

Farewell to Libyan Ambassador

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Sania Abu Al Qasim Ghoma, Ambassador of Libya to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. **DETAILS ON P2**



P10

OMANI FENCERS CLINCH 16 MEDALS AT WEST ASIAN EVENT



P13

OMAN LNG WEIGHS FORAY INTO LNG BUNKERING



P20

BORN IN MUSCAT, THIS OPERA SINGER CAME BACK 16 YEARS LATER TO PERFORM AT ROHM



HM GETS MESSAGE FROM SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The message was handed over to HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received at his office on Wednesday Abdullah Saud al Enezi, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them in various fields. The meeting was attended by the Secretary General and the two advisers at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad. – **ONA**

Initiative to spread culture of start-ups



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said chaired the second meeting of the Supervisory Committee on Wednesday. – **ONA**

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Programme for Promising Omani Start-ups, on Wednesday chaired the second meeting of the Supervisory Committee of the programme for the year 2023. The programme aims at activating the system of companies whose core structure is based on

technology and innovation in Oman. The programme also focuses on the dissemination of the culture of start-ups in educational institutions, enhancing community awareness of their importance and upgrading Omani start-ups to the regional and global standards. During its meeting, the Committee discussed a number of

topics on its agenda, including the progress made in implementing the decisions of the first meeting of the Supervisory Committee. It also studied the progress made in pursuing initiatives of the programme within the themes of capacity building for start-ups, notably school education initiatives that cover the development of a syllabus on

start-ups, implementing start-up ideas camps and devising a smart educational game on start-ups. The meeting also focused on university education initiatives that envisage the preparation of an educational material about start-ups and the implementation of camps and competitions targeting university and college students. **TURN TO P2**

MUSCAT
MAJLIS TO HOST HEALTH MINISTER
The Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, to deliver his ministry's statement at the council's 13th ordinary meeting to be held on Sunday. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura. He added that the statement will include four main axes dealing with the health sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The first axis is dedicated to comprehensive health coverage and includes the implemented projects. **DETAILS ON P2**

OMAN, IRAN TO BOOST TRADE TIES
Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, met in Tehran on Wednesday, Mahdi Dousti, Governor of Hormozgan. This came during the minister's visit to the Port of Shahid Rajaei in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two sides reviewed means of activating mutual cooperation between Oman's ports and the Port of Shahid Rajaei and the economic zone. — **ONA**

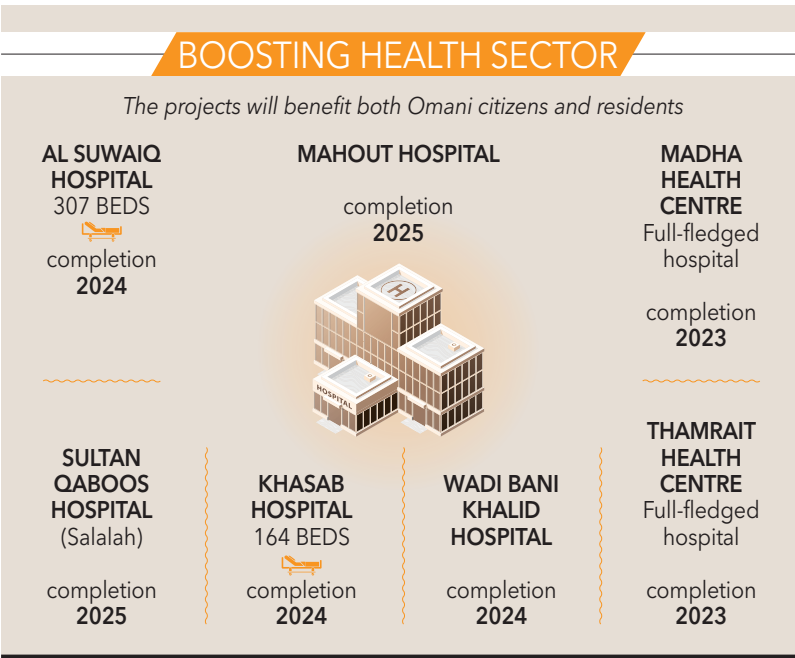
SPOTLIGHT ON ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN



A free digital copy of the magazine is issued with the newspaper

11 NEW HOSPITALS TO MEET POPULATION GROWTH

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has embarked on construction of 11 hospitals in various wilayats and governorates, to develop the health sector and keep pace with the growth of population in Oman. The projects will benefit both Omani citizens and residents. Jamal bin Salim al Shanfari, Director General of Projects and Engineering Affairs at the Ministry of Health, said that the projects under way include the new Al Suwaiq Hospital in Al Batinah North Governorate (with a capacity of 307 beds — expected to be completed in 2024) and the new Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, which is expected to be completed in 2025. Al Shanfari added that the new Khasab Hospital in Musandam Governorate (164 beds) will be



opened in 2024. The Ministry of Health is upgrading Madha Health Centre in Musandam Governorate, to make it a full-fledged hospital, scheduled to opened later this year. He said that to raise the efficiency of the Madha Health Centre to a hospital, the

completion rate has reached 80 per cent and is expected to be completed during this year. **FLOATING OF TENDERS** In raising the efficiency of the Thamrait Health Centre to a hospital the completion rate is 55 per cent, and it is expected to be completed during this year, and in Wadi Bani Khalid Hospital in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, the completion rate has reached 25 per cent, and is expected to be completed next year. Al Shanfari said that the designs and layouts for three new hospitals are being finalised in preparation for floating of tenders. They are new Samayil Hospital in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Al Nama Hospital in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and Al Falah Hospital in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. — **ONA**

Survey unearths sites from early Stone Age

MUSCAT: The archaeological missions during 2022/2023 season saw participation of 28 archaeological missions from 12 countries. This was revealed by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Wednesday at a press conference on major outcomes of the programme of archaeological missions. The conference underlined the ministry's efforts to



protect and highlight the archaeological heritage of the Sultanate of Oman. It seeks to maximise gains from Omani heritage components and utilise them as tourism attractions. A recent survey unearthed important data at more than 68 archaeological sites dating back to epochs of the early Stone Age. Many important archaeological sites dating

back to different eras have been discovered, including the sites of Ras Al Hamra, Bat, Al Khutm, Al Ain, Besya, Salut, Al Baleed, Khor Rori, Al Safa and Qalhat, while various important archaeological holdings were discovered in these sites dating back to local and neighbouring civilisations, which indicates the historical and cultural depth of Oman. **TURN TO P2**

Oman denounces Israeli aggression

GAZA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Foreign Ministry, condemned the aggression launched by the Israeli occupation forces on the Gaza Strip and its raids on the West Bank city of Nablus. The Sultanate of Oman expressed its deep condemnation of this unjustified escalation that constitutes a clear violation of international law, the UN Security Council resolutions and international legitimacy. The Sultanate of Oman called on the international community to take deterrent measures against Israel to stop its repeated aggression against the Palestinians.

TUNISIA The Sultanate of Oman expressed its sincere condolences and sympathy to the government and people of the brotherly Republic of Tunisia and to the families of the victims of the attack on the El Ghriba Synagogue in the Tunisian island of Djerba.



HH Sayyid Asaad bids farewell to Libyan Ambassador



MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and

Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Wednesday Sania Abu Al Qasim Ghoma, Ambassador of Libya to

the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. During the meeting, the ambassador expressed her thanks

to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to her during her tour of duty from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people. She also wished His Majesty good health, happiness and a long life and the Sultanate of Oman further development and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty. On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassador in serving bilateral relations and wished her success. He also wished the people of Libya further progress and prosperity. The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two Advisers at HH Sayyid Asaad office. — ONA

Defence secretary-general receives US naval forces commander



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, Commander of the US Naval Forces Central Command. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Military Attaché of the United States Embassy at Muscat. — ONA

Majlis Ash'shura to host health minister on Sunday

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, to deliver his ministry's statement at the council's 13th ordinary meeting to be held on Sunday.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura.

He added that the statement will include four main axes dealing with the health sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The first axis is dedicated to comprehensive health coverage and includes the implemented projects and those that are expected to be established during the Tenth Five-year Plan (2021-2025) and, the development of emergency departments, ambulance services and the specialised clinics in the governorates, physiotherapy centres and the availability of services for chronic diseases in the governorates and other related issues. It deals with the quality of health services at the primary health institutions and the mechanisms of handling medical errors, complaints, long waiting time and the monitoring of private health institutions.

The first axis also deals with the management of health crises and emergencies including the current situation and the



Shaikh Ahmed al Nadabi

mechanism for future work, health infrastructure, financial and human requirements for combating health crises and the strategy and plans of the health sector to deal with health crises in the future.

The second axis is dedicated to health human resources and includes the ministry's Omanisation strategy and the provision of medical and technical jobs, qualifying and training medical and paramedical staffs and administrative cadres, Al Nadabi said.

The third axis is dedicated to the financing of the health system and includes the sustainability of financing the health system in order to achieve comprehensive health coverage and optimising spending and improving partnership between the public and private health sectors. The fourth axis is dedicated to the digital transformation projects in the health sector, he said.

VINOD NAIR
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The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has said that consumers should take help from the law if they are denied of their rights.

Recently, the Directorate-General of Consumer Protection (DGCP) in Al Batinah North Governorate helped a consumer to get the newly-bought faulty car with a new one.

The DGCP, in a statement, said it received a complaint from a consumer against a car dealer who reported certain defects in his car, which was bought not later than 15 days, which is the period specified in the law for replacement.

As soon as he received the car, he heard a loud noise coming out of its engine and contacted the car dealer.

The car was examined and the defect was detected.

The consumer filed a complaint to DGCP, who after following the necessary procedures summoned people in charge at the car dealer. The seller admitted that the car is defective and agreed to replace it with a new one.

The chapter on consumer rights in the law states that the consumer has the right to guarantee the quality of the commodity or service and to acquire the same at the declared price.

The right to all that guarantees the consumer's health and safety



upon acquiring any commodity or receiving any service and safety from damages or harms upon the normal and ordinary use of this commodity or service.

The right to receive fair compensation for damages suffered by the consumer or the property thereof and which results from the procurement or ordinary use of the commodity or the receipt of the service.

The right to represent the interests of the consumer upon the formulation of consumer protection policies.

Article (15) states that the consumer shall be entitled to obtain an invoice written in Arabic language proving the purchase of

the commodity or the receipt of the service and the invoice shall include the basic information on the commodity or the service and any other information as determined by the regulations.

Article (16) states that the customer, within a period of fifteen (15) days of his receipt of any commodity- save consumer items that are readily spoilable, shall be entitled to replace, return or refund the value of the commodity without any additional costs if such commodity is defective or noncompliant with the standard specifications or unfit for the purpose for which the commodity was procured, provided that the consumer shall submit proof of

purchase of the commodity from the provider and that the defect is not due to misuse by the consumer of the commodity.

Article (18) states that the consumer may prove the presence of defects in the commodity by all methods of proof.

Article (25) states that the provider shall take back the commodity and refund the price thereof to the consumer or replace or repair the same free of charge in case the consumer discovered that the commodity is defective.

Article (26) states that the provider shall guarantee the repairs and maintenance in accordance with this law and the regulations.

Survey unearths sites dating back to Stone Age

FROM PAGE 1

The archaeological sites and collections are considered among the most prominent tourist destinations which enrich tourism in the Sultanate of Oman through museums and the establishing of visitor centres in archaeological parks, while the outputs of archaeological excavations also contribute to providing the National Museum and other museums affiliated with the ministry with archaeological holdings as well they could be displayed in local, regional and international exhibitions and museums.

During the conference, a visual display was presented on the history of archaeological research in Oman, discovered sites, major archaeological missions and approaches undertaken by the ministry as part of this programme.

The visual presentation revealed rock drawings of animals and



people. It depicted the experiences and conditions lived by prehistoric inhabitants.

The visual presentation clarified that the first archaeological missions were the Danish one in 1972, which discovered the Wadi Suq cemetery, which consisted of 430 graves, it also implemented surveying and excavation works at the Bat site, followed by the American Harvard

University mission during the period of 1973 to 1976, which discovered 180 sites, including the settlement of Wadi Ibra and Bahla BB-19, BB21 and a surveyed at Arja in Wadi Al Jizzi as well.

It also clarified that the British archaeological mission during the period of 1971, 1973 and 1978 has discovered 79 sites and carried out excavations works in Salut, Samad Al

Shan and Al Missar (which date back to the third millennium BC). The Italian-French archaeological mission and the German mission worked to excavate various archaeological tombs which were rich in funerary artefacts and had a large number of ancient settlements, sites and towers as well as discovered copper mining sites dating back to the third millennium BC (the Bronze Age – in the Majan Civilisation period).

Archaeological surveys also discovered rock drawings of animals and people which reflect the experiences and situations that the first inhabitants were exposed to, some of which date back to the seventh millennium BC. It has also found some proving shreds of evidence documenting ancient communication between Oman and the countries of Sindh and Mesopotamia. These evidences include seals, utensils, and bitumen from Mesopotamia.

Initiative to spread culture of start-ups

FROM PAGE 1

The committee reviewed an orientation programme initiative mandated to support projects and start-ups in the initial stages, initiatives of start-ups owners and entrepreneurs and relevant innovative ideas.

These include inputs by parties interested in the implementation of national hackathons and interactive education virtual courses for start-ups that are conducted by the Digital Entrepreneurship Academy.

This is in addition to an initiative to spread the culture of start-ups by drafting of a guide for start-ups in Oman, an audio podcast for start-ups and an initiative on the "Leadership and Growth Programme" targeting owners of the fastest growing Omani start-ups.

The meeting also included an introductory presentation on "Injaz Oman" establishment and its contribution to the development of student start-ups and the evolution of the entrepreneurship sector.

The committee also followed up the progress made in implementing a study on of emerging companies (start-ups) that focus on innovation and technology. The overall objective is to identify challenges and come up with effective policies and programmes that could bolster the growth of nascent firms and enhance their economic impact. — ONA



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GCC commerce under-secs review means of enhancing Intra-trade



MUSCAT: GCC under-secretaries of ministries of commerce and industry on Wednesday held the 56th preparatory meeting of the commercial cooperation committee and the 42nd preparatory meeting of the industrial cooperation committee, held under the chairmanship of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

The preparatory meeting of the commercial cooperation committee discussed a spectrum of topics, namely addressing challenges facing intra-trade between GCC countries, facilitating trade exchange and developments to commercial laws, among other topics. It also discussed establishing a permanent committee for investment, with the aim of augmenting GCC local and outbound investments, as well as providing an investment

milieu based on transparency and stability. Meanwhile, the preparatory meeting of the industrial cooperation committee discussed a range of topics, such as specifying a unified definition for GCC products and addressing challenges facing the industrial sector, among other topics. The following meetings will be held in Muscat on Thursday: the 64th ministerial meeting of the commercial cooperation

committee, the 50th ministerial meeting of the industrial cooperation committee, the 5th meeting of the ministerial committee for standardisation affairs and the consultative meeting between ministers of commerce and industry and heads of GCC chambers and unions of commerce, under the chairmanship of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — ONA

UTAS academic board reviews bylaw, library system



MANAH: The Academic Board of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) held its third meeting of the academic year (2022-2023). The meeting was chaired by Dr Said Hamad Al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences and Chairman of UATAS Academic Board. Held at Oman Across Ages Museum, the meeting coincides with the 20th Student Forum hosted by the museum. The meeting studied the results of the university's graduates during the Fall Semester and the university's academic

calendar for the year 2023-2024, which includes the dates of semesters, exams, academic activities and other events associated with academic affairs. The board also reviewed and discussed the bylaw of UATAS, which is embarked on devising its own regulations in preparation for submitting them to the competent authorities for review and approval. UATAS board discussed ways to develop a unified reference for the university's libraries in order to achieve high quality standards and implement advanced electronic systems to better serve students and other beneficiaries. — ONA

Jusoor Foundation to sign five agreements for social projects

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Jusoor Foundation is geared up to sign five agreements on Thursday to implement five strategic projects in North Al Batinah Governorate. The projects are funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale — as social investment projects with an investment of RO 3.26 million. The signing ceremony will be held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah and Chairman of the Jusoor Board of Directors, will attend the event. The first agreement pertains to the setting up of a dialysis unit in Sohar Health Centre. The second is the construction of Al Suwaiq Park, the third is the establishment of Liwa Fish, Vegetables and Fruits Market, the fourth is the building of Al Suwaiq Sports Club, and the last is the implementation of the Youth Competency Development Programme (San'ah). The event coincides with Jusoor Foundation's 10th anniversary. In ten years, it successfully implemented around 63 projects covering all the wilayats of North Al Batinah in areas like health, sports, social and youth sectors. The Foundation's total social investment stood at RO 14 million.

'Moon scientist of India' to visit Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef



Dr Mylswamy Annadurai, known as the 'Moon scientist of India' who was part of the national space missions, will be visiting Oman and interact with the students from different schools on May 19 and 20, according to the organisers. Dr Annadurai, who was awarded one of the three civilian titles, Padmasree, will be the chief guest at the 'Science Fiesta 2023' organised by the Indian Science Forum at the National University of Science and Technology. "We are privileged to have a scientist of his (Dr Mylswamy Annadurai) stature as he can inspire and guide many of our aspirant students who are passionate about space technology and space science," said Dr J Retnakumar, Coordinator, Indian Science Forum. Dr Annadurai, the present vice-president for Tamil Nadu State Council for Science and Technology (TNSCST), Chairman, Board of Governors, National Design and Research Forum (NDRF), was part of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and served as Director, ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC), Bangalore. He joined ISRO in 1982 and during his 36 years of service with ISRO, he had some of the major contributions to the space world which included two of the

major missions of ISRO, namely Chandrayaan-1 and Mangalyaan. Annadurai has been listed among 100 Global thinkers of 2014 and topped the innovators list and his works are mentioned in textbooks of Tamil Nadu Board of Secondary Education (TNBSE). Dr Annadurai holds a Bachelor's Degree in engineering (Electronics and Communication) in 1980 from Government College of Technology, Coimbatore, and a Master's Degree in engineering from PSG College of Technology besides and PhD from Anna University of Technology, Coimbatore. "The space specialist engineer will also be interacting with students from different schools sharing his experience in spacecrafts and missions which will be a one-of-its-kind event for the students of Oman as he has some of the original contributions to the INSAT systems maintenance as the mission director of INSAT missions," Dr Retnakumar adds.

Trial run of early warning service next week



MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authority and telecommunications service providers, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will conduct a real trial run of an early warning broadcast service via mobile phones in several wilayats of the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, Muscat and

Dhofar. Sub-committees will be distributed in various locations in the wilayats to ensure that warning messages are received to all subscribers of Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) and Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo) in the same wilayat. — ONA

Now, customers in Dhofar can view food preparations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The Dhofar Municipality has said that restaurants, cafes, bakeries and kitchens must have HD surveillance cameras (CCTVs) in the food preparation areas in the first phase of this project. These places must install at least 32 TV screens in the dining halls

so customers can view food and beverage preparation in real-time. The objectives of the project are observing the food preparation and the performance of the cooking staff, ensuring the safety of visitors to food outlets, and food safety, utilising modern technologies to streamline and enhance control work processes, developing the food work system,

reducing violations and raising the efficiency of self-health control. For new licences for targeted activities in the first phase, compliance with the conditions is required before issuing the municipal licence. The existing activities targeted in the first phase will be given a deadline between May 15 and August 15 to implement the decision.





COPING WITH EXAM STRESS

CREATING A HAPPY AND CALM FAMILY ENVIRONMENT
IS KEY TO REDUCING STRESS AMONG STUDENTS



AHMED AL KAABI

As final exams approach, many families experience stress, conflict and turmoil in their homes. It is like ‘a state of emergency’ in the family. Here lies the role of everyone in the family to create a happy and calm environment to give a boost to the children who are writing the papers.

Educational experts confirm that families play a critical role in helping their children navigate this challenging time of the school year.

According to Saif al Kaabi,

a social worker, stress and fear are common among families during the examination period. However, to reduce this suffering, families must objectively assess the value of these exams. Instead of viewing exams as an ordeal, they should see them as an opportunity to evaluate and improve their children’s performance.

Al Kaabi advises that during the pre-examination period, students should focus only on revision to prevent distraction and mental exhaustion. Additionally, balancing study with appropriate time for relaxation and stress-reducing

activities can help students manage their anxiety.

He stresses the importance of avoiding harmful habits, such as comparing students to their classmates or siblings and focusing solely on high grades. Instead, families should reward their children for their academic achievements and avoid creating a state of emergency, which can lead to marital problems and crises.

Manifestations of tension often arise when families prohibit activities such as watching TV, using mobile phones, or visiting friends. However, these restrictions can significantly impact children

during this period. Parents should strive for balance and moderation to maintain a healthy atmosphere at home. They should also postpone non-urgent problems until after exams to ensure that their children do not develop negative associations with studying.

Al Kaabi emphasises that families play a significant role in perpetuating exam stress. Waiting for success without understanding the rationale for passing exams increases stress levels for students. Families should engage in dialogue with their children about the importance of education and

success and communicate the shared responsibility for success and failure. This can help reduce psychological pressure and negative effects on educational competencies.

Success is not solely dependent on intelligence, and the ability to memorise does not bear fruit without organisation. The system is the foundation of a student’s life, and several factors must be combined to achieve the best results. Students should develop an organised plan to review all courses, allocate time for each course, and create summaries of the most important ideas.



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Research project helps improve teaching practices in HEIs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has been funding innovative research projects.

One such project is ‘Researching on academic practice at Omani Higher Education Institutions through Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and Open Education Resources (OER)’.

The project was led by the principal investigator Prof Raja Maznah Raja Hussain, Professor at the Department of Instructional and Learning Technologies at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

According to Prof Raja, “The aim of the research project was to facilitate the practice of innovative teaching and learning through action and conceptual research. The project also developed a training framework for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) based on virtual and/or physical communities of practice and/or training the mentors. Through the training, the faculty could share their teaching practices in public higher education institutions.” Furthermore, the project team conducted preliminary research on SoTL to ensure that the modules to be developed meet the needs of the target audience from public higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Prof Raja stated that the project members have contributed to planning future e-learning strategies at the national level and at SQU.

Moreover, the project members participated in SQU committees responsible for planning and drawing policies related to teaching and learning, and technology as well as e-learning. They also contributed to the Open Education Resources (OER) movement in the Sultanate of Oman through the project team’s collaboration with the Ministry of Education, as well as contributing to their review and redesigning of the Instructional Learning and Technologies BA programme at SQU.

In terms of research outputs, Prof Raja and her colleagues led multiple SoTL and OER workshops for the country’s higher education institutions and schools. They also worked with SQU’s Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to modify the new teachers’ training curriculum and make the SoTL module easier to teach. They also participated in the National E-Learning Strategy Committee, constituted by the Oman Ministers Council (2021), to develop an e-learning strategy plan to improve e-learning across the Sultanate. They also worked with the Omani National Commission for Education, Science and Culture to organise the ALECSO OER League in Oman. They supervised SQU academics in undertaking SoTL research through seminars and individual coaching.

Besides Prof Raja, the research team comprised Dr Khalid al Saadi (Co-PI), Dr Mohammed Osman Eltahir, Prof Wan Mohammad Fauzy Wan Ismail and Dr Rouhollah Khoda Banda Lou.

BADRIYA AL BALUSHI
MANAH, MAY 10

The Oman Across Ages Museum hosted the 20th Students’ Forum on Tuesday. The event saw attendance from academic and administrative staff from various branches of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences UTAS), employees of public and private sectors, and students.

The day kicked off with a workshop titled ‘Your Way to Build a Brand’ conducted by the renowned branding expert Professor Rayyan Abdullah, Dean of the Fine Arts College in Leipzig, Germany. Professor Rayyan shared insights on the mental process of designing and the importance of being an open-minded traveller to discover the magic of different



countries worldwide, which in turn helps to renew the designer’s energy.

He explained that designing is the biggest philosophy of a company in the smallest space given, using examples from his experience working on highly acclaimed companies such as

Volkswagen and the German Federal Eagle.

Professor Rayyan also spoke on designing unique fonts for various brands and emphasised the need to create meaningful, visual, distinctive, protectable, positive and future-oriented designs.

The second workshop,

“Branding Visual Identity,” was delivered by visual communication and identity specialist Waseem Qaddora. He discussed the difference between brand and brand identity and covered essential elements of branding and brand naming. Waseem explained that in today’s world, a brand logo is the most crucial aspect of any business, and sometimes the branding of a logo costs more than designing it.

The third workshop, ‘How to Make Reels,’ was presented by Jawaher al Kharusi, a student from UTAS Nizwa. She explained how to make creative reels, the obstacles that reel makers might face, and how to overcome them. Attendees expressed happiness about the workshop and how it improved their reel-making skills.

MEDRC concludes vocational training for SMEs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

In partnership with the British Embassy in Muscat, MEDRC concluded the REROM SMEs programme with a graduation ceremony held under the auspices of Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Under-Secretary for Water Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The REROM SMEs programme is a vocational training programme that aims to build the capacity of young Omanis by equipping them with the necessary skill set to



start SMEs in the water treatment sector in Oman. Seventeen young Omani job-seekers graduated from the programme this year after an intensive nine-week training programme at MEDRC. The programme included courses

in wastewater treatment, business and finance, solar training, plant construction and installation.

James Goldman, Charge d’Affaires of the British Embassy, commented: “We are proud to have sponsored the REROM SME’S

programme and congratulate the 17 young Omanis who completed the programme. We look forward to seeing their contribution to a more sustainable future and green economy. Innovation and entrepreneurship are critical to the UK and Oman. That is why we are partnering with the Government of Oman on a range of initiatives to support the development of SMEs. Alongside REROM, in the last 12 months, we have also helped to upskill over 30 Omani tech companies and worked with the SME Authority on producing a strategy for SME development in Oman.”



OMAN CHLORINE S.A.O.G. عمان كلورين ش.م.ع.م

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Chairman’s Report For the three months period ended 31 March 2023

Dear Shareholders,

After greetings,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present parent and consolidated unaudited results for the three months period ended March 31, 2023.

The summarized operating result for the above period is as under:

Details	Parent		Variance % YOY	Consolidated		Variance % YOY
	31-03-2023	31-03-2022		31-03-2023	31-03-2022	
	RO’000	RO’000		RO’000	RO’000	
Revenue	2,878	3,405	(15.5%)	7,894	6,997	12.8%
EBITDA	1,003	1,324	(24.2%)	2,852	2,584	10.4%
Net Profit After Tax for the period	588	908	(35.2%)	981	920	6.6%
Profit After Tax attributable to parent co. shareholders	588	908	(35.2%)	810	936	(13.5%)
Share of profit/(loss) After Tax attributable to minority shareholders	-	-		171	(16)	1168.8%

1. Performance Overview of Parent Company

The enhanced capacity of the Plant coupled with maintaining the capacity utilization at high level at 104% has enabled the parent company to maintain its performance. As compared to the same period last year the selling prices were higher for Caustic and its value added products whilst Acid and its value added products selling prices were lower. The company has continued to focus on fixed costs management and financial discipline while leveraging on caustic prices.

2. Performance overview of Subsidiaries – Union Chlorine LLC (UAE), Gulf Chlorine WLL (Qatar) and Oman Industrial Development Company SAOC

Union Chlorine (UAE) was operating at higher capacity utilization of 105%, the subsidiary by capitalizing on the international demand and securing more contracts at higher realizations the company achieved higher price realization on its products.

Gulf Chlorine, Qatar has further strengthened its long-term agreements and its position with the major players in Qatar and GCC whilst targeting all major customer both locally and in the region including government entities for a sustainable products supply. The company has further expanded its export market in the region and will strive to improve the presence over various geographies for better price realization.

Oman Industrial Development Company is fully owned by Oman Chlorine and the company holds an 11.1% economic interest in Union Chlorine LLC – Abu Dhabi.

3. Outlook

The Group continues to monitor the Oil price fluctuations and chemical commodities prices globally. The Group is optimistic about meeting the targets for the year 2023 provided the oil and gas activities continue to remain at this level.

4. Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management, we wish to express our loyalty and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq May God protect Him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its People in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Government Authorities for their support and encouragement in particular the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority as well as all the employees of the company and management for their sincere efforts, leading to the continued success of the company.

Sheikh. Said Mohamed Ahmed Al Harthy
Chairman of Board of Directors

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2023

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/3/2023	31/12/2022	31/3/2023	31/12/2022
	RO’000	RO’000	RO’000	RO’000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	16,348	16,417	75,891	76,434
Investment in subsidiaries	14,353	14,353	-	-
Subordinated Loan	2,302	2,302	-	-
Investment in Joint Venture	-	-	1,234	1,157
Right of use assets	778	789	2,445	2,467
Total non-current assets	33,781	33,861	79,570	80,058
Current assets				
Inventories and consumables	1,513	1,527	3,906	3,675
Trade and other receivables	3,225	2,902	6,824	6,056
Cash and bank balances	2,857	2,560	3,425	4,013
Total current assets	7,595	6,989	14,155	13,744
Total assets	41,376	40,850	93,725	93,802
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	7,151	6,810	7,151	6,810
Statutory reserve	2,848	2,848	3,012	3,012
General reserve	900	900	900	900
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	(217)	(243)
Retained earnings	17,658	19,113	12,218	13,451
Equity attributable to the Parent Company’s shareholders	28,557	29,671	23,064	23,930
Capital contribution from non-controlling interest	-	-	7,903	7,187
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(527)	-
Total equity	28,557	29,671	30,440	31,117
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	4,885	5,117	43,904	43,534
Liability on land lease non-current	811	816	2,529	2,544
End of service benefits	144	162	346	354
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	362	301
Deferred tax liability	880	865	880	865
Total non-current liabilities	6,720	6,960	48,021	47,598
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	4,598	2,808	9,640	7,845
Liability on land lease current	73	73	118	118
Current portion – Term Loan	939	939	3,702	5,316
Short term borrowings	-	-	1,315	1,304
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	-	105
Provision for income tax	489	399	489	399
Total current liabilities	6,099	4,219	15,264	15,087
Total liabilities	12,819	11,179	63,285	62,685
Total equity and liabilities	41,376	40,850	93,725	93,802
Net asset per share	0.399	0.436	0.323	0.351

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the 3 months period ended 31 March 2023

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/03/2023	31/03/2022	31/03/2023	31/03/2022
	RO’000	RO’000	RO’000	RO’000
Revenue	2,878	3,405	7,894	6,997
Cost of sales	(1,678)	(1,818)	(4,839)	(4,013)
Gross profit	1,200	1,587	3,055	2,984
Selling and distribution expenses	(301)	(287)	(676)	(710)
General and administrative expenses	(266)	(265)	(482)	(486)
Operating profit	633	1,035	1,897	1,788
Finance charges	(84)	(41)	(922)	(602)
Other income	144	78	33	67
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	78	(169)
Profit before taxation	693	1,072	1,086	1,084
Current tax	(90)	(153)	(90)	(153)
Deferred tax	(15)	(11)	(15)	(11)
Profit for the period	588	908	981	920
Attributable to:				
Owners of the Parent Company	588	908	810	936
Non-Controlling Interest	-	-	171	(16)
	588	908	981	920
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that are or may be reclassified to :profit or loss				
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	43	85
Total comprehensive income	588	908	1,024	1,005
Total comprehensive income attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	588	908	836	987
Non-controlling interest	-	-	188	18
	588	908	1,024	1,005
Earnings per share on profit attributable to the Parent Company shareholders – Basic and diluted	0.0082	0.0133	0.0113	0.0137

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of a written request.



Israeli forces kill 3 in West Bank and Gaza as fighting flares again



Smoke billows following Israeli strikes on Gaza City. – AFP

GAZA/RAMALLAH: Israel’s air force hit Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza for a second day running on Wednesday, as areas around the enclave braced for a response from the armed Palestinian faction.

The military said it had hit rocket launch sites belonging to the group, as a series of blasts rocked different points including what witnesses described as a training camp in the northern part of the Gaza Strip and an open area in the south.

At least one man was killed and one wounded in the strikes, medical officials said.

The attacks came a day after the military launched a series

of strikes it said were aimed at senior leaders of Islamic Jihad responsible for planning attacks against Israel. At least 10 civilians were killed in the strikes as well as three senior commanders.

Islamic Jihad has promised to retaliate for the strikes but has so far not fired any rockets. Meanwhile, many residents in areas in southern Israel around Gaza have been evacuated.

Dawoud Shehab, an Islamic Jihad spokesperson, said the group would inevitably retaliate and the delay was “tactical”.

“The resistance decides the timing of the response in line with its tactics and calculations because we see that the response

must match the size of the crime,” he said.

Earlier, Israeli forces killed two Palestinians who opened fire on them in Qabatiya, in the occupied West Bank. Islamic Jihad claimed the two as members.

The army said the two Palestinians fired on troops from a car and were shot dead. An assault rifle was recovered from the vehicle, it said, adding that there were no Israeli casualties.

In Gaza, businesses and schools remained closed, Israel kept its two commercial and people crossings with Gaza closed.

The move would stop the entry of goods, fuel and humanitarian aid as well as patients, who receive

treatment in hospitals in the West Bank and Israel.

Sirens sounded in Israel’s commercial capital Tel Aviv on Wednesday, the military said, signalling Palestinians in Gaza were firing rockets of increasing range across the border.

In Gaza, businesses and schools remained closed, Israel kept its two commercial and people crossings with Gaza closed. The move would stop the entry of goods, fuel and humanitarian aid as well as patients, who receive treatment in hospitals in the West Bank and Israel.

Egypt has called for immediate ceasefire between Israeli army and Palestinians. — **Reuters**

Syria’s Assad receives Saudi invitation to Arab summit

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad received an invitation to next week’s Arab summit in Saudi Arabia, the presidency said on Wednesday, the first such invitation since more than a decade.

On Sunday, the Arab League welcomed back Syria’s government, securing Assad’s return to the Arab fold after years of isolation.

Assad received an invitation from Saudi King Salman “to participate in the thirty-second Arab League summit, which will be held in Jeddah on May 19”, the Syrian presidency said in a statement.

Assad said the summit “will enhance joint Arab action to achieve the aspirations of the Arab peoples,” the statement added.

Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Jordan, Nayef bin Bandar al-Sudairi, delivered the invitation.

The last Arab League summit Assad attended was in 2010 in Libya.

The invitation comes a day after Riyadh and Damascus announced that work would resume at their respective diplomatic missions in Syria and Saudi Arabia, after more than a decade of severed relations.

A decision in March by Saudi Arabia and Iran, a close ally of Damascus, to resume ties also shifted the political landscape.

In April, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan met Assad in Damascus on the first such visit since the war broke out.

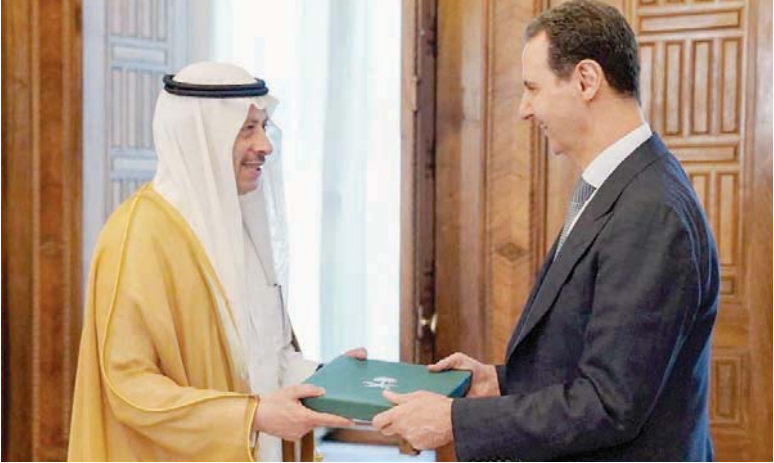
Regional capitals have gradually been warming to Assad as he has stubbornly held onto power and clawed back lost territory with crucial support from Russia.

Türkiye, which supported early rebel efforts to topple the Syrian government and maintains a military presence in Syria’s north, has also shown interest in mending ties with Damascus.

The foreign ministers of Syria and Türkiye were meeting on Wednesday in Moscow for the first time since the start of the war.

Russia’s top diplomat proposed a roadmap to normalise Syrian-Turkish ties, with Iran’s foreign minister also attending the meeting.

Top diplomats from nine Arab countries discussed the Syria crisis in Saudi Arabia last month. — **AFP**



Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad receives an invitation from Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz through Saudi Arabia Ambassador to Jordan Naif Bin Bandar Al-Sudairi to attend the Arab League summit, in Damascus. – **Reuters**

Battles shake Sudan’s capital as power struggle escalates

KHARTOUM: Fighting in Sudan’s capital escalated on Wednesday with fierce clashes and air strikes, witnesses said, as delegations of rival military factions continued talks in Saudi Arabia aimed at securing a ceasefire and humanitarian relief.

Residents reported ground battles in several neighbourhoods of Khartoum between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), as well as heavy gunfire in the north of Omdurman and the east of Bahri, two adjacent cities separated from Khartoum by the River Nile.

The army has been pounding targets across the three cities since Tuesday as it tries to root out RSF forces that have taken control of large residential areas and strategic sites since early in the conflict that erupted on April 15.

“There’s been heavy air strikes and RPG fire since 6:30 a.m.,” said Ahmed, a resident of the Bahri neighbourhood of Shambat.

“We’re lying on the ground and there are people living near us who ran to the Nile to protect themselves there under the embankment.”

The conflict has created a



Refugees who crossed from Sudan to Ethiopia wait in line to register at IOM (International organization for Migration) in Metema. – **AFP**

humanitarian crisis in Africa’s third-largest nation by area, displacing more than 700,000 people inside the country and prompting 150,000 to flee to neighbouring states.

It has also sparked unrest in Sudan’s western Darfur region.

The UN World Food Programme said that up to 2.5 million more Sudanese were expected to fall into hunger in the coming months because of the conflict, raising the number of people suffering acute food insecurity to 19 million.

Army and RSF delegations

have been meeting since the end of last week in talks sponsored by the United States and Saudi Arabia in the Saudi Red Sea port city of Jeddah.

Negotiations aim to secure an effective truce and allow access for aid workers and supplies after repeated ceasefire announcements failed to stop the fighting.

A Western diplomat familiar with the talks in Jeddah said there had been no concrete outcome so far but mediators intended to keep going until they could secure a result. — **Reuters**

TEHRAN

Drug cartel members sentenced to death

Iran executed three convicted drug cartel members on Wednesday, the judiciary said.

“The death sentence of three members of the Panjak gang, the largest cocaine distribution cartel, which was one of the main drug cartels in the country, was carried out this morning after legal procedures,” the judiciary’s Mizan Online website reported.

“Six members of the gang were arrested in 2014,” Mizan said, adding: “At the time of arrest, one kilogramme of cocaine, opium



and methamphetamine were recovered from the gang.”

At least 582 people were executed in Iran last year, the highest number of executions in the country since 2015.

WASHINGTON

Biden to host Modi for state visit on June 22

US President Joe Biden will host India’s Narendra modi for a state visit in June, it was announced Wednesday, as Washington courts New Delhi as a bulwark against China.

The state visit, the highest level of diplomatic reception, will boost the United States and India’s “shared commitment to a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific,” the White House said.

It will be the first state visit by Modi to the United States.



He visited Biden at the White House in 2021 as part of the Quad summit bringing together the United States, Australia, Japan and India. The trip will include a state dinner. — **AFP**

KINSHASA

10 killed in landslide after more heavy rains

Ten people were killed in a landslide in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo’s Lubero territory on Wednesday, local authorities said — further victims of recent heavy rains that have killed hundreds in floods in the broader region.

A fresh downpour loosened the earth on a hillside above a village in Vuveyi Lac area, burying the victims as they slept in their houses below, said Alain Kiwewa, Lubero’s military administrator. “As of now, the



bodies are still under the ground. Work is under way to get them out,” he said. The death toll from the Kalehe floods stands at 426 with around 1,000 people still missing. — **Reuters**



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In brief

■ SOFIA



PARTY TAPS EU COMMISSIONER AS PM-DESIGNATE

Bulgaria's conservative party nominated EU Commissioner for Innovation Mariya Gabriel as prime minister-designate on Wednesday as the EU.

The conservative GERB won a general election last month, the fifth to take place in two years, but has struggled to form a government.

The political deadlock has prevented the Eastern European country from passing a budget, making progress on eurozone accession or tapping into the EU resilience and recovery fund.

"EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel will be our candidate for prime minister," GERB leader and former prime minister Boyko Borisov told parliament on Wednesday. — **AFP**

■ BRUSSELS



BELGIUM ARRESTS 30 OVER DRUG TRAFFICKING

Belgian police on Wednesday detained 30 suspects accused of drug trafficking in an operation that also saw authorities in Spain swoop on a string of locations.

Prosecutors in the port city of Antwerp, a major hub for illicit drugs coming into Europe, said in a statement that police conducted raids at addresses across Belgium. It said Spanish police had simultaneously carried out seven searches in their country, but there were no details on any arrests there.

The raids in the two countries together netted guns, 55,000 euros in cash, hauls of hashish and cocaine, luxury watches and cars, it said. — **AFP**

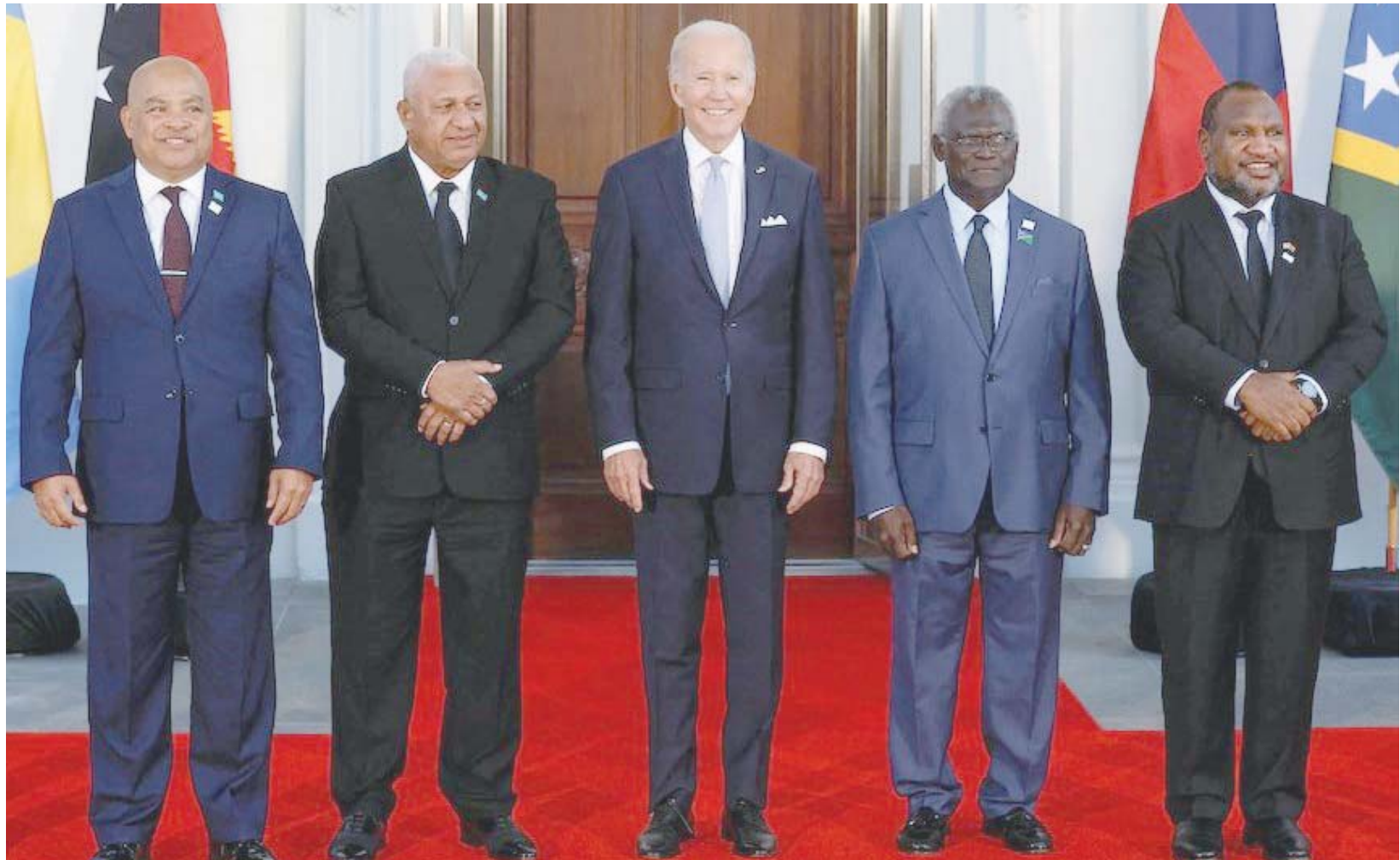
■ PARIS



EX-POLICEMAN GOES ON TRIAL OVER RWANDA GENOCIDE

A former Rwandan military policeman went on trial in France on Wednesday, charged with genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1994 slaughter in his home country. Philippe Hategekimana fled to France after the genocide, obtaining refugee status and then French nationality under the name Philippe Manier.

The 66-year-old appeared in court on the first day of his trial on Wednesday morning, wearing tortoiseshell glasses and a suede jacket over a checked shirt. It is the fifth such trial in France of an alleged participant in the massacres, in which around 800,000 people, most of them ethnic Tutsis, were slaughtered over 100 days. — **AFP**



US President Joe Biden, poses with leaders from the US-Pacific Island Country Summit, including Papua New Guinean Prime Minister James Marape, far right, at the White House. — **Reuters** file photo

Biden to sign defence pact in Papua New Guinea

SYDNEY: US President Joe Biden will sign defence and surveillance agreements with Papua New Guinea, the island nation's foreign minister said, on a visit that renews the strategic importance of the nation.

PNG, the South Pacific's most populous nation, will also see a doubling of US development assistance to \$32 million, including \$25 million to tackle its security priority of climate change, State Department documents submitted to the US Congress show.

Washington is seeking to deter Pacific island nations, which span 40 million kilometres of ocean in a rising concern amid tensions.

Biden will visit PNG capital Port Moresby on May 22 on his way to a summit of the Quad countries - the United States, Japan, India and

PNG will also see a doubling of US development assistance to \$32 million, including \$25 million to tackle its security priority of climate change, State Department documents submitted to the US Congress show

Australia — in Sydney, the White House has confirmed.

There he will meet 18 Pacific island leaders.

Foreign Minister Justin Tkachenko said a Defence Cooperation Agreement between the US and PNG was finalised last week, "which now allows us to

officially sign it when Biden comes here". A separate agreement to allow the US Coast Guard to patrol PNG's vast exclusive economic zone, with PNG officials on board as "ship riders", also will be signed and cover satellite surveillance, he said in an interview.

"We will be able to utilise the US satellite security systems. Once we sign that it will help monitor our waters, which we can't at the moment," he said.

"It will be a fantastic agreement protecting our natural resources from being illegally poached and stolen, especially our fishing," he added.

For Biden, the visit also will have personal significance that highlights PNG's importance to regional security.

Two of his uncles were based in PNG in World War Two as airmen,

including one who died in a plane crash in May 1944, Biden recalled during a 2016 visit to Australia.

The US pledged an \$800 million economic assistance package after meeting with Pacific island leaders last year, which must be approved by Congress in negotiations not due to progress until the autumn.

US embassies recently opened in Solomon Islands and Tonga, but consent for proposed embassies in Vanuatu and Kiribati is yet to be gained, an official told a congressional hearing.

Biden's meeting in person with Pacific leaders is seen in the region as a major step in restoring trust.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was told by Pacific leaders in Fiji last year: "We have felt at times, to borrow an American term, like a flyover country."

— **Reuters**

Interpol urges help to solve 22 'cold cases' of murdered women

LYON: Interpol on Wednesday launched a campaign asking members of the public to come forward if they can help identify the bodies of 22 women believed to have been murdered in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands in recent decades.

A printed T-shirt, a silver bracelet and a rose tattoo are among images posted to Interpol's website and social media accounts, details from usually classified "Black Notices" on each of the killings where investigations have hit the buffers.

The oldest of the remains was found by the A12 motorway in the Netherlands in 1976, while the most recent was found in a park in Belgium in August 2019.

"Partly because the women are likely from countries other than where they were found, their identities have not been established," Interpol said in a statement announcing the "Identify Me" campaign.

The bodies may have been left in different countries "to impede criminal investigations", it added. A facial reconstruction has been created for each of the victims as well as information about the place and time they were discovered, personal items found on the bodies and their clothing and jewellery.

"Every avenue we could think of to solve these cold cases has been explored," said Francois-Xavier Laurent, who manages Interpol's DNA databases.

"The investigations have reached a dead end and we're hoping public attention will allow us to move them forward," he said. "Families, friends, colleagues who may have stopped seeing this person from one day to the next" could offer information, "even tiny clues" that could help solve the cases and inform the women's families, Laurent said. — **AFP**

Ukraine says some Russia units have retreated

KYIV: A Ukrainian military unit said on Wednesday it had routed a Russian infantry brigade from frontline territory near Bakhmut, claiming to confirm an account by the head of Russia's Wagner private army that the Russian forces had fled.

Moscow has not commented on the reports that its 72nd Separate Motor-rifle Brigade had abandoned its positions on the southwestern outskirts of Bakhmut.

Russia's ministry of defence did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

A Russian brigade is typically formed of several thousand troops. The eastern Ukrainian city has been the primary target of Moscow's huge winter offensive and scene of the bloodiest ground combat in Europe since World War Two.

Russian mercenary boss Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has repeatedly accused Moscow's regular armed forces of failing to adequately support his private army leading the fight in Bakhmut, said that the Russian brigade had

abandoned its positions.

"Our army is fleeing. The 72nd Brigade pissed away three square km this morning, where I had lost around 500 men," Prigozhin said.

In a statement overnight, Ukraine's Third Separate Assault Brigade said: "It's official. Prigozhin's report about the flight of Russia's 72nd Independent Motorised Rifle Brigade from near Bakhmut and the '500 corpses' of Russians left behind is true."

"The Third Assault Brigade is grateful for the publicity about our success at the front."

Early on Wednesday the Ukrainian unit, which was formed last year from the nationalist Azov Battalion, reposted a video of one of Azov's founders, Andriy Biletsky, who said his forces had "defeated" the Russian brigade.

"In fact, the 6th and 7th squadrons of this brigade were almost entirely destroyed, brigade intelligence was destroyed, a large number of fighting vehicles were destroyed a considerable number of prisoners were taken," he said.

"The attacks were implemented



Ukrainian service members fire a self-propelled howitzer "Dana", near the town of Avdiivka in Donetsk. — **Reuters**

within a territory 3 km wide and 2.6 km deep, and this entire territory is completely liberated from the Russian occupying forces."

Ukraine's eastern military

command said the Russian brigade had been heavily damaged, although it said Russia was still trying all-out to capture the rest of the city.

"Unfortunately they have not

destroyed the whole (Russian) brigade yet, two companies have been seriously damaged there," Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for the eastern military command, said in comments. — **Reuters**

Will the I2U2 give results?



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Do you remember that one (or several times), when you rushed to submit an assignment at the last minute? A recent quick scan of the United States National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s points on Middle East Policy reminded me of those distant college days studying political science at West Virginia University and having to submit multiple assignments.

I must admit that the lack of patience and depth makes reviewing those submitted papers at the time a fun, yet painful experience at the same time.

You would expect that a regional national security policy, by a major global power such as the US, that affects the lives of more than half a billion people would be written with more patience, depth and innovation.

In a bid to win the support of

pro-Israel interest groups ahead of the upcoming presidential elections, the US President Biden’s administration invested considerable time, energy and resources for the past 18 months in a forum called I2U2, which stands for the member countries: Israel, India, United States of America and United Arab Emirates, and designed to be a “moving forward better” plan than former president Trump’s Abrahamic Accords.

While I2U2 media campaigns will resonate well for domestic politics and elections in the US, it would be useful to think of a number of factors that would make it look less like and impactful initiative, and more like a rushed college assignment or a video game.

While the stated goals of I2U2 are better integration, partnership and deterrence in the region, facts

WHILE THE STATED GOALS OF I2U2 ARE BETTER INTEGRATION, PARTNERSHIP AND DETERRENCE IN THE REGION, FACTS ON THE GROUND ARE DIFFERENT

on the ground show that for the past 40 years of signing an agreement with Israel came with catastrophic consequences for every country that signed, with no exceptions.

The Egyptian economy is on a long recovery of journey, Jordan’s economy cannot survive without foreign investments, Sudan signed and descended into a civil war, Morocco’s economy has not improved, Lebanon’s marine agreement sent the Lebanese

economy into further tailspin.

In addition to unannounced security arrangements with Syria that lead to the deaths of a half million civilians, and at least 13.5 million refugees. Will new countries signing agreements succeed in lifting the curse? Only time will tell.

Our world’s largest democracy and information technology hub has been lured into this US regional policy by the promise of infrastructure initiatives.

This includes railway projects connecting the Indian subcontinent to our region, however, without including the whole of the Indian subcontinent in these initiatives since the inception and design of these infrastructure plans seem more like media campaigns than visionary peace and prosperity initiatives.

The UAE has been the most innovative and venturing lifestyle hub in the region in recent years, attracting top foreign direct investments and talents. The question is what value the other players can bring to the table that equals the value that the UAE is bringing given their previous track record in the region?

Our world could greatly benefit when global leaders invest in and share inspiring, visionary plans that put us, the main target audience people, first, yet the US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan Middle East policy points make I2U2 Forum sounds like another violet video game where the only role innocent bystanders play is to eventually loose.

I am optimistic that other countries in the region will share more visionary plans in the future.

India builds more hospitals as population surges

SHIVAM PATEL

Mithilesh Chaudhary, 21, coughs weakly as he struggles to his feet after spending the night outside the state-run All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi.

“We have been waiting for two nights,” said his grandfather Bhim Lal, as the two waited in a line of about 100 people outside the hospital’s main gate, seeking an appointment.

“He suffers from chest congestion, and no one has been able to tell us what exactly is the issue. We have been to many hospitals around our district and finally, a doctor at a private hospital asked us to visit the AIIMS in Delhi.”

Chaudhary, who lives 1,200 km away in Bihar state, doesn’t have an appointment and was not given the name of a doctor. His only recourse is to stand in the queue until he can get one of the few slots that open up every morning for those waiting outside. His plight and that of others who queue every day starting at dawn highlights the shortage of specialist doctors and health workers in India’s countryside, where more than two-thirds of its 1.43 billion people live.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government has built more than a dozen similar medical institutes for specialised treatment since he took office in 2014. The government has plans to build at least one major hospital in each of India’s 761 districts. The problem is a lack of doctors, a shortage that is reaching crucial levels as India becomes the world’s most populous nation.

India’s doctor-to-patient ratio hit a record high of 1.2 doctors per 1,000 patients in 1991, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), but as its population surged, the ratio dropped to about 0.7 in 2020.

The WHO recommended level is 1 and China, with a comparable population to India, is at 2.4.

Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya told parliament in March that India in fact had a ratio of 1 doctor per 834 patients, well above the WHO level, but the number included doctors practising traditional forms of medicine such as Ayurveda, Homoeopathy and Naturopathy.

The WHO and doctors groups such as the Indian Medical Association do not include traditional medicine practitioners in their calculations.

Inaugurating the first specialised medical institute in northeast India last month, Modi said his government had sought to increase the number of doctors by setting up more medical colleges.

“This deficiency was a major barrier to quality health services in India,” he said. — **Reuters**

Sudan deepens crisis in Africa as UN sees 5 million more needing aid

MAHAMAT RAMADANE, JOE BAVIER AND EMMA FARGE

When a power struggle between Sudan’s rival military leaders shattered a tenuous peace in her village in Sudan’s western region of Darfur, Halime Yacoub Issac’s first instinct was to take her five children and run.

But four days after seeking refuge in neighbouring Chad — a country with its own dire humanitarian crisis — she had yet to receive any assistance and was just hoping they wouldn’t starve.

“We’re entirely dependent on food Chadian families give us,” Issac said, sitting in a rare patch of shade near the border village of Goungour with other newly arrived women and children, some of them orphans.

Nearby, hundreds of families were camped out under trees or had built flimsy shelters out of sticks and bedsheets that swayed in the wind.

The battles between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that erupted in the capital Khartoum in mid-April have now engulfed large parts of Sudan, killing hundreds, wounding thousands and unleashing a humanitarian disaster that could not have come at a worse time.

Africa was already facing a deepening set of crises — from drought

to floods and a growing list of armed conflicts — that has seen demand surge for life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Now, according to an internal UN estimate obtained by Reuters, 5 million additional people in Sudan will require emergency assistance, half of them children.

By October, some 860,000 people are expected to flee to neighbouring countries including Chad, placing additional strain on nations already facing some of the world’s most under-funded humanitarian crises.

Yet a Reuters analysis of United Nations funding data for Africa shows financial support from key donor governments is dropping off.

Securing additional money is a long shot, 12 aid workers, diplomats and donor government officials said. More likely, they said, funding gaps will grow as Europe focuses on Ukraine, post-Brexit Britain turns inward, and some lawmakers in the United States, the world’s largest donor, target budget cuts. “There is going to be less funding this year,” the World Food Programme’s (WFP) new executive director, Cindy McCain, said during a visit to Somalia this month. “I pray that there won’t be. But the reality of it is that there is going to be less.”

Every day, hundreds of Sudanese

trek across the desert scrubland and dry riverbeds that make up large sections of the country’s 1,400-km border with Chad. Some 30,000 have arrived so far, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, which expects it will need to establish five new camps to accommodate them.

Aid agencies are rushing to distribute emergency food and register new arrivals, but resources are tight. Even before the latest crisis, UN humanitarian appeals for Africa faced a \$17-billion funding gap this year, risking leaving millions without lifesaving assistance.

Desperation is growing among the refugees. Chadian soldiers used whips on Sunday to beat back dozens of women who had started grabbing bags of provisions in Koufroune, another border village, when they saw that supplies brought by a Turkish aid group were running out.

“You’ve got this huge arc of misery across this part of Africa, and Sudan is just the latest crisis to be added to that in humanitarian terms,” Andrew Mitchell, Britain’s minister of state for development and Africa, said during a trip to Kenya this month.

Between 2020 and this year, Africa’s needs reflected in UN appeals grew nearly 27 per cent. But as wealthy countries began looking inward to shield their citizens from the Covid-19 pandemic, many cut back on humanitarian activities abroad.

Britain, for example, announced in 2021 it would temporarily reduce its aid budget to 0.5 per cent of gross national income from 0.7 per cent to pay for the pandemic response. Last year, it spent a third of its overseas aid budget housing refugees inside the UK, a British aid watchdog said in March.

“There’s no question that very large amounts of money have been lost,” Mitchell said, asked about Britain’s aid budget.

Between 2020, when the UK was the third-biggest contributor to UN humanitarian appeals in Africa, and 2022, its contribution dropped by 55 per cent. — **Reuters**



A man offloads belongings of refugees from Sudan in Metema, Ethiopia. – AFP

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.com

Record surge in holiday spending in China

China’s services sector has demonstrated a much-awaited resurgence in consumer spending during the celebrated “golden week” holiday, where domestic tourism revenue has exceeded pre-pandemic levels for the first time since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis.

The recent uptick in demand has further reinforced the roaring recovery of the Chinese economy in the first quarter that also surpassed the most optimistic calculations. Marking the first time in three years that the country’s travellers have emerged from the Covid-related restrictions and are eager to indulge in post-pandemic extravagance, the skyrocketed surge in China’s Golden Week holiday has also bettered all projections.

For many, the five-day May Day period from April 29 to May 3 was the first opportunity to go on vacation in over three years, without having to worry about contacting Covid infection. This fervour for travel and holidaying is a sign that pent-up demand has finally been unleashed, and people are eager to make up for lost time. This time the consumer behaviour was quite different from the Chinese New Year holiday in January when a significant number of individuals chose to stay at home due to the fear of getting infected amid China’s “exit wave,” when the disease was contracted by an unspecified number of people. As China continues to recover from the pandemic, this trend signals a sustained economic revival. The consumer spending data during the five days long holiday has bamboozled all the previous records.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has reported that during the five-day break that began on Saturday, Chinese travellers made a staggering 274 million domestic trips, representing a 70.8-per cent rise from the previous year and a 19-per cent increase from 2019. These travellers spent 148 billion yuan (\$21 billion), a remarkable 128.9 per cent jump from the previous year and comparable to 2019 levels.

As this is the first travel season since



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

THE RECENT UPTICK IN DEMAND HAS FURTHER REINFORCED THE ROARING RECOVERY OF THE CHINESE ECONOMY

the pandemic without restrictions, the figures from this year’s May Day holiday are being acutely monitored as a barometer of China’s economic health. The recent surge in domestic travel by Chinese tourists during the May Day holiday period is definitely a promising sign for the country’s economy. There was a significant resurgence in services-related consumption, as dining and retail companies reported an almost 20 per cent surge in revenues during this week.

According to data from the Ministry of Commerce, this growth is particularly significant considering retail sales only saw a 10.6-per cent increase in March. Alipay, the country’s largest digital payment app, also noted a 200-per cent surge in online holiday spending compared to the previous year, and a 70-per cent increase compared to the 2019 level. According to a statement by Alipay, a leading digital payments app in China, travel-related purchases made by Chinese consumers surged by 70 per cent in the first three days of the country’s five-day national holiday, when compared to the same period in 2019.

Meanwhile, average daily transactions for transportation-related spending nearly tripled at WeChat Pay during the first four days of this year’s holiday compared to 2019, while hotel and tourist attraction spending jumped by 93 per cent. These figures indicate a significant increase in consumer spending and suggest a promising rebound for China’s tourism industry.

At the same time, in a stunning demonstration of China’s post-pandemic economic resilience, the country’s railway system has also recorded a new milestone by reporting a remarkable 120 million trips between April 27 and May 4, marking a 20-per cent surge from the same period in 2019. However, despite such astounding performance of China’s domestic tourism industry, some economists are cautioning against the sustainability of this demand boom, suggesting that the road ahead for the economic recovery could be more challenging.

RISKING LIFE AND LIMB



Migrants trying to reach the United States walk by a border wall in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, as seen from El Paso, Texas, US. Thousands of migrants in Mexico have been clambering onto dangerous freight trains rumbling northward in a scramble to reach the US border by the time the United States ends a tough migration policy later this week. – Reuters

Dilemmas of deterrence

We live in a world where geopolitical stability relies largely on

deterrence. But how can we prove that deterrence works? Consider the ongoing war in Europe. Beginning in December 2021, US President Joe Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that Russia would face severe new sanctions if he waged war on Ukraine, to no avail.

Then, when the United States and its European allies thwarted Russia’s plans by providing arms to Ukraine, Putin brandished the nuclear option. But Western aid continued unabated.

Did deterrence fail or succeed? Answering this question poses a challenge because it requires assessing what would have occurred absent the threat. It is hard to prove a negative. If I put a sign on my front door saying, “No Elephants,” and there are no elephants in my house, did I deter them? It depends on the likelihood of literate elephants entering in the first place.

The Ukraine war demonstrates how risk reduction is not always an either/or choice, but often a matter of degree. Perhaps Putin, counting on a flimsy Western alliance, believed the sanctions would fail. But he has so far refrained from striking supply lines in Nato countries.

And while the West, for its part, has continued to arm Ukraine despite Putin’s nuclear saber-rattling, it has



Joseph S Nye, Jr

The writer is a professor at Harvard University and a former US assistant secretary of defence

HISTORY REMINDS US THAT SOME FACTORS, LIKE CREDIBILITY, ARE CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF COUNTRIES’ EFFORTS TO PREVENT UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR BY OTHERS

been reluctant to provide longer-range missile systems or modern warplanes.

Credibility is essential for deterrence to work: threatening a maximum response to defend a minor interest strains credulity. This is particularly true when a nuclear power promises to extend its umbrella to defend a distant country.

During the Cold War, the US and the USSR credibly extended their nuclear deterrence to Western and Eastern Europe, respectively. While some analysts were skeptical that the US would risk New York to defend the isolated enclave of West Berlin, the threat worked, partly because of the American troops stationed there. While the so-called Berlin Brigade was too small to defend against a Soviet invasion, it ensured that a nuclear strike on the city would result in American casualties. (At the same time, US forces in Europe, both nuclear and conventional, were not a credible deterrent for Soviet military intervention in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968.)

This history is relevant to the current situation in Korea, where North Korea has nuclear weapons and South Korea remains bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty. One recent poll found that more than 70 per cent of South Koreans were in favour of their country



US President Joe Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that Russia would face severe new sanctions if he waged war on Ukraine, to no avail.

developing its own nuclear arsenal. Instead, when South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol met with Biden in April, they agreed that the US would station a nuclear-armed submarine near the Korean Peninsula and deepen consultations with South Korea on nuclear and strategic planning, similar to US engagement with Nato allies during the Cold War.

The credibility of US-extended deterrence in this instance, much like in the Berlin example, is reinforced by the presence of 28,500 US troops in South Korea. The two countries are locked in a “community of fate” because North Korea cannot attack South Korea without killing Americans.

Forward bases in Japan offer the same guarantee.

That is why former US president Donald Trump’s frequent musings about the withdrawal of troops from places like Japan and South Korea were so damaging.

Trump’s presidency also highlighted the ineffectiveness of nuclear intimidation and bribes. When North Korea successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in 2017, Trump threatened “fire and fury like the world has never seen,” to no effect. Next, he tried direct diplomacy. After meeting with North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un in 2018 — a long-sought foreign-

policy goal for the North — he brashly predicted the swift demise of the country’s nuclear-arms programme. To no one’s surprise, North Korea did not disarm. As Kim sees it, his reputation and the fate of his family dynasty depend on nuclear weapons.

History reminds us that assessing a deterrent’s success can be difficult.

There are some factors, like credibility, that are crucial to achieving the desired outcomes. But as dilemmas of deterrence continue to evolve and multiply, studying the strategy’s limits is equally important for finding an approach that works.

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OMAN EMERGE OVERALL CHAMPIONS IN JORDAN

Omani fencers clinch 16 medals at West Asian event



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman national teams emerged champions in the West Asian Fencing Championship for age groups in Jordan's Al Hussein Youth City from May 4 to 7.

Omani boys and girls won 16 medals competing with 240 players, representing 8 countries, namely, Oman, the UAE, Palestine, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria, Qatar and Jordan.

The organisers Jordan Fencing Association had set 39 medals to be claimed in three days of competition in three categories of epee, foil and sabre, for individual and group events.

In the epee team event, the

concluding competition of the tournament, Oman boys under-15 team won first place and the gold medal.

Lebanon claimed second place and hosts Jordan finished third.

The Omani girls under-15 team also won the gold in epee event. Jordan fencers swept the second and third places.

The Omani under-15 girls team dominated the foil section to claim the gold. Jordan won the second and third places.

Oman came on top in under-13 boys epee section to take the gold medal. Syria took the silver, while Lebanon claimed the bronze.

INDIVIDUAL MEDALS

Omani fencers also claimed the

honours in the individual section.

In the individual foil competition for girls under 11 years, Oman's Jude bint Abdul Karim al Balushi snatched the gold medal.

In the individual foil competition for boys under 13 years, Oman's Ali bin Hamad al Busaidy won the gold medal, while teammate Ammar bin Mohammed al Azizi won the bronze medal.

In the individual epee competition for girls under 13 years, Oman's Jana bint Mohammed al Sharjiyah was ranked first to take the gold medal and teammate Salma bint Said al Deghaishiyah claimed the silver medal.



SA qualify for Cricket World Cup after Ireland-Bangladesh washout



LONDON: South Africa secured direct qualification on Tuesday for the 50-over Cricket World Cup in India later this year after the first one-day international between Ireland and Bangladesh ended in a no-result washout.

Ireland had to win all three matches in a series against Bangladesh taking place at Chelmsford, the headquarters of English county Essex, if they were to move up from 11th place in the points table.

Even if Ireland now take the series 2-0, they cannot surpass South Africa in eighth place in the World Cup Super League

(WCSL) standings.

Ireland will now have to compete in the June 18-July 9 qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe, that also includes former champions West Indies and Sri Lanka.

The Irish were 65-3 in the 17th over, chasing Bangladesh's 246-9, made from a full 50 overs, when bad light and rain halted play at 4:34pm local time (1534 GMT).

A minimum of 20 overs had to be bowled in Ireland's innings for a result to be declared under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method for rain-affected matches.

But the fixture was called off at 1800 GMT when the umpires deemed conditions too wet to restart play.

Josh Little — fresh from starring in the Indian Premier League — led Ireland's attack with 3-61, with two wickets apiece for Graham Hume and Mark Adair as Bangladesh were restricted to a seemingly modest total on a good pitch.

Mushfiquur Rahim celebrated his 36th birthday by top-scoring for the Tigers with 61 in front of a crowd of some 3,000 at Chelmsford, mainly consisting of Bangladesh fans.

Najmul Hossain Shanto

made 44.

Ireland, however, soon found themselves in trouble at 27-2 following the loss of experienced opener Paul Stirling and captain Andrew Balbirnie.

The series continues on Friday.

The first spots in the 10-team World Cup go to the top eight finishers of the WCSL, a competition that has run over the last three years.

Reigning champions England, India, New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan have already guaranteed their places.



France's Paret-Peintre wins Giro stage, Leknessund in pink

LAGO LACENO, Italy: French climber Aurelien Paret-Peintre hailed his "perfect day" as he broke away to win stage four of the Giro d'Italia on Tuesday with Andreas Leknessund of Norway taking the overall leader's pink jersey.

The duo had led the peloton by over five minutes and held on to just enough of that lead on the final sharp climb to the ski resort Lago Laceno for the Norwegian to take the fabled pink jersey held overnight by race favourite Remco Evenepoel.

"It was a dream day, a perfect day for me — the breakaway was super hard to make," said Paret-Peintre, who rides for AG2R-Citroen.

On the final climb, Leknessund attacked first but Paret-Peintre was able to come back on the flat of the last three kilometres.

"I was patient on the last climb and I think he blew his legs a bit. Afterwards I knew I was faster than him in the sprint," added the Frenchman.

While Evenepoel took pink on the opening day in a time-trial along the Adriatic coastline, Leknessund, a former Norwegian time-trial champion, trailed him by 1min 18sec and is

the new leader due to that effort combined with Tuesday's escape.

"It's super special to be in the pink," said Leknessund. "As everyone knows cycling is not so easy and to actually make it is unbelievable."

Overall Leknessund leads Evenepoel by 28sec with Paret-Peintre third at 30sec followed by UAE's Joao Almeida and Jumbo-Visma's Primož Roglic.

Evenepoel suffered a late puncture as the peloton rolled through heavy rain into the mountains of the Lucanian Apennines, which his team dealt with swiftly.

The Belgian also had an early scare when his key rival Roglic joined a failed escape whilst the Quick-Step star was stuck at the back.

Evenepoel displayed his trademark confidence after the stage.

"It's no problem giving up the pink jersey, on Wednesday I'll be wearing the rainbow one," he said, referring to the world champion colours he claimed in Australia last season.

"I was relaxed throughout the stage even if it was difficult, high-speed and nervous out there at times." — **AFP**

Desperate Time Brings Must Win For Kolkata and Rajasthan



In the local round up, Zeeshan Maqsood the Oman Cricket Team has been ranked as 5th in the ICC ODI All Rounders Ranking. With this Oman will be competing in CWC Qualifiers between June 18 and July 9th 2023 at Zimbabwe. USA, UAE, Oman, Scotland, Nepal, Netherlands, Ireland, Sri Lanka, West Indies and Zimbabwe will be competing in the 50 over format for a position in the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023. Both these topics stayed as the number trending cricket related topic for Oman on social media.

Although IPL has made sure that the cricketing community's focus doesn't deviate and that has been certified by the quality of the matches and the level of the competition. In 54 games and 107 innings so far, IPL has managed to produce 34 innings of 200 runs or more. The highest and lowest scores are made by the Lucknow Super Giants, which are 257/5 and 108/10.

MATCH 56 of 74 – KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS (KKR) VS RAJASTHAN ROYALS (RR) AT KOLKATA

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA — Both these teams only clash once in the league stage and it's come at a stage where everything will be on the line for both these teams sitting at the business ends.

Which ever of these teams can win all their remaining three games, should be able to make a perfect case of qualification by reaching at 16 points. Both are at 5th (RR) and 6th (KKR) position in the points table currently.

INTRODUCTION — A win in this game will take the team straight to the 3rd spot in the points table. Rajasthan have lost 4 out of their last 5 game and have lost all the momentum with which they started this season. Kolkata did have a disappointing start to the tournament, but with 3 wins from the last 4 games have certainly made them a strong contender for qualifying.

Head-to-Head — **Played** — 27; **Won** by KKR - 14; **Won** by RR - 12; **No Result** — 1

KKR possible 12 — R Gurbaz, V Iyer, N Rana, R Singh, A Russell,



S Narine, S Thakur, V Arora, H Rana, S Sharma, V Chakaravarthy, J Roy

RR possible 12 — Y Jaiswal, J Buttler, S Samson, J Root, D Jurel, S Hetmyer, R Ashwin, S Sharma, K Yadav, Y Chahal, O McCoy, K Sen

Pitch & Weather Report — The Eden Gardens surface is well-known for its batting-friendly wickets. Because of the stadium's small size, it is a high-scoring venue in the shortest format of the game. Notably, the team which prefers to bowl first has a better chance of winning at this venue. It's going to be a slightly warm



evening with the temperature being between 28 to 38 degrees Celsius.

Our Match Prediction — Kolkata and Rajasthan are both champion and extremely dangerous sides. One has an extremely explosive top order with the trio of Buttler-Jaiswal-Samson, while the other one has top quality middle & lower order with the likes of N Rana-A Russell-R Singh. Although one thing is for sure, The Eden Gardens is to sure produce another high scoring encounter between both these desperate sides. Both have a quality spin attack as well. Although, I feel

that Kolkata is coming with a momentum and that's what should be able to take them through. So, expect some delicious Mishti Doi and Rosogulla at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

FAN COMMENTS

"I have always loved the IPL and closely followed it as well. But somehow, this year's IPL is a little extra special. For it to have such a close finish, I feel that somehow its scripted. These are cricketers and its certainly not sure to act in between all these cameras and viewership. I am very hopeful of the entrance of two unexpected teams in the playoffs and one of them might win the trophy as well. My bet is on underdogs Delhi." — Rajesh Shankar, Web Series - Script Writer, 41 Years, Indian.

"This year's IPL has produced some serious high-quality and talented youngsters and I also feel that some low or under-performing players have also been exposed for not playing to their full potential and giving average performances at the international level. Shouldn't the top 20-25 Indian players from the IPL be representing the Indian team based on their current form and requirement." — Rishab Gupta,

Managing Director/Fantasy Sports App, 51 Years, Indo - South African.

"Franchise cricket is slowly moving towards a phase where it will soon take over the International Cricket in the next 5 to 10 years. For the survival of International Cricket, its important that more countries start to play this game and compete on the world's highest level for which India has to play a very big role, considering that it has the maximum funds allotment and it surely isn't short of any talent resources." — Danielle Hayden, Sports Science, 26 years, Australian.

"Indian Cricket has had great development in the last decade cause of the IPL and its funding. It has not only created lots of opportunities for the players, but also it has created a lot of opportunities for other sports related professionals just like myself. I have been consistently reading this column and I feel that this is the ideal example for a news front, where people are presented with honest opinions and their views are well respected." Sandip Tyagi, Retired Judge, 71 Years, Indian.

Bruyne stunner earns Man City draw at Real Madrid

MADRID, May: Kevin De Bruyne netted a stunning equaliser with a rasping low strike to give Manchester City a 1-1 draw against Real Madrid in their Champions League semi-final first leg on Tuesday on a night of glorious goals in the Spanish capital.

The City midfielder powered home from distance in 67th minute after Vinicius Jr had opened the scoring in the first half with an equally sumptuous strike.

City dominated the match in the early stages but it was Real who took the lead as Vinicius netted a brilliant curling effort from the edge of the area that flew into the top-right corner with Real's first shot on target in the 36th minute.

The holders got back on top in the second half and took control, but it was City who scored after they won possession high up the pitch and worked the ball to De Bruyne who drilled in with the outside of his boot to leave the tie poised ahead of next Wednesday's second leg.

It was a frantic encounter at a sold-out Santiago Bernabeu with the home fans spending the first half hour of the match on the edge of their seats as City started strongly.

Real struggled with City's relentless pressure and the visitors dominated proceedings early and maintained control as the first half progressed.

Pep Guardiola's team enjoyed a staggering 75 per cent ball possession for a large part of the first half and by the halfway point of the opening period City had recorded six attempts, with four on target, compared to none from Real.

But the hosts slowly started to get a foothold in midfield and started to test City on the counter, with Vinicius moving to a more central position, luring markers away from touchline and creating



Soccer Football - Champions League - Semi Final - First Leg - Real Madrid v Manchester City - Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid, Spain - May 9, 2023 Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates Bernardo Silva and Erling Braut Haaland. — Reuters

space for Eduardo Camavinga.

After Camavinga and Vinicius combined to create two half-chances, they nailed a textbook counter attack.

Camavinga burst down the left touchline and passed to Vinicius, who let fly with a missile from outside the area that shot into the

corner of the net.

Real got on top in the second half and almost scored early on when Karim Benzema fired wide.

The France striker seemed off the pace, making uncharacteristic errors and misfiring with several attempts on goal.

It was after a poor pass from

Benzema that Man City stopped another Real counter and, after recovering the ball high up the pitch after a poor attempt at a clearance by Camavinga, that De Bruyne netted the equaliser.

City keeper Ederson made two critical saves to keep the scores level ahead of next week's return

encounter.

"The tie remains open... we played a good game. They had possession early, yes, but no real chances... Too bad about the goal, we had more chances than they had," Luka Modric told Movistar Plus.

"I don't think anyone goes to

the second leg with a mental edge. It's an open tie, we already knew that this wasn't going to end here at Santiago Bernabeu, that nobody was going to take an advantage to kill it today.

"The tie, before this game, was 50-50. And now, it's still the same." — Reuters

Embiid, Sixers close to win after downing Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid led the Philadelphia 76ers to within one win of a series triumph over the Boston Celtics on Tuesday, scoring 33 points in a 115-103 road victory in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference playoff duel.

Embiid delivered another towering performance that underscored his NBA Most Valuable Player status as the Sixers dominated from early in the first quarter to leave Boston's TD Garden home crowd in stunned silence.

The result gives the third-seeded Sixers a 3-2 series lead, meaning they can advance to the conference finals with a win in game six on home court in Philadelphia on Thursday.

The Sixers will head into that game brimming with confidence after an assured display in game five that left second-seeded Boston's postseason campaign hanging by a thread.

Embiid led the scoring in a superbly balanced Sixers offensive performance, with five players finishing in double figures.



Tyrese Maxey tormented the Celtics with 30 points, including six three-pointers, while point guard James Harden was a constant thorn in the side of the Celtics, finishing with 17 points,

10 assists and eight rebounds.

"I thought Joel did a great job of shooting when he needed to shoot, and passing when he needed to pass," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. — AFP

Oman take on Palestine in Arab Cup beach soccer

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The Oman national beach soccer team is set to compete in the Arab Cup competitions at the King Abdullah Sports City in Saudi Arabia from May 11 to May 20. The team will start its campaign in the tournament by facing Palestine on May 13, followed by a match against Egypt on May 15. Oman's last match in the group stage will be against Kyrgyzstan on May 17.

A total of 12 teams, including Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Kuwait, Comoros and Oman will participate in this edition of the tournament. The teams have been divided into three groups, with Oman being placed in Group 2 along with Palestine, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals, along with the two best teams occupying third place in the three groups. The group stage will be held from May 11 to May 17, while the quarterfinals will take place on May 18, the semifinals are set for May 19 and the final on May 20.

The Oman team left for Saudi Arabia on Tuesday after concluding its internal training



camp held in the Barcelo Resort in Al Musannah. During the camp, the team's technical staff led by national coach Talib bin Hilal focused on raising the team's level of fitness and mental approach. They also implemented some plans and tactics that will be applied in the Arab Cup.

Coach Talib emphasised the importance of the tournament, saying that the Arab Cup competitions are essential as they bring together teams from the Asian and African continents. He added that the team is looking forward to taking on a new challenge and gaining experience by playing matches against teams that they have not played with for a long time.

Regarding Oman's placement in Group 2, the coach said they

had previously played with Egypt 10 years ago, who were the champions of the third edition of the Arab Cup.

He added that the team is familiar with the Kyrgyzstan team's style of play and has played with them in the last AFC Cup. Furthermore, the coach expressed confidence in the team's ability to overcome the obstacles and qualify as the first in the group.

With regards to Palestine, who are in the same group as Oman, Talib revealed that they had previously played against the team in the Asian Beach Cup in Thailand, where Oman had won 5-1. He added that the team is eager to start the tournament on a positive note and aims to achieve many victories in the matches of the group stage.



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Ibri Industrial City begins attracting investors

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The first phase of Ibri Industrial City, the latest addition to the expanding network of manufacturing parks established by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), is nearing completion in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Infrastructure work on the new development is around 80 per cent complete. Phase 1 will offer around 3 million square metres of land for investment. It will also incorporate roads, as well as water, sewage, rainwater drainage and telecom networks.

Further, with 303 solar powered streetlights installed, it will contribute to sustainable energy use.

Eng Nasser al Mabsali (pictured), Director General of Ibri Industrial City, said that the industrial city is currently home to 28 projects on a total area of 270,000 sqm, with a



As new projects and factories begin operations within the industrial city, the number of opportunities available is on the rise.

ENG NASSER AL MABSALI
Director General
Ibri Industrial City



total investment volume exceeding RO 9.7 million.

These projects' activities vary between construction materials, oil and gas services, food industries, manufacturing industries, as well as warehousing, and service and commercial activities. Some of these localised factories have already commenced production, while others will enter the production and implementation

phase in the coming period.

Al Mabsali pointed out that Ibri Industrial City project has contributed to providing opportunities for small and medium enterprises, and job

opportunities during 2023. "As new projects and factories begin operations within the industrial city, the number of opportunities available is on the rise," he added.

Al Mabsali also noted that investors have shown keen interest in taking advantage of Madayn's incentives, which have been instrumental in attracting diverse types of investments, including a two-year rental exemption for investors followed by a 50 per cent exemption for the subsequent three years.

Madayn has also signed an agreement to establish an integrated station spanning 40,000 sq metres, which will be implemented in phases and will include a fuel station, a rest area, and a facility that provides services to trucks and cars.

The project will serve investors in Ibri Industrial City as well as travellers on the road leading to Saudi Arabia.

Pact signed for new bunkering station at Duqm Fisheries Port



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Marine fuel trading firm O Bunkering has signed an agreement with Marsa Al Duqm Investments Company — a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman — to build and operate a bunkering station for marine vessels in the Duqm Fisheries Port.

O Bunkering will supply all ships and fishing boats with bunker fuel at the fishing port berth in Duqm. The project is expected to significantly boost the port's capabilities and enhance Oman's position as a key player in the regional marine industry.

The new bunker supply station will be equipped with the latest technology and infrastructure, including advanced metering and monitoring systems to ensure the safe and efficient supply of marine fuels and other related products. It will be staffed by a team of highly trained professionals, who will be responsible for ensuring that all operations are carried out in strict accordance with international safety and environmental standards.

The agreement was signed by Ali Amur al Shaibani, CEO of O Bunkering and Eng Nabil al Bimani, CEO of Fisheries Development Oman.

Ali Amur al Shaibani, CEO of O Bunkering, said "This agreement represents a significant success and a big step for the company. O Bunkering will undertake the design and construction of the bunker station in Duqm Fishing Port in accordance with international standards, ensuring the highest levels of safety and reliability for their customers.

The company aims to provide exceptional services in the field of supplying ships with bunker fuel to the global shipping industry, which contributes to the promotion of both local and international fishing industries."

The development of the bunker supply station is part of Oman's wider plans to develop its ports and logistics infrastructure, in order to support economic growth and diversification.

Duqm is a key part of this strategy, and the development of the bunker supply station is expected to help attract more business to the port.

Oman LNG weighs foray into bunkering of liquefied natural gas

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman LNG, majority-owned by the Omani government, says it is exploring the potential to offer LNG bunkering services – a move that will, among other things, further strengthen its bid to remain in productive operation well beyond 2024 when its current mandate expires.

Oman LNG CEO Hamad al Numani said the initiative, if evaluated to be viable, will help diversify the company's operations, presently focused solely on the liquefaction and export of natural gas.

"Currently, all of our production is exported. However, although at an early stage, we are considering bunkering as an opportunity, with a small portion of our output going there.

At the moment we are trying to figure out who would be the right partner," Al Numani said in a recent interview featured in The Energy Year, a leading UK-based energy-centric news portal.

The move comes as growing numbers of ships switch to LNG as a bunker fuel in place of traditional marine fuel oils, which as linked to emissions harmful to the environment and the planet.

Moreover, with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) mandating limits on sulphur-emissions, effective from January 2022, leading international shipping lines are moving to decarbonise



NATURAL GAS AS FEEDSTOCK FOR THE LNG PROJECT IS PROPOSED TO COME FROM BLOCK 10 IN CENTRAL OMAN, WHICH CAME INTO PRODUCTION EARLIER THIS YEAR.

their fleets initially by retrofitting them to run on LNG initially, and thereafter on zero-carbon ammonia and methanol when the relevant technologies become available cost-competitively on the market.

Oman LNG's Al Numani said the company is currently studying the business case for introducing LNG bunkering operations.

"We certainly recognise the value of LNG as a big bunkering option coming up as other products — methanol and ammonia — are far behind and we don't expect to have LNG ships running on ammonia in the medium term.

So, we are continuously evaluating and assessing bunkering opportunities, but first you need to have enough ships converted and in your traffic lane to justify such a business."

He further added: "It is definitely a way to diversify our operations and I think in the next five years, it might materialise."

If green-lighted for development, the proposed LNG bunkering service will be the second of its kind to the offered by the Sultanate of Oman in the coming years.

At Sohar Port, energy major TotalEnergies has plans to set up a bunkering terminal anchored by a low-carbon LNG plant named Marsa LNG.

The 1 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) capacity plant will be owned 80 per cent by TotalEnergies and the rest by OQ Group.

Natural gas as feedstock for the LNG project is proposed to come

from Block 10 in central Oman, which came into production earlier this year. TotalEnergies has a 26.55 per cent equity stake in Block 10.

Longer term, and as other low-carbon fuels based on green hydrogen derivatives such as ammonia and methanol become suitable for marine bunkering, Oman is looking to leverage its strategic location to become a leading player in this future industry as well.

Last December, an international consortium comprising OQ Group, Sumitomo Corporation, AP Moller-Maersk and Asyad Group, signed an agreement to explore the feasibility of introducing green fuel bunkering at the ports of Duqm and Salalah.

The consortium will also assess the potential for green fuel ship-to-ship bunkering operations and green fuel loading operations in Oman ports.

Khimji Ramdas launches new Läderach store at Mall of Oman



MUSCAT: In bringing premium SwisschocolatierLäderach’sfresh, artisanal chocolate experience to chocolate aficionados in the Sultanate of Oman, leading business conglomerate Khimji Ramdas (KR) and Khoory and Sons, have opened the doors of a luxury chocolate store at the Mall of Oman.

The grand opening of the boutique witnessed the presence of H E Thomas Oertle, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Oman, along with members of the Läderach and Khimji Ramdas families. With every aspect of its interior design embodying the Läderach aesthetic and exuding the core values of Swiss chocolate, the store is located on the left side of Entrance B, on Level 3, at the Mall of Oman.

A treat for all five senses, the boutique features a dedicated ‘FrischSchoggi’ (fresh chocolate) counter, where chocolate lovers can select from multiple varieties of Läderach’s iconic hand-broken chocolate bark.

The store is also home to an assortment of decadent delights, ranging from hand-crafted ‘pralines and truffles’, ‘tartufi’ (Italian-inspired sweet truffles), ‘snacking’ (chocolate snacks), to the ‘tablet’ (pure chocolate bars); all of which are prepared as per the highest standards of

confectionery-making.

Anil Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group stated: “Khimji Ramdas recognises that today’s customers are not just looking for world-class brands, but also seeking unforgettable, premium experiences.

Therefore, we are pleased to have opened Läderach store in the heart of the biggest mall in Oman. Läderach, as we all know is dedicated to introducing innovative ideas that offer unparalleled chocolate indulgence; the new boutique characterises this, and showcases our joint commitment to providing customers with a personalised and distinctive experience.”

Johannes Läderach, CEO of the Läderach Group mentioned: “Customers in Oman share our passion for freshness, taste and quality. It is hence our priority to bring to them the delight of freshly-made premium swiss-chocolate, where the quality of each ingredient and the manufacturing process itself is meticulously scrutinised. Since our approach is infused with creativity, we aspire to constantly surprise customers in Oman, as we do with customers world-over, and provide them with a luxury chocolate experience that can be savoured with all their senses.”

MENA IPO momentum continues in Q1 with 10 IPOs raising \$3.4 bn

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

IPO activity in the MENA region retained strong momentum despite the weaker global sentiment, according to the EY MENA IPO Eye Q1 2023 report.

The quarter saw 10 IPOs with the combined proceeds of \$3.4 billion. This represents a 33 per cent drop in the number of listings and a 14 per cent decrease in value compared with Q1 2022.

Globally, Q1 2023 saw a total of 299 IPOs, raising \$21.5b – a 61 per cent decrease in volume year-on-year (YoY). This follows the trend for 2022, when IPO-bound companies and investors faced ongoing macroeconomic and geopolitical uncertainties, exacerbated by stress in the global banking system.

IPO windows are short, and funding conditions are getting tougher, with investors prioritising value over growth.

The MENA region, however, remains buoyant, with a promising pipeline for the rest of the year, driven by various enabling initiatives, such as the Abu Dhabi IPO Fund (ADIPOF).

Six companies in the Kingdom



of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have announced their listing plans on the Saudi Exchange (Tadawul) Main Market.

These include Ghida Al-Sultan Company, Foods Gate, Meyer Construction Co, Saudi Lime Industries Company, First Mills Company and HyperPay.

Volatility experienced in the MENA equity market during 2022 continued into Q1 2023 due to rising interest rates, inflation concerns, unexpected global banking turbulence and geopolitical uncertainties, which has impacted investor sentiment.

At the end of the quarter, six out of the 10 MENA IPOs had a positive return compared to their IPO price, with Presight

Al Holding PLC achieving the highest gain of 146.3 per cent.

Brad Watson, EY MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, says: “Q1 2023 proved MENA IPOs continue to go against global trends in these uncertain economic times, building on the momentum from last year. 2023 shows a healthy pipeline across the region, with several initiatives to support private and government entities on their path to IPO.”

KSA was the frontrunner in listing activity in Q1 2023. This included six IPOs on the Nomu – Parallel Market with proceeds of \$0.7b as well as one Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) raising \$0.1billion. In the UAE, Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX)

had the largest IPO of the quarter globally, with ADNOC Gas PLC raising \$2.5 billion.

The IPO was oversubscribed 58 times, with its first closing day share price trading 19 per cent higher than its listing price of AED 2.37.

The IPO of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, Oman’s largest oilfield services provider, raised \$0.2 billion on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and was oversubscribed 8.7 times in the MENA region.

In addition, the Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) welcomed a direct listing by Damaan Islamic Insurance Company.

Gregory Hughes, EY MENA IPO and Transaction Diligence Leader, says: “Despite the 33 per cent YoY decline in the number of IPOs in Q1 2023, MENA IPO and trading activity remained robust, proving the strength of investor confidence in the region against global financial headwinds.

Saudi Arabia is still the most active market in terms of volume, while the largest IPOs continue to be dominated by the energy sector. Q2 2023 is already off to a strong start with a number of announced regional listings.”

Pact signed for new bunkering station at Duqm Fisheries Port

FROM PAGE 13

Duqm is a key part of this strategy, and the development of the bunker supply station is expected to help attract more business to the port.

Al Shaibani added, “The project is an essential step for the fisheries industry in the Sultanate of Oman. This project will contribute to achieving Oman Vision 2040 and emphasises the diversification of the sources of the Omani economy.

The Duqm Fishing Port is one of its main pillars, in addition to promoting social and economic development.”

Duqm is strategically located on the coast of Oman and is a key hub for the marine industry in the region. The development of the new bunker supply station is expected to help the port capture a larger share of the growing global bunker market, which is expected to reach \$330 billion by 2027, according to a recent report

by Global Market Insights.

In December last year, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) officially inaugurated a bunker fuel terminal at the Port of Duqm. Located in the Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD), the OOMCO marine bunker fuel terminal will supply the full range of bunker fuel to ships at the port and port anchorage, which promises to further position Oman as a world-class logistics and shipping hub.

Duqm Fishing Port is the largest fishing port in the Sultanate of Oman, with yards designated for commercial and tourism purposes and direct services needed by fishermen.

It is also distinguished by its association with the largest area for fish industries in Oman and its proximity to Duqm Airport. This strategic location will make the port a destination for many ships and boats operating in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Geely Auto and Towell Auto Centre launch Geely’s revolutionary range of new vehicles in Oman

MUSCAT: Geely Motors and Towell Auto Centre (TAC) have come together to deliver a remarkable achievement in the form of a whole range of new vehicles — the all-new CoolRay, the all-new Emgrand, the all-new Okavango and the all-new Azakarra.

The exclusive car launch event, held on May 9 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel Muscat, witnessed imaginations reaching infinite levels with the unveiling of these vehicles. The theme of the event was “Infinite Imaginations”, which symbolises Geely’s commitment to pushing boundaries and exploring endless possibilities with forward-looking technologies and systemic advantages that Oman is about to witness.

On behalf of Towell Auto Centre and distinguished guests from Geely Motors, Riyadh Ali Sultan, General Manager of Towell



Auto Centre welcomed everyone to the event and expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to showcase Geely’s innovative and technologically advanced cars in Oman.

Geely and TAC are proud to bring the all-new CoolRay, the all-new Emgrand, the all-new Okavango and the all-new Azakarra, are the latest additions

to Geely’s lineup of exceptional automobiles. These vehicles are designed to offer the ultimate driving experience, combining cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features, and unparalleled comfort.

All-new Emgrand, a sedan that is set to redefine the driving experience, and the all-new Coolray, the first overseas SUV



born from the BMA platform, both were unveiled at the event.

All-new Okavango is a seven-seater vehicle that offers ample space for families, creating uncompromised memories. With its advanced safety features, Advance technologies, modern design, combined with exceptional performance, makes it a top choice for families looking

for a reliable and stylish vehicle.

The all-new Azakarra is a premium SUV that combines power and elegance, with a spacious and luxurious interior, outstanding performance, and exceptional safety features.

Geely’s new range of vehicles models embody bold styling, high quality, superior performance, and smart interiors. The launch event also marked the debut of Geely’s new visual identity, which is embodied in products as well as their new logo.

The new logo inherits and extends the visual DNA of the Geely brand, signifying the brand’s evolution and readiness to serve the Omani market with exceptional automobiles.

The launch event was attended by several dignitaries and guests. The speech of GU Xiaen (Alex), Deputy General Manager of Geely Auto Middle East, was screened during the event where

he highlighted the collaboration between Geely and TAC and how it is a coming together of two visionary organisations to deliver the best-in-class automobile experience to people in the Sultanate of Oman.

“Together, we are pushing the boundaries of smart mobility solutions, setting new benchmarks for the future of transportation, all to be available in Oman,” he said.

He further expressed Geely’s excitement about bringing their new visual identity and logo to Oman.

“The new logo shows a more ‘creative, vigorous, and imaginative’ Geely Auto. The new Geely, with its creativity, creates a product experience that exceeds users’ expectations. It explores more possibilities with infinite imagination and transforms imagination into reality through implementation of forward-looking technologies,” he added.

Positive ramifications of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Recent political developments between Saudi Arabia and Iran, mediated by China, will strengthen cooperation between Asian countries especially in the field of conventional oil and gas energy projects, as well as renewable resources.

Recently, the issue of an Iranian-Pakistan gas pipeline was raised by a member of the Pakistani Parliament who stressed in his intervention the need to move forward with the implementation of this proposal.

First discussed between the two countries several years ago, the issue has been raised again in the context of the new political and economic

developments in the Asian region.

Iran has the potential to export electricity to Pakistan as part of its efforts to boost trade and cooperation with its neighbours in a number of fields, including tourism and investment.

Prospects for the export of Iranian gas to both India and Pakistan were first raised several years ago based on attractive gas price agreement valid for a period of 25 years. This so-called 'Peace Gas Pipeline' would reach Pakistan through India.

But the proposals faced many challenges because of India's withdrawal from the venture and Pakistan's inaction, further compounded by US embargo and international sanctions against Iran.

All of these developments led to the freezing of the project, until recently, with both Russia and China saying they are ready to support and finance this vital project.

Iran for its part, has completed the laying of the pipeline on its territory, while also allocating a \$500 million loan to Pakistan to complete its side of the project.

Unfortunately, this has not been achieved to date. Iran is also making efforts with India to secure its support for the 'Peace Gas Pipeline' by undertaking official visits for talks between the two countries.

It is also working to revive support in Pakistan as well. The goal is to ensure the security of the project, but also agree on a gas price between the countries involved.

All of this comes at a time when the two countries face energy supply challenges amid international supply shortages, strong growth in energy demand from the transport sector and the steep increase in international oil prices.

Against this backdrop, the two countries have an opportunity to benefit from Iranian gas in the future, in addition to opening up supply opportunities to other countries in their vicinity that also need energy.

The completion of this project will undoubtedly open new horizons for mutual cooperation between these countries and enhance investment opportunities among them. It will also help achieve trade and economic integration in Central Asia, Europe and the Middle East, alongside China and Russia.

In the recent past, Pakistan suffered a major flooding crisis that exacerbated its electricity supply challenges when power stations and grid infrastructure were inundated by the floods.

Shortages of LNG only complicated the situation, forcing Pakistan to restrict power supply even as import costs of LNG began soaring.

EU debt's credibility problem is worsening



European Union flags flutter outside the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters

REBECCA CHRISTIE

The European Union's debt credibility is suffering from rising doubts, as well as rising rates. While yields are up across the 27-nation bloc, its jointly issued bonds now trade above those of France instead of roughly parallel.

To close the spread the EU needs a shift in investor mindsets, and to make good on some revenue-raising promises.

Relative to initial projections, EU borrowing costs are on course to go up by tens of billions of euros.

The EU's cost of funding has grown from 0.14% in 2021 to 2.6% in the second half of 2022, with further rises expected. With outstanding bonds of 381 billion euros as of end-April and more coming, the extra costs add up.

Part of that is the unavoidable consequence of rising rates in general. Even so, as of Tuesday, two-year EU bonds were yielding 3.02% compared to 2.79% for France and 2.94% for Spain, with five-year EU bonds at 2.87% against 2.63% for France.

Even though the EU is rated AAA by Fitch and Moody's as well as AA-plus by S&P, higher than France's Aa2 at Moody's, AA-minus at Fitch and AA at S&P, the bloc is paying more in part because markets have not accepted Brussels as a sovereign borrower.

EU debt trades as a supranational institution, not a country. Hence it is left out of government bond indexes and portfolio slots. If it was included, asset managers would be more likely to sell France and buy the EU, earning extra yield on similarly rated sovereign debt.

Right now, they mostly aren't.

This puts the European Commission in a bind. Its technical campaign to jump categories has not taken hold, despite the support of the European Central Bank, which last year promoted EU debt to its top tier of monetary policy collateral.

Market participants like LBBW Chief Economist Moritz Kraemer say the euro area has not proven its political will to stick together. Critics focus on the pandemic borrowing programme's temporary nature as well as the common currency's near-breakup during its 2010-2015 crisis.

This leads to a situation where even though there is plenty of well-managed debt to trade, market participants are already pricing in a future lack of liquidity. Other reserve currency safe assets, like US Treasury bonds or Japanese debt, face no such prospective cuts in supply.

On top of that, the EU has boxed itself in with promises to pay its obligations down with new sources of revenue that have not yet materialised, such as digital and carbon taxes.

This looks bad. Financially, the EU general budget will be able to manage the increase in debt costs using existing measures.

But for political leaders to get more comfortable with joint debt and to advance the euro as a reserve currency, Brussels needs to convince member states to deliver on promised new revenues.

If they don't, pan-European bonds could wind up like the unfinished EU banking union: another reminder that euro countries aren't totally sold on being joined together.

— Reuters

Reasons for raising interest rates by the US Federal Reserve



SALIM BIN KHAMIS BIN SALIM AL SIYABI

The author is a prominent member of the Oman Association of Chartered Public Accountants

The issue started during the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, as the United States injected liquidity into the market of nearly a trillion US dollars' worth. It was aimed to encourage consumption and activate the market.

However, this action led to a large excess of liquidity in the market. After the end of the coronavirus crisis, the world supply chains were affected and the goods that could reach the US market and other global markets were few, leading to a situation where a lot of liquidity was chasing few goods.

Likewise, the Russian-Ukrainian war deepened the crisis further due to the rise in energy prices, which led to a rise in inflation in America and the world at large. Since the continued rise in the inflation rate was going to lead to the collapse of the US

economy, the US central bank was forced to intervene to control and curb inflation by raising the interest rate to 4.75%.

The Federal Reserve continued raising the rate of interest and recently it has been raised by almost 25% to reach 5% for the US bonds is 5%.

What is the economic impact of raising interest rates on the US market and emerging markets?

The raising of interest rates led to the withdrawal of liquidity from the market, as individuals, companies, institutions, and investment funds tended to direct liquidity towards investing in the US government bond market.

Thus, liquidity was withdrawn from the US market, but not to the required level which existed before the interest rate hike at the beginning of the year.

On the other hand, this action deepened the crisis for the banks which had invested earlier in US bonds.

Those banks incurred losses due to being forced to sell the bonds they held for a price less than the interest rate in order to pay the claiming depositors their money, which then led to the collapse of some American banks.

However, the Federal Reserve is still continuing to raise interest rates until now and believes that it is not yet time to stop raising interest rates and lowering their rate again, because this may negatively affect other banks.

With regard to emerging markets, they depend on foreign investment funds to invest in local government bonds and as such support most of the emerging economies.

These investment funds also lend the governments of emerging countries to activate their economies and markets, but the raising of interest rates by the federal reserve has led to these investment funds withdrawing their money from emerging markets and transferring it to US markets, to be invested in government bonds due to their almost non-existent risk compared to the higher risk in emerging markets.

This led to the scarcity of the dollar in emerging markets and the collapse of the currencies of those countries against the dollar.

Consequently, many countries failed to pay their debts or tried to pay at the expense of their economies.

As expected, the gravely affected classes by the high prices of goods and services were the poor and the middle classes of society. The declining value of local currencies made it difficult for those countries to obtain the financing required to support their economies and to provide a good investment environment.

The high-interest rate in the US led countries with emerging economies to raise their interest rates, which in turn led to an

increase in the cost of lending to local companies.

This was consequently reflected in the rise in prices in the local markets, with a direct impact on the poor and middle classes.

Egypt is one of the countries that was greatly affected when investment funds withdrew their money from the Egyptian market, which led to the accumulation of goods in the Egyptian ports due to the scarcity of the dollar in Egyptian banks.

The Egyptian banks were unable to fulfil the necessary documentary credits and the transfer of dollars to external sources. This led to scarcity and an incredible rise of goods in the Egyptian market, and the value of the Egyptian pound decreased drastically.

The recent interest rate hike may exacerbate the suffering of Egypt and emerging countries and put a lot of pressure on the economies and citizens in those countries.

In conclusion, in order to avoid such crises, it is necessary to strengthen the national industries, and it is necessary to create an environment for internal investment, enhance the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the economy, and support the innovator and everyone who has a project that supports the national economy, as this may at least help to stabilise the market.



A cyclist passes the US Federal Reserve in Washington, in this file photo. – Reuters

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MUSCAT: To mark the 10th anniversary of the Omani... SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

OMAN OBSERVER DAILY

Born in Muscat, this opera singer came back 16 years later to perform at ROHM

Of the many surprises that are noteworthy in latest opera show at the Royal Opera House Muscat this weekend, it was the discovery that one of the main characters was actually born in Oman created an excitement... **P20**

France to shut Pompidou museum for five years in 2025

THE POMPIDOU CENTRE in Paris, one of the world's top modern art museums, will shut down for refurbishment for five years from 2025, France's culture minister said on Wednesday.

The Pompidou houses work by artists from Pablo Picasso to Wassily Kandinsky and welcomed more than three million visitors last year. But its ground-breaking "inside out" structure by architects Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, that displays pipework on the outside, has suffered serious wear

and tear.

The institution is also facing stiff competition from newer Parisian galleries created by the mega-wealthy Louis Vuitton Foundation and billionaire Francois-Henri Pinault.

Culture minister Rima Abdul Malak said the refurbishment would "enable its survival" and hailed the museum for hosting 300 million visitors since it was opened in 1977.

The Pompidou boasts Europe's biggest modern art collection and is



the world's leading lender of paintings and sculptures, lending out between 8,000 and 10,000 a year to other museums and galleries.

The building's first major upgrade in its history will cost 262 million euros (\$287 million) and will see the structure updated for fire safety, disability access and general repairs.

On the inside, gallery spaces will be reworked, new areas will be installed for younger visitors and its hugely popular public library will be expanded.

The upgrade was initially planned to run from 2023 to 2027 to allow the building to reopen for its 50th anniversary, but it now will not reopen until 2030.

The Pompidou has sought to boost its coffers recently with international deals, signing an agreement with Saudi Arabia in March to help build a modern art museum at the Al-Ula heritage site.

It already has franchise museums in Shanghai, Brussels and Malaga, Spain, as well as a large outpost in Metz in eastern France.

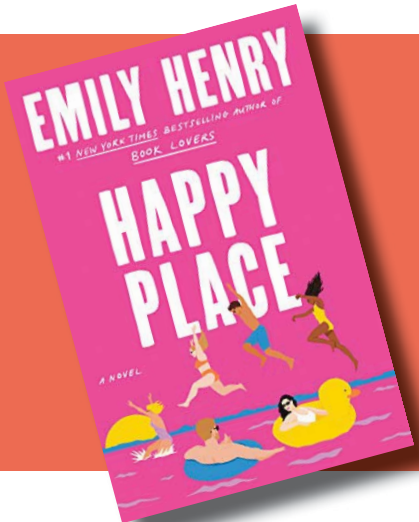
It is also working with Korean business group Hanwha on a series of exhibitions in Seoul. — AFP

READ

HAPPY PLACE

BY EMILY HENRY

A former couple pretend to be together for the sake of their friends during their annual getaway in Maine.



FASHION

Models present designs for Los Angeles CHANEL Cruise 2023/24 show at Paramount Studios in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



ART

A photograph shows smashed Lapis Lazuli blue pigment at the Rijksmuseum's drawing school in Amsterdam as part of an explanation focused on the way paint was made in the 17th century including by Dutch Masters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer. The paint is today delivered by the windmill De Kat, outside of Amsterdam and is the last in the world to make pigment such as the blue of Lapis Lazuli used by the Rijksmuseum's drawing school to give its students a step back in time. — AFP





Drought spells ‘catastrophe’ for Spain’s olive harvest

AN ONGOING DROUGHT and soaring temperatures have unleashed fears of an olive “catastrophe” in Spain, the world’s largest producer of olive oil, which suffered a very difficult year in 2022.

“It’s barely rained since January. The ground is very dry,” worries Cristobal Cano, Secretary-General of the small farmers’ union (UPA) in the southern region of Andalusia, the heart of Spain’s olive oil industry.

Cano, who owns 10 hectares of olive trees in Alcala la Real near Granada, has never seen such a worrying situation in the 20 years he’s been a farmer.

“If something doesn’t change radically in the next few weeks, it’s going to be a catastrophe,” he warned.

According to the AEMET weather agency, accumulated rainfall since October 1 has been 25 per cent lower than normal across Spain and 50 per cent lower in most of Andalusia, where reservoirs are at 25 per cent capacity.

And the situation worsened at the end of April, when an early heatwave brought exceptionally high temperatures that saw the mercury hit 38.8 degrees Celsius (101.8 degrees Fahrenheit) in southern Spain.

“This happened as the olive trees were in bloom,” says Rafael Pico, director of Asoliva, the Spanish association of olive oil producers and exporters, who fears the blooms will dry up.

“If there are no flowers, there’s no fruit. And if there’s no fruit, there’s no oil.”

ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE

For Spain — which normally supplies 50 per cent of the world’s olive oil and exports close to 3.0 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) worth every year — the situation is even more worrying given the sector’s disastrous output in 2021-2022.

During that season too, a lack of rain and extreme temperatures saw olive oil production plummeting 55 per cent to 660,000 tonnes, compared to 1.48 million tonnes in 2021-2022,

agriculture ministry figures show. The scene is set to play out again this year.

“Looking at the forecasts, it’s almost a given — it’s going to be another grim year,” says Rafael Sanchez de Puerta, head of Dcoop, Spain’s leading olive cooperative.



If the predictions prove true, it could spell the end for many olive farms.

“We can cope with one difficult year. It’s a natural part of the growing cycle. But two years in a row will be a disaster. Many are on the brink of collapse,” he says.

With the cost of machinery, paying salaries and repaying loans, “farmers need liquidity” to remain afloat, says Asoliva’s Pico, recalling that many in Spain live from olive oil production.

RUNAWAY PRICES

For consumers, the outlook is also bleak.

“The global price of olive oil depends largely on Spain,” says Pico.

In recent months, the price of oil has jumped.

“In mid-April, olive oil was selling at 5,800 euros (\$6,400) per tonne, up from 5,300 euros

At the end of 2022, the Spanish government moved to lower VAT on olive oil from 10 per cent to five per cent as part of a package of measures to help consumers in the face of soaring inflation.

And to help farmers cope with the drought, the government has

reduced the sector’s income tax by 25 per cent.

But for many, it’s too little in the face of the looming crisis.

“Lowering taxes for people who will have almost no income is of little use to them,” says Dcoop’s Sanchez de Puerta, calling for more ambitious moves to combat “a drought that is lasting longer than it should”. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Nicaraguan paradise draws Americans, Europeans despite political strife



TUCKED AWAY IN A SOUTHERN corner of Nicaragua, far from the political persecution of the opposition by President Daniel Ortega, a tiny colony of Americans and Europeans have carved out a new home on the Pacific, lured by the area’s natural beauty, security and tranquility.

San Juan del Sur, on the Pacific coast 140 kilometers (85 miles) south of Managua on the border with Costa Rica, is an ideal place to retire or set up a business.

While Ortega’s political opponents are thrown in jail or forced into exile — a “continuum of repression,” in the words of a recent Amnesty International report — this little corner of tropical paradise attracts foreigners to enjoy its bars, restaurants, whale watching and landscapes.

Many expats first visited as tourists before deciding to stay permanently, while other more recent arrivals were attracted by lax Covid-19 vaccine rules.

American Christina Alty came 10 years ago to surf and has since set up an estate agency.

“I like the lifestyle of Nicaragua in general, it checks all my boxes for all the outdoor things that I enjoy: the beaches, the hiking, the scenery,” said Alty.

Her clients “just enjoy the different lifestyle change.”

“It’s a lot slower pace of life here than wherever they came from,” added the 37-year-old mother of two children who study in a bilingual school in the town of 17,000 inhabitants.

While Alty strolls along the beach, tourists lounge on chairs, lie on the sand, play sports or enjoy a dip in the sea.



THE SPACE TO BE CHILDREN

Two bilingual schools combine formal education with open air classes.

“We are in a very natural environment, we’re four kilometres (2.5 miles) from the centre of San Juan del Sur, we’re surrounded by mango, almond and plum trees,” Jaime Lynn Hunter, director of the Adelante school, said.

“And I think parents like to send their children here because they don’t feel enclosed, they have the necessary space to stretch, run and be children,” added the 38-year-old, who has lived in the town for 13 years.

The school has 170 pre-school and primary pupils. It was established in 2016 to teach English to local children with the cooperation of US and Japanese NGOs.

The pupils, 30 per cent of whom are foreign, follow the Nicaraguan curriculum but classes alternate between Spanish and English from one week to the next.

“We’re delighted that our children are safe here and can study in an outdoor setting, not with gates and closed doors, and they don’t need to be afraid of anything more serious such as shootings, which you see a lot these days” in US schools, said Hunter.

Arriving in 2010 to work as an English teacher, Hunter married a Nicaraguan and now has two children.

“What I like here is that they still play in the street, they still go to the park. Children here are still children and this makes me think of when I was a child, when I would go out and play until it got dark.”

Hunter said she has always been treated well by the local population.

“When I came here, I saw people that had nothing, but they were prepared to give me everything,” she said.

The other bilingual school, San Juan del Sur Day School, has 175 pupils with 43 per cent coming from 17 different foreign countries, including the US, Britain and Russia.

A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY

Every year, around 30 cruise ships from the US, Canada and Europe dock at the port in San Juan del Sur, according to the tourism ministry.

In the mid 19th century, thousands of east coast Americans passed through this small town during the US gold rush, on their way to California.

One of them was writer Mark Twain, who shares a monument with Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario in a town square.

It remains a popular destination for tourists today.

“I like surfing and there’s also beaches nearby to surf,” said British tourist Mark Gutler.

“It’s a beautiful country, it has great weather here, I really like the people, I really like the ocean. I mean, what more could I ask for?” — **AFP**



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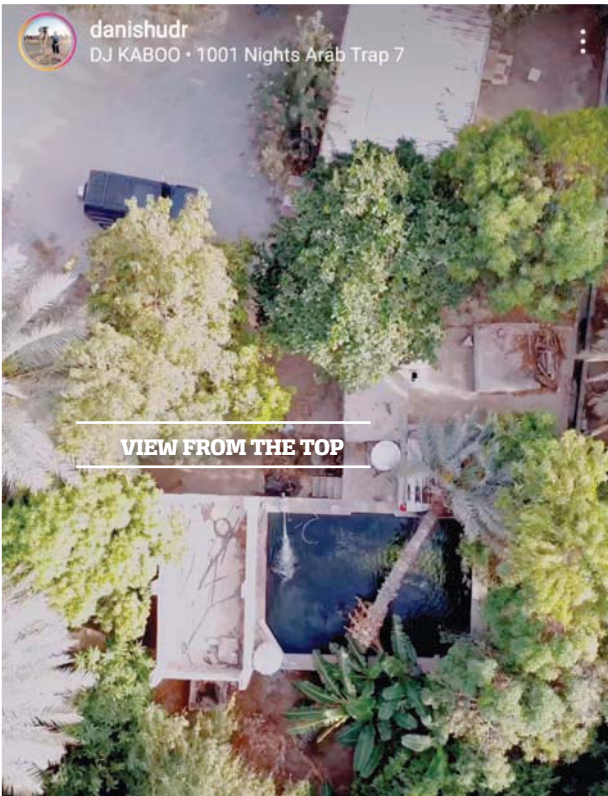


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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Enhance any makeup look with a single stroke



SKIN STORY, RENOWNED for natural, multipurpose makeup products, announces their latest makeup launch. The clean beauty brand introduces their first vegan DEFINE Black eyeliner using the brand's signature cruelty-free, ethically-derived, non-GMO and fragrance-free formulas. Whether you're a makeup pro or novice, DEFINE is a luxe staple worthy of your makeup bag.

Eyeliners wield a special power that a lot of other makeup products don't: the ability to make a huge difference in just a few strokes. There's no one way to do your eyeliner. You can do a messy and glittery party-girl look or you can lean into the clean-girl look and just opt for a simple yet classic cat-eye.

Give your eye area a clean beauty experience. Made with precision in mind, DEFINE is enriched with panthenol and peptides for nourishment and to promote natural eyelash growth. Made for novices and pros alike, the richly pigmented eyeliner formula is oil-free and smudge-proof with medium-to-full coverage for all-day wear. DEFINE is supplemented with panthenol, also known as pro vitamin B5 to help nourish, hydrate, and condition the delicate eye area. The ingredient also enhances the lashes with a fuller, longer look. The lash enhancing peptides acts as a conditioner for your lashes, making them revitalised and stronger, while giving



ing a fuller, healthier and shiny-look. The ultra-fine tip allows you to have full control throughout the application process.

Perfect for creating bold and dramatic looks (think graphic or winged cat-eyes), Skin Story black liquid eyeliner DEFINE in a hydrating, smudge-resistant formula gives you the most precision and helps you create well-defined thin lines. Shake to saturate the tip with ink; start with a thin line in the inner corners and gradually increase the thickness. Add a wing for a glam look.

Founded by UAE-based sister duo Nidhi and Rashi Sethi, Skin Story first burst onto the clean beauty scene in 2021 with three consciously-created multisticks, followed by the DRAMA Mascara and 2-in-1 GROWTH Lash & Brow. The vegan mascara delivers dramatic results, composed of castor oil for lash strength, peach leaf extract for hydration, and peptide for volume and lengthening benefits. The mascara protects against clumping, flaking and smearing while delivering day-to-night wear with a nourishing formula. GROWTH works to promote exactly as the product says it does; formulated with peach leaf extract, peptides, biotin, and panthenol, give your brow and lash follicles the ultimate nourishment, growth, shine and strength.

ART

Turning 'Ashes and Sand' Into Art



THE FAIRY TALE CASTLE that Alice Stori Liechtenstein and her family inhabit in the hilly countryside of southern Austria is far from the hotbeds of contemporary design — distant both geographically (it's a six-hour drive from Milan, for example) and stylistically (built in medieval times, with later Baroque and Rococo additions).

But every May, Schloss Hollenegg, as the castle is called, draws design aficionados when the doors are thrown open for a group show of new work revolving around a theme of Liechtenstein's choosing. This year's exhibition, called "Ashes and Sand," is devoted to glass and named for the two materials needed to make it.

The exploration of glass began last summer, with a three-week residency for a handful of current and recent design students. The lucky young creators, who lived on the premises for the duration, were encouraged to wander the castle's halls, poke through its 52 rooms and take inspiration wherever they found it.

"It's a bit like summer camp," said Liechtenstein, 44, a curator who has run the design residency program for seven years.

But the participants worked hard, too. By the time the residency concluded, they had in hand precise sketches for designs, and — thanks to Liechtenstein's connections — contacts for production partners to help them realise their plans.

While the wares were being made, Liechtenstein commissioned pieces from other designers to round out the show, which she co-curated with Rainald Franz, glass and ceramic expert at

sels, whose speckles result from the area's soft red sandstone.

Designers pushed traditional glassblowing techniques in new directions, such as to make furnishings commonly constructed of sturdier materials: Philipp Weber, a German designer, created a curvy silver side table, while Tamara Barrage, a Lebanese designer based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, who was in residence last summer, conjured up a statueque candelabra.

Of-the-moment technology also came into play. Julia Körner, an Austrian architect, conceived fluted vessels that were 3D-printed by Swarovski, the crystal maker. Barry Llewellyn, an Irish designer based in the Netherlands, created mirrors rigged with solar panels and LEDs so that they charge during the day and light up at night.

Works by the designers in residence will remain at Schloss Hollenegg, alongside centuries-old castle furnishings including Flemish tapestries, stoves made of ceramic tiles and gilt-framed ancestral portraits. The castle has been in the family of Liechtenstein's husband for two centuries.

"Every generation has added something," she said. Her own efforts to incorporate 21st-century designs help "keep the place alive," she added.

Preparations for the 2023-24 session — to be devoted to wood — are in progress. "Ashes and Sand" is on view through May 28. — NYT

Vienna's Museum of Applied Arts.

Some works in the show incorporate recycled glass, reflecting current concerns about sustainability.

Some grew out of research into historical glass techniques: Lenn Gerlach, a German designer, delved into green glass made for centuries by artisans in the Black Forest before conceiving of his variously shaped green ves-

DISCOVERY

New study finds prehistoric migration from China to Americas



AS THE LAST CONTINENTS to be settled by humans, the question of how and when people first came to the Americas has long intrigued scientists.

A new genetics study published on Tuesday in Cell Reports finds that some of the first arrivals came from China during two distinct migrations: the first during the last ice age, and the second shortly after.

"Our findings indicate that besides the previously indicated ancestral sources of Native Americans in Siberia, the northern coastal China also served as a genetic reservoir contributing to the gene pool," Yu-Chun Li, one of the report authors, said.

Li added that during the second migration, the same lineage of people settled in Japan, which could help explain similarities in prehistoric arrowheads and spears found in the Americas, China and Japan.

It was once believed that ancient Siberians, who crossed over a land bridge that existed in the Bering Strait linking modern Russia and Alaska, were the sole ancestors of Native Americans.

More recent research, from the late 2000s onwards, has signalled more diverse sources from Asia could be connected to an ancient lineage responsible for founding populations across the Americas, including Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and California.

Known as D4h, this lineage is found in mitochondrial DNA, which is inherited only from mothers and is used to trace maternal ancestry.

The team from the Kunming Institute of Zoology embarked on a ten-year hunt for D4h, combing through 100,000 modern and 15,000 ancient DNA samples across Eurasia. They eventually landed on 216 contemporary and 39 ancient individuals who came from the ancient lineage.

By analysing the mutations that had accrued over time, looking at the samples' geographic locations and using carbon dating, they were able to reconstruct the D4h lineage's origins and expansion history.

The results revealed two migration events. The first was between 19,500 and 26,000 years ago during the Last Glacial Maximum, when ice sheet coverage was at its greatest and climate conditions in northern China were likely inhospitable.

The second occurred during the melting period, between 19,000 and 11,500 years ago. Increasing human populations during this period might have triggered migrations.

- COASTAL MIGRATION -

In both cases, the scientists think the travellers were seafarers who docked in America and travelled along the Pacific coast by boats. This is because a grassy passageway between two ice sheets in modern Canada, known as the "inland ice-free corridor," was not yet opened.

In the second migration, a subgroup branched out from northern coastal China to Japan, contributing to the Japanese people, especially the indigenous Ainu, the study said, a finding that chimes with archeological similarities between ancient people in the Americas, China and Japan.

Li said a strength of the study was the number of samples they discovered, and complementary evidence from Y chromosomal DNA showing male ancestors of Native Americans lived in northern China at the same time as the female ancestors, made them confident of their findings.

"However, we don't know in which specific place in northern coastal China this expansion occurred and what specific events promoted these migrations," he said.

"More evidence, especially ancient genomes, are needed to answer these questions." — AFP

art & life

Local Scene

f t i y l p @omanobserver

THURSDAY | MAY 11 | 2023

Born in Muscat, this opera singer came back 16 years later to perform at ROHM

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

As its last opera show for the season, the Royal Opera House Muscat journeyed back to the era of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart through the opera buffa *Così fan tutte* which in Italian means, "All women do the same."

Of the many surprises that are noteworthy in this production, it was the discovery that one of the main characters was actually born in Oman.

Così fan tutte is often described as a comic opera. It was premiered in Vienna on January 26, 1790.

A day before the stage performance, ROHM held a talk to help the media and other invited guests dissect and understand this wonderful work.

The vibrant speaker, Gaston Fournier, excitedly told the group attending the pre-event that the story of *Così fan tutte* took place in the Bay of Naples in the 18th century. The setting was the library at ROHM and in the middle of this room was a piano. It became an important element because soon the pianist, Aclelia Novello Tommasimo transformed the room for opera performances, and the books took a back seat. Facio spoke about the characters and ushered in each actor.

FERENT TECHNIQUES. WAS THE TRANSITION A DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE?

"I think the Carnatic music really helped. It made my voice move easier, but it was definitely a big learning curve to move to opera because we sing in foreign languages. We sing in Italian, German, Spanish, and sometimes in Russian. So those are the challenges of the job. You have to be fluent and be able to speak these languages," she noted.

French was definitely easier because she was in Canada. But she was perfectly at ease with Italian too.

"It has been years of learning, and I love singing in Italian. Here, the whole cast of *Così fan tutte* is fully Italian except me. So it has been a good introduction for me to hear my colleagues talk in Italian and me interact with the Italian speakers," she explained.

Deppa is based in Los Angeles, where she's currently working with LA Opera Company. But this summer she's going to make a European debut and is scheduled to perform in London, France, and Austria. "I am really happy to start in Oman this year before I set out to different European countries," she said excitedly.

Deppa also shared that her mother is here too.

"My mother is thrilled to be back and see



He shared what society was like, and he also gave an insight into the characters.

Noemi Muschetti played the role of Fiordiligi, Michelle Patti was Guglielmo, Antonio Gates was Ferrando, Lavinia Bini was Despina and the old philosopher, Don Alfonso was played by Alfonso Di Lieto. Dorabella, was portrayed by Deppa Johnny.

When it was her turn to introduce herself, Deppa casually mentioned her name, but the next part was quite a surprise for the attendees.

"I was born in Muscat, and I must say, it feels great to be home!" she revealed.

Oman Observer caught up with Deppa after the performance.

"I never thought I would ever be back in Muscat after my family moved to Canada. It just so happened that I had the opportunity to perform at the Royal Opera House Muscat and it has brought me back 16 years later! So it is a great thrill to be back here."

Not only born in Oman, she also attended school at the Indian School Darsait.

"I was here until the fourth grade. When I was around 10 years old, we moved to Alberta, Canada," she said. "This is where she took up classical music."

"In Muscat, I had taken lessons in Indian Carnatic music, so I had an initial introduction to voice lessons, but in Canada I studied Western traditions of opera and classical music," Deppa reflected.

Below is how the conversation with Deppa went.

INDIAN CARNATIC AND WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC ARE TWO DIFFERENT

me perform in Muscat. Every time I talk about it, she begins to cry. She is so happy," Deppa said.

Bringing back memories Deppa went to Darsait of course, she even met one of her kindergarten teachers and was thrilled the teacher recognised her. And she did everything that was on her bucket list.

"I went to Muttrah, Muttrah Souq, Nakhal Fort, I have been getting Shawarma every day. It was just nostalgic revisiting all the old memories," the singer reflected. She's also added on her must-do list a visit to a desert camp.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE BEING A CLASSICAL OPERA SINGER?

The challenges were early in my career. I learned to overcome, and now I know how to move forward. I think a lot of things that have happened in my life is because people came and directed me so early on. If not for those people, I'm not sure if life would have led me through music. That is because there are so many reasons why I should not have been a musician because I'm an Indian and in the family it is not the most supported idea. But somehow the right people came by and found something in me, and they believed in me. They encouraged me to continue my passion. So if that happens to you, don't stop. Never give up, continue to work on your skill set, and take life as 'always learning'. Learning something new, even when something goes wrong. It is always an opportunity for growth.

So continue to work hard, and you too can dream big and have everything come true.

