramadhan, not only one is helping those in need, but also purifying one’s own wealth and earning the forgiveness and blessings of the Almighty.

THE ENDANGERED CUBS!



Two critically endangered female Sumatran tiger cubs Alif and Raya are pictured as they emerge from their den for the very first time, at Chester Zoo, Cheshire, Britain, in this recent handout image obtained on Tuesday. – Reuters

A new Asian order is emerging...

By building up the notion of the Indo-Pacific as a critical region, Abe Shinzō, the late Japanese prime minister, created a strategic framework that presaged the geopolitical and economic integration now taking place across Asia and parts of Africa. As South Asian and Middle Eastern countries merge into West Asia, a new continental order could reshape the global balance of power.

During his first visit to India as prime minister, in August 2007, Abe delivered his seminal “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech to the Indian Parliament. Abe drew his speech title from a book written by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in 1655, which explored the commonalities between Islam and Hinduism as neighbouring religious and civilisational constructs. The Pacific and Indian Oceans also share many commonalities, Abe noted. The “dynamic coupling” of these “seas of freedom and of prosperity” would transform not only the Indo-Pacific region but also “broader Asia.”

But Abe, who was assassinated last July, had more than just maritime metaphors in mind. His overarching goal was to build the most consequential bilateral relationship in the Indo-Pacific – India and Japan. As one of the first Asian leaders to recognise the global and regional impact of China’s rise, Abe went on a one-man crusade to create a viable new balance of power. By expanding the geopolitical dimensions of the Asia-Pacific region and pushing it westward towards the Indian Ocean,



Mohammed Soliman

The writer is a global strategy adviser at McLarty Associates, is Director of the Strategic Technologies and Cyber Security Program at the Middle East Institute

BY REDEFINING AND EXPANDING THE ASIA-PACIFIC’S GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS, ABE SHINZŌ, THE LATE JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER, OFFERED A GEOSTRATEGIC MODEL THAT IS NOW BEING REALISED ACROSS SOUTH ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

he helped shift the region’s strategic profile.

Abe’s 2007 speech highlighted the intellectual vacuum in Washington at the time. While the United States was at the height of its ill-fated “war on terror” and mired in two protracted, costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Abe sought to redefine the Indo-Pacific on Japan’s terms, as a rival to the China-centric “community of common destiny.”

For Abe and his successors, fostering cooperation across the Eurasian and African rim lands through extensive networks of Defence and trade ties was the key to realising the vision of a broader Asia. In placing the Indo-Pacific at the heart of this vision, they drew on the insights of the nineteenth-century American admiral Alfred Mahan and the British naval historian Julian Corbett.

Mahan and Corbett, the pioneers of modern naval strategy, viewed sea power as an essential source of national strength. The twentieth-century political scientist Nicholas Spykman emphasised the strategic centrality of the Eurasian rim land, in contrast to Halford Mackinder’s insistence on the centrality of the Eurasian heartland. Together, Mahan and Corbett’s writings on sea power and Spykman’s maritime-based approach to geopolitics provided the intellectual foundations for

Abe’s broader Asia.

Today, the clearest manifestation of Abe’s Indo-Pacific strategy is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the Quad, which began as a humanitarian initiative when the US, Australia, India, and Japan formed a joint relief operation following the deadly tsunami that devastated Indonesia in 2004. After his re-election in 2017, Abe repurposed it as a vehicle for his geopolitical vision.

But the Quad was only the beginning. It has been followed by a series of “mini-lateral” institutions, including the AUKUS defence pact between Australia, the US, and the United Kingdom; the

US-Australia-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue; trilateral cooperation between Australia, Indonesia, and India; and a joint Italy-Japan-UK fighter jet project. These initiatives, all of which aim to boost security and stability across the Indo-Pacific, reflect the region’s ongoing transformation into a “geography of strategies.”

After the Iraq War and Arab Spring pushed Arab states to diversify their alliances and partnerships and decrease their reliance on the US, Asian countries such as China, Japan, India, Indonesia, and South Korea rushed to fill the vacuum. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, for example, are India’s third- and

fourth-largest trade partners, respectively. Japan has become a trusted regional leader in technology, clean energy, and space exploration. And South Korea is now a major supplier of technology and arms to the Gulf states and Egypt. Deepening defence and trade ties, together with the Gulf states’ growing clout, have accelerated the Middle East’s integration into the Asian economic sphere.

While Abe sought to offset China’s rising power by redefining the Asia-Pacific region, strategists and intellectuals (including me) have been trying to establish regional balance of power by expanding the geopolitical definition of the Middle East to include India and other South Asian countries. The Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, the Negev Forum, the I2U2, and the France-UAE-India trilateral framework all point to a fledgling Indo-Abrahamic alliance between India, Israel, and the Arab states.

The introduction of India into the Middle East’s political and economic domain is an extension of the geostrategic model Abe championed in his “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech. With India as the link between the Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Abrahamic countries of West Asia, a continental Asian order is beginning to take shape.

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A new continental order could reshape the global balance of power.

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AL SUWAIQ THRASH SUR TO CLOSE IN ON TOPPERS AL NAHDA

Al Oruba edge Bashayer to post first OL win

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Al Oruba tasted their first victory in the 2022-23 Omantel League in the 20th week as they defeated Al Bashayer 2-1 on Monday night at Sur Sports Complex.

Frank from Al Oruba scored the

winning goals while Al Muhanad al Habsi netted the regulation goal for Al Bashayer. The triumph meant Sur-based team equalised Al Bashayer as both teams have 10 points. Despite their win, Al Oruba and Al Bashayer are placed in the danger zone and the closest teams to relegated into the first

division league. The difference to the fourth team from bottom is ten points as Sur hold 20 points.

AL SUWAIQ REDUCE GAP
Al Suwaiq reduced their gap with the league toppers Al Nahda to two points as they registered a 4-1 win over Sur at Al Rustaq

Sports Complex. Oman national team player Issam al Subhi put his team ahead in the 34th and 40th minutes and the first half ended with 2-0.

In the deciding half, Abdulrazaq Feston scored the first goal for Sur in the 57th minute before Al Suwaiq's Mamadoo confirmed

North Al Batinah team's victory by scoring the third and fourth goals in the 77th and 86th minutes respectively. The win took Al Suwaiq to 40 points while Sur remained on 20 points.

Al Rustaq snatched a crucial 1-0 win over Al Ittihad at Al Saada Sports Complex. The only goal in

the match was scored by Ahmed al Adawi in the second minute of the match.

The winning points kept Al Rustaq in third place with 38 points, two points more than second-placed team Al Suwaiq. The defeat put Al Ittihad in trouble with 16 points in the 12th place.

Oman beach soccer team rises to 14th in world rankings

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

The Beach Soccer World Wide, the global beach soccer governing organisation, has released its latest rankings for beach soccer teams following the completion of two continental championships in March. The Copa America took place in Argentina from March 11-19, while the Asian Nations Cup was held in Thailand from March 16-26.

The Brazil and Argentina teams have secured their spot in the Emirates World Cup by reserving their seat from South America. In addition, Japan, Iran and Oman have qualified for the World Cup,

which will be held in Dubai in November 2023. Brazil has taken the lead in the ranking from Portugal, reaching 2,745 points, after winning all six matches in the tournament against Argentina twice, Peru, Ecuador, Uruguay and Paraguay. Argentina reached 13th place in the world because of their runners-up finish in Copa America.

In Asia, Iran entered the top 10 list after winning the Asian title, securing an eighth place with 1,503 points. Japan, the runner-up, came fourth in the world with a score of 2,103 points.

Oman have advanced to the 14th place in the world with a score of 969 points due to the successive victories achieved in

the friendly matches before the Asian Cup Championship. Oman also posted victories in the recent Asian tournament in Thailand against Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Kuwait and the UAE. Oman are now the fourth-highest ranked team in the continent, behind Japan with 2,103 points, Iran with 1,503 points and the UAE with 1,278 points. Other countries in the top 50 include Saudi Arabia at 29, Bahrain at 31, Kuwait at 37, Palestine at 44 and Thailand at 45.

Oman will take part in the Arab Cup and the World Beach Games in Indonesia's Bali as well as the World Cup in the UAE, which will give them the opportunity to enter the top 10 list.



Gaikwad, Moeen lift Chennai to first season win

CHENNAI, India: An opening century partnership between Ruturaj Gaikwad and Devon Conway helped Chennai Super Kings to a 12-run win over Lucknow Super Giants at the Indian Premier League on Monday.

The match began five minutes late after a dog invasion but Gaikwad (57) and Conway (47) soon turned the spotlight to cricket with their blazing stand of 110 in Chennai.

Four-time winners Chennai, led by MS Dhoni, reached 217-7, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Lucknow to 205-7 and register their first win of this season.

England's Moeen Ali took four key wickets and was ably supported by fellow spinner Mitchell Santner, who returned impressive figures of 1-21.

But Gaikwad set up victory as he smashed his way to his second half-century this season to entertain a raucous home crowd, which witnessed its team in action live after a long break due to Covid.

The 16th edition of the money-spinning T20 tournament has returned to its home-and-away format after a few years of

pandemic forced closed-door and limited-venue seasons.

Gaikwad tore into the Lucknow attack with a string of sixes including one off England's Mark Wood after the left handed Conway hit the express bowler for three boundaries in that over.

Lucknow hit back to remove the openers after leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi sent back Gaikwad and Wood had his revenge on Conway with Krunal Pandya taking a stunning low and diving catch in the deep.

Lucknow kept chipping away with wickets including Ben Stokes out for eight before Ambati Rayudu, who hit an unbeaten 27, took the total past 200.

Dhoni hit two straight sixes off Wood in the final over to go past 5000 IPL runs before he departed.

In reply, Kyle Mayers smashed 53 off 22 balls to start the chase strongly but Lucknow soon lost their way to Moeen's off-spin.

Moeen got Mayers, skipper KL Rahul (20) and Marcus Stoinis (21) to dent the chase and despite Nicholas Pooran's quickfire 32 Lucknow could not recover. — AFP



40 players compete in Dhofar open chess tourney

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

The Dhofar Open Classic Chess Championship was launched at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah on Monday and will continue until April 10.

The championship is part of the Youth and Sports gathering activities, organised by the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in the Governorate of Dhofar, within the annual plan for events and programmes.

As many as 40 top chess players are taking part in the tournament, namely: Salem al Amri, Mohammed al Amri, Muslim al Amri, Mohammed al Amri, Salem Beit Saeed, Thabet al Meshali, Said Cotton, Abdulsalam al Mashaikhi, Mohammed al Amri, Hassan al Kathiri, Amer Jaid, Ahmed Cotton, Salim Shammash, Muslim Jaaboub, Hamid Tabuk, Ali Zaabnot, Salim al Rawas, Mohammed Beit Said, Said al Kathiri, Abdulaziz al Amri, Ahmed Amoush, Salim al Mashaikhi, Manea al Kathiri, Ali al Kathiri, Ali Majudah,

Amin al Ansi, Hamid al Kathiri, Abdullah Fadel, Muslim al Amri, Fahd Tabuk, Hamed Hardan, Faisal al Mashani, Mohammed Baqi, Ahmed Fadel, Mohammed Fadel, Abdullah al Hadary, Mohammed Beit Said and Mahad Tabuk.

The championship is supervised by Salim bin Ahmed Fadhel, as the chief referee, Abdullah bin Said al Shanfari, Abdulghaffar bin Al Baz Jamaan and Salem bin Ali Faraj al Mashaikhi.

SWISS RAPID SYSTEM

The tournament applies Swiss rapid system. Each player will play nine rounds, two games on each day for 20 minutes and 10 seconds for each movement.

The tournament also applies the tie-breaking system. In the event of the two or more players are tied in points, the positions are determined according to the tie-breaking systems in the Swiss system, which consider the result of the players meeting, or the Buchholz system, in which the total points of both the players are considered for the elimination. In the case of a further tie, the winner will be decided with a play-off match.

Rajasthan, Punjab look to keep momentum



Walking into the sixth day of IPL, the fans just can't get over, with appreciating the high intensity of action that is being provided this season. There is a lot of appreciation for the commentary in regional languages, especially the Bhojpuri commentators are killing it! With the cricket finally moving to Guwahati, which is the home ground for Rajasthan, it's expected to be another full-house.

RAJASTHAN ROYALS (RR) AND PUNJAB KINGS (PBKS)

TEAM INFO: There was a time when Punjab vs Rajasthan was an equal affair, although in the last 5 encounters it has been dominated with 4 wins to Rajasthan and just 1 win for Punjab. It's Kagiso Rabada (PBKS) that's finally available for selection and he is likely to replace Tim Southee. With both teams coming from a winning momentum, there is certainly going to be a war for domination from both. Momentum plays a big role in such high profile tournaments and both teams wouldn't be willing to lose it.

Head-to-Head: Played - 24; Won by RR - 14; Won by DC - 10

RR Possible Impact player – Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Sandeep Sharma, Navdeep Saini, Murugan Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Cariappa
PBKS Possible Impact player – Harpreet Singh, Rishi Dhawan, Atharva Taide, Mohit Rathee and Arshdeep Singh

PITCH REPORT

The pitch at Guwahati's Barsapara Cricket Stadium offers a batting-friendly surface in T20 cricket. Although the records suggest something different. The average first innings score here is 153, with teams batting second winning just two of six T20 matches here. Expect this to be a 180 affair and the team batting first to have the advantage.

FAN COMMENTS

"RR has been favouring youngsters for long and its high time they start delivering the expected result. Mediocre and average glory can't be accepted for long. — Abhilash, 35, BCCI level 1 umpire and cricket data analyst, Indian/Dubai.



"Let's support the RR as they aim to leave us breathless yet again with their incredible skills. Halla Bol, come on Royals." – Abhiyank Choudhary, 22, Student, Indian.

"It's important that BCCI focuses on mental grooming of upcoming talents. Sanju not being a regular part of the Indian team is a big failure of the BCCI." – Muddassir Khan, 37, administrative official, Indian.

"RR will win this match for sure, Hope Riyan Parag plays his part in his home ground. Halla Bol!" – Sreejith Savithri, 36, Sales Manager, Indian.

"PBKS has an average season, year after year. They somehow find ways to lose close matches. This time they have started with a bang and the expectations are really high and hoping for them to stand up to it." – Aradhya Kohli, 23, Product Innovation Manager, Indian.

"The phrase halla bol represents the same intensity and fighting spirit that is synonymous not just with the team, but also with the people of Rajasthan." – Pradeep Kumar, 37, Sales Manager, Indian.

"RR is one team, which has a bigger fan base in Kerala. All Keralites want Sanju Samson to have the biggest season that IPL has ever

seen and slap open the door to Indian team. — Flourry Mathunny George, 30, Engineer, Indian.

MATCH PREDICTION

With both teams coming from a winning momentum, it's anyone's game. Although, it will be Rajasthan Royals that will start with the slightest of advantage with the quality spin attack of Ravi Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal. Rabada's presence will also make a big difference. So it's going to be 'Balle-Balle' Punjab Kings in the Assamese city of Guwahati.

Send us your comment for 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, designation, age and nationality.

You could post us your views and question 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 the #OOIPL2023 for better reach.



Nadal, Alcaraz and Felix to miss Monte Carlo Masters

BERLIN: Rafael Nadal will miss next week's Monte Carlo Masters having failed to recover in time from an injury that has sidelined him for months, he said on Tuesday, shortly before top-10 players Carlos Alcaraz and Felix Auger-Aliassime also pulled out of the tournament.

Nadal was forced to skip the Masters 1000 event in Indian Wells last month as well as the Miami Open that ended last week, as he continues his recovery from a hip issue that ended his Australian Open title defence in the second round in January.

"Unfortunately I am still not ready to compete and will miss one of those special tournaments I always love to play," Nadal said in a statement.

"Monte Carlo is and has been a key event in my career, but unfortunately I will have to miss it again since I am still not ready to compete without the risk of getting injured. I will continue



the process of getting ready to come back."

His absence from competitions means that Nadal days ago dropped four places to 13th in the rankings, ending his record 912-week stay inside the top 10.

The Spaniard, who has won

Monte Carlo 11 times in his career still hopes to be fit for the French Open in May, a clay court tournament he has dominated for years, having won there 14 times.

World number two Alcaraz, who had an injury-plagued start to the season, was last in action

at last week's Miami Open, where he was beaten in the semifinal by Italian Jannik Sinner.

"After two months of competing, I am happy to be back home but sad that I finished my semifinal match in Miami with discomfort," the US Open champion said in a post on social media.

"After visiting my doctor today... and being evaluated, I won't be able to go to Monte Carlo to start the clay court tour.

"I have post-traumatic arthritis in my left hand and muscle discomfort in my spine that needs rest to cope with all that is to come."

Canadian Auger-Aliassime, ranked seventh in the world, said he has been struggling with a left knee issue.

"(I) decided it was the smartest decision to take some time off so I'm able to fully heal and recover before my next tournament at the Madrid Open." — **Reuters**

Four crucial victories in opening round of OJA tourney

SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Four crucial victories were registered in the opening round of the Oman Journalists Association's (OJA) Ramadhan football tournament which began on Monday night at Al Hilal playground in Athaiba.

In Group A, Oman News Agency defeated Oman TV 4-1 while Oman Journalists Association suffered their first loss against Oman Radio team 3-0. In Group B, Finance and Administrative team of Ministry of Information thumped Galfar Company (media team) 4-0 while Al Shabiba newspaper team edged Oman Daily newspaper 3-1.

As many as 16 goals were registered in the opening round

of the tournament with an average of four goals in each game. The first round of games explored technical performance among the participated teams. It is expected the competitions will heat up in the coming rounds as the winners will work hard to register their second successive triumph to confirm their progression into next round while the losers will aim to keep alive their hopes to snatch the two direct spots to the next stage.

In today's fixtures, Oman TV will meet Oman Radio while Oman News agency will take on Oman Journalists Association (OJA) in Group A. Finance and Administrative team of Ministry of Information will face Al Shabiba team in a tight clash while Oman Daily will play against Galfar team in Group B.



Muscat Nights basketball tourney on April 6, 7

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, APRIL 4

The Muscat Municipality, together with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Oman Basketball Association, announced the opening of registration for the Muscat Nights Basketball Triples Tournament. This event is designed to promote basketball in the Sultanate of Oman and to provide a platform for youth and sports talents to showcase their skills.

The championship competitions will be held at the Strike Sports Centre in the Oman Automobile Association, on April 6 and 7. The championship aims to attract 12 men's teams and six women's teams. The organising committee has set the last date for registration as Wednesday, April 5.

The tournament is part of the municipality's efforts to promote healthy competition among participating teams, attract young

The tournament is part of the municipality's efforts to promote healthy competition among participating teams, attract young people and talents in various sports, and create night events in Muscat that stimulate the practice of physical and sports activities

people and talents in various sports, and create night events in Muscat that stimulate the practice of physical and sports activities. The municipal committee has allocated financial prizes for the top-performing teams to encourage participation.

The organising committee requires the formation of a team that includes four players whose age in male category not less than 21 years, and the age of female

participants not less than 23 years. The committee also allows the participation of the national basketball team players. This is to discover excellent players in the game of basketball trios, in order to support the national teams that are awaiting upcoming participation in basketball trios.

To facilitate registration and speed up the process, the Organising Committee has opened the door for electronic registration via the link (<https://forms.gle/NSGVX6TYmApkCEfe9>). This enables teams to register their players and attach the required documents.

The Oman Basketball Association has nominated a number of international referees and basketball triathletes to manage the tournament matches for the men and women categories.

The Muscat Nights Basketball Triples Tournament promises to be an exciting event that will bring together some of the best basketball players in Oman.



Invest Easy portal to facilitate investment in private education sector



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion yesterday unveiled new electronic services on the Invest Easy portal (www.business.gov.om) with the goal of expediting service completion and simplifying business processes. The longer-term objective is to boost Oman's ranking in the global business environment index, it said.

Additionally, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, the ministry launched new electronic services on the Invest Easy portal to enable private investment in the private school sector, including registering for private schools for early education (kindergarten), private schools, international private schools, foreign schools (for expatriates), and private schools for early education (kindergarten - Quran education).

Moreover, in collaboration with the municipal sector in the governorates of Oman, the Ministry introduced a service for issuing commercial signs to facilitate investors in initiating

their business activities through the Invest Easy portal.

This service is integrated into the economic activity license application submission process when registering a new branch for practicing activities, and incurs a one-time fee of RO 15 upon application submission, with the annual renewal service for commercial signs being discontinued.

Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dhuhani, Director General of Trade, stated that the new features are in line with the National Programme for Digital Transformation and the comprehensive development of services provided by the ministry in collaboration with government agencies.

According to Al Dhuhani, the launch of services in the education and municipalities sectors will support the launch of new businesses and assist investors in completing their transactions electronically through the self-service or service delivery offices.

The portal is presently connected to 34 data exchange agencies and 17 government agencies with licensing authority, he said.

MDO set to become significant contributor to national economy

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Minerals Development Oman (MDO), the state-owned mining and minerals processing flagship of the Sultanate of Oman, is making strides in fulfilling its vision of becoming the benchmark for mining-related investments and a global centre of excellence. With this, MDO is confident in becoming a significant contributor to the national economy.

"By prioritising our core values of sustainability, integrity and excellence in all aspects of our operations, and by continuously striving for innovation and enhancing the performance of our employees and subsidiaries, we are confident in becoming a significant contributor to the national economy, and a key player in Oman's renewed renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik," Dr Badar al Kharousi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of MDO, said in the Chairman's message in the recently released MDO Annual Report 2022.

In 2022, MDO made significant progress in key projects. The company succeeded in boosting the economic potential of the Mazoon copper project located in Yanqul by intensifying its exploration and mining efforts. As a result, the growth of proven reserves now stands at 22.9 million tonnes of copper ore.

Moreover, the Shaleem Complex for Industrial Minerals project is making good progress. The project has advanced to the stage of conducting detailed economic feasibility studies, along with developing engineering designs for the port, as MDO



By prioritising our core values of sustainability, integrity and excellence in all aspects of our operations, and by continuously striving for innovation and enhancing the performance of our employees and subsidiaries, we are confident in becoming a significant contributor to the national economy.

DR BADAR AL KHAROUSI
BoD Chairman, MDO

has obtained the initial approval from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to establish a seaport linked to the project in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands. With regard to the downstream sector, MDO and its partners commemorated the laying of the foundation stone for the Sohar Titanium project. Aimed at producing titanium dioxide in the Free Zone in Sohar, the project will be established on an area of more than 120,000 square metres. This accomplishment represents the company's efforts in enhancing the manufacturing industries in the mining sector in the Sultanate of Oman. Significantly, MDO Group recorded RO 5.5 million revenue for the financial year ended December 31, 2022. The Group also successfully managed to reduce the net loss compared to approved budget by 45 per cent to reach RO 1.9 million in 2022

compared to budgeted loss of RO 3.4 million.

MDO Exploration and Evaluation Assets (EAA) has also increased exploration in 2022 by 4 per cent to reach RO 104.5 million compared to RO 100.5 million in 2021. The RO 4 million in EEA was mainly in Block 12A1 (Mazoon Copper project), Block 4, Shaleem project, Block 52 (Masirah Island) and others. In the last 5 years, MDO's group asset has increased from RO 58.6 million in 2018 to RO 136.3 million in 2022. At year end, the Group has a healthy financial position with fixed deposits of RO 36.5 million placed with financial institutions as well as cash and cash equivalents of RO 2.3 million. Furthermore, the Group has net current assets of RO 5.7 million as at the end of financial year December 31, 2022 which is sufficient for the Company to continue as a going concern.

Muscat Municipality to designate new mobile vending areas

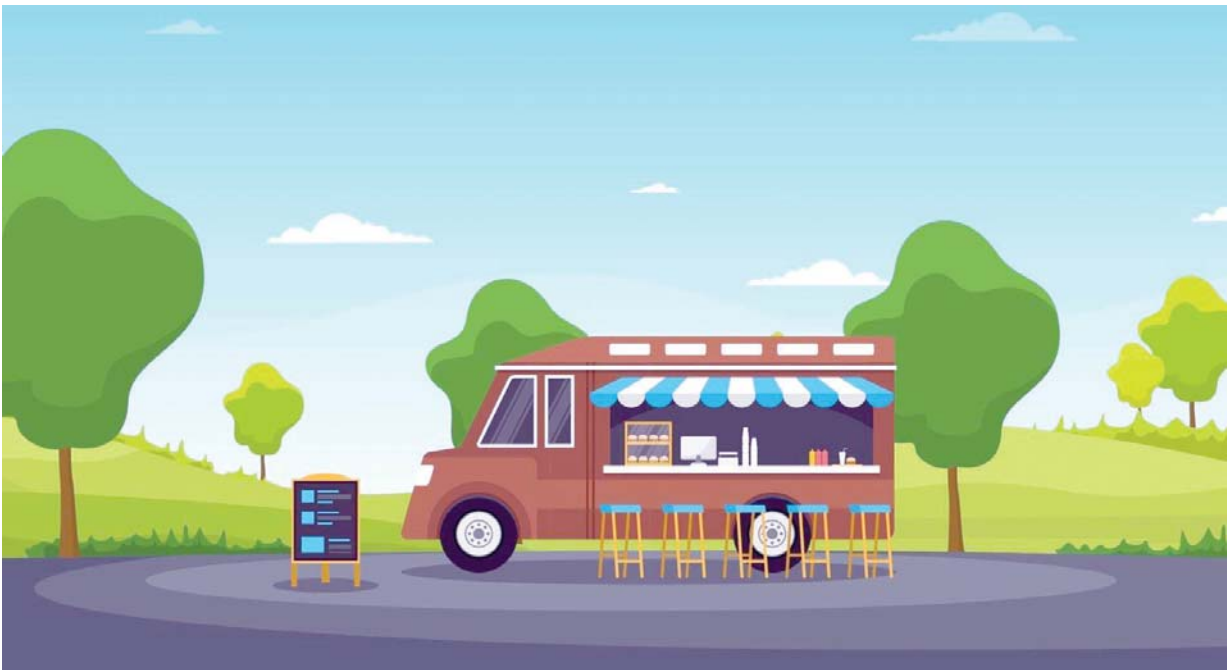
HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Muscat Municipality announced that it is in the process of designating and reallocating sites for mobile vending businesses in the governorate.

In an interview with Radio Oman, Director of the Service Development Department at the Municipality, Sulaiman bin Mohammed al Hinai, shared, "Muscat Municipality has identified numerous sites throughout Muscat Governorate, ensuring that they are distant from residential areas, away from main roads, and not in commercial areas where similar activities are carried out."

He added, "The Municipality of Muscat is working to provide other sites in the coming period."

According to Al Hinai, the main reasons behind this decision include complaints received from residents of neighbourhoods where mobile vendors ply their trade, mobile vendors operating through late hours of the night, and occupying spaces that hinder



other authorities from performing their duties.

However, some mobile vendors are wary of this new decision. According to Mohammed al Mandhri, the general manager of a mobile food business in Al Athaiba, location is everything for a food cart vendor like him.

"We have already built a base here over almost 20 years. So will it be worth it for us to move (to

a new location identified by the Municipality?

Will be new location have required support facilities for our activities?

Is the Municipality going to provide us with electricity and water, or do we have to fend for ourselves by bringing our own water and using our own generators? If not, then a relocation won't be worth it for us

— It will just be a waste of time."

Furthermore, designated mobile vending sites can add to already intense business competition, Al Mandhri warns. "We already have huge competition in this area ... so if we have a bigger area the chance of getting more customers will be less."

Nevertheless, the entrepreneur is hopeful that the new sites

IN LIGHT OF THE UPCOMING CHANGES, THE MUNICIPALITY HAS URGED MOBILE VENDORS TO ABIDE BY THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS AND TO RECTIFY ANY BREACHES WITHIN A PERIOD OF ONE MONTH. LICENSED MOBILE VENDORS SHOULD SPEEDILY RECONCILE THEIR CONDITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HEALTH CONTROLS AND REQUIREMENTS.

will be suitably furnished with, for example, seating areas for customers as well as water and electricity supplies for vendors.

"Seating areas are the most important, because we are not allowed to have seating areas here by law. In addition to electrical supply for our [equipment], and water, the site and its surroundings should be clean as well. This is important."

Younus al Wahaibi, the owner of a mobile food business in Al Amerat, agrees. "We are not allowed to have tables and chairs. But people travelling from afar would prefer to sit and eat in a

proper dining area," he shared.

In light of the upcoming changes, the Municipality has urged mobile vendors to abide by the laws and regulations and to rectify any breaches within a period of one month.

"... Licensed mobile vendors should speedily reconcile their conditions in accordance with the health controls and requirements stipulated in the Ministerial Decision No. 241/2016 issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, which relates to the issuance of the regulation of the organisation of mobile vendors, and to comply with the provisions of Muscat Municipality resolutions No. 185/2017 and administrative resolution No. 219/2019, within a period not exceeding one month from the date of issuing this announcement," it said in a statement.

According to the statement, the most common breaches include the employment of non-Omanis, operating without a licence, and not adhering to health guidelines.

Design of Salalah Smart City project gets underway

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

A consortium of international consultants has announced the launch of work on a detailed masterplan and design of the Salalah Smart City project on behalf of the Omani Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Leading the consortium is leading multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy firm F&M Middle East, which has tied up with international architecture and design firm Sasaki (for the master-planning components), mobility planning and infrastructure design firm MIC-HUB (for mobility aspects), and UK-based multidisciplinary engineering firm Cundall (for infrastructure and environmental elements).

Last month, consortium leader F&M Middle East Engineering Consultancy said it was among a number of companies that had signed contracts with the Ministry for the development of as many as seven Smart Cities in the Sultanate



of Oman.

The Smart City initiative, it noted, was part of Oman's Urban Spatial Strategy Plan conceived in line Vision 2040. The Smart City project will significantly enhance Salalah's important as a rapidly expanding hub for tourism, industry, investment and international maritime trade.

Home to an international airport, as well as one of the region's biggest cargo transshipment and logistics hubs, Salalah is ideally placed for long-term development as sustainable city.

"Salalah has a host of incredible natural features, cultural and historic assets – to compliment all of these, our goal is to create the most vibrant, human-scaled,

innovative, diverse, smart and sustainable destination in the region. Salalah Smart City will present a bold vision for the prosperous and sustainable future of the area," said consortium member MIC-HUB in a statement.

"Our approach will be rooted in the broader ecological context of Salalah and forward-thinking strategies of sustainability,

livability, and smart systems will be integrated throughout. We envision the city of the future, with a pedestrian oriented design that seeks to reinforce a new paradigm shift towards greater community and environmental stewardship."

According to MIC-Hub, a mobility framework for the Smart City will seek to reduce car use by providing safe spaces for residents and visitors. The goal is to promote shared mobility, micro-mobilities, and on-demand and demand-responsive transport modes.

Also envisaged are an integrated public transport network, driverless vehicles to reduce road congestion and digital platforms for integrated mobility systems.

Significantly, the start of work on the Salalah Smart City project follows the successful progression of the Greater Muscat Structure Plan – also initiated by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Due to be completed this year, the aim of the project is to provide a more focused spatial development strategy for the 1360 km2 metropolitan region.

Among other features, the new plan will ensure that Greater Muscat benefits from an efficient and resilient city-wide utility infrastructure network, with an emphasis on renewable technology and water lifecycle. It will incorporate a sustainable and smart city framework and shore up defences against flood risks.

Last year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning kicked off an ambitious initiative to support the development of 'Smart Cities' in a number of locations, notably, Suhar, Nizwa and Salalah.

The initiative stems from a landmark Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) first unveiled by the Ministry in March 2021. Billed as "the essential enabler for the implementation of Oman 2040 Vision", the Spatial Strategy sets out a broad framework for urban growth in the country over the next 20 years.

It also seeks to ensure that key national cities remain competitive and their growth aligned with the UN Goals for Sustainable Development 2030.

Oman Arab Bank draws smiles on faces of children with cancer at the Royal Hospital

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) began its wide-ranging programME of community events, in celebration of the holy month of Ramadhan with a special visit bringing smiles and joy to young patients undergoing cancer treatment at the National Oncology Centre at The Royal Hospital in Muscat.

The bank in collaboration with 'For You We Serve Cancer Patients' group hosted a memorable Iftar gathering for young cancer patients and their families, who received gifts and played a number of interactive games with OAB staff members along with sharing messages of hope and encouragement.

The bank staff also toured the cancer unit, learning about the care and treatment provided. They also expressed their gratitude and admiration for the



hospital staff's dedication and commitment to the children's well-being. Next week, a festive Qaranqasho evening will be held at the Child Welfare Centre.

The four-week Ramadhan programme is part and parcel of OAB's ongoing commitment to continue making a positive impact in various communities across the Sultanate of Oman.

Bahar wins top Omani brand award in FMCH Homecare category

MUSCAT: A flagship brand of National Detergent Company (NDC), Bahar has been a popular household name in the local market. Attesting to its popularity, the brand was recognised with the prestigious Alam Al Iktisaad 'Top Omani Brand' award in the category of 'FMCG Homecare' in a ceremony held in Al Bustan, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on March 15, 2023.

The high-profile event was conducted under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said and was hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani. The event witnessed the presence of more than 100 key officials, delegates, and market experts from a cross-section of industries. The winners were declared after a detailed survey with stringent parameters conducted by Alam Al Iktisaad in partnership with Arabian Research Bureau.

Dedicated to acknowledging, applauding, and encouraging the



concerted efforts of organisations that demonstrate the highest brand recall value in the local market while establishing their position as the trusted choice amongst consumers, these awards are one of the most coveted in the industry.

Murali Sundar, CEO said, "With this award, Bahar has once again reaffirmed its strong foothold in the Omani market.

This recognition also further cements our unflinching commitment to quality and our keen focus on the evolving needs of our prized consumers. Apart from leveraging our inherent product knowledge to deliver the promise of hygienic cleaning, Bahar has also been mindful of the environment, taking quantifiable efforts to develop products that are sustainable."

Bank Muscat successfully joins Buna payment system for enhanced customer experience

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to provide an enhanced customer experience through innovative solutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced joining Buna, the Arab payment system operated by Arab Regional Payments Clearing and Settlement Organization, a subsidiary of the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF).

A state-of-the-art payment platform, Buna provides clearing and settlement services across the Arab region in multiple currencies. It provides modern payment solutions that comply with international standards, principles and compliance



requirements.

Payments are settled in real time as the remitter and beneficiary banks are direct platform participants. The Buna system aims to increase opportunities for economic and financial integration in the region, in addition to strengthening investment relations with trading partners.

Talal bin Abdulhameed al Zadjali (pictured), Deputy General Manager – Operations, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to enhance customer experience by joining the Buna payment system. This will enable our customers to send and receive cross-border multi-currency payments.

Going ahead, the bank will continue its investments in cutting-edge technology so as to ensure the highest standards throughout the payment chain.

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, we are committed to offering the latest financial services and solutions in line with global financial trends."

Bank Muscat is focused on maintaining its leadership in offering cutting-edge products and services, including electronic payments and online services, through multiple channels and new products and services, which cater to its different customer segments. Its continuously upgraded Internet and mobile banking services offer customers a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience.

Today, over 1.5 million banking customers use various features like real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups, instant credit card bill payments, school fees payments etc. In addition, fund

transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; Speed Transfers to a number of countries including Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, Pakistan Sri Lanka and Egypt; Zakat calculator and charity payments.

The bank's performance, which is driven by its customer-centric vision and the adoption of global best practices, has been consistently lauded by the international financial and banking community for decades.

In 2022, Bank Muscat was recognised as one of the "Top 100 Companies in the Middle East" and as one of the "Top 30 banks in the Region" by Forbes Middle East.

Invest Easy portal to facilitate investment in private education sector

FROM PAGE 13

Dr Khadija bint Ali al Salamiyah, Director General of Private Schools at the Ministry of Education, said the new features will accelerate and facilitate investment in the private school education sector.

Moreover, they will contribute towards providing investors with accurate licensing data, streamline procedures, and clear transaction pathways, making it easier for investors to track the progress of their applications.

Furthermore, licenses will be integrated with relevant entities to establish private schools. Additionally, a new service has been launched that allows investors to change the legal form of their individual establishment to a commercial company electronically, eliminating the need to visit the ministry or its affiliated directorates and departments in the governorates.

Oil prices rebound on hedge fund short covering

JOHN KEMP

Investors had started to pair back short positions in petroleum even before Saudi Arabia and its Opec+ allies surprised the market by announcing production cuts totalling more than 1 million barrels per day.

The scale of the cuts and the element of surprise is likely to have been intended to intensify the rush of short-covering as well as boost confidence and draw more bullish investors back into the market.

Hedge funds and other money managers purchased the equivalent of 61 million barrels in the six most important petroleum futures and options contracts over the seven days ending March 28.

This marked a sharp turnaround after fund managers sold a total of 281 million barrels over the two preceding weeks, the fastest rate of selling for almost six years.

Most of the buying came from the closure of previous bearish short positions (-48 million barrels) rather than initiation of new bullish longs (+13 million). Buying was concentrated in NYMEX and ICE WTI (+49 million barrels), US gasoline (+14 million), US diesel (+5 million) and European gas oil (+1 million) with sales of Brent (-9 million).

Short positions in NYMEX and ICE WTI were slashed (-51 million barrels) but no new bullish positions were established and in fact long positions were trimmed marginally (-2 million).

Fund managers seem to have concluded WTI prices had found a floor after touching a 15-month low of less than \$67 per barrel on March 17 and were unlikely to fall further in the short term.

THE SCALE OF THE CUTS AND THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO INTENSIFY THE RUSH OF SHORT-COVERING AS WELL AS BOOST CONFIDENCE AND DRAW MORE BULLISH INVESTORS BACK INTO THE MARKET.

Positions were all reported at the close of business on March 28, ahead of the decision by Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Opec+ producer group to cut their output targets by more than 1 million barrels per day on April 2.

Prior to the most recent week, positioning in WTI had become especially bearish, leaving the market primed for a sharp short-covering rally.

Hedge funds had reduced their net position in WTI to just 56 million barrels by March 21, the lowest since February 2016 and in only the 1st percentile for all weeks since 2013.

Funds' bullish long positions outnumbered bearish short ones by a ratio of just 1.39:1 on March 21, the lowest since August 2016 and in only the 2nd percentile.

Positions had become so stretched towards the downside creating conditions for a sharp rebound if and when the news flow become more bullish or at least less bearish.

Even before the Opec+ announcement, the concentration of bearish shorts and absence of bullish longs seems to have encouraged at least some fund managers to realise profits ahead of the expected recoil.

The announcement will likely fuel even more short covering in the near future, which was probably one of the motivations for the decision, announced to maximise its impact when trading resumed. — Reuters

Unlocking the past: A gateway to sustainable economic growth



MUKUND MANOHAR

The writer is a long-time Oman resident and is currently doing his doctoral studies researching the Impact of Oman's Tourism Development Strategy on Economic Diversification.

Oman boasts five Unesco World Heritage Sites, representing the country's rich history and stunning landscapes. These sites, that include Bahla Fort, Archaeological Sites of Bat, Al Khutm, and Al Ayn, Aflaj Irrigation Systems, Land of Frankincense, and Ancient City of Qalhat, have immense potential to contribute to the country's economic growth.

Oman can develop a sustainable tourism industry by promoting these sites and other cultural sites across the country, generating income and employment opportunities for local communities.

Sustainable tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors worldwide, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), with the number of international tourists travelling to environmentally-friendly and socially-responsible destinations expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.

Sustainable tourism is estimated to be worth around 25 per cent of the global tourism industry, making it an important contributor to economic growth.

This trend towards sustainable tourism is expected to continue as travellers prioritise experiences



that are culturally authentic, environmentally friendly, and socially responsible.

Oman can boost its economy and preserve its cultural and natural heritage for future generations by promoting its one-of-a-kind Unesco World Heritage Sites and other cultural attractions.

Encouraging private sector investment in sustainable tourism is one way for Oman to achieve this goal.

By offering incentives to protect the sites and enhance visitor facilities, Oman can strategically invest in infrastructure to attract global tourists and highlight its unique cultural and natural heritage.

For instance, Bahla Fort has the potential to be developed into a cultural tourism hub, attracting visitors interested in Islamic architecture, history, and culture.

The Archaeological Sites of Bat, Al Khutm, and Al Ayn can be leveraged to promote sustainable tourism, such as ecotourism, showcasing Oman's natural beauty and biodiversity.

The Aflaj Irrigation Systems can be used to promote

sustainable agriculture and water management, generating employment and promoting investments in the agricultural sector.

The Land of Frankincense can be a centre of heritage tourism, promoting Omani culture and tradition, such as the production of frankincense, handicrafts, and traditional medicine.

The Ancient City of Qalhat can be used to promote tourism, trade, and investment.

Oman's Vision 2040 includes several goals for the tourism sector, including increasing the contribution of tourism to the country's GDP, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and creating employment opportunities for Omani nationals within the tourism sector.

Additionally, the vision aims to develop world-class tourism infrastructure and promote Oman as a unique and diverse tourism destination, showcasing its cultural and natural heritage.

By leveraging its Unesco World Heritage Sites and other cultural attractions, Oman can achieve these goals and foster

broad-based economic growth.

The promotion of sustainable tourism practices and the development of visitor facilities can create employment opportunities for local communities, generating income and supporting the country's economic growth.

Oman's Unesco World Heritage Sites showcase Oman's unique history and natural beauty, offering priceless insights and appreciation.

These sites hold not only national but global importance, reflecting the richness and diversity of human history and nature.

By promoting Oman's unique cultural and natural heritage, the country can position itself as a leader in sustainable tourism in the region, attracting visitors interested in responsible tourism practices and who seek out environmentally friendly experiences.

Through the development of a sustainable tourism industry, Oman can achieve its tourism goals and contribute to its broader vision of sustainable economic growth and development.

East Asia's economic miracle: Lessons we can learn

SAIF AL ABRI

Over the past decades, the economic growth of East Asia has been remarkable. Economists widely regard the growth in countries like Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and many Chinese provinces as 'miraculous'.

The literature offers varied arguments to explain this phenomenon, but by identifying the reasons for their success, we can potentially replicate it elsewhere. These economies have created unparalleled wealth in the region, with sustained annual growth rates of output per person sometimes exceeding 5 per cent, outperforming the rest of the world.

The growth of economies depends on three key factors the workforce (labour), the tools they use (capital), and the methods they use to work more efficiently (technology).

While some believe that adding more labour and capital will result in growth, sustained economic growth requires technological

progress.

Continually adding more labour and capital will eventually lead to diminishing returns (adding more labour and capital can work for a while, there are limits and it can't last forever). Therefore, economies must focus on improving technology for long-term growth, also known as intensive growth.

Studies have found that technological progress has the most significant impact on output per person (Solow's 1956). The success of East Asian countries is often attributed to their "fast technological catch-up and efficient use of technology" compared to their competitors.

In summary, technology is crucial for sustained economic growth, and economies must prioritise its development.

The traditional view that advocates for minimal government intervention in the economy is based on the neoclassical approach, which emphasises the importance of physical resources and innovative technology advocates for minimal government intervention in the



economy, with the government's role limited to providing public goods and ensuring law and order (Sarel, 1996).

However, the success of East Asian countries has challenged this belief and has shown the importance of the revisionist view, which recommends an active government to moderate market excesses and assist with orderly economic development.

The East Asian countries success has also been confirmed by the World Bank (1993) report, which acknowledges that fundamental policies alone do not tell the whole story.

The report highlights that the

government's systematic and multiple interventions played a vital role in fostering development. These interventions took various forms, including "targeted and subsidised credit, low deposit rates, protection of domestic import substitutes, subsidies to declining industries, the establishment and financial support of government banks, public investment in applied research, firm and industry-specific export targets, development of export marketing institutions, and wide sharing of information between public and private sectors".

While the free market argument for minimal government

intervention in the economy still holds, the success of East Asian countries suggests that an active government can assist with orderly economic development.

Several studies have shown that favourable initial conditions related to education, income, and land distribution have played a crucial role in the economic growth of East Asian countries.

Rodrik's 1994 study found that the initial conditions in East Asian countries were significantly better than other developing countries with similar income levels. This study suggests that these initial conditions played a vital role in the impressive growth rates observed in East Asia.

Moreover, the role of education in economic development has been widely recognised, with scholars such as Schultz emphasising the importance of education as a factor of economic growth.

Additionally, historical studies like Sokoloff's factor endowment study further support the argument that initial conditions, such as income and land distribution, have played a key

role in other countries.

Therefore, favourable initial conditions, particularly those related to education, income, and land distribution, have been instrumental in the economic success of East Asian countries.

In conclusion, the East Asian economic growth experience provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to sustained economic growth. The presence of favourable initial conditions, such as high-quality education, equitable income distribution, and access to land, is crucial for achieving rapid growth.

However, as seen sustained growth also requires consistent and strategic government intervention. While this intervention should be aimed at addressing market excesses and promoting orderly economic development, policymakers must also be vigilant of possible inefficiencies that may arise from excessive intervention. As such we must a balance between free market principles and active government intervention is essential for promoting long-term economic growth.

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Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
 m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
 ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
 95919344

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ramadhan



Nizwa offers visitors a unique glimpse into the Islamic faith

During the holy month of Ramadhan, there's no better place to experience the beauty of this month than the historic city of Nizwa. During Ramadhan, the city comes alive with vibrant celebrations, special events, and culinary delights that are not to be missed... P20



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

The Compassionate has taught the Quran. He created man. And taught him clear expression.

(Al Rahman, 1-4)

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported:

When any one of you gets up in the morning in the state of fasting, he should neither use obscene language nor do any act of ignorance. And if anyone slanders him or quarrels with him, he should say: "I am fasting, I am fasting."

HEALTH TIPS

If you consume coffee regularly, try cutting back two weeks before the holy month of Ramadhan to prevent headaches and fatigue.

RAMADHAN WELLNESS

Fasting During Pregnancy



BY MONIKA SETH

IT IS IMPERATIVE to Ramadhan that we practice self-control, self-discipline and healthy balance while learning to appreciate food. Fasting during the holy month is not only an opportunity to grow spiritually but also to gain physical health benefits. It is important to take good care of your health and body during the fasting period.

Pregnancy is such a great time to eat all of your favourite foods, but if you choose to fast throughout the month while pregnant, you must eat well to acquire all of the nutrients your body needs at this special time.

DON'T MISS SUHOOR

Suhoor is inevitably the most important meal during fasting; plan it well and include foods with low GI (slow energy releasing) i.e. fibre-rich fresh fruits, pulses, nuts, grains, dried fruits, dates etc. Avoid salty foods at this time to save you from feeling thirsty during the day.

EAT RIGHT AT IFTAR

Break your fast with a few dates and a glass of fresh fruit juice/labani or a bowl of low-fat yoghurt with chopped fresh fruits and nuts to get the essential nutrients as well as to maintain steady blood sugar levels.

INCLUDE HEALTHY CARBS

While fasting, your body requires stored energy to help you get through the day, and the best way to do this is to get a mix of simple and complex carbohydrates. Include some complex carbs like brown rice, sweet potatoes, and whole grain bread along with some that provide a faster boost of energy, like white rice, as these simple carbohydrates get digested and absorbed quickly, and this combination works best at iftar, especially if you are pregnant.

FOCUS ON GREENS AND HEALTHY PROTEIN

Leafy greens are a good source of folic acid and iron, so make sure you include spinach, mustard leaves, mint, coriander, spring onions, and radish leaves, combined with some excellent protein sources like chicken, meat, fish, eggs, lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, and green beans. Include these in your Iftar menu.

SAY YES TO FRUITS

Choose fruit over that dessert in front of you especially when you crave anything sweet, pick a fruit you like. This will give your body the required amounts of not only sugar but also vital nutrients.

STAY HYDRATED

You need to stay hydrated, so keep sipping water between Iftar and Suhoor, especially if Ramadhan falls in the summer. You can also add fresh coconut water and lemon ginger water to your fluids-to-drink list.

BE WARY OF CAFFEINE

It might sound a little discouraging to exclude tea/coffee from your routine, but caffeine not only reduces the ability of your body to absorb nutrients but also acts as a diuretic, draining water from your body. If you still want to indulge, take no more than 200 grammes of caffeine a day, followed by a glass of water every time you indulge in a caffeinated drink.

Fasting during pregnancy is a personal decision based on a variety of factors like your health, work, responsibilities, week of pregnancy and your overall health conditions etc. and your best bet would be to discuss with your doctor and nutritionist to plan a healthy fasting menu for you.

**Monika Seth is a nutritionist and freelance consultant residing in Oman for the last 22 years. She is a health enthusiast with two decades experience in the field of health.*

RECIPE

Try “ash-e reshteh,” a hearty soup beloved during Ramadhan in Iran



AS THE SUN SET over the sprawling city of Tehran on the first day of Ramadhan, families and friends gathered together in their homes to break their fast with an array of delicious dishes. Ramadhan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, is observed by Muslims around the world, including those in Iran.

The most popular dish during Ramadhan in Iran is called “ash-e reshteh,” a hearty soup made with beans, herbs, noodles, and sometimes meat. It is a dish that is both nutritious and satisfying, perfect for breaking the day-long fast. Here’s the recipe for ash-e reshteh:

INGREDIENTS:
2 cups cooked kidney beans
1 cup cooked chickpeas
1/2 cup lentils
1/2 cup barley
1/2 cup noodles
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon dried mint
1 tablespoon dried parsley
1 tablespoon dried dill
1 tablespoon turmeric
Salt and pepper to taste
6 cups water
1 cup spinach, chopped
1 cup chives, chopped
1/2 cup cilantro, chopped
1/2 cup parsley, chopped
1/2 cup green onions, chopped
1/2 cup sour cream

DIRECTIONS:
In a large pot, sauté the onions and garlic in oil until fragrant. Add the kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, and barley, and stir to combine. Add the dried mint, dried parsley, dried dill, turmeric, salt, and pepper, and stir to combine. Add the water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and let simmer for 30 minutes. Add the noodles and spinach, and let cook for an additional 10 minutes. Add the chives, cilantro, parsley, and green onions, and let cook for an additional 5 minutes. Serve hot, topped with a dollop of sour cream.

As families sat down to enjoy their ash-e reshteh, they reflected on the meaning of Ramadhan and the importance of fasting and giving to those in need. Ramadhan is a time of spiritual reflection and self-improvement, and the delicious food shared during iftar brings people closer together and strengthens their bond.

For the people of Iran, Ramadhan is not just a month of fasting and prayer, but also a time of celebration and tradition. And ash-e reshteh is just one of the many delicious dishes that make up this rich culinary heritage.



Iran Ranks High Globally as a Model Muslim Country

IRAN, A PREDOMINANTLY Muslim country in the Middle East, has recently earned high praise in a global ranking for its adherence to Islamic principles and values. According to the 2023 Muslim Country Index, Iran has been ranked among the top 10 Muslim countries in the world, with an overall score of 8.5 out of 10.

The index, which was published by the International Islamic News Agency, assesses 56 Muslim-majority countries based on a range of indicators, including religious freedom, social justice, economic prosperity, and political stability. Iran was praised for its commitment to upholding Islamic law and traditions, as well as its efforts to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

Iran’s high ranking in the index is a testament to the positive impact of religion on the

country’s society and culture. Islam has played a central role in shaping Iranian identity and values, providing a moral framework for individuals and communities to navigate the challenges of modern life.

Religion has also been a powerful force for social cohesion and solidarity in Iran, particularly in the face of political and economic upheaval. Many Iranians turn to their faith for comfort and support during times of hardship, and religious rituals and traditions serve as a source of comfort and meaning for millions of Iranians.

Iran’s high ranking in the Muslim Country Index underscores the positive role that religion can play in promoting social justice, economic development, and political stability. As Iran continues to navigate the

complex challenges of the modern world, its commitment to Islamic values and traditions is likely to remain a source of strength and resilience for its people.

HISTORY OF ISLAM IN IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran is known for its rich cultural heritage, beautiful architecture, and warm hospitality. However, what many people may not know is that Iran is also home to one of the oldest and most significant Islamic civilisations in the world.

Islam was introduced to Iran in the 7th century AD during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), when his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, became the fourth caliph of the Islamic Empire. The spread of Islam in Iran was gradual, and it was not until the 16th century that the Safavid dynasty

officially declared as the state religion. During the holy month of Ramadhan, the people of Iran observe various traditions to commemorate the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

One of the most popular traditions during Ramadhan in Iran is the daily breaking of the fast at sunset, known as iftar. Families gather around the table to enjoy a meal of dates, water, and traditional Persian dishes such as ash-e reshteh, a soup made with beans, noodles, and herbs.

Another important tradition during Ramadhan is the recitation of the Quran. Many Iranians visit mosques during the month to recite and listen to the holy book being read aloud. The most significant night of Ramadhan, known as Laylat Al Qadr, is believed to be the night on which the Quran was first revealed. It is customary for people to stay up all night to pray and ask for forgiveness on this auspicious occasion.

In Iran, the observance of Ramadhan is not just a religious obligation but also a time for self-reflection, spiritual growth, and community building. Through their adherence to the teachings of Islam, the people of Iran have created a unique and vibrant culture that continues to inspire and captivate people around the world.

UK museum to surrender Courbet painting stolen by Nazis

A BRITISH UNIVERSITY museum has agreed to return a 19th-century painting by French artist Gustave Courbet, which was seized by the Nazis, to the descendants of its original Jewish owner.

Cambridge University’s Fitzwilliam Museum, in eastern England, is acting on the advice of a government-appointed expert panel, which investigates claims for Nazi loot.

For more than a year, the panel probed the history of “La Ronde Enfantine”, an oil landscape dating from about 1862 that has been lying in the museum’s storage.

In a report published on Tuesday, it concluded that the evidence supported the restitution claim made by the heirs of its one-time owner, Robert Bing, a French Resistance hero during World War II.

“This is a deliberate seizure by the German authorities from a Jewish citizen of France with the diversion of the work of art to Nazi leaders,” the 19-page review stated.

“No other reason for seizure other than the Jewishness of Mr Bing has appeared to explain this seizure.”

It added that the museum had “cared for the work so that it can now be restored to the heirs of the original owners”.

A spokesperson for the Fitzwilliam said it will follow the advice.

The panel confirmed that Nazi occupiers stole the artwork from Bing’s Paris apartment in 1941, after he and his widowed mother had fled the city before their arrival.

His maternal grandmother had likely acquired the oil-on-canvas, depicting children playing in woodland, after



marrying a wealthy banker and merchant.

COLOURFUL HISTORY

Two members of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) – a Nazi organisation set up to traffic plundered art – stole the painting, the report said.

The artwork then had “a somewhat colourful history” and was held during the war for Gestapo founder Hermann Goering, who amassed a large collection of stolen art.

“He proposed to exchange it as part of a transaction involving the German

Foreign Minister, (Joachim von) Ribbentrop, but either the latter or his wife disliked the work and that transaction did not proceed,” the report revealed.

In 1951, La Ronde Enfantine resurfaced in the inventory of a London art dealership and was subsequently sold to the then Dean of York, Eric Milner-White. The Anglican priest, a “generous donor of some 50 paintings to public collections in the UK”, gifted the artwork to the Cambridge museum later that year, according to the report.

It noted that its recommendation

“implies no criticism” of the museum or Milner-White, who both “acted honourably and in accordance with the standards prevailing at the time”.

Courbet, who died in 1877, was the leader of the Realist movement in French art and responsible for “L’Origine du monde”, considered the most scandalous painting of the 19th century for its depiction of a woman’s genitalia.

Bing, meanwhile, was active in the French Resistance until 1944, and received several notable awards for bravery. He died in 1993. — **AFP**



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CLIFFSIDE VIEW

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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Major Gego exhibition begins in New York's Guggenheim



THE NEW YORK Guggenheim Museum has begun showing a major exhibition of works by the German-Venezuelan artist Gertrud Goldschmidt, known as Gego. About 200 works by the artist, who was born in Hamburg in 1912 and died in 1994, went on display on Friday in the museum's famous rotunda halls.



"Gego is one of the most significant artists to emerge from Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century," the museum said. Fleeing Nazi persecution in 1939, she immigrated to Venezuela, where she settled permanently.



"Tracing a markedly individual artistic path, Gego defied categorisation," the museum said. She became known for her geometric and kinetic sculptures, many of which from the 1950s to the 1990s are on display at the Guggenheim alongside photos of installations and public works, sketches and letters. — dpa

ENTERTAINMENT

Super Mario: Nintendo's decades of star power



HOLLYWOOD IS HAVING its second bash at sprinkling some movie magic on the "Super Mario Bros" video game franchise, three decades after the last attempt. The pint-sized plumber from Japanese game maker Nintendo has enjoyed 40 years of extraordinary popularity that has transformed the character into a truly global icon. Nintendo owes a lot to its moustachioed hero, created by a young game designer called Shigeru Miyamoto initially as the protagonist in the "Donkey Kong" arcade game 1981. The firm had been struggling to crack the North American market and, according to some accounts, was on the verge of financial ruin. With Kong, the Japanese studio finally succeeded in the United States — and invented the platform video game along the way. The hero was known as "Jumpman" until 1983 when he was given the name "Mario". Miyamoto then let him loose in his own "Super Mario Bros" game in 1985, where he was finally renamed "Super Mario".

GAMING ICON The main Super Mario games have since shifted more than 400 million units. And that does not account for wildly popular spinoffs like "Mario Kart" and "Mario Odyssey" or "Mario Golf" and "Mario Tennis". Mario's stratospheric success helped propel Nintendo to the pinnacle of the gaming world. Game designers have built a Mario universe with characters including his green-clad brother Luigi, turtle-demon nemesis Bowser, and friendly dragon-like sidekick Yoshi. The franchise has thrived through transitions from 2D to 3D and from consoles to smartphones with "Super Mario Run" and "Mario

Kart Tour". And retro-gamers are still willing to pay big bucks for a slice of its history. A sealed Nintendo 64 cartridge of "Super Mario" sold for \$1.56 million in 2021, a record for a video game, according to Heritage Auctions in the US. "He is a pop culture icon known to everyone, young and old," authorities in the Spanish city of Zaragoza in 2010 when they named a new street Super Mario Bros Avenue. Though it is just around the corner from streets named after Space Invaders and Tetris.

REAL-WORLD EMPIRE Nowadays, movie adaptations of video games are everywhere. Some, like "Resident Evil" and "Tomb Raider", have become bankable franchises. But Super Mario was there first with the 1993 movie "Super Mario Bros" starring Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper. But it bombed. Critics and audiences hated it. Nevertheless, the wider Mario universe has expanded undeterred with the genial working-class hero getting toy tie-ins with Lego, watches made by Tag Heuer, and a backpack range from Eastpak. "Mario" theme parks are also popping up — first in Osaka in 2021, then Los Angeles last year, and a planned third "Super Mario World" in Florida. One of the attractions being considered is the ultimate tie-in, where the real world and Mario world finally meet — an augmented reality "Mario Kart" race around Bowser's castle. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

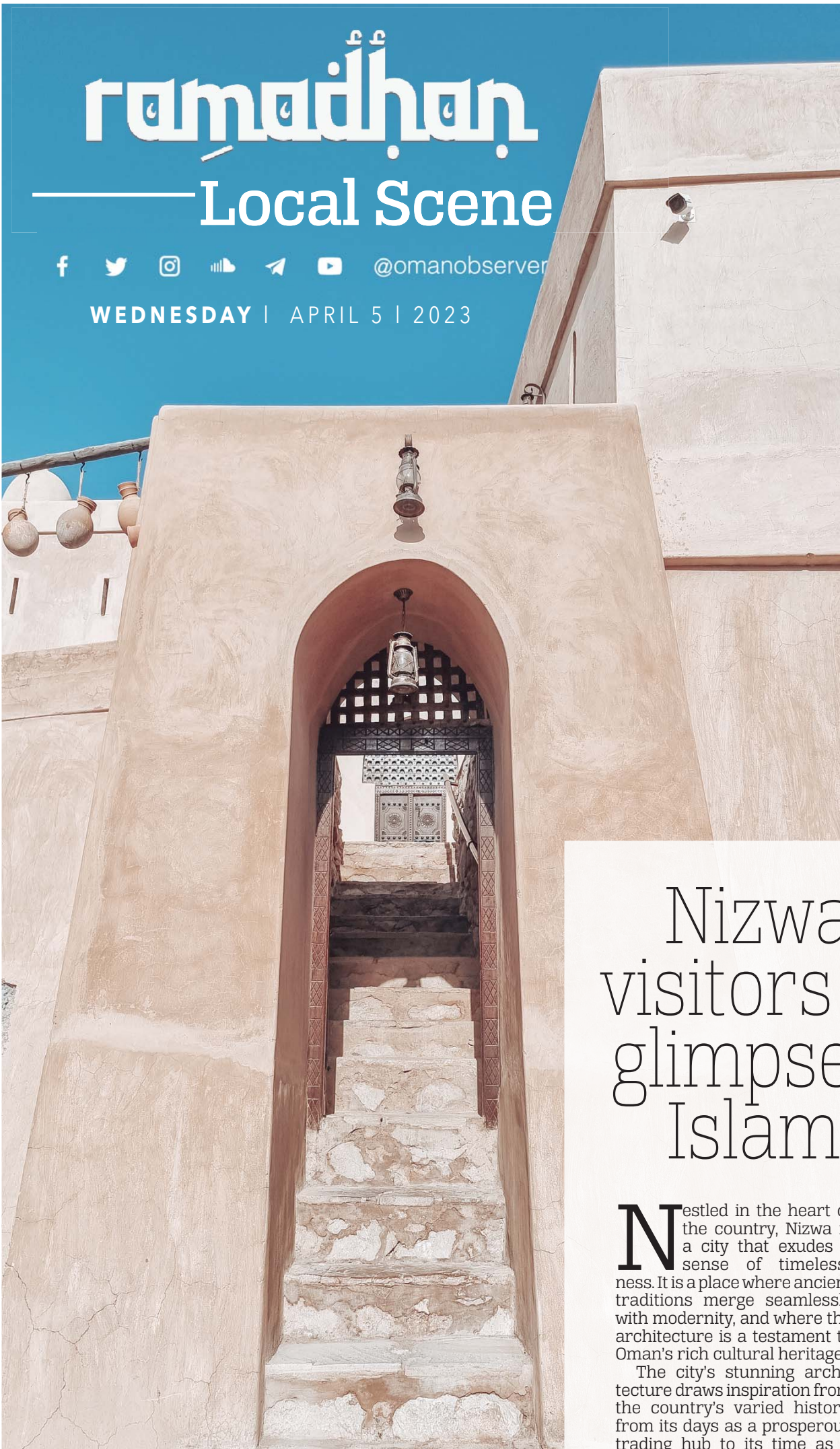
Barcode turns 50 but its days might be numbered



THE PATCH OF irregular vertical lines that revolutionised checking out at the supermarket and facilitated the globalisation of retail is turning 50. But as the barcode celebrates its birthday on Monday, its days might be numbered as it faces competition from the younger QR code, the information-filled squares used in smartphones. The trademark beep as a product is scanned is heard about six billion times per day across the world as around 70,000 items are sold each second. It has become so integrated in the shopping experience that it is easy to forget how much the technology revolutionised retail by speeding up the checkout process and giving retailers the ability to trace products and better manage inventory. The barcode not only identifies a product, but "gives professionals in stores access to other functionalities", said Laurence Vallana, head of France de SES-Imagotag, a company that specialises in electronic tagging.

CHEWING GUM TO FRUIT Barcodes were initially patented by Norman Joseph Woodland and Bernard Silver in the United States in 1952. But it wasn't until nearly two decades later, in 1971, that US engineer George Laurer perfected the technology and moves towards its commercialisation began. On April 3, 1973 the standard to identify products was agreed by a number of large retailers and food companies. It later became known as EAN-13, which stands for European Article Number and the number of digits in the barcode. The following year, on June 26 in the US state of Ohio, the first product was scanned: a pack of chewing gum that is now in the National Museum of American History in Washington. Today, the non-governmental organisation Global Standard 1 manages the barcode system and counts about two million firms as members. It provides companies with a unique "global trade item number" for each product, which is then translated into the barcode. Each firm must pay an annual fee based on their sales, up to nearly \$5,000 per year.

FROM BARS TO QRs But the humble barcode will soon give way to another standard developed by the organisation, said Renaud de Barbuat and Didier Veloso, the respective heads of GS1 Global and GS1 France. The new standard, based on QR, or Quick Response code, will be introduced around 2027. If barcodes have been compared to prison bars by critics of the over-commercialisation of society, the Chinese game Go with its white and black pieces on a square board was the inspiration for the QR code's Japanese creator, Masahiro Hara. Developed in 1994, QR codes can hold much more information as they are read both horizontally, like barcodes, and vertically. Instead of having to search a database for information to go along with a product, the QR code can integrate information directly, such as the composition of the product and recycling instructions. GS1 believes moving to the QR code format allows the sharing of far more information about products as well as content, enabling new uses that will be accessible to consumers as well as retailers. As smartphones can read QR codes, they are an easy way to send people to websites to get additional information, leading to their widespread adoption by companies, artists and even museums. They are even used by payment systems. But barcodes are likely to remain in place for years to come as the world gradually transitions to QR codes. — AFP



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Local Scene

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WEDNESDAY | APRIL 5 | 2023

Nizwa offers visitors a unique glimpse into the Islamic faith

Nestled in the heart of the country, Nizwa is a city that exudes a sense of timelessness. It is a place where ancient traditions merge seamlessly with modernity, and where the architecture is a testament to Oman's rich cultural heritage.

The city's stunning architecture draws inspiration from the country's varied history, from its days as a prosperous trading hub to its time as a powerful Islamic empire. Today, Nizwa is known for its magnificent forts, ornate mosques, and traditional souqs, making it a must-visit destination for anyone travelling to Oman.

One of the main attractions in Nizwa is the Nizwa Fort, a 17th-century structure that was once the seat of power for the local Imams. The fort is a testament to the region's rich history and provides visitors with an insight into the lives of the Imams who ruled Oman centuries ago. The fort's towering walls and ancient architecture are sure to leave visitors in awe.

Another must-see attraction is the bustling souq, or market-place, which is located at the base of the fort. Here, visitors can browse a wide array of goods, from handcrafted pottery and textiles to spices and perfumes. The souq is a sensory overload, with the sounds of haggling merchants and the scent of spices filling the air.

For those seeking outdoor adventures, Nizwa is surrounded by breathtaking landscapes, including the towering peaks of the Hajar Mountains and the stunning Jabal Al Akhdhar range. Visitors can explore these rugged landscapes on foot or by car, taking in the spectacular views of the

surrounding valleys and canyons.

But perhaps the most memorable experience here is the opportunity to interact with the local people and experience their culture firsthand. Visitors can attend traditional performances, such as the Al Ayala dance, and witness local craftsmen at work, such as silversmiths and weavers.

During the holy month of Ramadan, there's no better place to experience the beauty of this month than the historic city of Nizwa.

Nizwa offers visitors a unique glimpse into the Islamic faith and its traditions. During Ramadan, the city comes alive with vibrant celebrations, special events, and culinary delights that are not to be missed.

At the heart of Nizwa's spiritual significance is the famous Nizwa Mosque, one of the oldest and most revered mosques in Oman. Built in the 9th century, the mosque has played a crucial role in the spread of Islam throughout the region, and is a testament to the enduring legacy of Oman's Islamic heritage.

For those looking for a more contemplative experience, Nizwa offers numerous opportunities for spiritual reflection and introspection. The city's many mosques and religious sites provide peaceful retreats for prayer and contemplation, and the surrounding mountains and desert offer a tranquil escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Nizwa is a city full of surprises and delights, offering travellers an immersive cultural experience that is sure to stay with them for a lifetime. So why not make Nizwa your next travel destination?