

HIS MAJESTY BEGINS IRAN VISIT TODAY

DIPLOMATIC
TIES TO
FLOURISH AS
HIS MAJESTY
COMMENCES
MOMENTOUS
VISIT TO IRAN

HIS MAJESTY'S
VISIT TO
DEEPEN
BONDS OF
FRIENDSHIP
AND
COOPERATION

VISIT
EXPLORES
AVENUES
OF TIE-UPS
ACROSS
VARIOUS
SECTORS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran today, according to a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court.

The statement reads as follows: “In culmination of the ties of friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Iran with effect from May 28, 2023, Sunday, in response to an invitation from the Iranian President, Dr Ebrahim Raisi.

The visit stems from the fruitful relations and good neighbourliness between the two countries.

His Majesty’s visit comes within the context of the continuous consultation and coordination between the two leaderships to discuss various developments at the regional and international arenas.

The visit will also touch on means of promoting cooperation between Oman and Iran in different spheres to serve their current and future interests and aspirations.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by

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

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him good health, happiness and success for the good of the Arab and Muslim nations.” — **ONA**

SEE ALSO P 2, 3, 4, 8



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY THANKED BY BELGIUM KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Phillippe Leopold Louis Marie of the Belgians, on Saturday afternoon. During the phone conversation, King Phillippe expressed his thanks and gratitude to His Majesty for the efforts the Sultanate of Oman made to settle the issue of citizens detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Belgium. His Majesty and King Phillippe also reviewed the strong bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of fostering them in all fields. — **ONA**

HIS MAJESTY GREETINGS TO ETHIOPIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sable-Work Zewde of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on her country’s National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president wishing the friendly Ethiopian people more progress and development. — **ONA**

GREETINGS TO REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ilham Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan on his country’s National Day. HM expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president wishing the people of Azerbaijan more progress. — **ONA**

INSIDE



21 OMAN DAILY OBSERVER
SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2023

OMANIRAN TIES

TIMELINE 1979 - 2022

OMAN'S MAJESTY'S VISIT TO IRAN DEEPENS FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

OMAN, IRAN TIES - TIMELINE 1979 - 2022

P2

Nasa launches storm tracker satellite quartet

WASHINGTON: Nasa has launched the final pair of a satellite quartet designed to track tropical cyclones hour by hour, in a project that could improve weather predictions on devastating storms. The storm trackers, sent into orbit on a rocket built by US company Rocket Lab and launched from New Zealand’s Mahia Peninsula early Friday, completed the TROPICS constellation of shoebox-sized satellites.

They can fly over hurricanes (or typhoons in the Pacific) every hour, compared to every six hours with current satellites.

“As a lifelong Floridian, I know firsthand how critical it is for millions of Americans to have timely and accurate forecasts for hurricanes,” NASA administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement.

“More intense rainfall and increased coastal flooding are devastating livelihoods and taking lives, demonstrating the importance of

NASA’s cutting-edge science to help answer questions that nobody else can.”

The first pair of satellites were launched successfully earlier this month.

The information gathered on rainfall, temperature and humidity could help scientists determine where a hurricane will make landfall and how intense it will be, helping people living in coastal areas be better prepared for possible evacuations.

In the long term, a better understanding of the formation and evolution of these storms could help improve climate models.

The constellation was originally intended to have six satellites, not four, but the first two were lost when a US Astra rocket malfunctioned shortly after lift-off last year.

Hurricanes, or typhoons, are becoming more powerful as the ocean surface warms, scientists say.

Hurricane Ian, which devastated Florida in 2022, killed dozens of people and caused more than \$100 billion in damage, making it by far the world’s most expensive weather disaster of the year. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday predicted a “near normal” hurricane season with 12 to 17 named storms packing winds of at least 39 mph.

After three seasons with an atmospheric phenomenon called La Nina, which worsens hurricanes in the Atlantic, NOAA predicts an El Nino to develop this summer, which has a suppressive effect on hurricane activity.

But this could be offset by more localized conditions favorable for hurricanes, such as an above-normal west African monsoon, “which produces African easterly waves and seeds some of the stronger and longer-lived Atlantic storms,” NOAA said. — **AFP**



TIMELENE
1979 - 2022

Both countries signed a memorandum of understanding on the topic of increasing military cooperation

Oman played a vital role in facilitating communications between two parties (UN, US), Iran, and the P5+1 in nuclear talks

The first shipping route was launched between Bandar Abbas and the Port of Sohar

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau thanked Oman for its help in the release of the Iranian university professor Homa Hoodfar

Oman helped in the release of four American prisoners held in Iran on charges of export violations

Launched a new container shipping line to transit cargoes between the southern port city of Bandar Abbas and Port Sultan Qaboos

Oman and Iran signed agreements to develop two gas pipelines and an oil field along their common sea border

Signed 12 memoranda of understanding during the visit, including in the fields of oil and gas, transport, trade and investment

Late His Majesty
Sultan Qaboos bin Said
visited Iran to reaffirm
cooperation and friendship

Oman played the role of diplomatic representative for the UK in Iran

ate His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said visited Iran and signed an agreement between the two countries to improve economic cooperation

**President
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
visited Oman**

President Mohammed Khatami arrived in Muscat, the first visit of an Iranian president to Oman in the last 34 years

Yusuf bin Alawi, former minister of foreign affairs, visited Iran, only the second Arab political figure to visit after the revolution

Oman-Iran ties have passed tests of time

VINOD NAIR
 @vinot_nair

RELATIONS
WITH IRAN:
CORNERSTONE OF
FOREIGN POLICY

TIES FACILITATED THE RESUMPTION OF SAUDI-IRAN TIES

NON-PARTISAN
DIALOGUE IS KEY
TO RESOLVING THE
REGIONAL CRISIS

ECONOMIC RELATIONS SEE BIG GROWTH

MUSCAT: Notwithstanding the political equations in the region, Oman-Iran relations have successfully passed several tests of its time.

This special relationship can be called the cornerstone of the Sultanate of Oman's foreign policy that meaningful solution to any crisis can be achieved only through a comprehensive dialogue.

Over the last 50 years, the Sultanate of Oman has been a key player in regional diplomacy and has been a host or part of many key negotiations, including the Iran Nuclear talks in 2015.

As a result, despite individual economic aspirations, all GCC countries today enjoy good economic and political relations. Recently, Saudi Arabia and Iran resumed diplomatic relations in which they thanked the Sultanate for facilitating talks.

Iran and Saudi Arabia said in a statement they, “thank the Republic of Iraq and the

Sultanate of Oman for hosting the talks held between the two sides in 2021 and 2022 as well as the leaders and government of the People's Republic of China for hosting and supporting the talks.”

The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the resumption of ties, which will strengthen the pillars of security and stability in the region and consolidate positive and constructive cooperation that benefits all peoples of the region and the world.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION DEALS

Iran and Saudi Arabia said they would reopen embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago. The Sultanate of Oman has been maintaining friendly relations with Iran, and both countries have been working on several projects, including a natural gas pipeline project.

According to the international media, Oman always played a constructive role through mediation. It did not take any sides

During the past two years, trade exchange between Oman and Iran grew by 27.9% to reach **RO 320.8 million** by the end of 2022

but played a constructive role in resolving the conflicts in the region.

Iranian former president Hassan Rouhani paid his first visit to Oman in 2103, reflecting the cordial relations between the two countries. The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was the first Arab leader to visit Iran after the election of Rouhani in 2014.

After the nuclear deal in 2015, Rouhani praised Oman's role, while the then US secretary of state John Kerry said that Oman not only hosted several important meetings, but also played a critical role in getting these talks off the ground in the first place.

As a result, the Omani-Iranian economic relations have been witnessing remarkable growth in various areas.

During the past two years, trade exchange between Oman and Iran grew by 27.9 per cent to reach RO 320.8 million by the end of 2022.

The number of companies with 100 per cent Iranian shareholding reached 1,346. The number is equivalent to 72.9 per cent of the total number of companies with Iranian investment.



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OMAN CONTINUES TO BE A DIPLOMATIC BRIDGE BETWEEN IRAN AND THE WORLD

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

@shadadm

The Sultanate of Oman, known for conducting a moderate, balanced, and diplomatic foreign policy, has been a long-time friend of Iran. It has served a stabilising role in the Middle East since the Late Sultan Qaboos ascended to power in 1970.

The Omani-Iranian relations were built on a firm and solid foundation, including good neighbourliness and non-interference in internal affairs, which contributed to resolving a number of contemporary regional issues, as the two countries hold political discussions on a regular basis, the most prominent of which will be held during His Majesty's visit to Iran.

Oman's foreign policy is largely geared towards securing peace and prosperity within the country's own borders. This outcome is most realistic when stability and security exist across the wider region, which helps explain why the country has spent decades pursuing a friends-of-all foreign policy to ensure that Oman does not make enemies.

In this regard, Iran is not an exception. The Omanis have generally sought to achieve neutral positions vis-à-vis regional and international conflicts, and its neutrality means that Oman has long served as a diplomatic bridge between regional and international actors, including Iran and the West.

The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday affirms the advanced relations between Oman and Iran. These relations are based on mutual respect and good neighbourliness, and the talks to be



conducted by His Majesty the Sultan with President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of Iran, will also exchange views on a set of regional and international issues.

Recently, the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian appreciated Oman's role in lifting sanctions on Iran, describing it as "constructive and fruitful". In a statement to ONA, he said that the Sultanate of Oman has serious initiatives for the Iranian nuclear deal that will contribute to returning to the negotiations. Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks during his meeting with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in Muscat.

"We discussed bilateral cooperation and our shared commitment to fostering regional security, stability

and constructive dialogue among all countries," Sayyid Badr tweeted.

The Omani diplomacy created space for converging the contentious points of view between the Islamic Republic of Iran and a number of countries, which permanently yielded positive results. In addition, the good relations between the two countries contributed to the release of a number of people of different nationalities who were detained by the Iranian authorities on security grounds.

Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran, affirmed that the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Iran would contribute to the development of relations and that Oman and Iran enjoy historical and stable relations, pointing

out that Oman relies in its relations with other countries on several principles, including credibility and transparency. "These principles enabled Oman to play prominent roles at the regional and international levels," he said.

Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman, reiterated that Oman has a special place in Iran's foreign policy. "Iran's supreme leadership always lauds Oman's balanced and influential role in the regional and global arenas," he said.

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have historical relations that have been strengthened by joint cooperation over the past 50 years, mutual interests, and good neighbourliness.

TALKS BETWEEN HIS MAJESTY AND PRESIDENT RAISI WILL OPEN BROADER HORIZONS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN DIFFERENT SPHERES

OMAN AND IRAN HAVE MAINTAINED GOOD RELATIONS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL BY HOLDING ANNUAL TALK SESSIONS

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE HISTORICAL AND DISTINGUISHED WITH ONGOING COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

OMAN HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY, AS IRAN'S SUPREME LEADERSHIP ALWAYS LAUDS OMAN'S BALANCED AND INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ARENAS

Trade and economic ties on an upswing

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Trade and economic ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have burgeoned in recent years as both countries leverage their geographical proximity, historical ties and strong neighbourly relations to boost commerce to support the diversification of their economies. Of late, these ties have expanded in scope to include shipping and logistics, multimodal transportation, energy cooperation, tourism and people movement as well.

Data shared recently by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicates that Omani exports to Iran have been expanding by leaps and bounds, although Oman-origin merchandise remains minuscule. It amounted to RO 207.4 million in 2022, which included a barely discernible RO 4.2 million in Omani origin goods. Nevertheless, the figures were a testament to a progressive uptick in trade between the two countries.

Re-exports into Iran from

Oman included machinery, devices and equipment for heat treatment, plates, sheets, tapes, diesel engine lubricants, optical tools, equipment for medical examination and electrical equipment.

Imports from Iran into Oman amounted to RO 113.4 million in 2022, compared to RO 98.7 million in 2021. They comprised mainly livestock and semi-finished products of iron steel and bitumen, as well as fruits and shrimp.

Significantly, it was during the recent pandemic that bilateral trade, notably in the area of foodstuff, livestock and farm produce, received a major boost between Oman and Iran when conventional modes of supply together with supply chains were disrupted in the wake of international lockdowns. During this challenging period, Iran – with its abundance of fresh produce – became a practical and cost-competitive source of supply to the Omani market. Satellite ports along the Sea of Oman coast flourished in its wake, helping ensure that the food requirements of Oman were adequately met.

Since the start of 2023, both countries have exchanged high-level visits designed to set the



ground for a significant uptick in trade and economic relations. Notable have been efforts to broaden transportation ties between the two neighbours for commercial and touristic purposes through various methods, including rail, road, air, and maritime routes.

To this end, Oman's Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, led

a delegation to Tehran to meet with Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash earlier this month. Both sides explored the feasibility of a comprehensive maritime transport agreement envisioning direct shipping lines between the ports of Iran and Oman, particularly between Bandar Abbas and Shinas Port.

The two countries also discussed plans to facilitate trade through multimodal transit channels from

Central Asia to Oman through Iran under the Ashgabat Agreement. Signed in 2011, the Ashgabat Agreement is a multimodal transport deal among Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Oman for creating an international transport and transit corridor in order to facilitate the transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Arabian Gulf. The agreement came into force in April 2016.

Further, with the goal of boosting trade and economic ties, Oman and Iran are eager to sign a landmark Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) against the backdrop of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's historic visit to Tehran starting Sunday, May 28, 2023. Helping pave the way for this groundbreaking pact was the recent visit of Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef. This eagerness to ramp up trade and economic relations was also reflected in the attendance of around 200 Omani business leaders at Iran Expo 2023.

Significantly, Oman's private sector has also committed to setting up a sales agency for Iran Khodro Industrial Group (IKCO), makers of the popular Iran Khodro brand of vehicles, in the Sultanate of Oman. The facility will support the export of the Iranian automotive brand into Oman and elsewhere in the GCC.

More than 1,300 wholly-owned Iranian businesses operate in the Sultanate of Oman – a figure that is expected to rise dramatically in the wake of His Majesty the Sultan's landmark visit to Tehran.



A deep-rooted and longstanding historical depth

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT

For more than five decades, the diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have strengthened, and their historical ties have solidified partnerships in various political, security, economic and cultural domains. Despite the changing dynamics in the region and numerous challenges, the importance of the relationship between Oman and Iran remains evident. This strong relationship is built upon historical and cultural foundations that both countries have carried since ancient times.

The Omani-Iranian cultural ties highlight shared commonalities and deep bonds between the two brotherly peoples, emphasising the significance of cultural communication. This has become increasingly evident in recent times, with efforts being made to reinforce these cultural relationships and propel them forward. This includes collaborations in cultural fields in general, as well as scientific, academic, artistic, cinematic, handicraft, media, tourism, youth and sports cooperation, among others.

ART AND CALLIGRAPHY

As part of enhancing and exchanging expertise in the field of art and exploring global artistic experiences, the Omani Society for Fine Arts has organised several diverse events in various areas of visual arts, calligraphy and workshops. One notable example is the virtual art exhibition of Iranian artist Hassan Yadegarzadeh, who is considered one of the prominent Iranian artists with expertise in different areas such as painting, design and sculpture. He has participated in numerous local, regional and international forums.

Additionally, an art exhibition titled

“Woman” was organised, featuring the works of Iranian visual artist Sima Sardarzhahi. Her artwork delves into the depths of the human psyche, particularly focusing on women, their issues, and their situations within the context of society. She employs an expressive style that captures moments of astonishment and beauty in the world of women from various profound perspectives. Furthermore, a dedicated exhibition was also held for Iranian visual artist Narjes Heydari by the Omani Society for Fine Arts.

GRAPHIC ARTWORKS

Iranian artist Nakisa Samadi has created a collection of graphic artworks of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, inspired by his personality and his love for his country and fellow beings and her works were exhibited in an exhibition in Oman for two days.

The Iranian calligrapher Mohammad Kashtkar participated in a workshop organised by the Omani Society for Fine Arts in Suhar, specifically focusing on the Arabic calligraphy style of “Naskh.” The workshop covered various aspects, including the history of Naskh calligraphy, the differences between its varied schools, and the types of templates used to shape calligraphic compositions.

Furthermore, there has been participation from several artists in the artistic gatherings organised by the society, including Omani and resident artists in the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, a number of Iranian artists participated as members of the judging panels for exhibitions held by the society in the past period.

CRAFTS INDUSTRY

Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran exchange expertise in the field of traditional crafts and professions. Iranian artists from various crafts and traditional industries participate in exhibitions organised by the Sultanate of Oman. Handicrafts and visual arts serve as a bridge for communication.



Iranian artist Nakisa Samadi has created a collection of graphic artworks of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, inspired by his personality and his love for his country and fellow beings and her works were exhibited in an exhibition in Oman for two days

Oman has taken initiatives to solidify the institutional and organisational culture of its handicraft sector, reflecting the importance of emerging sectors in increasing national income and promoting diversity and enrichment.

Iran is known for its advancements in the field of traditional crafts and professions. The two countries share common features and characteristics in many inherited craft industries, emphasising the importance of geographical and social proximity in establishing foundations for peace and stability. There are many shared craftsmanship specifications and similar characteristics between the two countries, especially in fashion and diverse craft industries, such as perfume distillation, natural dyes, wool and cotton textiles, copperware and silver craftsmanship. Moreover, there are similarities in the techniques used in inherited traditional professions.

PERSIAN LANGUAGE

The inception of a Persian Language Education Centre was prompted by the shared characteristics of the Arabic and Persian languages, as well as the significant role language plays in advancing Islamic culture and fortifying cultural ties. In 2009, during the visit of the late Sultan Qaboos, an agreement was reached to establish an institute dedicated to teaching the Persian language in Muscat.

Over the years, the institute has garnered the interest of numerous enthusiasts of the Persian language. Its primary objective is to acquaint learners with the intricacies of the Persian language, underscore the similarities between Arabic and Persian, and offer instruction in Persian literature, verb conjugation, sentence construction, and reading comprehension while also familiarising students with Persian language culture and the distinguishing elements between the two languages.



Why knowing the ‘Feels Like’ temperature matters

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 27

With more and more people getting live air temperatures on their mobile phones or vehicle dashboards, the one commonly used but scientific term is the ‘feels-like’ temperature.

The ‘feels-like’ temperature relies on environmental data including the air temperature, relative humidity and wind speed to determine how weather conditions feel to bare skin.

Different combinations of temperature, humidity and wind speed can increase the sensation of being hot or cold. For example, a day that is very humid may feel hotter than it really is outside because your body sweat does not evaporate (and thereby cool the body) the way it is intended.

Oman Meteorology has said that there is a difference between a perceived (feels-like) temperature and actual recorded temperatures.

For example, at the writing of this report, the actual Muscat temperature was around 40° but the feels-like temperature was a



Oman Meteorology has said that there is a difference between a perceived (feels-like) temperature and actual recorded temperatures

notch higher at 42°C and 43°C.

The recorded temperature is generally felt to be lower than the temperatures that a person feels.

Oman Met underlines the ability of the human body to adapt to the high air temperature through a self-cooling mechanism like sweat that evaporates

and works to lower the body temperature, and the higher the relative humidity, the lower the rate of sweat evaporation, which keeps the body temperature high compared to the actual temperature recorded.

Some global meteorological facilities have established another approximate measurement index called the ‘felt temperature’ degree, a mathematical measure that combines the air temperature and the relative humidity to determine the approximate temperature that a person feels.

An example is the temperature of 35° and relative humidity of 70, so the sensible heat is 51°Celsius.



Plan to install 100,000 LED lighting units on Muscat roads

GHALIA AL DUKHRIYAH
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Muscat Municipality has completed the second phase of the project for the replacement of the existing conventional road lighting by more efficient energy-saving and environmentally-friendly lights by installing 17,000 lighting units on Muscat roads.

Engineer Faisal bin Amin al Zedjali from the lighting and traffic control department at Muscat Municipality said that the project is being executed on five phases and began with replacing conventional sodium vapor lamps by LED lamps. The project began in 2018 and will cover all the roads of Muscat Governorate. He added that the first phase ended in 2020 and covered five main roads within Muscat Governorate namely the Sultan Qaboos road, Qurayat-Fins road, Darsait bridge, Al Qurum road, November 18 road and the Grand Mosque road with a total of 7,400 lamps replaced. Another 17,000 units were installed in the second phase of the project covering the roads of the wilayats of Al Seeb, Bausher, Muttrah, Al Amerat and Muscat, Al Qurum-Al Athaiba section of the Sultan Qaboos



road, some bridges and service roads in Muttrah and Muscat. The specifications for the third phase are currently under study with 30,000 lighting units expected to be replaced. The third phase is in the process of awarding and bidding. More than 100,000 lamps were replaced in Muscat Governorate so far and the project is expected to be completed in 2026, Al Zedjali said, affirming that the new lighting system reduced the energy consumed

by 70 per cent and lowered the cost of maintenance and carbon emission.

The Lighting and Traffic Signals Control Centre in Muscat Municipality will add more traffic signals. The centre oversees all 98 traffic signals in Muscat Governorate and controls the lights and handles reports on road lighting issues. It also conducts studies and prepares reports on energy consumption of road lights.

Training programme highlights human rights issues

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Oman Human Rights Commission and a number of civil society organisations took part in a five-day introductory training programme on human rights in The Hague, Kingdom of Netherlands, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in the Sultanate of Oman.

“The programme aims to benefit from the Kingdom of Netherlands’ experiences at the national and international levels. This is in addition to exchanging with the National Institution for Human Rights as well as to learn about the best practices of national institutions in the Netherlands through collaboration with civil society institutions, and to understand the mechanism for integrating human rights concepts into the work of law enforcement agencies,” a press statement said.

This is in addition to identifying future areas of cooperation and knowledge exchange projects between organisations in the Netherlands and the Oman Human Rights Commission in relation to children’s rights, and the rights of juvenile prison inmates through field visits.



The programme also fits within the Oman Human Rights Commission ongoing efforts to strengthen its external role and benefit from the experiences of friendly countries in developing its work and responsibilities in society. This is in addition to strengthening partnerships with community institutions

in assuming responsibility and promoting joint action.

The team included committee members and employees, as well as representatives from the Omani Journalists Association, the Genera Federation of Oman Workers, the Children First Association, and the Association of Children with Disabilities.

WHA approves health strategy proposed by Oman

GENEVA: The 76th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) currently taking place in Geneva, Switzerland, approved the global infection control strategy proposed by the Sultanate of Oman to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) praised the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to enhance global health, emphasising the importance of the strategy in light of the gaps and shortcomings that the world witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic and previous epidemics.

The Sultanate of Oman submitted a draft resolution on the strategy as it held, in cooperation with the Global Infection Control Office, several negotiation sessions on the content and details of the draft and worked with experts from countries, institutions and relevant organisations to produce and ratify the final version of the strategy. — ONA



Indian Social Club Oman TENDER NOTICE Expression of Interest

The Indian Social Club Oman is planning to build its new club house at Al Amerat on DBF (Design, Build & Finance) basis. The total Built up area of the project is approx. 4,000 sq.mtrs. with associated facilities and car parking.

The ISC Oman invites interested companies with the relevant experience to send the expression of interest to eoiscoman@gmail.com

ANNOUNCEMENT

An Announcement to Update Suppliers and Contractors’ Data in Nama Group

Nama Group is committed to practicing its purchasing procedures in a fair, ethical, and transparent manner, and takes these values very seriously. As part of the Group commitment to deal with legal contractors, authorized to conduct business according to the Sultanate laws, the contractors and suppliers were connected and requested to update their data especially who are assigned for projects and supply products or services.

Nama Group also invites companies that have not yet updated their data to proceed with this process in the Group suppliers and contractors register.

For further clarification and inquiries, please contact the Group Suppliers and Contractors Registration Section by phone: 24559295 and email: fahad.alnaabi@holding.nama.om or contact the Procurement Sections in the Group subsidiaries.

Best regards,
Group Procurement Department – Nama Holding



TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



China deletes 1.4m social media posts in crack down on ‘self-media’ accounts

BEIJING: China’s cyberspace regulator said 1.4 million social media posts have been deleted following a two-month probe into alleged misinformation, illegal profiteering, and impersonation of state officials, among other “pronounced problems”.
The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said in a statement it had closed 67,000 social media accounts and deleted hundreds of thousands of posts between March 10 and May 22 as part of a broader “rectification” campaign.
The crackdown targeted accounts on popular Chinese social media apps including WeChat, Douyin and Weibo that fall under the category of “self media,” a term that broadly refers to accounts that publish news and information but are not government-run or state-approved.
Beijing frequently arrests citizens and censors accounts for publishing or sharing factual information considered sensitive

or critical of the Communist Party, the government or the military, especially when such information goes viral.
Of the 67,000 accounts that were permanently closed, almost 8,000 were taken down for “spreading fake news, rumours and harmful information,” according to CAC. Around 930,000 other accounts received less severe punishments, from being removed of all followers to the suspension or cancellation of profit-making privileges.
In a separate campaign, the regulator recently closed over 100,000 accounts that allegedly misrepresented news anchors and media agencies to counter the rise of online fake news coverage aided by AI technologies.
The CAC said its latest campaign had targeted almost 13,000 counterfeit military accounts, with names such as “Chinese Red Army Command”, “Chinese Anti-terrorist Force” and “Strategic Missile Force”.
— Reuters



A sign above an office of the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) is seen in Beijing, China. – Reuters file photo



Smoke billows in Sudan's capital Khartoum on May 27. – AFP

Truce reduces fighting in Sudan, little relief for humanitarian crisis

DUBAI/CAIRO: Khartoum was calmer on Saturday morning as a seven-day ceasefire appeared to reduce fighting between two rival military factions although it has not yet provided the promised humanitarian relief to millions trapped in the capital.
A truce signed by the two fighting parties — Sudan’s army and a paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces — aimed to secure safe passage for humanitarian aid and lead to wider talks sponsored by the United States and Saudi Arabia.
On Saturday, witnesses said that Khartoum was calmer, although sporadic clashes were reported overnight. A gulf broadcaster reported some clashes

in northwestern Khartoum and southern Omdurman, a city neighbouring the capital.
In a statement, the RSF accused the army of violating the ceasefire and destroying the country’s mint in an air strike. The army had accused the RSF on Friday of targeting the mint.
The army said meanwhile that its call for army reservists was a partial mobilisation and constitutional measure, adding the army expected large numbers to respond to the call.
Those who remain in Khartoum are struggling with failures of services such as electricity, water and phone networks. Looters have ransacked homes, mostly in well-off neighbourhoods. Sudanese

police said they were expanding deployment and also called in able retired officers to help.
“Our neighbourhood has become a war zone. Services have collapsed and chaos has spread in Khartoum,” said 52-year-old Ahmed Salih, a resident of the city.
“No one is bothered to help the Sudanese people, neither the government nor internationally. We are humans, where is the humanity?” he added.
Aid agencies say that despite the truce they have struggled to get the bureaucratic and security guarantees to transport aid and staff in safer parts of the country to Khartoum and other hot zones.
Fighting has also expanded into the fragile Darfur region,

most impacting the western city of El Geneina, which has seen an onslaught of militia attacks that have destroyed its infrastructure and killed hundreds.
The governmental Combating Violence Against Women and Children Unit said late on Friday it had received reports of 25 cases of violence to women and girls in Darfur and 24 reports in Khartoum since the conflict erupted.
It said that victims had described 43 of the men as wearing RSF uniforms and either riding vehicles with RSF licences or located in RSF-controlled areas.
The RSF has denied reports that its soldiers are engaged in any assaults or looting. — Reuters

Israeli settler kills Palestinian amid rise in violence

WEST BANK: An Israeli settler shot dead a Palestinian man who the military said tried to carry out a stabbing attack in a settlement in the occupied West Bank.
The incident came as several European countries condemned Israeli demolitions and settler violence in the West Bank, which flared again as Palestinian farmers said Jewish settlers fired at them while they were working on their agriculture land.
The Palestinian health ministry said it was informed by the unit that coordinates civilian affairs with Israel that 28-year-old Alaa Qaysiyeh was shot dead “by the occupation” south of Hebron.
Israeli media said the incident occurred as people in the settlement of Teneh Omarim were gathering for prayers for the Jewish Shavuot festival.

Qaysiyeh’s sister-in-law, Nana, said that the youngest of nine siblings worked intermittently, largely kept to himself and was not a member of any armed groups. She said his brother Murad, her husband, was released six months ago after 17 years in an Israeli prison on accusations of firing at a settlement and wounding three people.
No armed groups claimed Qaysiyeh as a member.
Israel occupied the West Bank, which Palestinians want as the core of an independent state, in the 1967 Middle East war.
Bashar al-Qaryuti, a field researcher with the St. Yves rights group, said Jewish settlers teased Palestinian farmers in three different areas of the West Bank, with the backing of Israeli soldiers.
In the village of al-Mughayyir

near the city of Ramallah, Palestinians said settlers fired and hurled stones at them as they were tending to their land, then torched their cars, setting off clashes.
“We were moving bales of hay when the settlers arrived with soldiers and started firing at us,” said Murad Abu Alia.
Attaf al-Naasan said that the settlers poured fuel on his car and set it on fire as the soldiers watched and prevented him from reaching it.
A European Union delegation to the Palestinians issued statements condemning on Friday’s settler violence and calling on Israel to “halt all confiscations and demolitions in the occupied West Bank, to return or compensate for donor funded humanitarian items and to give unimpeded humanitarian access”.



Palestinians check a car burned by Israeli settlers near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. – Reuters

SHORT TAKES

PESHAWAR

Avalanche kills at least 10 in northern Pakistan

An avalanche killed at least 10 people in a remote area of northern Pakistan, officials said, adding that poor weather and limited accessibility were hampering rescue efforts.
The avalanche, which also injured more than 10 people, happened near the Shounter Pass that connects the Gilgit-Baltistan region with Pakistan-administered Kashmir.
“A group of around 35 nomads who were returning from Kashmir had set up camp



close to a ravine,” rescue official Subah Khan said.
Muhammad Riaz, a police official from the area, said that residents were taking the lead in the rescue operation in the difficult-to-reach area.
— AFP

MADRID

Police arrest 30 connected to drug trafficking

The Spanish police, in cooperation with Europol, have once again busted a large international drug trafficking gang.
In the process, 30 people were arrested and around one tonne of cocaine was seized, the police unit Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) announced.
During 23 searches in Algeciras and the surrounding area of the Andalusian municipality, numerous weapons, jewels, \$184,000 in



cash and 10 vehicles were seized.
The gang had smuggled the cocaine from South America to Europe via the port of Algeciras, not far from Gibraltar. They were assisted by dock workers and goods transport companies.
— dpa

BELGRADE

President steps down as head of ruling party

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic stepped down as leader of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) at a party congress on Saturday, saying a new approach was needed to unite the country, but said he would remain head of state.
The move came a day after tens of thousands of people from across Serbia and from neighbouring Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia rallied in the centre of Belgrade in a show of support for Vucic following



big anti-government protests over two mass shootings.
Leaders of the SNS accepted Vucic’s resignation offer at the party congress in Kragujevac, central Serbia, and appointed defence minister Milos Vucevic to replace him. — Reuters

Frantic negotiations, late nights and no deal on America’s debt



Katie Rogers
The writer is a White House correspondent for The New York Times



Luke Broadwater
The writer is a congressional reporter in the Washington bureau of The New York Times

On Capitol Hill, the delicate talks to avert default on the government’s debts this week took place over middle-of-the-night video calls, marathon meetings in an opulent conference room, and at least one early morning bike ride.

At the White House, evening tour groups were diverted from the West Wing because President Joe Biden was in the Oval Office with his chief of staff and other advisers, who needed his quick feedback.

But all of the talking has so far failed to produce a deal to raise the country’s debt limit, raising fears of a potentially catastrophic default that could upend financial markets, spike interest rates and end in a downgrade of the nation’s credit.

The negotiators got a bit of breathing room on Friday afternoon, when Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States could run out of money to pay its bills on time by June 5 — a slight extension from the previous forecast of as early as June 1.

But a week of frenetic and “productive” meetings has given those trapped in the negotiating room the distinct feeling that the days and nights were all running together. “Here we are, night after night,” said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., one of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s top lieutenants.

“Everyone wants a detail of this,” McHenry said, as a crowd of reporters demanded to know whether the country was going to descend into economic calamity or not. “Everyone wants a tweet. I want an agreement that changes the trajectory of the country.”

As he spoke, the normally gregarious congressman telegraphed his fatigue in the smallest of ways: The bow tie he wears every day was gone.

McCarthy, who went for a bike ride on Friday morning with one of his key negotiators, Rep. Garret Graves, R-La., weighed in with the obvious: “We got to make more progress now.”

Although Biden and McCarthy have known each other for years and speak (mostly) respectfully about each other in public, their relationship has so far not been about finding comity but about extracting concessions.

Biden’s aides have been working around the clock since talks abruptly fell apart a week ago, leading to a Republican-



Rep Patrick McHenry, one of the lead negotiators for House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, speaks to reporters as negotiations continue over the debt limit on Capitol Hill in Washington.

imposed “pause” on talks that surprised members of Biden’s negotiating team. From Japan, Biden demanded frequent updates, and ended a scheduled dinner early to receive a briefing on the talks. On the last day of his trip, Biden’s advisers in Washington woke up at 4:30 a.m. to update him by video.

Since then, negotiators on both sides have met several times in a conference room on the House side of Capitol Hill, under a fresco painted by artist Constantino Brumidi that depicts “a retired Roman general recalled to defend his city, a classical event often seen as parallel to the life of George Washington,” according to the Architect of the Capitol’s website.

Descriptions of the meetings themselves have not been nearly as colourful. McHenry expressed dismay this week at all the people pretending to know what was happening.

“Everybody wants to have conjecture or wants to have some self-serving read

about what we’re talking about, but there’s just a few of us in the room,” he said.

Biden’s team of negotiators has been led by Shalanda Young, director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Steve Ricchetti, counselor to the president, who has been Biden’s liaison to Capitol Hill since his days as vice president. Ricchetti has been ferried back and forth along Pennsylvania Avenue all week, moving between White House meetings and meetings with Republicans, according to a person familiar with his schedule.

Throughout the negotiations, Ricchetti has been the lone member of the team empowered to make strategic decisions on Biden’s behalf, according to two people familiar with the talks. (He is also one of the few people empowered to answer the president’s phone on Biden’s behalf when they are together.)

The group also includes Louisa Terrell, the legislative affairs director. She and Young have deep relationships on Capitol Hill. Young was a longtime

staff member on the House Committee on Appropriations who has built up respect with both Republicans and Democrats, according to several former administration officials. Terrell’s experience on Capitol Hill dates back to Biden’s Senate office.

Their experience will be key in continuing to sell members on any deal that may come, according to several people involved. When Capitol Hill negotiators travelled to the White House midweek, they met at a conference room near Young’s suite of offices in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

At the White House, Biden gets daily updates from Jeffrey Zients, his chief of staff. Zients has not been as involved in the external negotiations, people familiar say, but he is leading the strategy that guides those meetings from the White House. He is in regular contact with Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., the majority leader, and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., the House’s top Democrat.

Far-right Russian volunteers make for worrisome allies



Valerie Hopkins
The writer is an international correspondent for The New York Times

A group of fighters aligned with Ukraine, who had participated earlier this week in the most intense fighting inside Russia’s borders since the attack, gathered the foreign and local press in an undisclosed location to celebrate, to taunt the Kremlin and to show off what they called “military trophies” from their incursion into their native land: Russia.

Their leader, Denis Kapustin, was proud that his force of anti-Putin Russians at one point controlled, he said, 42 square kilometres of Russian territory.

“I want to prove that it’s possible to fight against a tyrant,” he said. “That Putin’s power is not unlimited, that the security services can beat, control and torture the unarmed. But as soon as they meet a full armed resistance, they flee.”

Kapustin and prominent members of the armed group he leads, the Russian Volunteer Corps, openly espouse far-right views. Kapustin, who has long used the alias Denis Nikitin but typically goes by his military call sign, White Rex, is a Russian citizen who moved to Germany in the early 2000s. He associated with a group of violent soccer fans and later became, “one of the most influential activists” in a splinter group in the MMA scene, officials in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia have said.

Kapustin has reportedly been banned from entering Europe’s visa-free, 27-country Schengen zone, but he has said only that Germany cancelled his residency permit.

The fact that the group has garnered attention for its operation and revived coverage of the group’s ties to the group is an awkward development for Ukraine’s government, particularly since President Vladimir Putin of Russia has justified his attack on the false claim of fighting and made it a regular theme of Kremlin propaganda.

Most of the anti-Russian groups harbour long-term political ambitions to return home and overthrow the Russian and Belarusian governments.

“The Russian Volunteer Corps marches in and destroys the current government — that’s the only way,” Kapustin said earlier this year. “You cannot persuade a tyrant to leave, and any other force would be seen as invaders.”

In reality, far-right groups in Ukraine are a small minority, and Ukraine has denied any involvement in the Russian



Denis Kapustin, at right in black, the leader of an anti-Putin group of ethnic Russians.

Volunteer Corps or any role in fighting on the Russian side of the border. But Kapustin said that his group “definitely got a lot of encouragement” from Ukrainian authorities.

The Russian Volunteer Corps, also known by its Russian initials RDK, was one of two groups of anti-Russian fighters that conducted a cross-border attack in the Belgorod region of southern Russia on Monday, engaging enemy troops over two days of skirmishing.

The aim of the incursions, the groups say, was to force Moscow to redeploy soldiers from occupied areas of Ukraine to defend its borders, stretching its defences before a planned Ukrainian counteroffensive, a goal that aligns with the broader objectives of Ukraine’s military.

The Russian Volunteer Corps also claimed credit for two incidents in the Russian border region of Bryansk in March and April.

The second group was the Free Russia Legion, which operates under the umbrella of Ukraine’s International Legion, a force that includes American and British volunteers, as well as Belarusians, Georgians and others. It is overseen by Ukraine’s armed forces and commanded by Ukrainian officers.

At the news conference on Wednesday, Kapustin affirmed that his group was not controlled by the Ukrainian army but said that the military had wished the fighters “good luck.” There had been “nothing further than encouragement” from the Ukrainian part, he said.

What was your wake-up call?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Ahmed was in his late forties when he had his first heart attack. He was working on his computer at home when he suddenly experienced severe chest pain. He initially thought it was muscle pain but taking a breath became difficult and very painful.

His wife saw that and drove him to the hospital where he was told it was a heart attack. A few hours later he was lying in bed at the intensive care unit with drips and wires coming out of his body.

He was shocked and confused and kept asking himself “How did this happen to me? Was this because of my work? What if I die now? Who will take care of my family?

The following morning his doctor came and reassured him that his heart would be fine after

removing the small clots that caused the pain and advised him to “take it easy and watch your health”.

A few days later he was back at home resting most of the time but his worries were far from over.

He became anxious that the pain would come again and kept avoiding simple tasks like walking to the nearby mosque or sitting in the outside garden.

Heart diseases are becoming more common as modern life means that people move less and consume large amounts of unhealthy food that gets delivered to their doorsteps. Yet another factor that can increase your risk of heart disease is stress. Studies suggest that long-term stress can increase blood cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood sugar levels.

HEART DISEASES ARE BECOMING MORE COMMON AS MODERN LIFE MEANS THAT PEOPLE MOVE LESS AND CONSUME LARGE AMOUNTS OF UNHEALTHY FOOD THAT GETS DELIVERED TO THEIR DOORSTEPS, YET ANOTHER FACTOR THAT CAN INCREASE YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE IS STRESS

It can also increase your risk of having high blood pressure which eventually harm your heart.

New studies also showed that your mental health can also affect your heart. Mental health problems such as depression, social isolation,

and lack of quality social support carry the same risk as other factors such as smoking, high cholesterol levels, and hypertension.

Stress can also affect our eating and sleeping habits as some of us tend to eat more carbohydrates when stressed and sleep less.

So what can we do to reduce our risk of developing heart disease? Eating a healthy diet and performing physical exercise comes at the top followed by reducing your stress level. Let us agree that daily stress cannot be avoided so we need to manage our stress since we can't entirely avoid it.

Plan your day ahead and learn basic time management skills, avoid being a perfectionist as this tends to keep you on edge all the time.

Take frequent and small breaks

from work to relax. Take a break locally or abroad if you can afford it. Remember that work should not dominate your life.

Learn to switch off social media every day at least one hour before going to bed and avoid looking at your mobile phone the moment you wake up.

Building small healthy habits can take time and effort but it's worth it.

Surround yourself with positive people who are happy to see you succeed in life and not the negative-minded ones who keep comparing you with others and set unrealistic expectations so they can enjoy seeing you fall.

Have achievable goals and review them to make sure they are in line with your values in life. Watch after your physical and mental health in order to get better quality of life.

Monsoons in India become unpredictable as pollution wreaks havoc

VIDHI DOSHI

In a small laboratory on the outskirts of the Indian city of Hyderabad, professor Kirti Sahu is studying raindrops.

Using a machine that simulates the conditions of clouds, he is among a number of scientists aiming to understand how climate change and pollution are changing the monsoon rains that underpin the country's agrarian economy.

“The Indian monsoon is full of mystery. If we can predict rainfall, it will be huge for us,” said Sahu, a researcher in the department of chemical engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad.

The monsoon, the lifeblood of the country's \$3 trillion economy, delivers nearly 70 per cent of the rain that India needs to water farms and recharge reservoirs and aquifers.

The country of 1.4 billion plans its planting season, harvests and even weddings around the seasonal rains.

But climate changing emissions from burning fossil fuels for energy, and pollution, are changing the monsoon, impacting on agriculture and making forecasting harder.

Climate change is fuelling a range of extreme weather around the world, with wet areas generally getting wetter while dry regions are hit by more droughts.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) notes that although climate change is likely to lead to increased rainfall over Asia, the South Asian monsoon has weakened in the second half of the 20th century.

That change in the monsoon is linked to a rise in aerosols — tiny particles or liquid droplets in the air — as a result of human activities, the IPCC said.

Burning fossil fuels, vehicle exhaust, dust, and sea salt all add to aerosols in the atmosphere.

India has long struggled with high levels of air pollution that periodically cloak major cities in toxic smog.

In recent years, India has seen a shorter, more intense rainy season that leaves some areas flooded and others parched, said experts including G P Sharma, the lead on meteorology and climate change at Skymet, a private weather forecaster.

Six major droughts have hit the subcontinent since 2000, but forecasters failed to see them coming, Sharma said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



Dr Musallam Al Maani

The writer is dean of Al Zahra College for Women

His Majesty’s visit to Iran: a mark of honour to long-lasting relationship

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said begins a two-day Royal visit to the Republic of Iran today. The Iranians greet His Majesty the Sultan with respect, as the visit represents a mark of honour to a relationship which both countries have enjoyed for a long time and whose worth brings respect and fame to both countries.

Historically, Oman has maintained good relations with Iran for a long time. The confidence Iran places in Oman is derived from assured reliance on its strength and truthfulness, an attribute which has characterised Oman and become synonymous with its foreign policy.

Oman, under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, exhibits courage, strength and calmness in the face of situations in a volatile region which is often characterised by and subject to rapid and unexpected changes.

Oman also adopts a unique foreign policy, which aims to strengthen the bonds of cooperation and friendship with all countries and peoples around the world.

Oman's relationship with other nations is based on mutual respect and common interest, while refusing to take a part in concerns and internal affairs of others. Its foreign policy has become one of its strong attributes and an inherent and chief asset, proving to the whole world that Oman vigorously moves forward from strength to strength.

Countries around the world trust Oman as a reliable partner and can confide fully in its power to bring comfort, and reassurance to perplexed situations.

Blessed with a wise leader, Oman is widely known for its endeavours to end hostilities between those at war or in a state of enmity. That is why Oman refuses to allow itself to get involved in peevish disputes; instead, it devotes serious efforts and endeavours to bring peace and quietude.

When other countries start to break down, Oman always extends its hand to help them regain their composure. Within this framework, Oman has succeeded, due to farsighted visions of His Majesty the Sultan, to end active



and mutual hatred and ill will between nations.

Similarly, Iran, without doubt, occupies a strategic location in the

THE VISIT OF HIS MAJESTY TO IRAN IS HISTORICAL AND HIGHLY HONOURED AND COMES AS PART OF THE PIVOTAL ROLE OMAN PLAYS IN THE REGION

region. Geographically, it can be best described as a country that is balmy, mild and clement in weather and temperature.

If you ever visit Iran, you can expect no less than kindness and gentility of Iranians, who enjoy superior

social status and prestige evidenced by manners and mode of life, and demonstrate attitudes marked by delicacy, prudery and affection.

This is derived from Iran's relatively high level of cultural and technological development and of civilisation, with Iranians being characterised by refinement of thought and manners and by propriety and good taste in conduct and appearance.

As a powerful nation, Iran has such a moral strength and courage to face impending dangers and can confront and defy boldly challenges with assured power and resistance, a matter that makes Iran a great power, having prestige and influence over many events taking place in the region.

The visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Iran is historical and highly honoured. It comes as part of the pivotal role Oman plays in the region. There is no doubt that the people of both nations look forward to what this visit yields, whose significance shall be noticeable and noteworthy by all measures not only in Oman and Iran but in the world as a whole.

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

The Ballad of Bacari-Bronze O’Garro: Not a film

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs is the name of a 2018 anthology western film by the Coen Brothers, Ethan, and Joel. Just one of the anthology tales follows the deeds, of cowboy anti-hero Buster Scruggs.

You just know this tale is going to get more and more ridiculous from the outset when you see this pristine white-clad cowboy, with a whimsical, if the quizzical smile on his face, who espouses his philosophies, plays his guitar, sings, and shoots faster and more accurately than anyone else... for now.

He rides a white horse called Dan, plays the guitar, and his spurs jangle as he fearlessly promotes himself as ‘The Misanthrope’, on the ‘Dead or Alive’, wanted posters. And what is a misanthrope you ask?

Well, a lengthy deliberation of my own resolved, among other analyses, allusions to an antisocial malevolent presence, a cynical, somewhat selfish egotist. In other words, despite appearances to the contrary, a sceptical soul, or maybe that should be sole, as they are destined to be lonely, and alone and who, from a murkier, more psychotic perspective, sees themselves as self-loving, but is in fact self-loathing.

It is a very clever story. Beautifully filmed, and because the ridiculousness of the character leads the viewer towards levity initially, it comes as a shock to find that... wow, the dude can... actually... shoot... and suspends disbelief as he finds unique ways to kill his antagonists saying, “Don’t let my white duds and pleasant demeanour fool you. I too have been known to violate the statutes of man... and not a few of the laws of the Almighty.” It’s well worth a look, and the dialogue, or maybe the series of soliloquies, are worth the price of the admission, alone. “I don’t hate my fellow man,” he says to his horse, “even when he’s tiresome and surly and tries to cheat at poker. I figure that’s just human material, and he that finds in it cause for anger and dismay is just a fool for expecting better. Ain’t that right, Dan?”

Having earlier caused the death of the (now) late Curly Joe, Scruggs shoots off all five digits of Curly Joe’s brother’s right hand, and when that ruffian tries to clumsily draw with his unharmed



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THE BALLAD OF BUSTER SCRUGGS IS BEAUTIFULLY FILMED, AND BECAUSE THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF THE CHARACTER LEADS THE VIEWER TOWARDS LEVITY INITIALLY, IT COMES AS A SHOCK TO FIND THAT THE DUDE CAN ACTUALLY SHOOT AND SUSPENDS DISBELIEF AS HE FINDS UNIQUE WAYS TO KILL HIS ANTAGONISTS

left hand, Scruggs exclaims, “Whoa, it sure looks like they made this fella, they forgot to put in the quit.”

Then, using a hand mirror, Scruggs turns his back on the miscreant and debates his last shot saying, “Let me see here. His heart would be on the left, but in the mirror, it’ll be on the right, but we’re both facing the same way, and my gun is upside down, so... best not play too fancy,” and promptly shoots Curly Joe’s also now late brother... dead, muttering, “Hmmm, that’s cause for reflection.”

In the end, though, Scruggs gets his comeuppance as a young feller, ‘The Kid’ comes to town, and in the resultant duel, Scruggs notes both that ‘The Kid’ appears unpunctured, and his own previously spotless white fedora, or cowboy hat, has a bullet hole in the front, and a bloody bullet hole at the back, and offers the opinion that, “that ain’t good news!” And it ain’t! You see, there is always someone younger, faster, better... eventually...

And where is this leading... One young East Londoner, with the wonderfully grandiose name of Bacari-Bronze O’Garro, calls himself Mizzy as he seeks to achieve Internet stardom. Truth be told he’s already there... He’s making headlines... been to court, was fined, and got a two-year criminal behaviour order against his name which just add to his street cred, and why? He is a Tik-Tok intruder. As ridiculous as it sounds... He gets into other people’s cars, houses, and lives, films it, and posts it on the Internet, all in search of cheap fame.

Oh, he’s becoming famous all right, or more correctly... notorious, because he prays on the elderly, the weak, and the white, so he can hide behind, and be protected by his ethnicity. He doesn’t confront his own community, probably because he knows he would get a cuff around the ear, and he doesn’t pick on big, strong fellas either... at heart, he’s no more than a misanthropic bully... and one day, his ‘Kid’ will come along, and his fame won’t seem worth it anymore.

There is only one way this ballad will end... the same way as Buster Scruggs... badly! And we will all reflect upon the failings of lifestyles bullied by the web’s ‘like’ culture.

NO TO RUNAWAY PLASTICS



Guests stand next to Canadian artist and activist Benjamin Von Wong’s 5-metre tall art installation the ‘Perpetual Plastic Machine’ during its unveiling ceremony on the banks of the Seine River in Paris for the Global Plastics Treaty to stop runaway plastic and use. The Global Plastics Treaty (INC2), which begins on June 2 in Paris will welcome over a 1,000 delegates, including ministers and governments, the UN having set a goal for the treaty to be negotiated by the end of 2024. – AFP

The climate loss and damage fund is coming

Last November’s United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, concluded on a historic high note, with the last-minute agreement to establish a “loss and damage” fund. The decision to offer financial support to vulnerable countries suffering the worst effects of global warming was a remarkable achievement that has resonated worldwide. But as we move from establishing the fund to implementing it, important questions remain.

What is a realistic funding target? Who will receive financial assistance? Which entities will have final say over the fund?

As we near the halfway mark between COP27 and COP28 in Dubai, the international community must address these critical questions in the spirit of constructive multilateralism that animated the proceedings in Sharm El Sheikh. Governments, activists, and affected citizens were able to agree on this key plank of climate justice, and we must now demonstrate the same level of collaboration in making it a success.

In March, the COP27 presidency held the first Transitional Committee meeting in Luxor, Egypt, to begin addressing the operationalisation of the fund. The composition of the committee ensured a diverse range of voices, and complex issues were



SAMEH SHOUKRY

The writer is COP27 President and Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs

LAST YEAR’S UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE ENDED WITH A HISTORIC AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES SUFFERING THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING

discussed in a constructive spirit of cooperation.

The three-day meeting concluded with the adoption of a work plan containing substantive and procedural milestones to deliver actionable recommendations well in advance of COP28.

Moreover, the plan outlines how the committee will focus on all elements of its mandated recommendations at each gathering, gradually working towards consensus.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change defines loss and damage as the harm caused by human-generated climate change. Solutions to postpone, minimise, or prevent such harm to vulnerable communities worldwide must also be human-generated. It is our collective responsibility to implement effective policies to combat global warming, as well as to alleviate suffering and provide financial support to people whose lives have been upended by rising temperatures.

The Transitional Committee meetings are designed precisely for this purpose: to discuss effective methods and modalities that will turn the concept of the loss and damage fund into a tangible reality while identifying

gaps in the existing climate-finance system.

Requests and demands are currently being analysed and considered before finalising the mechanics to ensure proper implementation.

Backed by a broad range of government, civil-society, and private-sector stakeholders, the fund is designed to consider the short-, medium-, and long-term effects of climate change on developing countries. It will supply financial and technological resources for responding to loss and damage caused by both immediate and slow-onset events. That could mean early-warning systems, disaster-risk reduction, or ecosystem restoration.

As the architect of the fund,



Egypt is committed to ensuring its effectiveness, transparency, and accessibility. We strongly believe that all stakeholders must fully collaborate to fulfil its objectives and make a significant change in the communities hit hardest by global warming. The burden of climate change is unequal, and we have the chance to create a much fairer and stability-enhancing balance.

The loss and damage fund represents a major step forward, but it is not enough. We must continue to work tirelessly to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions — the root cause of climate change. This can be achieved by accelerating the transition to clean energy, empowering communities to adapt their

livelihoods, and adhering to scientific recommendations in line with internationally agreed principles.

At the same time, the need to create a working loss and damage fund that delivers on the promises made at COP27 is acute.

East Africa and the Sahel are currently experiencing severe droughts caused by human-induced climate change, which has resulted in meager rain levels as well as increased evapotranspiration in plants and soil. Plagued by food insecurity, many people in the affected countries are internally displaced or have been forced to migrate, underscoring global warming’s disruptive effects and the increasingly limited ability of both nature and humanity to adapt to them.

The newly created fund will remain a top priority in climate discussions, and it is crucial to enter COP28 with a clear strategy for its effective implementation. We must approach the task with a unified sense of purpose — only by working together and getting the details right can we begin to address the vast inequities of the crisis. But given the significance of the task at hand, I am confident that we will succeed.

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Oman and Uzbekistan players fight for the ball in Salah. – Abdulwahid al Hamadani

MALAYSIA BEAT S KOREA TO CONSOLIDATE GRIP ON POOL B

OMAN EARN FIRST WIN IN JUNIOR ASIA CUP

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 27

Oman earned their first points with a thrilling 3-2 win against Uzbekistan in the Men's Junior Asia Cup championship in Salah on Saturday.

Hahman Akaak netted the winner with three minutes to go for the hosts who posted their first win in the tournament.

Oman are fourth in Pool B with three points after three matches.

The hosts struck in the 10th minute with Al Noufali Alkhoder scoring a field goal. In the 13th minute, Azed al Fazari raised the lead with another brilliant strike.

Uzbekistan reduced the deficit in the 25th minute when Jamshidbek Komilov

scored from a penalty corner to make it 2-1.

The score remained the same until the final 10 minutes of the match.

In the 51st minute, Uzbekistan stunned Oman with an equaliser when Shokhrukhbk Salimjonov struck from a penalty corner.

The home team then went out on all-out attack to find a winner and Hahman Akaak struck it sweet with a brilliant field goal in the 57th minute to make it 3-2.

MALAYSIA ON TOP

Earlier, Malaysia outsmarted South Korea 3-1 to confirm their place on top of Pool B.

With their third win of as many pool matches, Malaysia have nine points.

South Korea sit second with six points from three matches.

In a well-contested Pool B match at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex Pitch 1, Malaysia took the lead in the first quarter itself with Perabu Tangaraja scoring from a penalty corner in the 11th minute.

No further goals were scored until the last quarter of the match with South Korea defending well.

Shahmie Irfan Suhaimi made it 2-0 in the 54th minute from another penalty corner.

The Koreans pushed hard for a goal and Geonwoo Park found the target in 56th minute with a brilliant field goal to make it 2-1.

Malaysia were on the attack again and Kamal Mughni confirmed their victory

by striking from a penalty corner.

Bangladesh are third in Pool B with six points but on a lesser goal difference compared to second-placed South Korea.

In a late match on Friday, Bangladesh beat Uzbekistan 3-1.

Star player Amirul Islam netted a brace (15th, 22nd minutes) from penalty corners while Mohammad Uddin found the target though a field goal in the 34th minute as Bangladesh raced ahead 3-0.

Uzbekistan pulled one back in the 51st minute as Fozilbek Husanov made his name into the scoresheet with a field goal.

JAPAN THRASH TAIPEI

In a Pool A match on Saturday, Japan thrashed Chinese Taipei 10-1.

Japan now have equal six points with Pool

A leaders Pakistan and second-placed India but played one additional match.

Japan, who lost to India 3-1 in their last match, came back all guns blazing against minnows Taipei.

Ikumi Saeki put Japan into an early lead from a penalty corner in the third minute. Kumpei Yasuda's brace (16th, 29th minutes) put them in a 3-0 lead. Tsubasa Tanaka made it 4-0 in the 29th minute from a penalty corner.

After the half-time, Kodai Saeki turned on the style with four goals (36-pc, 37-pc, 44-pc, 45th minutes).

Hiro Saito (40) and Ikumi Saeki (41-pc) were also on target as Japan completed their 10 goals.

Yueh Chin-Cheng netted a consolation goal for Taipei in the 38th minute.

OFA in talks with US Soccer for friendly in September

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Oman Football Association (OFA) is in a close follow-up with US Soccer to arrange a friendly match against USA team in September. The discussions are still going on between both parties to finalise the possibility of holding a preparatory international match which is planned to take place in USA in September. The USA team is the 13th world placed team as per Fifa world ranking for April 2023.

The Red Warriors will have their main assignment in January 2024 as they will take part in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals. Oman were drawn in Group F along with Asian favourites Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, the national team will compete in the first edition of the Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 in Uzbekistan during June 10 to 20. Oman are grouped with hosts Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in Group A while Iran, Kyrgyzstan (hosts) and Afghanistan teams comprised Group B.

The Oman national team, coached by Croatian Branko Ivankovic, will hold series of domestic and overseas camps during the forthcoming period to shape

up the squad for the top continental championship and the Cafa event.

On Thursday, Ivankovic announced the list of 24 players who will take part in the planned domestic camp which will begin on Monday and will conclude on June 8. The announced squad featured return of 2022-23 Omantel League top-scorer Mohsin al Ghassani who was away from the national team for many months.

The list comprised a new junior face represented by Muscat club's goalkeeper Mazin Saleh who will train with Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faye al Rushaidi and Ahmed al Rawahi. The majority of the players for the upcoming camp were selected from OL champions Al Nahdha, runners-up Al Suwaiq and Seeb among other clubs.

OMAN PROBABLES: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Kaabi, Al Mundher al Alawi, Omar al Malki, Ahmed al Matroushi, Faye al Rushedi, HARib al Saadi, Mahmood al Mushefri, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi, Abdulrahman al Mushefri, Essam al Subhi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Juma al Habsi, Salah al Yahyaei, Mohsin al Ghassani, Musab al Mamari, Abdullah Fawaz, Motaz Saleh, Fahmi Dorbeen, Mazin Saleh, Jameel al Yahmadi, Arashad al Alawi and Zaher al Aghbari.



Oman in Group B at eWAFF Championship

WEST ASIAN ELECTRONIC FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP
ON JUNE 1 AND 2 IN RIYADH



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The West Asian Electronic Football Championship draw took place on Saturday at the headquarters of the West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) in Jordan. The highly anticipated championship, hosted by Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is scheduled to be held on June 1 and 2.

The draw determined the composition of the tournament's two groups, with a total of six participating teams. Group One consists of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Palestine, while Group Two includes Oman, Kuwait and Lebanon.

In accordance with the latest international classification, the participating teams were placed into three levels. The first level includes Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the second features Oman and Qatar and the third comprises Lebanon and Palestine.

The tournament aligns with the approved Fifa days for electronic football. Matches will be played in a 2v2 format on the PlayStation platform, with four players representing each team.

The group stage, semifinals and final rounds will follow a home-and-away system to

ensure fairness and provide ample playing opportunities for all teams. This format guarantees that each team competes in multiple matches, upholding the principle of justice throughout the championship.

The tournament's inaugural edition took place in April 2021 using remote visual communication technology amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The Saudi team emerged victorious, securing the title, followed by the UAE team in second place, Kuwait in third and Qatar in fourth. The second edition was also conducted remotely in July 2021 with the Kuwaiti team triumphing and claiming the championship. The Saudi team secured second place, while the Emirati and Qatari teams finished third and fourth respectively.

In the third edition, held in Kuwait in May 2022, the Saudi team showcased their dominance by clinching the title. The Qatari team secured the runner-up position, followed by the Kuwaiti team in third place, and the Lebanese team in fourth place, according to the overall standings. The eWAFF Championship promises an exhilarating competition among the region's top teams.

‘Superstar’ Gill’s ton powers Gujarat into IPL final

AHMEDABAD, India: Shubman Gill called his 129 on Friday his “best innings” in the Indian Premier League after he powered champions Gujarat Titans into the final with a 62-run thrashing of Mumbai Indians.

Gill's 60-ball knock — his third ton in four IPL innings — fired Gujarat to 233-3, a total they defended by bowling out five-time winners Mumbai for 171 in 18.2 overs in the final play-off which started late due to rain in Ahmedabad.

They will play Chennai Super Kings in the final on Sunday at the same venue.

Named man of the match, Gill said: “I think this was probably my best innings so far in the IPL.”

Skipper Hardik Pandya praised his opener, saying: “Today's innings was one of the finest, he never looked rushed. It felt like someone was throwing balls and he was hitting. He will be a superstar in international and franchise cricket.”

Gill hit 10 sixes and put on a second-wicket stand of 138 with Sai Sudharsan, who made 43, to tear into the opposition attack at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

He became the leading batsman this season with 851 runs, surpassing Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis (730), before he reached his IPL best and the top score of this season.

Fast bowler Mohit Sharma took five wickets for Gujarat, who won last year's crown in a fairytale debut season, after a valiant 61 by Suryakumar Yadav.

The 132,000-capacity stadium had over 75,000 fans in attendance to witness the home team triumph.

Opener Gill, who is tipped as the future of Indian batting, made the most of a reprieve on 30 when Tim David dropped him off England fast bowler Chris Jordan.



Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill (C) celebrates after scoring a century during the Indian Premier League second qualifier match between Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

LITTLE IMPACT

The 23-year-old Gill brought up his fifty in 32 balls and then exploded to smash sixes and reach his hundred in 49 balls, taking a bow amid a standing ovation.

He finally fell to Akash Madhwal and Sudharsan retired out before Pandya, who made an unbeaten 13-ball 28, and Rashid Khan finished the innings on a high with 19 runs in the final over. Mumbai's worries increased

when wicketkeeper Ishan Kishan was injured after he was caught by the elbow of team-mate Jordan. He was later replaced by concussion substitute Vishnu Vinod. Tilak Varma struck 43 off 14 balls as he smashed Mohammed Shami for four fours and a six in an over but was soon bowled by Rashid.

Suryakumar attempted to mount the chase in his 38-ball knock and put on a key 51-run stand with Cameron Green, who

hit 30 in a stop-start innings after being hit on the elbow by Pandya.

Ireland's left-arm quick Josh Little, who came in as an impact sub for Gill after the Gujarat innings, bowled Green.

Suryakumar made his fifty in 33 balls but was bowled by Mohit, who struck twice in one over to derail the innings. Rashid trapped David lbw for two and hopes ended for Mumbai, who last won the crown in 2020. — AFP

Chennai's old school takes on Gujarat's new style



This is the day that both these teams would have been waiting for and finally it has arrived to the day that matters the most. Both these teams have clashed two times so far in this season and the head-to-head for the season, stays balanced between the both. It cannot be denied that these teams have been the best of this season by finishing as the top two sides in the league stage.

We must agree that these sides have taken advantage of their home matches, but even in the away games they were sides to beat with their balanced formation. Chennai bank on their long batting line-up, while Gujarat have a versatile batting line-up and they believe on playing situations.

Gujarat and Chennai clashed in the Qualifier 1, where Chennai got the better of Gujarat. Although,

this match was in Chennai, which is the fortress for Dhoni's men. Quality spinners and pacers on both sides would like to take advantage of this situation.

FINAL – GT VS CSK AT AHMEDABAD

● **TEAM INFO** – The top teams of the IPL 2023 are going to be fighting it out head-to-head in the battle which matters the most and for the prized possession. Both teams have got this far and they would like to finish with the trophy in their hands. Dhoni is expected to retire after this match, if CSK win the final. Gujarat would like to continue their dominance with the second consecutive title in just their second appearance. Chennai like to play dominating and attacking cricket, while Gujarat like to play the waiting option and make use of the right opportunity to further attack or defend.

● PREVIOUS

ENCOUNTERS – It all started with both these teams clashing in the very first game of the season at Ahmedabad. Ruturaj Gaikwad's single-handed brilliance (92 runs in 50 balls) took Chennai to 178/7, Chasing a below par 179 to win,



Gujarat were always in control of the game and chased this score with 5 wickets and 4 balls to spare. Rashid Khan was adjudged the man of the match for his 10 not out off 3 balls and 2/26 in 4

overs. The second game was in Chennai and once again batting first CSK posted 172/7. This was the Qualifier 1 and the Chennai wicket just didn't allow Gujarat to build any momentum and they fell

short by 15 runs. Ruturaj Gaikwad was announced as the man of the match of his 60 runs of 44 balls.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played — 4; Won by GT — 3; Won by CSK – 1

● **GT possible 12** – S Gill, W Saha, H Pandya, D Shanaka, D Miller, R Tewatia, R Khan, D Nalkande, M Sharma, N Ahmad, M Shami, V Shankar

● **CSK possible 12** – R Gaikwad, D Conway, A Rahane, A Rayudu, S Dube, M Ali, R Jadeja, MS Dhoni, D Chahar, T Deshpande, M Theekshana, M Pathirana

● Pitch & Weather Report

– The Ahmedabad stadium has been a sporting facility and it has something to offer to the bowler to start with and as the innings progresses, batting gets easier and the value for shots. Spinners do also have a role to play with slightly longer boundaries. With the temperature hovering between 28 and 39 degrees, expect dew to play a role in the second innings. Teams winning the toss are expected to bat first.

● **Match Prediction** – Both the teams are extremely well balanced and they would like to make sure that they implement the right

resources at the right time to take the maximum advantage of any particular situation. Both teams have some champion players, who can turn the game on their own, if it's their day. I feel that Dhoni would put his best foot forward and his strategy would play a big role in deciding the winner of this game. Although, I am not ruling out Gujarat, under the guidance of Nehra and Pandya. I have my slight edge towards Dhoni's Chennai. So, don't be shocked to have a sweet and spicy rasam in Ahmedabad, which might shake your entire soul.

Send us your comment for next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '+968 78795978' and the best comments will be included in our article. Thirty words on the team that you support, full name, designation, age, nationality.

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

DJOKOVIC EYES HISTORY AT FRENCH OPEN

SWIATEK AIMS TO BECOME FIRST WOMAN TO DEFEND TITLE IN 16 YEARS

PARIS: Novak Djokovic will bid for a record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam title at a French Open without his old rival Rafael Nadal for the first time since 2004, while Iga Swiatek attempts to become the first woman to defend the title in 16 years.

Serbian veteran Djokovic will not be the favourite for the title, though, after struggling with an elbow injury and failing to get past the quarterfinals in any of his three clay-court events so far this season.

Carlos Alcaraz won the Barcelona and Madrid Opens en route to taking over from Djokovic as world number one, while Daniil Medvedev is seeded second for Roland Garros after his maiden clay triumph in Rome.

But Djokovic will know this is a massive opportunity to break out of his tie with 14-time French Open winner Nadal at the top of the all-time list of most men's Slam singles titles.

The two-time champion has lost eight of his 10 French Open meetings with Nadal who is missing this year's edition due to a hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open.

Djokovic and Alcaraz are seeded to meet in the semifinals after being placed in the same half of the draw.

"I felt bad when I hear that Rafa was not able to play here in Roland Garros," said Alcaraz on Friday.

"I always want to watch the best players in the world playing the tournaments."

The 36-year-old Djokovic may also have to get past Monte Carlo Masters champion Andrey Rublev in the quarters.

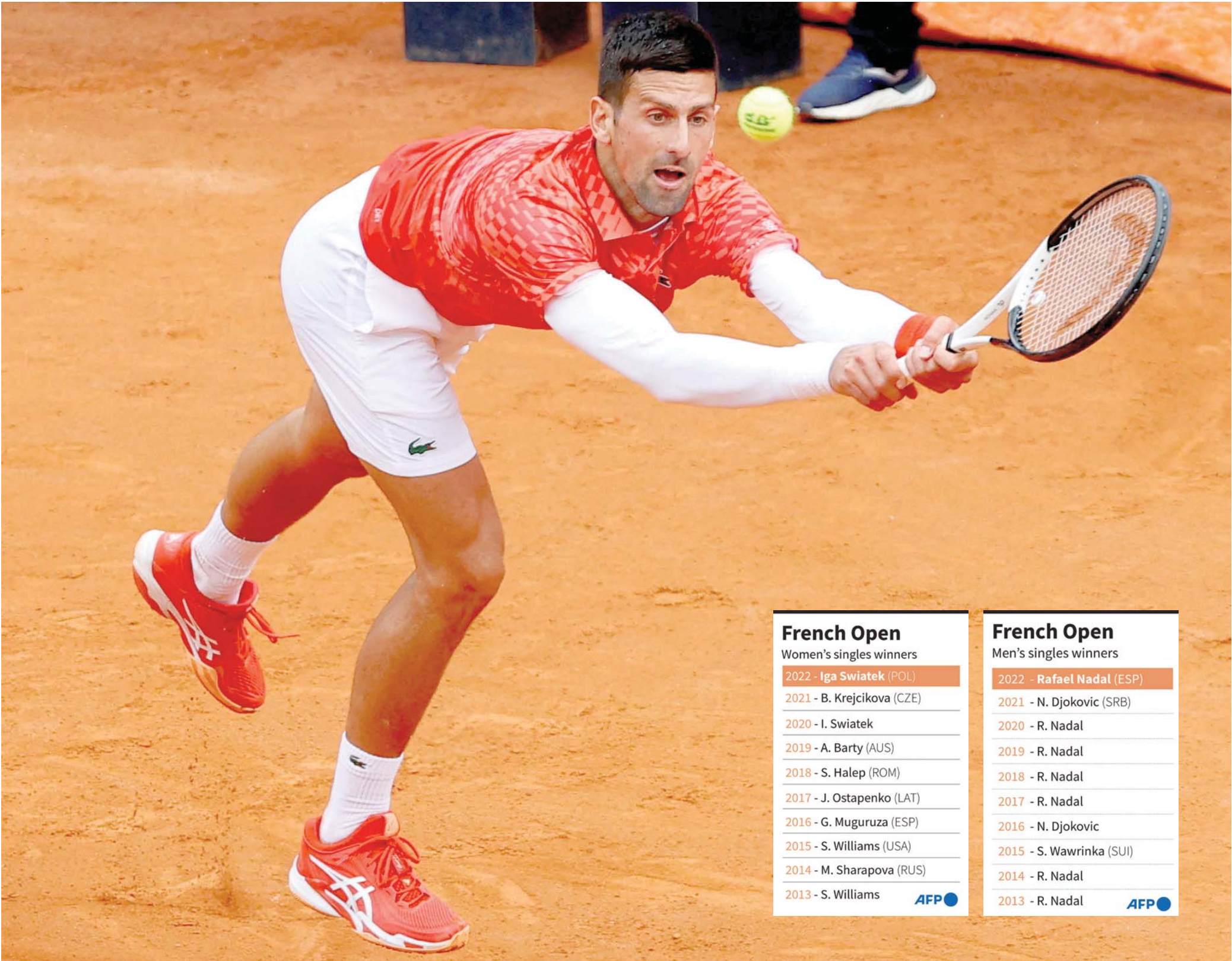
The other side of the draw appears wide open, with inform Medvedev the highest seed despite never having previously got past the quarterfinals on the Paris clay.

The Russian lost in the first round on each of his first four visits before making the quarters in 2021.

"I also don't want to put too much pressure on myself, in a way," said Medvedev.

"But what happened in Rome was amazing, especially beating a lot of good players."

Danish youngster Holger Rune, who made a surprise run to last year's quarterfinals, could face Casper Ruud in the last eight



French Open	
Women's singles winners	
2022 - Iga Swiatek (POL)	
2021 - B. Krejckova (CZE)	
2020 - I. Swiatek	
2019 - A. Barty (AUS)	
2018 - S. Halep (ROM)	
2017 - J. Ostapenko (LAT)	
2016 - G. Muguruza (ESP)	
2015 - S. Williams (USA)	
2014 - M. Sharapova (RUS)	
2013 - S. Williams	AFP

French Open	
Men's singles winners	
2022 - Rafael Nadal (ESP)	
2021 - N. Djokovic (SRB)	
2020 - R. Nadal	
2019 - R. Nadal	
2018 - R. Nadal	
2017 - R. Nadal	
2016 - N. Djokovic	
2015 - S. Wawrinka (SUI)	
2014 - R. Nadal	
2013 - R. Nadal	AFP

in a rematch of a bad-tempered meeting 12 months ago.

Ruud went on to be thrashed in the final by Nadal and also lost the US Open showpiece match to Alcaraz.

But the Norwegian world number four has struggled for form this year, only reaching the quarters in two of the 10 tournaments he has played.

Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost the 2021 final to Djokovic after being two sets up, will be among the likely contenders but has not won a title yet this term — the longest he has had to wait for a trophy in a season since 2018.

NEW 'BIG THREE'?

The winner of the women's singles



is expected to be one of the trio of reigning champion Swiatek, Australian Open winner Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina.

They have won the last four Grand Slam titles between them and at least one of them has featured in every WTA 1000 final this season.

Swiatek, who turns 22 during the tournament, will be the favourite as she chases a third Roland Garros triumph and a first successful women's title defence since Justine Henin won her third French Open in a row in 2007.

The Polish star retired from her Italian Open quarterfinal against Rybakina with a thigh injury but trained at Roland Garros on Wednesday.

"Luckily nothing serious happened, so I had couple of days off," she said on Friday.

"I'm still recovering from the thigh injury, but I'll be good for my first round."

Wimbledon champion Rybakina, ranked fourth, has already won the Rome and Indian Wells titles in 2023 and could face Swiatek in the Roland Garros semis.

"If I play my best, which it's impossible to play every time good and feel great, but I feel for sure no matter the surface, if I play my best, I can beat anyone," she said. Other title hopefuls include last year's runner-up Coco Gauff, Tunisian Ons Jabeur and world number three Jessica Pegula. — AFP

Virtuoso Verstappen claims first pole in Monaco

MONACO: Max Verstappen delivered a spectacular late lap on Saturday to claim his maiden Monaco Grand Prix pole position in a thrilling and dramatic qualifying session.

Red Bull's defending double world champion and series leader clawed back three-tenths of a second in the final sector to beat Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso and Charles Leclerc of Ferrari.

"We knew this was going to be a little bit of a struggle for us, here on this circuit," admitted the Dutchman. "In qualifying here, you need to go all out and risk it all." Red Bull team boss Christian Horner described the lap as the "best of his career".

Verstappen's success with a best lap in one minute and 11.365 lifted him 0.084 seconds clear of Alonso, who said he had been driving "like an animal" and

pledged to fight for victory in Sunday's classic race. "Tomorrow, we will try to win the race," he said. "It is a pity we couldn't take pole but Max was a little bit faster." Local hero Leclerc, who had taken pole for the last two years, was downcast.

"I am not satisfied, not with P3," he said. "It was a very tricky qualifying and I struggled a lot with the car."

Verstappen's pole was the 23rd of his career and gives him an opportunity to extend his lead in the title race ahead of Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez, who won last year, but will start from the back of the grid after crashing out in Q1.

Esteban Ocon was fourth for Alpine ahead of Carlos Sainz in the second Ferrari, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in his revamped Mercedes and Pierre Gasly in the second Alpine.

PEREZ CRASHES

After dominating final practice, Red Bull were hot favourites to repeat that success as qualifying began under blue skies and a very warm sun providing an air temperature of 25 degrees with the track at 50.

Verstappen stamped his authority on proceedings with an early lap in 1:13.784, a tenth faster than Perez, who promptly crashed heavily at Sainte Devote.

Perez, considered the current 'king' of street track racing, lost control as he turned to climb the hill to Casino Square, sliding left into the barriers in a cloud of steel debris. Initially, he appeared dazed by the impact, reporting "Guys, I've crashed" to the team before remaining in the car until, with some help, he climbed out unhurt. — AFP



Pole position winner Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (R) and grid second-placed Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso react after the qualifying sessions of the Formula One Monaco Grand Prix at the Monaco street circuit in Monaco. — AFP

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Energy storage a key goal for Oman: Al Aufi

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 27

Having set in motion an ambitious plan to harness solar and wind resources for low-carbon electricity generation, the Sultanate of Oman is now moving to develop its energy storage capacity to address intermittency challenges associated with renewable resources.

Energy storage technologies and systems allow for the storage of energy during times of surplus availability for utilisation during times of limited supply.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured), Minister of Energy and Minerals, affirmed Oman's commitment to developing storage capacity to address imbalances in supply from renewable resources, such as solar and wind.

"The main challenge is how can we bring an unstable power

generation system into the grid and continue to use it as a reliable source, and that's when storage becomes extremely important; we need to address storage and we will continue to push more and more for storage," Al Aufi announced here last week.

Speaking at the opening of the IEEE Power Talks forum held in Muscat, he noted that Nama Power and Water Procurement — the sole national buyer of electricity and water output — has been given the mandate to oversee the development of energy storage capacity in Oman.

"Earlier this year, Nama was tasked with creating a project focusing primarily on storage, because we believe it is extremely important for us if we are to achieve the targets that we set for ourselves," the minister stressed.

One early target is to secure

Earlier this year, Nama was tasked with creating a project focusing primarily on storage, because we believe it is extremely important for us if we are to achieve the targets that we set for ourselves

ENG SALIM BIN NASSER AL AUFİ
Minister of Energy and Minerals

around 30 per cent of power generation from renewables by 2030, which Nama has been mandated to achieve, he pointed out.

Further, to ensure that the



national electricity grid is robust enough to simultaneously handle supply from existing gas-based power plants as well as solar and wind schemes, investments in digitisation, smart grid and smart

metering will be necessary to help manage the grid, he said.

At the same time, Oman is forging ahead with decarbonisation of the transport sector as well, with the Ministry of Energy and

Minerals working in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to lay the regulatory groundwork to support e-mobility on a wide scale. This is attested by initiatives launched in recent months, promoting the adoption of electric vehicles (EV) and hydrogen-powered transportation in the future as well, said Al Aufi.

"(Recently), I signed regulation to support the installation of EV chargers at different locations, and so on," the minister said. In this regard, he reiterated his pledge, first shared at the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022, to ensure that EV users can drive from Muscat to Salalah and back without having to worry about the adequacy of charging points along the route — a pledge he hopes to see fulfilled by around this year's Summit in December, Al Aufi added.

Growth in money supply in Oman

MUSCAT: The money supply in the Sultanate of Oman experienced notable expansion, with the broad money supply (M2) increasing by 2.4 per cent on an annual basis to reaching RO 21 billion by the end of March 2023. Simultaneously, narrow money supply witnessed a growth of 0.3 per cent.

The rise in the broad money supply can be attributed to a 3.3 per cent increase in quasi-money, which encompasses savings and term deposits in Omani Rials,

certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin accounts, and all deposits in foreign currency held within the banking sector. Conversely, cash on hand experienced a decrease of 5.2 per cent, while demand deposits showed a modest increase of 1.9 per cent.

Regarding the interest rate structure of conventional commercial banks, the weighted average interest rate on deposits in Omani Rials increased from 1.923

per cent in March 2022 to 2.124 per cent in March 2023. In contrast, the weighted average interest rate on loans in Rial Omani decreased from 5.485 per cent to 5.381 per cent during the same period.

Furthermore, the average interest rates in the inter-bank lending market for one night witnessed an increase, rising to 5.073 per cent in March 2023 compared to 4.409 per cent in March 2022.

— ONA



Public Notice for Closure of Life Insurance Corporation (International) B.S.C.(c), Oman Branch

This is to inform the public at large and our valued customers that, for operational reasons, Life Insurance Corporation International has decided to close its Oman branch. We will continue servicing our Oman customers' policies from our branch in Bahrain effective from 01.08.2023.

We assure all of our customers in Oman that the transfer of their policies to our Bahrain office will be seamless and hassle-free. We are also committed to provide the same level of service and support they received from us so far. Our Bahrain office is fully equipped to handle all of our Oman customers' policy-related inquiries and requests.

There will be no changes to the policy terms and conditions, and the policy benefits of our Oman customers will remain the same.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the transfer of your policy, please do not hesitate to contact us through the contact details below.

- Telephone: +968 24700312
- Whatsapp: +968 99266786
- Email: oman.lici@licinternational.com

We will inform you about the contact details of our Bahrain Office separately, in due course.

We value your trust in us and remain committed to provide you with the best possible service.

We thank you for your continued patronage and look forward to serving you in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Life Insurance Corporation (International) B.S.C.(c), Oman Branch, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

China, S Korea agree to strengthen talks on chip industry

BEIJING: China and South Korea have agreed to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on semiconductor industry supply chains, amid broader global concerns over chip supplies, sanctions and national security, China's commerce minister said.

Wang Wentao met with South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Detroit, which ended on Friday.

They exchanged views on maintaining the stability of the industrial supply chain and strengthening co-operation in bilateral, regional and multilateral fields, according to a statement from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce on Saturday.

Wang also said that China is willing to work with South Korea to deepen trade ties and investment cooperation.

— Reuters

مدائن
madayn

Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
6/2023/PEIE/HQ-6	Consultancy Services for Assessment of the Current Situation and Requirements for Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) in Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), Sultanate of Oman.	11-06-2023	06-07-2023	Consultancy	First	50
7/2023/PEIE/HQ-7	Consultancy Services for Detailed Design and Construction Supervision for Industrial Complex (Plug and Play) in Nizwa Industrial City.	11-06-2023	06-07-2023	Consultancy	First	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

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

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

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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in t f y o o



OPAZ wins 3D printing award at Comex 2023

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) won the 3D Printing Award at COMEX Technology Show Awards 2023. This Award was received for using the 3D printing technology to build a commercial cafe with its facilities, and a residential unit with its facilities in the fishermen's village in the Tourist Zone in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SE-ZAD).

Winning the 3D Printing Award marks an acknowledgment for OPAZ excellence in providing pioneering digital services in the investment sector and serving investors. Likewise, it is a tribute to its tremendous efforts towards digital transformation through introducing various electronic programmes and online applications, as well as adopting artificial intelligence technologies. All these tools have been presented to simplify procedures and provide fast, safe and comprehensive services to investors.

Therefore, OPAZ is working on a strategic digital transformation plan that reflects its constant interest in innovation, development, and the use of modern technologies to improve the experience of investors and beneficiaries of the services it provides. In addition, OPAZ always strives to follow best practices to improve its services, and thrive the special economic and free zones,

and industrial cities, which it supervises.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) won this award for using the 3D printing technology in building the café, which was built over an area of 101 sqm in about 35 hours only, while the residential unit was built over 72 sqm of land, with the construction process took only 12 hours. Such projects stand as a remarkable milestone in the world of construction compared to the traditional construction method. Further, the 3D printing technology is distinguished by the standard construction speediness as construction does not require using concrete bases and columns when building the structure. Instead, the 3D printing technology is based on converting the concrete material of this technology into an integrated structure using an automatic printer.

It is worth noting that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has approved, since 2021, using the 3D printing technology in construction. This comes as part of OPAZ efforts to support innovation, research and development in the fields of construction using modern technologies, encourage and localise these technologies in construction and accelerate the pace of construction in economic and free zones and industrial cities supervised by OPAZ.



Bank Muscat provides corporate services through dedicated branches

Reflecting its pioneering role in supporting government and private institutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, consistently demonstrates its success in achieving new milestones by providing corporate banking services through its dedicated corporate banking branches at CBD, Al Nahdha Towers, Suhar and Salalah. The locations of these branches were chosen carefully so that they are close to business hubs, industrial areas and free zones.

Bank Muscat's branches are characterised by spacious and comfortable design and layout. The corporate branches are manned by well qualified and experienced Omani cadres and provide financial and advisory services which contribute to the development of business for these institutions and companies. The corporate branches of Bank Muscat offers a comprehensive suite of services that caters to the diverse needs of corporate and government institutions. These services encompass a wide spectrum of banking solutions including account opening, account management, remittance transactions, cash services including bulk cash, trade finance and specialised advisory services. The specialised teams in Bank Muscat's corpo-



rate branches possess extensive expertise and are well versed in the intricacies of corporate and government transactions, ensuring prompt service with attention to detail. Bank Muscat's corporate branches are unwavering in their commitment to deliver an unparalleled customer experience and empower businesses at every stage. The bank's corporate and institutional banking has achieved many positive results through the various services provided in branches, including those related to opening of new accounts, providing digital solutions, processing financial transactions in addition to global trade services. The bank is especially proud that it has played a key role in the successes recorded in a variety of sectors such as oil and gas, energy, water, mining, land transport, seaports, airports, integrated tourism projects, real estate

development, telecommunications, and the development of free zones and other industrial projects.

Over the past years, Bank Muscat has enjoyed close relations with many institutions and companies as it offers a wide range of banking products and services, including loans for project financing, debt financing through direct loans and syndicated loans. It also offers corporate loans and capital financing to expand the project as well as bid bonds, performance bonds, advance payment bonds, financial bonds, and performance guarantee bonds. The bank also provides letter of credit services for the purchase of equipment and machinery, standby letters of credit, and other services and products provided to the various corporate sector. Speaking on the occasion, Wafa bint Ibrahim al Ajmiah, Assist-



ant General Manager, Transaction & Government Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "The bank is one of the first financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman to have a full-fledged department to finance various large, medium and small institutions and fulfil their various needs in order to support their role in participating in Omani Renaissance. The allocation of corporate branches to provide services to government institutions and the private sector strengthens our leadership in the banking sector. The bank provides various banking services, facilities and financing solutions which are tailored for different companies across various sectors. Bank Muscat is always keen to provide the best services and help corporate customers develop their businesses and support them in their march to meet the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Eshraqa hosts 'Personal Excellence' workshop

FOR GOVT EMPLOYEES AT OCCI, IBRI

MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group's social development arm — Eshraqa — announced the successful completion of the second session of its 'Personal Excellence' workshop, aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of government sector employees.

The training, which kicked off earlier this year in Nizwa, has garnered significant success, with its second session being held at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Ibri. The workshop was attended by Varun Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group, and staff members from the Ministry of Labor.

The 'Personal Excellence' workshop is designed to shed



light on best practices in self-development, equipping participants with the tools and techniques necessary to achieve personal excellence and cultivate highly productive workforces within the government sector.

Comprising a total of six

sessions, the third session is expected to take place in Suhar. Each session will focus on sharpening individual skills, fostering personal growth, and creating more efficient work environments.

Emphasising the value of

such initiatives in enhancing the skills and capabilities of the nation's workforce, Varun Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group stated, "The 'Personal Excellence' workshop not only equips individuals with essential skills for personal growth but also strengthens the collaboration between the public and private sectors, fostering a brighter future for Oman. We are delighted to witness the positive impact of these workshops on participants from the government sector. The aim is to create a more productive work environment that develops the capabilities of individuals and supports the realisation of Oman Vision 2040."

Bank Nizwa CEO's vision for sustainable future at leaders conclave

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa's CEO, Khalid al Kayed, recently participated in the MENA BFSI Leaders Conclave 2023, held at the Dusit Thani in Dubai. The highly anticipated event brought together top executives and influential individuals from the MENA region's banking, financial services and insurance industries (BFSI). The event aimed to address solutions and challenges related to building a more inclusive, sustainable and collaborative world. As part of the panel discussion titled 'Embracing the demand to elevate and set apart for a more inclusive, sustainable and collaborative world', Al Kayed shared his insights on various topics, including the evolving role of financial services in the economy and society, leading the way to foresee challenges, macro trends that

matter and their impact in a post Covid-19 world, the significance of developing and implementing strategies that address regulatory reforms, technological complexity, competitive dynamics and shift towards a higher bottom line, refocusing on resilience for a competitive advantage in a radically uncertain world, and embracing Fintech through innovative solutions.

The CEO's participation in the panel discussion demonstrated his expertise and commitment to driving positive change in the BFSI sector. Speaking on the significance of the event, Al Kayed said, "As a participant in the MENA BFSI Leaders Conclave 2023, I am proud to have been part of a significant dialogue that will undoubtedly shape the future



of the BFSI sector in the MENA region. The event's emphasis on embracing the demand for inclusivity, sustainability and collaboration was particularly enlightening. Through continued

collaboration and innovation, I believe we can create a brighter future for the sector and the communities we serve. It was an honour to be part of such an esteemed gathering of leaders

and I am confident that the insights gained will help Bank Nizwa and the entire industry move forward with greater purpose and impact."

Bank Nizwa has been

recognised for its innovative digitalisation and fintech solutions. With an unwavering commitment to meeting the evolving needs of customers, the bank has invested significantly in online and mobile banking services to offer secure, convenient and accessible digital channels. The bank's steadfast belief is that digitalisation and fintech are essential enablers for driving growth and customer satisfaction.

As part of the bank's ongoing efforts, it is continuously working towards several new digital initiatives that will enhance its offerings and provide greater value to customers. The bank remains dedicated to continuously enhancing its digital capabilities and exploring new ways to harness technology to better serve its customers.



Oman explores energy cooperation with South Korea

SEOUL: An Omani delegation comprising a number of governmental and private agencies, headed by Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, is on a working visit to the Republic of Korea, followed by visits to the People's Republic of China and Malaysia.

These visits aim to enhance the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in green hydrogen investments, oil, gas and minerals in Oman, and to review the available opportunities with government officials and senior representatives of companies to enhance partnerships and cooperation opportunities to develop the in-country value chain.

During his visit to South Korea, the delegation met with a number of government officials and the private sector, and discussed with them

opportunities for cooperation in the fields of renewable energy and investment in green hydrogen production, transportation and storage projects between the two countries, and finding ways to achieve common economic and environmental aspirations and goals.

A number of business meetings were also held with major Korean companies, most notably Samsung, Hyundai, POSCO and SK Engineering, which expressed their desire to invest in green hydrogen, oil, gas and minerals sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

Mohsin al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, explained that these visits come with the aim of the Sultanate of Oman being at the forefront of the leading countries in the production of green hydrogen in the world. He pointed out that the ministry has developed an ambitious strategy



to ensure the development of the green hydrogen economy, and is also working on promoting this sector because of its positive impact on diversifying energy sources and reducing carbon emissions to reach zero neutrality. The ministry has also already started offering blocks for hydrogen production through the Hydrom platform, he noted.

Al Hadhrami said the ministry is working with its partners in

the sector to consolidate the position of the Sultanate of Oman in assuming a pioneering, reliable and competitive role in the global energy sector, and to enhance national capabilities by supporting national innovation, localising industry and advanced technologies in the field, and developing national competencies with the development of the renewable energy and green hydrogen

sector.

The delegation also participated in the Global Climate Industry Conference and the Global Green Hub Conference in Busan, Republic of Korea. At this event, Al Hadhrami led the Omani delegation at a special discussion between the two countries in green hydrogen. Taking part from the Korean side were Korean Minister of Environment Han Hwa-jin and others.

The two sides also discussed the latest technologies related to the added value chain of green hydrogen related to electrolysis, hydrogen transport and storage, fuel cells, uses of hydrogen in heavy industries, transport and methods of shipping it across oceans.

The delegation also toured the Cheongsongdae factory, during which they were briefed on a pilot project for a pipeline specialised in transporting hydrogen gas by

extracting it from the gas with carbon capture and converting it into blue hydrogen. They also visited steelmaker POSCO to study use of hydrogen in iron ore reduction.

Commenting on oil and gas cooperation with Korea, Dr Saleh bin Ali al Anbouri, Director-General of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production, explained that these relations are a strategic partnership between the two sides. Korea is keen to secure a safe and continuous supply of energy of all kinds, while Oman is eager to attract capital funds, technology and expertise from Korea.

He said that this visit aims to attract Korean exploration and production companies, which have the financial capabilities and technical expertise to carry out these operations. A group of offshore concessions will be launched in the third quarter of this year. — ONA

Campaign to enhance economic competitiveness

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is taking proactive steps to enhance economic competitiveness and improve the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman. In collaboration with key entities such as the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the Authority for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre is launching a comprehensive awareness campaign titled "Together to Ensure Freedom of Competition."

From May 28 to September 18, 2023, this campaign aims to educate citizens across all governorates of Oman about the vital role played by the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre. It seeks to promote awareness of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law, issued under Royal Decree 67/2014, along with its corresponding executive regulations outlined in Ministerial Resolution 18/2021.



Additionally, the campaign will emphasise the significance of the Unified Anti-Dumping Law established by Royal Decree 20/2015. The overarching objective is to raise awareness, bolster economic competitiveness, and cultivate a favourable business environment within the Omani market, ultimately contributing to overall economic growth.

The campaign will commence its activities in the Al Buraimi Governorate on May 28, 2023, specifically at the branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry situated in Al Buraimi.

Through this initiative, the awareness campaign seeks to familiarise individuals with the business landscape and the specialised services provided by the Centre. It aims to underscore the crucial role of competition protection and anti-monopoly laws in driving economic growth, fostering competitiveness, and nurturing a legal culture centred around fair competition and the prevention of monopolistic practices. The campaign endeavours to educate various stakeholders, including consumers, merchants and investors, about the provisions of

these laws and the fundamental principles of a free market, which are fundamental for cultivating a thriving competitive economy. Moreover, the campaign will highlight the importance of the anti-dumping law in safeguarding Oman's national industry against detrimental practices in international trade.

Furthermore, the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre plans to organise training and educational programmes designed to promote fair competition and its protection within the market. These efforts aim to contribute to economic growth in Oman by fostering transparency, integrity, impartiality and accountability in economic transactions.

The ministry remains dedicated to safeguarding the interests of market participants, ensuring justice and competitiveness, providing consumers with freedom of choice, promoting economic pluralism, and maintaining a fair and competitive market structure. The Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre also prioritises enforcing compliance with the law, regulations, decisions and relevant instructions, thus creating a level playing field for all stakeholders involved.

Transom Handling inks pact with Oman Data Park

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 27

On the sidelines of the 32nd edition of COMEX exhibition held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre last week, Transom Handling LLC signed an agreement with Oman Data Park for the provision of infrastructure services and Microsoft licences.

The agreement was signed by Shaikh Saud bin Abdulaziz al Azizi, CEO of Transom Handling LLC, and Eng Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park Company.

In accordance with this agreement, Oman Data Park will provide cloud services, complete infrastructure services and Microsoft licences to Transom Handling, in addition to managed services and cyber security services.

Commenting on this deal, Shaikh Saud of Transom Handling, stated: "Transom's leadership in the field of ground handling ranks it at the forefront of keeping pace with the latest developments in the field of information technology and digital transformation that enhances the efficiency of the company's operations and improves its performance as well." For his part, Eng Maqbool of Oman Data Park, said: "We are delighted with our partnership with Transom Handling, as it is a leading company in ground handling services at the airports of the Sultanate of Oman." He added: "The expansion of the handling operations of our client Transom



Handling enhances the expansion of our customer base, since we will have great present through them at the various airlines that they deal with." Transom Handling is the leading company in providing ground handling services to local and international airlines at all airports in the Sultanate of Oman, as it works to give its customers a dependable safe and distinctive travelling experience ensuring guests have a safe, reliable and timely journey. Its professional services include receiving and welcoming passengers, completing travel procedures, refueling aircraft, cleaning aircraft cabins, and so on.

ODP is Oman's first managed cloud services and cyber security provider, playing an integral role in supporting the digital transformation of Oman, through their offering of an all-in-one solution of computing, cloud computing, data storage, networking, web hosting and network security services. ODP also offers Oman's first Artificial Intelligence ready cloud infrastructure – Nebula AI powered by Nvidia.

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) Index closes at 4,641 points

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) experienced a decline in its main index last week, closing at 4,641 points after a decrease of 54 points. This downward trend affected several leading stocks in the market.

The decline occurred only one week after the index had shown signs of recovery following a four-week period of consecutive declines.

Trading statistics issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange revealed a decrease in most of the stock market indices, except for the bonds and sukuk market, which witnessed an increase in the number and value of traded bonds and sukuk. The market saw a rise compared to the preceding

week. This increase was primarily driven by investor interest in purchasing Sohar International Bank's perpetual bonds 2019, accounting for 28.6 per cent of the total value of stock exchange trading. Additionally, transactions involving the unsecured bonds of Ahli Bank 2022 contributed to the rise, representing 4.5 per cent of the total turnover.

Specifically, the financial sector index experienced a decline of 14 points, the industrial sector index lost 43 points, the services sector index decreased by 27 points, and the Sharia index recorded a slight decline of less than one point.

During last week's trading, local investment institutions showed a tendency to sell, while individual



investors leaned towards buying. The trading value witnessed a 23-per cent decline, falling from approximately RO 14.4 million to RO 10.9 million. Moreover, the

number of executed transactions decreased by 28 per cent, with deals dropping from 2,764 to 1,987, marking a decline for the third consecutive week.

Statistical data from the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated that sales by local investment institutions accounted for 66.7 per cent of the total trading value, compared to purchases representing 45.2 per cent of the total trades. Omani individuals accounted for 38.6 per cent of the total trading value in purchases, while sales constituted 21.4 per cent of the trades.

Investors focused their attention on the shares of Omantel and Bank Muscat, which accounted for 37 per cent of the total trading value. Omantel's shares witnessed transactions worth RO 2.1 million, while Bank Muscat's shares amounted to RO 1.9 million in transactions.

Among the securities, 40

experienced price declines, 19 saw price increases, and 13 remained stable. Notably, the decline affected the shares of Bank Muscat, the National Bank of Oman, Ooredoo, Oman Cement, Al Nahda Services, Al Jazeera Services, Al Jazeera Steel Products, as well as several energy, finance and investment companies.

On the other hand, the shares of Omani Finance Services, Building Materials Industry, Al Ahli Bank, and Shell Oman Marketing stood out as gainers. Among the losers were Barka Water and Power, Al Madina Investment, Renaissance Services, Sohar Power, Muscat Finance, and National Mineral Water.

— ONA

Biden ‘hopeful’ of imminent US debt deal



SEBASTIAN SMITH

The writer is a prize winning author and journalist

President Joe Biden said last week that Democratic and Republican negotiators were on the verge of resolving a debt ceiling standoff, as the deadline for a potentially catastrophic US default was pushed back to June 5.

“It’s very close and I’m optimistic,” Biden told reporters at the White House. “I’m hopeful we’ll know by tonight whether we’re going to be able to have a deal.”

Although there was no indication of an imminent public announcement, it was the strongest sign yet that the drama in Washington might end, allowing the government to borrow and avoid a default that would likely trigger a recession and send shockwaves through the global economy.

Earlier, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the dreaded X-date, when the government runs out of money unless it can borrow, will now be June 5, not June 1. Yellen, however, warned that the deadline extension does not change the urgency.

“Waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States,” she said in a letter to the Republican leader of the House of Representatives, Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

According to unconfirmed US media reports, the deal taking shape would include an agreement to extend the government’s borrowing authority for two years, meaning no repeat of the current drama before the 2024 presidential election.

Democrats, however, would have to offer concessions on Republican demands for sweeping spending limits on social safety and other domestic programmes.

McCarthy told reporters that negotiators had “made progress” but added: “Nothing is agreed to until it’s all agreed to.”

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva cited new data that she said showed the “US economy has proven resilient,” but urged a “speedy resolution” to avoiding the first default in US history.

“We think of the US Treasury market as an anchor for the global financial system, and this anchor needs to hold,” she said.

With the country getting a three-day Memorial Day holiday weekend, members of Congress were leaving Washington on their own 10-day recess. Even Biden — to the consternation of some in his own party — headed to his Camp David retreat, then his home in Delaware.

Yet Wally Adeyemo, the Deputy Treasury Secretary, told CNN that both Biden and McCarthy were focused on avoiding catastrophe.

“The president decided, the speaker has said it, and we have to get something done before June,” Adeyemo said. “The president is committed to making sure that we have good faith negotiations with the Republicans to reach a deal because the alternative is catastrophic for all Americans.”

The debt ceiling raise is an annual accounting manoeuvre that usually passes with relatively little notice. It simply allows the government to keep borrowing money to pay for bills already incurred through the budget.

This year, the increasingly hard-right Republican Party has decided to turn the debt ceiling into leverage to force Biden to

roll back favourite Democratic spending priorities.

Republicans call this taking responsibility for the \$31 trillion national debt. The White House accuses the opposition party, which controls the House of Representatives, of taking the economy hostage.

Democratic minority leader Hakeem Jeffries slammed the Republicans from the House floor on Thursday, accusing them of risking “a dangerous default in a crisis that they’ve created.”

Economists have spent months raising the prospect of economic catastrophe should the government default, and top military brass added their own dire prognosis on Thursday, warning that the crisis would have a “significant negative impact” on troops. — AFP

Unlocking the power of tokenised physical assets: Transforming the future of finance



STEFANO VIRGILLI

The author is member of International Press Association

In a digital age where innovation knows no bounds, the world of finance is experiencing a groundbreaking revolution with the emergence of tokenised physical assets. The fusion of traditional assets, such as real estate, art, and commodities, with the power of blockchain technology has paved the way for a new era of investment opportunities. Tokenised physical assets, including real estate, art, commodities, and more, are rapidly gaining momentum, captivating the attention of investors and reshaping the financial landscape.

Tokenised physical assets represent a paradigm shift in how we perceive and invest in tangible properties. Through tokenisation, these assets are converted into digital tokens, each representing a fractional ownership share. This transformation unlocks unprecedented liquidity and accessibility for investors, breaking down barriers that previously hindered participation in high-value markets.

The advantages of tokenised physical assets are manifold. Firstly, investors can now access previously illiquid markets with smaller capital commitments. Fractional ownership allows individuals to diversify their portfolios and invest in a range of assets that were once out of reach. For example, tokenised real estate enables fractional ownership of properties, making it accessible to a wider range of investors. Whether it’s residential properties, commercial buildings, or even landmark structures, tokenisation provides an opportunity to diversify real estate holdings and access potentially lucrative markets. Additionally, tokenised art allows investors to own fractional shares of valuable artwork and collectibles, participating in the art market without needing significant capital. It enhances liquidity by facilitating the trading of shares in high-value artworks. Tokenising commodities, such

as precious metals or agricultural products, introduces a new dimension to commodity trading. Investors can own digital tokens representing fractions of these physical assets, providing exposure to commodity markets with greater flexibility and liquidity.

Tokenising a physical asset involves several key steps. It begins with rigorous asset verification, ensuring legal compliance, and validating ownership. Once confirmed, the asset’s value is divided into digital tokens, which are then recorded on a blockchain. Blockchain technology, known for its transparency and immutability, provides a secure and tamper-proof record of ownership and transactions, instilling confidence in investors.

Decentralised finance (DeFi) platforms have become instrumental in the rise of tokenised physical assets. DeFi enables seamless trading, lending, and borrowing of these assets, creating a vibrant ecosystem. Investors can maximise their returns by staking their tokens or participating in yield farming strategies, all within a decentralised and automated framework. DeFi brings unparalleled efficiency and accessibility to the tokenised asset market.

As with any transformative financial innovation, regulatory frameworks are evolving to keep pace with the emergence of tokenised physical assets. Authorities around the world are addressing legal complexities to ensure investor protection and market integrity. Striking a balance between innovation and regulatory oversight remains a key challenge, requiring collaboration between industry participants and regulators to foster a robust and secure ecosystem.

The future of tokenised physical assets holds immense potential. As adoption increases and technology matures, we can anticipate greater market efficiency, enhanced liquidity, and broader investment opportunities. Tokenisation has the power to democratise finance, enabling individuals worldwide to participate in assets traditionally reserved for the privileged few. This trend has far-reaching implications for wealth distribution and financial inclusion, paving the way for a more equitable global economy.

Tokenised physical assets on blockchain represent a transformative force, revolutionising the world of finance.

Where is the Global South’s rescue brigade?



VERA SONGWE

The writer is Chair of the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, is a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution

Over the last few months, a G7 economy (the United Kingdom), a midsize US bank (Silicon Valley Bank), a small African economy (Ghana), a lower-middle-income South Asian economy (Pakistan), and the fastest-growing global services sector (technology) have all faced short-term cash constraints.

Monetary-policy tightening in the United States – where the Federal Reserve raised interest rates by 475 basis points in the space of a year – has produced knock-on effects around the world. But the stark disparities in how these effects are being treated speak volumes about current global financial arrangements.

The decade of low interest rates prior to 2022 led many countries and businesses to amass debt in the interest of boosting economic growth and creating jobs.

But no bonanza lasts forever, and this one came to a halt when inflation began rising in the US. Now, interest-rate hikes in the US and Europe are causing severe credit distress in developing countries.

Many currencies have depreciated against the dollar by over 30 per cent, as investors have withdrawn from emerging and frontier markets in a flight to safety. Emerging-market economies’ debt-servicing costs have increased by more than \$1 trillion in less than a year. Reserves as a share of imports have dropped, and inflation in



Africa has risen to over 14 per cent in the low-income countries in 2022.

Worse, the rate hikes are compounding a pre-existing “polycrisis” that also includes Covid-19, climate change, violent conflict, and higher costs of living (owing to the war in Ukraine and other factors).

In developed and developing economies alike, the technology sector had remained an oasis of robust growth, helping to provide resilience during the pandemic. Startups have multiplied, and most have been funded by affordable resources. But now, SVB’s collapse is hitting this sector globally, and Africa is not exempt.

But while US regulators rush to protect domestic depositors, startups and many others have not received such assistance. For the past three years, emerging-market economies have been calling for swift action to address debt distress and contain the pandemic’s economic fallout. But these pleas have received little attention.

Once again, Africa and the rest of the developing world are left to stand by and watch as the Bank of England and the Fed take swift action to contain the domestic effects of their own policies.

As always, pressures imposed on emerging-market economies by exogenous decisions are seen not as liquidity events but as insolvency issues born of those countries’ poor macroeconomic fundamentals. And, as always, the prescribed treatment will involve a protracted visit from

the doctor – the International Monetary Fund – rather than a quick liquidity injection. We already know from history that this unequal treatment will have huge consequences for development and financial stability across the Global South.

This latest episode offers several lessons for African countries and emerging and developing economies more generally. First, since a liquidity crisis can come on suddenly, and with serious consequences for the real economy, we must provide the appropriate remedies, which requires distinguishing between liquidity problems and genuine solvency issues and creating the appropriate instruments.

Second, when treated immediately and with the right remedy, confidence can be restored quickly, allowing growth to recover. To provide today’s global economy with sufficient liquidity to prevent another escalating crisis, the G7 and other major IMF shareholders should consider a new issuance of special drawing rights (SDRs, the Fund’s reserve asset) to serve this liquidity purpose.

Third, like everyone else, emerging-market economies need support to build the financial infrastructure required to address rapidly escalating liquidity problems in the future. Among other things, this means deepening capital markets and strengthening financial-sector regulation.

As the Basel Committee meets to consider revisions to the prevailing macroprudential bank regulations, it should pay

more attention to the contagion effects of developed-market crises on emerging and frontier economies.

Fourth, as the Fed and the European Central Bank contemplate the pace and magnitude of future interest-rate hikes, they must recognise how their policies affect frontier economies both directly and indirectly. There is a clear need for coordination beyond just the G20 countries and their central banks.

Finally, as the international financial system becomes more deeply integrated, we must develop truly inclusive tools to protect all economies. Innovations to preserve financial stability will need to be extended to Africa and other emerging markets.

The ECB’s programme of buying bonds from Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece to keep capital costs in check represents one such innovation. And now, the Fed has stepped in to help make all SVB depositors whole. It is possible to slow some parts of the global economy through policy tightening while still protecting growth in other parts. But this will require a clearly articulated shared objective.

In each case, eliminating the vast disparities in how we respond to systemic crises will require new and deeper forms of coordination between the IMF, central banks, finance ministries, and the international donor community. There is no better time than now to start exploring our options.

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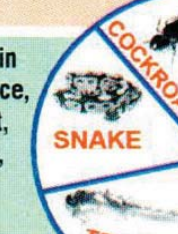
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The image shows three smartphones displaying the Oman Observer website and app interface. The left phone shows the app's home screen with the logo, a list of articles, and a 'Following' section. The middle phone shows the website's mobile version with a large headline 'we shall overco' and the Oman Observer logo. The right phone shows the website's desktop version with a 'BREAKING NEWS' section and a headline about COVID-19 cases in Oman.



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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTRATES OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Said

bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al-Ibadi, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Said bin Khalfalla bin

Said bin Khalfalla al-Bussaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shihab Al-Majbour

bin Abdulhadi bin Issa al-Hariri took the oath of office at Al-Burayk Palace on Thursday. **ALSO**

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, welcomed the role of the Sultanate in achieving peace efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

In a virtual video call to members backing the global coalition coalition, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in Yemen.

Guterres added that the Sultanate represents a unique model not only in the Middle East but also in the world. He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in achieving peace and stability. — OCHA

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL BUTTY

MUSCAT: The frequent entries and frequent arrivals by the government to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears.

As often around the government house and its adjoining areas people are still seen crowded at different corners and while standing to shoulder-to-shoulder.

are not. In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strains, we should stand on our toes.

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well, said Iqbal al-Majbour, who stopped for a moment

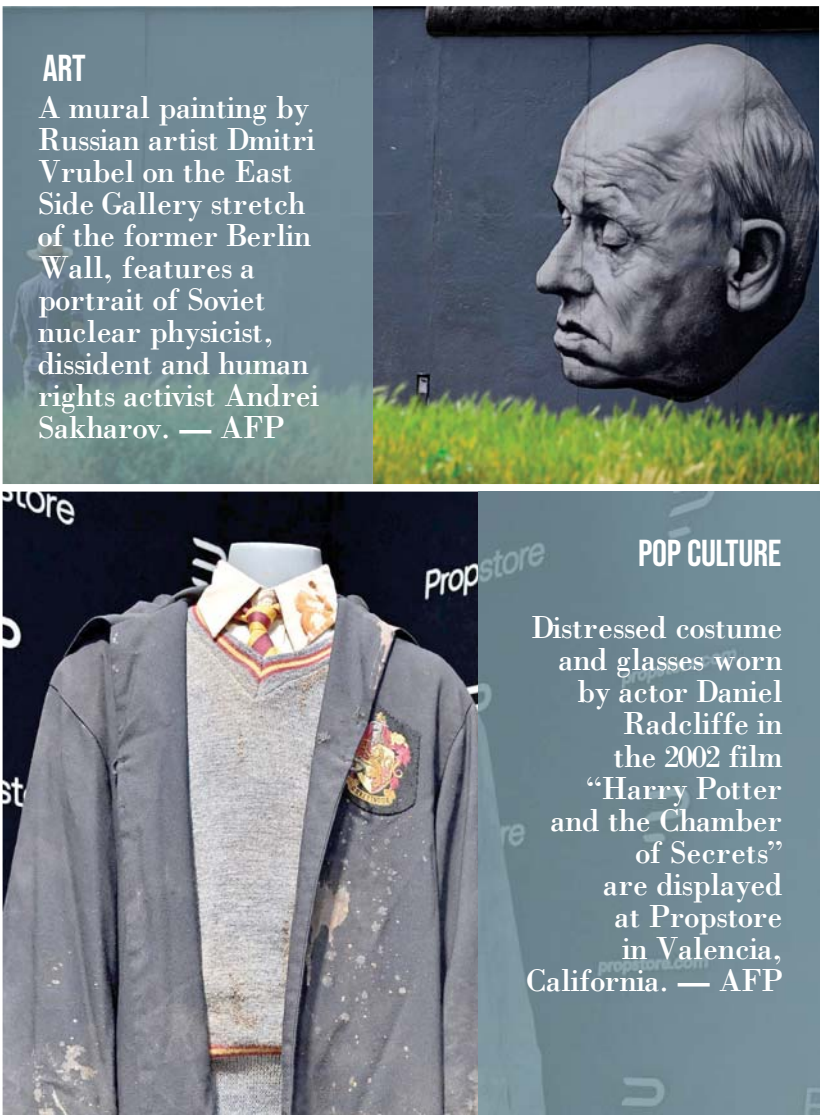
nearby a group of people at a mosque in Muscat. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. He said, "I am not surprised that they have the way for the spread of the virus. If we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can sue them in court."

TOB 10 14

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

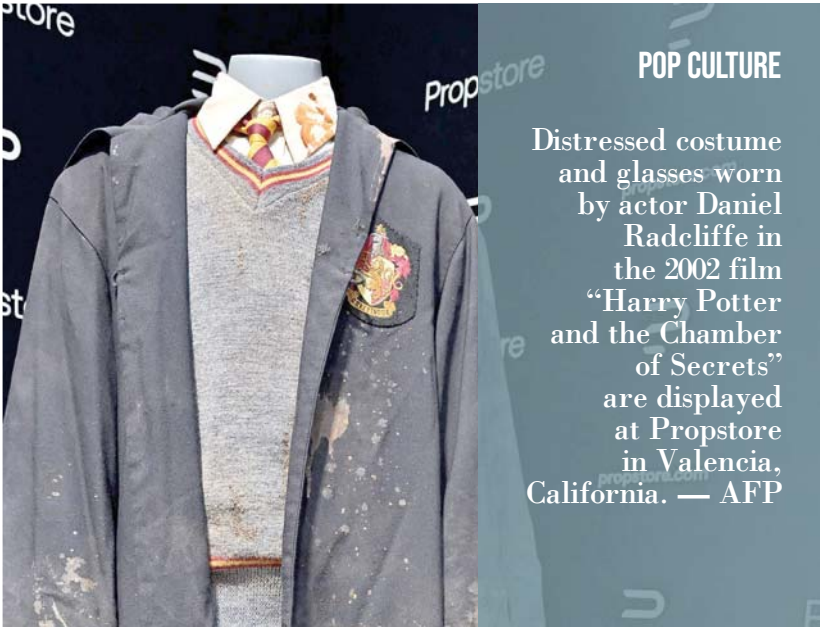
MUSCAT: To mark the 100th anniversary of the Omani independence and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Ministry of the Sultanate, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month.

CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TOB 10 14



ART

A mural painting by Russian artist Dmitri Vrubel on the East Side Gallery stretch of the former Berlin Wall, features a portrait of Soviet nuclear physicist, dissident and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov. — AFP



POP CULTURE

Distressed costume and glasses worn by actor Daniel Radcliffe in the 2002 film "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" are displayed at Propstore in Valencia. — AFP



FASHION

The 55.22 carat ruby Estrela de FURA, reported to be the largest and most valuable to ever appear at auction, is exhibited in Dubai. The gem will be offered during Sotheby's June 8th Magnificent Jewels auction in New York. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

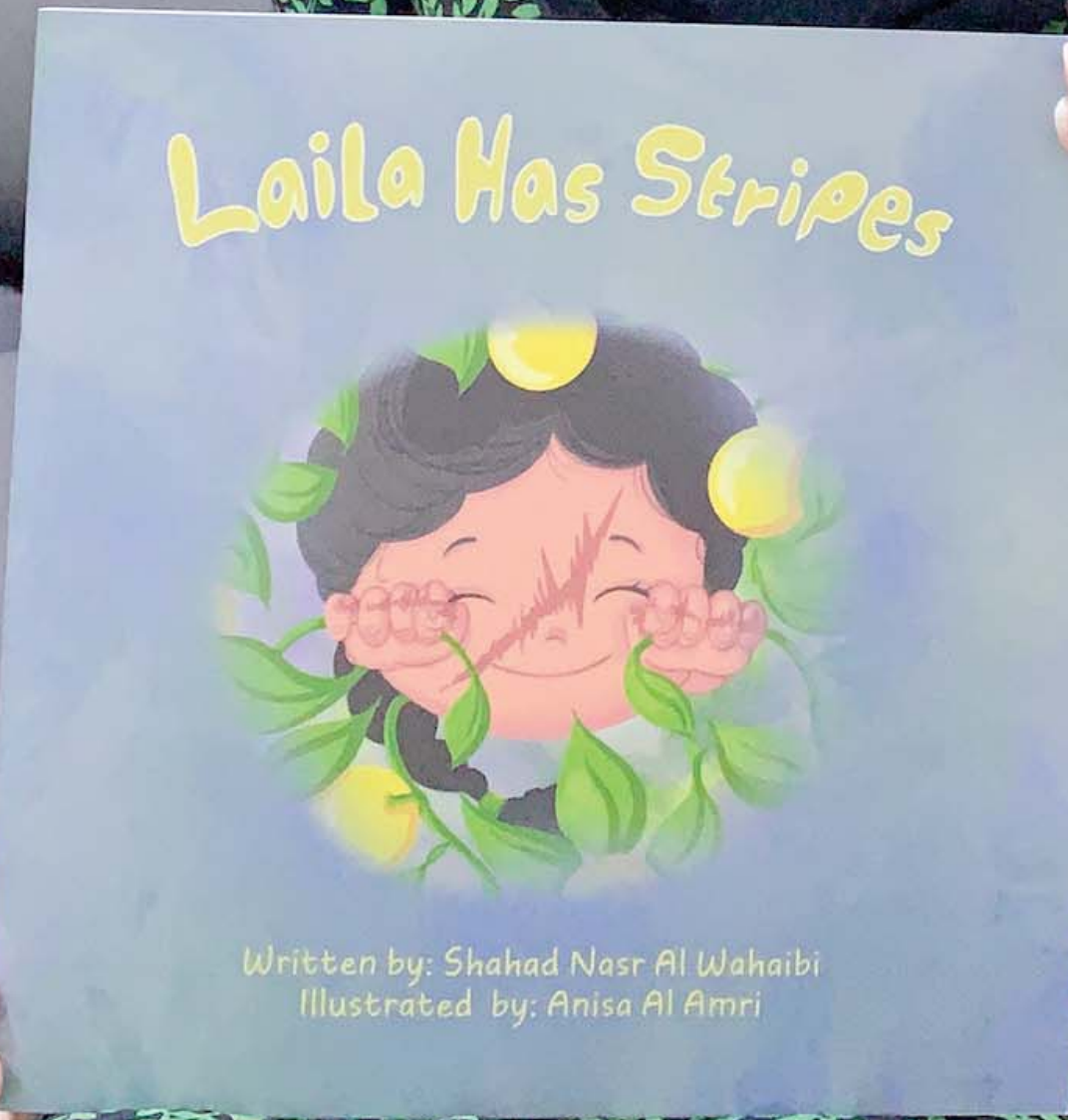
Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor attends the trailer launch event of his upcoming movie 'Bloody Daddy' in Mumbai. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A gannet prepares to land on the cliff top at RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) Bempton Cliffs near Bridlington, Northern England. — AFP

art & life



A book that celebrates the courage of being different

In the book "Laila Has Stripes, the author wants you to remember that it is alright for you or others to be different if you are kind and respectful. When it becomes hard for you to remain different, do not forget that being different is a superpower

Written by: Shahad Nasr Al Wahaibi
Illustrated by: Anisa Al Amri

CULTURE

Moroccan nomads keep alive ancient sport of sand hockey

IN A MOROCCAN oasis town on the edge of the Sahara, nomads in turbans and tunics are thwacking a camel-wool ball across the desert in a traditional pastime: sand hockey.

Similar in many ways to field and ice hockey, but played barefoot and with palm wood sticks, the ancient game is called "mokhacha" in the local Hassani Arabic dialect.

"We play mokhacha in our spare time," said one participant, Hamadi Boudani, at the recent International Nomads Festival in the southern town of M'hamid El Ghizlane.

"Our ancestors were nomads and as soon as they pitched their camp somewhere they would first rest and

then, to pass the time, they would start a game," he said.

"This game is part of Saharan tradition."

The players were cheered on by enthusiastic fans as they churned up the sand in what was once a stop on the storied caravan route to Timbuktu.

They were wearing the daraa, an ample tunic favoured by nomadic tribes, and the cheche cloth turban to cover their heads and faces from the desert sun.

The two teams, one in white the other in blue, had a go at it on May 1, during the annual Nomads Festival which also celebrates song and dance and other desert traditions.



Each team is made up of at least seven players, the outline of the pitch is crudely traced by hand in the sand, and the referee is simply known as the sheikh.

'ANCESTRAL HERITAGE'

Sand hockey "is part of our ancestral heritage", said Rachid Laghouanm who heads an association that promotes traditional sports and games in M'hamid El Ghizlane.

"It was handed down from father to son, and it is vital that it does not disappear," he said.

But like other popular or traditional games and sports, "nomad hockey" as it is often called, is fading into oblivion.

"We are trying to create awareness about the game" by organising compe-

titions and encouraging players to join them, said Laghouanem.

According to the UK-based Hockey Museum, which says it is "the first and only museum of hockey in the world", sand hockey has been around as long as any form of hockey "has been in existence".

Forms of sand hockey are also enjoyed in Ethiopia, where it is called Genna, and in Tunisia under the name of Oggaf, the museum says on its website.

These and the Moroccan version, it says, "date back over hundreds of years and a number of these games are still thriving, almost unchanged, to this day".

Other experts believe that hockey's precursor was a stick-and-ball game with origins as far back as ancient Greece and Egypt.

Boudani says he does not know which came first, sand, field or ice hockey. But what is clear to him is that "the nomads had no means of knowing that Westerners had a similar game". — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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By Lakshmi Kothaneth

A book with an important message for young readers is, 'Laila Has Stripes' written by Shahad bint Nasr al Wahaibiyah.

Shahad works in the oil and gas sector and is the Chief Marketing Officer for iSAW a global organisation that accelerates women's growth in the corporate world. She is also the local consular for Strathclyde MBA in Oman and teaches a marketing course. She has also been the recipient of the NTI BizPro Award and is a member of the Toastmasters community.

This is the first book for the author of the children's book who comes from a family that loves books and reading.

The story is about Laila who has stripes and so she looks different in the eyes of others. Laila used to live on a farm, but when she moved to the city, she discovered that she is different. The book is about her journey of accepting the situation, how her parents handle it, and leaving the reader with the thought of how one can make life better for somebody like Laila.

Shahad has majored in Finance which deals in a way with numbers but her passion is also for words.

"One of my instructors at Sultan Qaboos University had said with finance you can see the future, as we can read if something would work or not in terms of the corporate world. So I use numbers to see what would happen business-wise and words are a way for me to shape the future and the minds of our future generation. That is why I chose to write children's books," Shahad explained.

This is her first book, but the book indicates a sequel.

"I am planning to make Laila a series. I have seven other girls out there in my mind. So I will be starting to work on them. But I also wanted to see if the concept is well received. The good thing since the announcement of the publication is that the response has been excellent," she noted.

She has received invitations from various organisations. It is only after you read the book one can clearly see it is a book even adults should read to guide their children on how to treat children with special needs or who could be different in any way.



Shahad writes a personal message to young readers.

"Laila wants you to remember that it is alright for you or others to be different if you are kind and respectful.

When it becomes hard for you to remain different, do not forget that being different is a superpower because it helps show you - who loves you for who you truly are!" she writes.

So who is Laila?

Laila is a way to tell the children that it is okay to be different. She is born with stripes on her skin - and that is

just a symbolic way of putting it as being different.

"It is something that you are seen and known for. In this story, she interacts with others for the first time and she gets the sense of being unaccepted by many because she looks different at the end her mother explains to her that being different is kind of a power and assures her that love of her mother will protect her always," explained Shahad.

During one of the incidents a child



whom Laila chose to play with in the park is accepting but the mother of the child is enraged when she sees Laila and stops her son from playing with her.

Shahad wanted a resilient face for Laila because even though Laila gets hurt she tries to smile for others' sake. But finally, Laila breaks down and her mother runs to sweep her and take her back home. The illustrations have been done by Anisa al Amri.

It is in the cozy environment of the

bedroom, the mother has the delicate conversation with Laila, and in the background is the father who appreciates the way his wife is handling the situation and goes out to bring his wife's books which she had dropped at the park when she ran to the crying Laila.

"I believe children are smart and they understand the value of empathy. We also in the story look at the importance of dolls. We have all been children once and I am sure we can all remember how strange it felt when we could not come across dolls that looked like us in the shops. Dolls are dolls and they do not depict reality. And that is one of the reasons some of the girls refused to play with Laila as they stated, 'There is no doll that looks like her'."

To all this, her mother gives a beautiful explanation and it is best left to be read from the book.

Shahad said she has dedicated this book to children and adults because there are adults today who are still waiting to overcome the difficult childhood they had to go through because they were different in appearance.

'Laila has stripes,' is a book that heals.

CULTURE

Neglected Igbo-Ukwu Bronzes get new life at Nigerian museum



AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM in Lagos, workers carefully remove rust and patina from Igbo-Ukwu Bronze artefacts, part of restoration work on some of Nigeria's oldest but lesser known collections.

The Igbo-Ukwu, which date back to the 9th century according to the museum, were discovered in 1939 in southeastern Anambra state, part of the region inhabited by the Igbo people.

Some of the artefacts include intricately designed bowls, pots, vases and shells.

Their restoration comes at a time when there is uncertainty about the

return of thousands of the more famous Benin Bronzes from museums and collectors abroad.

In March, President Muhammadu Buhari decreed that all returned Benin Bronzes that were looted from the ancient Benin kingdom should be in the custody of a royal ruler in modern day Benin city,



southwestern Nigeria. That led a British university to postpone the return of more than 100 artefacts.

At the museum in Lagos, curator Omotayo Adeboye said she considered the Igbo-Ukwu "masterpieces of creativity and indigenous craftsmanship." — Reuters

SCIENCE

Most powerful space telescope identifies ancient star-studded galaxy

ASTRONOMERS HAVE used the most powerful telescope ever built to identify a massive, densely packed galaxy 25million light years away.

Known as GS-9209, the galaxy formed around 600 to 800 million years after the Big Bang, and is the earliest of its kind found to date, researchers say.

The scientists, led by University of Edinburgh experts, used the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) to reveal the properties of GS-9209 for the first time.

Lead researcher Dr Adam Carnall, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Physics and Astronomy, said: "The James Webb Space Telescope has already demonstrated that galaxies were growing larger and earlier than we ever suspected during the first bil-



lion years of cosmic history.

"This work gives us our first really detailed look at the properties of these early galaxies, charting in detail the history of GS-9209, which managed to form as many stars as our own Milky Way in just 800million years after the Big Bang.

"The fact that we also see a very massive black hole in this galaxy was a big surprise, and lends a lot of weight to the idea that these black holes are what shut down star formation in early galaxies."

The researchers found that despite being around 10 times smaller than the Milky Way, GS-9209 has a similar number of stars to our own galaxy.

According to the study, their combined mass is around 40 billion times that of our sun, and they were formed rapidly before star formation in GS-9209 stopped.

GS-9209 is the earliest known example of a galaxy no longer forming stars - known as a quiescent galaxy.

When the researchers observed it at 1.25 billion years after the Big Bang, no stars had formed in the galaxy for about half a billion years.

The study also suggests there is a supermassive black hole at the centre of GS-9209.

It is five times bigger than astronomers might anticipate in a galaxy with this number of stars. — PA Media/dpa



LIFESTYLE

South Africa presses for recognition of its high-end olive oil

SOUTH AFRICA is famous for its wines but not necessarily for olive oil, where Greece, Italy and Spain are the undisputed kings.

But the country's farmers are undeterred, eyeing a potential share of the lucrative market for top-quality extra virgin oils.

At Tokara, a farm about an hour's drive from Cape Town, workers pull rakes through branches to make the ripening olives tumble to the ground.

Harvesting the green treasure is under full swing in this popular wine region at the southern tip of Africa, where the landscape is reminiscent of Tuscany.

"Can you smell" the aroma, asks Gert van Dyk, 49, the farm's operations manager, holding a glass of freshly-pressed extra virgin olive oil that clinched an award in the United States earlier this year.

"You can taste the nice bitterness at the back of the throat. Then the pepperiness comes through and the back of the throat is burning nicely," he says rolling the light green liquid over his tongue like a wine master.

The estate originally specialised in wine but now has oil as one of its flagship products — and even offers tastings of it.

"We have really extraordinary quality olive oil," enthuses French restaurateur Christophe Dehosse, 55. When he moved to the country 30 years ago, few people used olive oil, he recalls.

"But now a lot of farms have been planting olives...

there's really no reason to buy an olive oil coming from Europe 10,000 kilometres (6,200 miles) away," said Dehosse who owns four restaurants in the region.

"We really get artisanal, fantastic products."

'VERY FASHIONABLE'

At his table, he offers an Italian-style appetiser of simple bread dipped in olive oil, which has become "very fashionable".

He always goes for locally-produced oil. "I know what I buy hasn't been cut with anything. It's 100 per cent extra virgin olive oil".

The first South African olives were grown in the early 20th century by an Italian immigrant, Fernando Costa, says SA Olive, an association of grower and producers.

Then in 1998, Giulio Bertrand, a retired Italian in South Africa, imported 17 varieties of olive trees and planted them on his farm in Stellenbosch.

Today, the Morgenster farm grows olive trees on 42 hectares, and millions of trees across the country descended from Bertrand's first olive trees.

"My grandfather was known as the father of olive oil in South Africa as he paved the way to the olive oil industry as we know it today," says Bertrand's 29-year-old granddaughter, Vittoria Castagnetta, who works for the family's still-active business.

Since then, the idyllic hills of the Cape region, with their Mediterranean climate and rolling vineyards, have produced olives recog-

nised beyond the country's borders for their quality.

A South African oil was in May awarded the "Absolute Best Olive Oil" in the world title at the prestigious EVOOLEUM awards in Spain. The winning farm, De Rustica, 400 kilometres from Stellenbosch, enjoys the same Mediterranean climate.

While olive oil remains a luxury product for many South Africans, producers like Van Dyk have in recent years noticed "an increase in demand from the local market" as part of the quest for healthier diets.

Producing up to two million litres of olive oil annually, against global output of over three million tonnes, means it may take time for South Africa to compete with big global brands.

Yet making inroads into the luxury oil industry, is "one of the things South Africa can really be proud of. Same thing as our wine, it just needs to be discovered," said the chef.

But South Africa may well start to position itself for the export market as some of the world's traditional producers in Europe are facing headwinds in the face of droughts and recurrent heatwaves.

Low output caused by climatic disasters have drastically hiked global olive oil prices in recent months.

In January 2022, oil sold at 3,500 euros (\$3,700) per tonne, a year later it was up at 5,300 euros, and this month it had shot to 5,800 euros, according to international oil broking firm Baillon Interco. — AFP



DISCOVERY



Fossils reveal ancient beast's epic journey to oblivion

IT WAS A DIRE moment for life on Earth. Runaway global warming triggered by calamitous volcanism in Siberia inflicted the worst mass extinction on record — dooming perhaps 90% of species — roughly 252 million years ago at the end of the Permian Period.

Unlike the asteroid 66 million years ago that ravaged the dinosaurs, this extinction event unfolded over a protracted time span, with species perishing one by one as conditions worsened. Scientists said on Monday fossils unearthed in South Africa provide a peek into this drama, telling the tale of an apex predator that over multiple generations migrated halfway around the world in a desperate, and ultimately failed, bid to survive.

This beast, a tiger-sized, saber-toothed mammal forerunner called *Inostrancevia*, had been known only from fossils excavated in Russia's northwestern corner bordering the Arctic Sea until new remains were discovered at a farm in central South Africa.

The fossils suggest that *Inostrancevia* left its place of origin and trekked over time — maybe hundreds or thousands of years — about 7,000 miles (12,000 km) across Earth's ancient supercontinent Pangaea at a time when today's continents were united. *Inostrancevia* filled the ecological niche of top predator in South Africa left vacant after four other species already had vanished.

"However, it did not survive there long," said paleontologist Christian Kammerer of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, lead author of the research published in the journal *Current Biology*, noting that *Inostrancevia* and all of its closest relatives disappeared in the mass extinction called "the Great Dying."

"So, they have no living descendants, but they are a member of the larger group called synapsids, which includes mammals as living representatives," Kammerer added.

Inostrancevia is part of an assemblage of animals called protomammals that combined reptile-like and mammal-like features. It was 10-13 feet (3-4 metres) long, roughly the size of a Siberian tiger, but with a proportionally larger and elongated skull as well as enormous, blade-like canine teeth.

"I suspect these animals primarily killed prey with their saber-like canine fangs and either carved out chunks of meat with the serrated incisors or, if it was small enough, swallowed the prey whole," Kammerer said.

Inostrancevia's body had an unusual posture typical of protomammals, not quite sprawling like a reptile or erect like a mammal but something in between, with sprawled forelimbs and mostly erect hind limbs. It also lacked the mammalian facial musculature and would not have produced milk.

"Whether these animals were furry or not remains an open question," Kammerer said.

The mass extinction, occurring over a span of a million years or so, set the stage for the rise of the dinosaurs in the subsequent Triassic Period. Massive volcanism unleashed lava flows across large portions of Eurasia and pumped carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for thousands of years. This caused a spike in worldwide temperatures, depletion of oxygen in the seas and atmosphere, ocean acidification and global desertification.

Top predators were especially vulnerable to extinction because they required the most food and space.

"They tend to take a relatively long time to mature and have few offspring. When ecosystems are disrupted and prey supplies are reduced or available habitat is limited, top predators are disproportionately affected," Kammerer said.

The researchers see parallels between the Permian crisis and today's human-induced climate change.

"The hardship these species faced was as a direct result of a global-warming climate crisis, so they really had no choice but to adapt to it or go extinct. This is clear by evidence of their brief perseverance in spite of these conditions, but eventually they disappeared one by one," said paleontologist and study co-author Pia Viglietti of the Field Museum in Chicago.

"Unlike our Permian predecessors," Viglietti added, "we actually have the ability to do something to prevent this kind of ecosystem crisis from happening again." — Reuters