

His Majesty greetings to Zimbabwe President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Mnangagwa and the people of his country further progress and prosperity.

SUNRISE - 05:43 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:25 AM
DHUHR - 12:11 PM
ASR - 03:38 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:34 PM
ISHA - 07:48 PM



1,630 PEOPLE RESCUED AND MORE THAN 630 EVACUATED

RESCUE OPERATIONS CONTINUE AS RAIN SUBSIDES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) joined hands with military, security and civil authorities and other sectors to deal with the current adverse weather conditions. The SAF is lending support through a plan set by the Military Committee for Management of Emergencies.

The committee is holding meetings at SAF headquarters in Muaskar Al Murtafaa to assess and upgrade military units' preparedness to tackle the impacts of the exceptional weather condition. The meetings are chaired by Brig Hamid bin Abdullah al Balushi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, Chairman of the Military Committee for Management of Emergencies.

During a meeting on Wednesday, the committee was briefed about measures taken by all military subcommittees in the governorates affected by the exceptional weather condition, as well as the roles undertaken by all formations, bases and units in the

SAF and other departments of the Ministry of Defence.

The meeting reviewed means of providing support and devising plans to extend assistance to citizens and residents in accordance with the requirements of emergency situations and the plan set by the committee.

Meanwhile, the body of a girl of Asian origin was found in a wadi in the Wilayat of Saham.

The field teams of the Royal Oman Police, Royal Army of Oman, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority dealt with a report of 23 people being stranded in Wadi Al Sail in the Wilayat of Mahout, and all of them are rescued.

The Royal Oman Police have responded to a number of reports in the past three days, which resulted in the rescue of more than 1,630 people and the evacuation of more than 630 people.

Police aviation carried out eight sorties over the past hours for more than 13 people, including rescuing people, transporting the injured, treating patients, and searching for missing persons.



The Royal Oman Police handled a slew of reports on rain-related incidents over the past three days. Nineteen people lost their lives in flash floods, while search is still ongoing for 4 missing people.

Majlis requests for discussion with Education Minister

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura held its 9th ordinary meeting of the first annual session under the chairmanship of Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, on Wednesday.

The Office reviewed a request for discussion submitted by Majlis members to the Minister of Education regarding the impact of the extreme weather condition on schools in Al Sharqiyah

North Governorate.

The Office referred the annual report for 2023 on the projects of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to the relevant committee after it was reviewed by the office.

The Office was briefed on a number of issues including the response on addressing the problem of traffic congestion in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. The response stated that the implementation of traffic consultation services for Muscat Governorate, aimed at providing sustainable solutions to traffic congestion, is currently under study.

— ONA

DEATH TOLL FROM RAINS CLIMBS TO

19

MUTTRAH SOUQ BEARS THE BRUNT AGAIN

23

PEOPLE STRANDED IN WADI RESCUED

MAHADHA GETS MAXIMUM RAIN IN

3 DAYS

BASIC SERVICES SUCH AS ENTRY TO ADAM CUT

ELECTRICITY OUTAGE IN SAHAM FOR

12 HOURS



Oman calls for unified efforts to combat human trafficking

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

The Sultanate of Oman has taken many measures to protect workers from exposure to exploitation or human trafficking, including issuing the new labour law issued via Royal Decree No 53/2023, which includes prohibition of forced labour and related practices.

This was stated by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs and Chairman of the

National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) during the 5th session of the Government Forum to Combat Human Trafficking in the Middle East.

The forum held in Muscat, aims at devising a cohesive strategy to address this issue.

Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Khalifa drew attention to the dire situation in the Gaza Strip and emphasised the atrocities of killings, starvation, and displacement inflicted by the Israeli occupation forces, highlighting the evident double

The new labour law issued by Royal Decree No 53/2023 comes with a set of rules that guarantee the rights of workers and protect them from being exposed to human trafficking

SHAIKH KHALIFA BIN ALI AL HARTHY
Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs

standards and inconsistency in principles and stances.

He said a team comprising various government entities was formed to enhance bilateral cooperation with countries exporting labour. This team visited 10 countries with the aim of signing memoranda of understanding in the fields of

labour and combating human trafficking.

Additionally, the Wage Protection System was launched, which is a joint electronic system between the Ministry of Labour and the Central Bank of Oman.

It aims to monitor wage disbursements in private sector establishments and track them to ensure compliance with transfer of salaries of workers to their accounts in approved local banks, as stipulated in Article (87) of the Labour Law.

The Sultanate of Oman also established a Joint Inspection Unit between the Ministry of Labour and the Public Authority for Security and Safety, aiming to enhance the quality and efficiency of inspection operations, increase effectiveness in performing related tasks, and support inspection operations with security assistance services. This initiative positively impacts the intensification of inspection campaigns on non-compliant establishments and unregulated labour, as well as simplifying procedures for workers.

TURN TO P4



THURSDAY | APRIL 18 | 2024

SHINAS FLOODS: HEAVY RAINS CAUSE WIDESPREAD DAMAGE, DISRUPTION

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

The Wilayat of Shinas experienced unprecedented heavy rainfall over the past two days, resulting in the overflowing of wadis and a significant rise in water levels. The wilayat recorded a record 206 mm of rainfall between April 14 and 17, leading to flooding in many areas.

Shinas residents faced significant challenges in getting around due to the heavy rains and flash floods that swept through the streets, submerging roads and cars. Social media was circulated by shocking videos of the raging floods engulfing homes and businesses.

DAMAGE TO INFRASTRUCTURE

The floods caused extensive damage to infrastructure and property. Numerous homes and businesses were flooded, and some roads and bridges were damaged. The floods also caused power outages in some areas.

Many Shinas residents expressed their fear and anxiety about the floods. They said they had not witnessed such a natural disaster in a long time.

“Shinas has not seen such heavy rains in a long time,” said Mohammed al Futaisi, a resident of Shinas. “The floods caused a lot of damage, submerging some properties and destroying some homes,” he added,

Yousef al Abri described the experience of the wilayat’s residents as one of the harshest trials. He pointed out that there is no comparison to this experience because it is a natural disaster.

Regarding the damage to his house, Al Abri said that the water level was very high in his house and they had not witnessed such weather conditions before. He added that the continuous rainfall caused cracks in the walls of the house from the inside and water seeped into the house.

For his part, Mohammed Saif said that they had not seen the wadis flowing at such a high level

in Shinas. The strong flow of the wadis caused the water to enter some houses. All citizens must be careful after the rain stops and not risk entering the wadis because sometimes the wadis come with dangerous snakes from the mountains.

CALL FOR ACTION

Mohammed al Futaisi urged the government to take swift action to mitigate the risks of recurring floods in the wilayat. He called for deepening the wadis, diverting their course, and paving them with stones, especially in densely populated residential areas, to avoid such damage in the future.

Ahmed Abdullah said that Shinas floods are not just a passing event, but a wake-up call to the climate change disaster that is weighing heavily on people’s daily lives. “The unprecedented water flow in the wadi paths witnessed by Shinas clearly indicates the increasing intensity of extreme weather events due to climate change,” he said.

He added, “We can no longer deal with these serious events in the same way we dealt with in previous crises. What was sufficient in the past is no longer sufficient today.

“The time has come to take radical steps at the urban planning level, including old residential plans that should be reviewed and revised to ensure they meet flood safety standards, including providing adequate space for wadis to drain water without obstruction.”

He said that adequate space should be allocated for wadis to drain water without encroachment or obstruction of their natural flow.

Meanwhile, government efforts continued their rescue operations in the wilayat to assist residents affected by the floods. Local authorities are also assessing the damage, repairing damaged infrastructure, and restoring electricity and communications in areas experiencing outages.



The floods caused extensive damage to infrastructure and property



Rains bring cheer to Al Sawaqim residents

TEXT AND PHOTO
BY YAHYA ALSALMANI

After a drought that lasted more than five years, residents of the village of Al Sawaqim in the Wilayat of Qurayat are glad that their wells and aflaj are filled with water. For more than two days, the water canals have been overflowing with pure water, which provides water to the agricultural oases located along Wadi Al Sumair. The amount of water of this wadi ends in Wadi Majlas which is one of the largest wadis in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

The village of Al Sawaqim is surrounded by mountains from the north and south sides, and its residents are famous for practicing agriculture. These farms produce dozens of local products, the most



After a drought that lasted more than five years, residents of the village of Al Sawaqim in the Wilayat of Qurayat are glad that their wells and aflaj are filled with water

important of which are dates, mangoes, lemons, and various types of vegetables.

“In agricultural production, we depend on groundwater and aflaj water. Therefore, today we feel very happy after the heavy rain.

We are certain that this year’s harvest season will be good,” an Omani resident told the Observer.

Most agricultural products are marketed in local markets. Among the most important of these markets is the Qurayat Central Market, which is about 20 km from the village of Al Sawaqim.

Some agricultural products are also marketed in Muttrah Souq, which is witnessing an increasing demand for local agricultural products.

The continuity of water flow in this area also feeds the areas

located to the east of this village, such as Al Hajir and Al Maseelah. These areas have depended on agricultural and pastoral production since ancient times.

Heavy rains in this region will also help natural resources flourish.

Dozens of perennial trees and plants grow on the banks of this valley. Many species of wildlife also live here, including Arabian ibex, deer, and resident and migratory birds.

This is in addition to other types of Omani reptiles and butterflies.

This wadi attracts dozens of tourists daily, as it provides an opportunity for recreation and exploration of the geological sites located on the mountain hills adjacent to the valley.

Muttrah Souq bears the brunt of rain

KABEER YOUSUF
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Hundreds of commercial outlets in the traditional Muttrah Souq remained closed on Wednesday as the gushing water in the aftermath of the Tuesday rains made passage into the paved souq near to impossible.

The rainwater that flowed from the parking side towards the sea kept everyone on pins swiping away the loose objects en route and continued till Wednesday late evening.

“I couldn’t enter the antique shop where I work and we stayed at the entrance points of the souq through the day expecting the strong water flow to weaken,” Mohammed Sadiq, one of the employees inside the souq, said.

Some of the vendors heaved sigh of relief as the torrential rains didn’t cause much damage, and they could save their stocks unscathed, thanks to the preventive measures against floods inside the souq.

“When flash floods and gushing water after the rains became a routine, the Muscat Municipality and other authorities made some changes to the souq, such as elevating the floor level and constructing better drainage systems because of which we are not affected badly,” Abdul Rahim al Lawati, who owns a shop inherited from his father, said.

“We had shifted most of our water-sensitive stocks to an elevated area and were standing guard in close vicinity of the souq



Some of the vendors heaved sigh of relief as the torrential rains didn’t cause much damage



and we are glad that the stocks were safe,” said Abdul Latheef, another merchant.

Muttrah traders inside the souq bore the brunt of the adverse rains in the past; the last such situation occurred in October 2021 when Shaheen wreaked havoc in the country followed by other similar incidents during the torrential rains.

This traditional souq, which

is the largest one in the Sultanate of Oman, is also the livelihood for more than 5,000 vendors, salesmen and craftsmen from across the world, along with citizens, and traditional tradesmen and residents around.

The loss suffered by the souq during the rains in the past was colossal and they thanked the authorities for adopting effective measures against the adverse weather in advance.

Mohammed Kunhi, who runs a traditional Omani herbs shop at the entrance of the souq, made it to his outlet since morning and he was one of the few who managed to open the shops. However, lack of customers made his efforts in vein and closed the shop by early evening.

“Some of us who have shops near to the pavement and entrance gates managed to open our shops but there was not even a single person out there as most of the customers remained indoors or didn’t visit the souq fearing rain and flash floods,” Mohammed said.

Muscat Municipality has warned vendors and others who worked inside the souq to stay cautious against electrical hazards as several lines seemed broken and remained in the ponds of water. However, having the power supply discontinued for some time helped save lives from electrical shock.

Meanwhile, cleaning personnel from Muscat Municipality were seen on the roads and wadis cleaning the debris as soon as the rains subsided on Wednesday morning.

MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT RECEIVES ‘DIVERTED’ FLIGHTS



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Muscat International Airport, managed by Oman Airports, received several flights diverted from neighbouring airports, including Dubai, which were affected by the extreme weather conditions as per the international protocols followed in emergencies.

Dubai International Airport temporarily diverted all inbound flights on Tuesday while departures were operated as scheduled, but it urged people not to come to the airport, unless necessary. Flights continue to be delayed and diverted,” the announcement said.

The airline suspended check-in passengers departing from Dubai until 8 pm on Wednesday. A flydubai spokesperson said that the severe weather conditions have resulted in significant disruption to the airline’s operations at Dubai International (DXB).

“Many flydubai flights have

been cancelled or experienced extensive delays.” Sharjah-based carrier Air Arabia’s flights too were cancelled or rescheduled, the airline confirmed in a statement.

“Affected passengers are being notified of their flight changes and passengers are requested to visit the Air Arabia website or contact dedicated call centre for the latest update on their flight status,” an airline spokesperson said.

The airline said it is working diligently to minimise the impact of the disruption caused by the weather conditions. “We reassure you that the safety and well-being of our passengers and crew remain our top priority,” the spokesperson added.

Heavy rains and flooding persisted throughout Tuesday across the UAE, leading to disruptions at all major airports in the country.

All inbound flights to Dubai International Airport have been diverted to ‘nearby airports’ until the inclement weather situation improves.

Flash floods cause extensive damage to infrastructure, property





Organisers of ‘SABIS Stars’ revealing the details of the talent festival

Choueifat International School to host ‘SABIS STARS’ on Friday

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

The main organising committee of the ‘SABIS Stars’ revealed the details of the forum organised by Choueifat Muscat School in cooperation with the Ministry of Education from April 19 to 20.

In a press conference, Hamad bin Faisal al Raisi from the main committee of the forum said: “We are happy to host the SABIS Stars Forum, which provides a platform for students to showcase their talents in various fields of arts and sciences, including advertising, public speaking, debate, poetry recitation, creative writing, photography, drawing and science exhibition, ‘Our World - Our Cause.”

He stressing that the event is an exceptional opportunity to enhance students’ creativity and innovation skills, and discover and support their talents. “This event also contributes to building bridges of communication between SABIS school students from different parts of the world, and inspires them to work together to build a better future,” he said.

Farah bint Abdullah al Raisiyah said this event will be attended by many students from different parts of the world, including China, Brazil, the United States, and other countries. She added that the event will be an opportunity to introduce students, teachers, and staff accompanying them from around the world to the Sultanate of Oman, through learning about its culture and people.

Fadi Kleep, Director of Regional Projects at SABIS Schools, indicated that the forum is expected to be attended by more than 500 students representing

36 SABIS schools from 17 countries, making it a unique display of academic capabilities, innovation, and student talents.

The competitions in the “SABIS Stars” event provide students with an opportunity to showcase their talents in various fields, where they will compete in designing the advertisement, where the participating team carries out a marketing campaign that includes the brand name, logo, short video, and billboard. The jury will evaluate the next day, and it also includes a poetry recitation competition in Arabic and English, a creative writing competition, a debate competition, a science and innovation exhibition, as well as a public speaking, visual arts and photography competition.

Armin Mansourian, Director of Choueifat School, said: “Preparations for the forum began last year through specialised committees and teams that planned and organised this major global event until the competitions were organised and according to everyone’s expectations, there are 48 experts from various government institutions, including universities and the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Dr Abdulmunim bin Mansour al Hassani, a member of the forum’s arbitration committees, said: “Schools are factories of creativity and sources of dreams. The forum is an event that we are proud of in the Sultanate of Oman for the great importance it acquires and for what it includes in scientific and creative fields. Universal participation is a real addition to achieving more creativity and an opportunity to get to know the civilisation, history, and culture of the Sultanate of Oman.”

Combating human trafficking high on agenda: Sayyid Badr

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday hosted the 5th session of the Government Forum to Combat Human Trafficking in the Middle East (2024).

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Bousaidy, Foreign Minister, received heads of committees tasked with combating human trafficking, representatives of GCC states, Jordan, Egypt, the GCC Secretariat-General and representatives of regional and international organisations taking part in the forum.

During the meeting, Sayyid Badr underscored



During the meeting, Sayyid Badr underscored the role of GCC-Arab committees entrusted with combating human trafficking. – ONA

the role of GCC-Arab committees entrusted with combating human trafficking through the measures that the panels undertake to spread public awareness, as well as their participation in regional and international events, the enactment of national

laws, the exchange of expertise and experiences and their endeavours to join ranks to address the phenomenon in a manner that guarantees public security.

Sayyid Badr stressed the need to strengthen coordination among those

committees and put to practice the findings of the studies that they conduct. He pointed out that the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking receives the full support of the government in Oman due to the committee’s effective contribution with other institutions of the country.

The meeting also dealt with prominent topics on the agenda of the forum which seeks to upgrade the level of performance of the committees concerned and realise the aspirations of the leaders and peoples of the region. — ONA

Oman calls for unified efforts

FROM PAGE 1

The new labour law issued by Royal Decree No 53/2023 comes with a set of rules that guarantee the rights of workers and protect them from being exposed to human trafficking. It is prohibited for the employer to impose any form of forced labour on the worker as per Article 5. The penalty for violating the provision of this article has been determined by imprisonment of up to one month and a fine of up to RO 2,000. It is impermissible to keep the worker’s passport and private documents without his or her written consent under Article 6. Not assigning the worker to work that differs from what was agreed upon in the contract except in specific cases and temporarily under the provisions of Article 53.

The law allows the worker to terminate the contract while guaranteeing all his rights and compensation if he is exposed to fraud during the contract, non payment of wage for more

than two consecutive months, or assaulting him, etc., according to Articles (11,12). The law also prohibits advertisement and promotion of employment, classifying the basis of creed, colour, or caste, and advertising them in a manner that humiliates their dignity under the provision of Article 32. It is prohibited to take any sums from the worker in return for his employment under Article 31, which is liable to a penalty of up to one month in prison and a fine of RO 5,000. Workers shall be exempted from judicial fee for all lawsuits filed by workers, or by their beneficiaries under Article 13. It is prohibited for the employer, under Article 29 to allow any non-Omani worker who has been licensed to employ them, and for whom a license to practice has been granted, to work for others, except after notifying the ministry electronically.

A worker may not be

employed for more than eight working hours per day under Article 70. The employer is not discharged from the worker’s wages unless he transfers wages to his account in a local bank or financial institution licensed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Representing the Kingdom of Jordan, Dr Ahmed Nori, Minister of Justice, said that our region has become vulnerable to cross-border illicit activities, with drug trafficking and human trafficking being among the most dangerous. This necessitates cooperation and coordination between our countries to combat these transnational crimes and pool efforts to close the gaps exploited by organised crime syndicates to carry out their activities.”

Dr Nori assured that in 2009, aiming to combat human trafficking in all its forms, prevent perpetrators from escaping punishment, and provide necessary protection and assistance

to victims, a specific law was issued — the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law No (9) of 2009, which defined the crimes of human trafficking.

Dr Nibras bin Mohammed, CEO of the Labour Market Authority, Kingdom of Bahrain, said that Bahrain’s position is firm on the crime of trafficking in persons in all its forms and manifestations. The constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain completed the legislative process by prohibiting forced labour in explicit terms, followed by Law No (1) of the year 2008 regarding combating trafficking in persons, noting that it was not the first, as it was preceded by other legislation represented in the provisions of the Penal Code issued by Decree Law No (15) of 1976 and its amendments, which criminalises some forms that intersect in some aspects with the crime of trafficking in persons, such as withholding wages and prostitution.

Oman marks World Heritage Day

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in celebration marking World Heritage Day, which falls on 18 April every year, under the slogan “Discover and Experience Diversity”.

This year, the event coincides with the launch of a programme of Sur as the Arab Tourism Capital 2024 — a programme that highlights the City of Sur’s historical monuments, archaeological sites and community culture in the Wilayat of Sur. Those features serve as authentic components of cultural tourism.

Commenting on the event, Eng Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, said, “The World Heritage Day is an opportunity to spotlight our



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism accords attention to the documentation and restoration of historical and archaeological sites. – ONA

ancient cultural heritage that reflects our historical identity. Through this celebration, the Sultanate of Oman enhances global understanding of the diversity of heritage and encourages cultural interaction among various communities. The event also seeks to encourage research and discoveries in the field of cultural heritage and establishing a community partnership system capable of consolidating identity and

citizenship”.

Al Kharousi pointed out that the Ministry prepared a programme to celebrate this occasion at the City Walk Centre in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The programme includes an exhibition and an educational workshop on the basics of archaeological excavation.

Targeting children, the workshop showcases a practical experience on the excavation of heritage sites and

the use of decoupage (use of paper decoration) and plastic to highlight ancient Omani symbols on souvenir items. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism accords attention to the documentation and restoration of historical and archaeological sites, in addition to highlighting global significance of the sites through projects that contribute to the growth of the local economy within context of Oman Vision 2040.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism registered approximately 36,000 archaeological sites. Out of a total of 3,525 historical monuments, the Ministry restored 366 in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman until 2023, as part of a programme to protect the country’s monuments against extinction and keep them witness to Omani civilisation throughout the ages. — ONA

Recall

Cadillac CT4

Cadillac CT5

Recall Date: 18/04/2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Cadillac CT4	2021	1
Cadillac CT5	2021	10

Recall consequence

General Motors has decided to conduct an Emission Recall involving certain 2021 Cadillac CT4 and CT5 vehicles with a 2.0L engine. The Engine Control Module (ECM) may not properly diagnose, may not set Diagnostic Trouble Codes (DTCs) or may not illuminate the Malfunction Indicator Light (Check Engine Light) if certain fault conditions of the catalytic converter were to occur.

Recall Action

Dealers will update the software in the vehicles' Engine Control Module (ECM) to correct the condition.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pcap.gov.om>

هيئة حماية المستهلك
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pcap.gov.om
80079009
80077997

Oman Trading Establishment LLC
Contact details OTE - Toll free number 80050002 on all working days, 08:00am to 01:00pm and 2:00pm to 05:00pm



MTC SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH UK UNIVERSITY



The signing ceremony took place during the visit of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, to the UK. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Defence has signed a renewal addendum to the academic connection agreement between the Military Technological College (MTC) and the University of Portsmouth, as part of the two institutions' existing cooperation.

The signing ceremony took place during the visit of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al

Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, to the United Kingdom where he held meetings with officials of the UK Ministry of Defence.

The Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence was accompanied by a military delegation comprising senior officers from the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). — ONA

‘be’ah’ receives over 31,000 tonnes of waste during Eid Al Fitr



The quantities of municipal solid waste and slaughter waste received at the company's landfills from April 9 to 13 exceeded 31,000 tonnes.

— ONA

MUSCAT: Throughout the celebration of Eid Al Fitr in 2024, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company's 'be'ah' engineered landfills saw an influx of over 31,000 tonnes of municipal and slaughter waste, marking a 13 per cent rise from the usual intake. To tackle this substantial rise, proactive measures were implemented, including the deployment of extra skips, machinery and personnel.

Mohsin bin Mohammed al Barwani, GM of MSW Planning & Service Optimization at be'ah, affirmed that the company set an

extensive strategy in partnership with service providers across all governorates.

This strategy is designed to address the anticipated surge in waste volumes during the Eid festivities. The approach includes the strategic placement of sizable skips designated for slaughter waste, calibrated to the demographic scale and accessibility of various communities.

Moreover, it involved augmenting the regularity of skip clearance and waste collection, as well as bolstering on-site supervision to maintain service

excellence during the Eid holidays.

Al Barwani added, "The quantities of municipal solid waste and slaughter waste received at the company's landfills during the period from 9 to 13 April exceeded 31,000 tonnes, representing an increase of 13 per cent compared to the quantities of waste received during normal days.

Slaughter waste contributed significantly to the increase in the quantities of waste received, in addition to a significant increase in a few other types municipal solid waste quantities." Al Barwani further pointed out, "The highest

increase of waste received this Eid was in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Buraimi with an increase of 93 per cent in these governorates."

He further explained, "A positive change has been observed in the community's overall awareness in dealing with slaughter waste and disposing of it in designated areas, as a result of the efforts made by be'ah through its awareness campaigns before and during the Eid, focusing on the correct behaviour in dealing with slaughter waste and preserving the environment."

— ONA

DEADLINE TO REGISTER FOR HACKATHON ENDS TODAY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

April 18 is the last day to register for Imdad Hackathon for Food Safety and Quality, which is implemented by the Food Safety and Quality Center, aiming at embarking on the creative journey to bring change.

Participants will meet mentors and experts and have the opportunity to select and improve technical and innovative ideas and present to a jury, which includes specialists in the field of food safety and quality.

Through interaction and dealing with experts and mentors, participants will have the opportunity to obtain specialised guidance, valuable consultations to develop ideas and turn them into successful projects.

Unsafe food practices cause serious health problems, including infections and diseases transmitted through contaminated food.

By joining the Emdad Hackathon, participants will



help find solutions through cooperation, innovation, and programming of solutions, challenges, and problems in the field of safety and food quality.

The participation aims to improve food tracking systems to raise the level of transparency, in addition to discovering the future of food safety through artificial intelligence, to develop food logistics to provide safe products to the consumer.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is keen to create an appropriate environment to develop and enhance the food safety and quality system in the Sultanate of Oman as a national duty and a basic pillar.

CBFS & ISACA renew MoU to enhance professional education

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) existing between the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) and the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA) has been renewed for a period of 3 years from April 2024, aiming at enhancing the ongoing Continuing Professional Education (CPE events).

The renewed MoU was signed by Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean, CBFS and Maari Ponniah, President, ISACA Muscat Chapter in the presence of Dr Yousuf al Mabsali, Asst Dean-Academic Affairs, CBFS and the office bearers of the ISACA Chapter recently.

The College has been sponsoring ISACA Muscat Chapter since 2000 and supporting its knowledge building programmes for its members drawn from across all sectors in Oman and other invitees from CBFS and its sponsor banks aiming at disseminating updated information and acclimatising



The renewed MoU was signed by Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean, CBFS and Maari Ponniah, President, ISACA Muscat Chapter

the members of the changes happening in the sector across the world. The College has also partnered with ISACA for organising training courses and seminars for the banking and financial sector in Oman. The Chapter has also held preparatory classes for various certifications of ISACA and thereby contributed to local capacity building across all sectors in its area of specialisation.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr

Zahran al Salti, Dean, said that the renewed MoU with ISACA adds further significant value to audit, IT and IS professionals by providing them a real-time insight into prevalent practices in information systems security and audit.

"This is a key element in a series of measures that reflect the consistent commitment of the college to local capacity building," he added.

A government organisation established by a Royal Decree in

1983, CBFS is under the juristic supervision of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and is also supported by all commercial banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

The college has over 1500 students attending various academic and professional programmes. The College also offers about 150 training courses annually, both under its Annual Training Plan and customised courses, which are attended by about 2500 participants.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialized companies to participate in the below said Tenders

EOI Number	EOI Name	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2024/ M/001	Installation of HV CT VT Operated Meters at 11KV and 33KV Feeders	28 th April 2024	27 th May 2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/ M/002	Unit Rate Contract for the Network Extension Projects in Dhofar Governorate-2024	28 th April 2024	27 th May 2024	—

- To purchase the tender document, send Email to purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om
- Contractors shall be submitted the price proposal in separate cover and technical proposal in separate cover with heading "COMMERCIAL OFFER & TECHNICAL OFFER".
- The proposal document should be deposited in the tender box located at our main office.
- In the event of receipt of the EOI document on behalf of another company, the interested in the above EOI document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- The Contractor shall be registered with NDS, meeting HSE qualification criteria.
- Valid "CEP Authorized card copy issued by NDS" Shall only consider for assessment.
- The Contractor shall be registered electrical contractor with Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) Oman (D-Grade or above), a valid "DCRP Registration Certificate" are to be attached along with the technical documents.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232563
email: riyamm@dhofarservices.nama.om
nasrings@dhofarservices.nama.om



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Security Council to vote today on Palestine’s full UN membership



The Palestinian push for UN membership faces a major hurdle, as the US, Israel’s closest ally, could use its veto power to block the recommendation.

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council will vote on Thursday on the Palestinians’ application to become a full UN member state, several diplomatic sources have said.

Amid Israel’s military offensive in Gaza, the Palestinians in early April revived a membership application first made to the world body in 2011, though the veto-wielding United States has repeatedly expressed opposition to

the proposal.

The General Assembly can admit a new member state with a two-thirds majority vote, but only after the Security Council gives its recommendation.

Regional bloc the Arab Group issued a statement on Tuesday affirming its “unwavering support” for the Palestinians’ application.

“Membership in the United Nations is a crucial step in the right direction towards a just and

lasting resolution of the Palestinian question in line with international law and relevant UN resolutions,” the statement said.

The vote on Thursday will coincide with a Security Council meeting scheduled several weeks ago to discuss the situation in Gaza, which ministers from several Arab countries are expected to attend.

The Palestinians — who have had observer status at the United Nations since 2012 — have lobbied

for years to gain full membership.

According to the Palestinian side, 137 of the 193 UN member states already recognise a Palestinian state, raising hope that their request would be supported in the General Assembly.

But the Palestinian push for UN membership faces a major hurdle, as the United States — Israel’s closest ally — could use its veto power to block the Security Council recommendation.

— AFP

UN SEEKS \$2.8 BN FOR PALESTINE AID

GENEVA: The United Nations appealed on Wednesday for \$2.8 billion in funding to assist more than three million people in Gaza and the West Bank until the end of the year, to help ease food shortages and prevent looming famine in Gaza.

A flash appeal published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that the sum was needed to help 3.1 million people and “reduce human suffering and prevent further loss of life.”

A major chunk of funding — \$782.1 million — will be destined for food aid for 2.2 million people in Gaza and 400,000 people in the West Bank, the appeal said.

More than six months of war have created critical food shortages among Gaza’s Palestinians that in some areas now exceed famine levels, according to the United Nations.

A senior UN aid official said on Tuesday that the United Nations was struggling to prevent famine in the Gaza Strip and while there had been some improvement in coordination with Israel, aid deliveries in the enclave still faced obstacles.

Gaza health authorities say Israel has killed more than 33,000 people since, in its assault on the enclave. Israeli tanks pushed back into parts of the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday which they had left weeks ago, while warplanes conducted air strikes on Rafah, the Palestinians’ last refuge in the south of the territory, killing and wounding several people, medics and residents said.

Residents reported an Internet outage in the areas of Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in northern Gaza. Tanks advanced into Beit Hanoun and surrounded some schools where displaced families



A Palestinian boy enters a building destroyed by Israeli bombardment the previous night in Rafah, the southern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. – AFP

More than six months of war have created critical food shortages among Gaza’s Palestinians that in some areas now exceed famine levels, according to the United Nations

have taken refuge, said the residents and media outlets of Hamas.

“Occupation soldiers ordered all families inside the schools and the nearby houses where the tanks had advanced to evacuate. The soldiers detained many men,” one resident of northern Gaza said.

Beit Hanoun, home to 60,000 people, was one of the first areas targeted by Israel’s ground offensive in Gaza last October.

Heavy bombardment turned most of Beit Hanoun, once known as ‘the basket of fruit’ because of its orchards, into a ghost town comprising piles of rubble.

Many families who had returned to Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in recent weeks after Israeli forces withdrew began moving out again on Tuesday because of the new raid, some residents said. Palestinian health officials said an Israeli

strike had killed four people and wounded several others in Rafah, where over half of Gaza’s 2.3 million people are sheltering and bracing for a planned Israeli ground offensive into the city, which borders Egypt. Just before midnight, an Israeli air strike hit a house in Rafah and killed seven people, including children, and wounded several others, Palestinian health officials said. There was no immediate Israeli comment. — Agencies

Qatar says Gaza truce talks stalling

Doha: Negotiations between Israel and Hamas to secure a truce in Gaza and a release of hostages have stalled, Qatar’s prime minister said on Wednesday.

“We are going through a sensitive stage with some stalling, and we are trying as much as possible to address this stalling,” Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani told a news conference with Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu.

Qatar, with the United States and Egypt, has been engaged in weeks of behind-the-scenes talks to secure a truce in Gaza and the release of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Negotiators are trying to “move forward and put an end to the suffering that the people in Gaza are experiencing and returning the hostages”, Shaikh Mohammed said.

The mediators had hoped to secure a ceasefire before the start of Ramadhan, but progress repeatedly faltered without any cessation of hostilities in the Muslim holy month which ended last week. Instead, fears have grown of the months-long war in Gaza spilling over into a regional conflict after Iran’s first-ever direct attack on its arch-foe Israel this weekend.

The Qatari premier said Doha had “warned from the beginning of this war against the expansion of the circle of conflict, and today we see conflicts on different fronts”.

“We constantly call on the international community to assume its responsibilities and stop this war,” he added, saying people of Gaza faced “siege and starvation” with humanitarian aid being used as a “tool for political blackmail”. — AFP

5,000 lives destroyed by one Israeli shell on fertility clinic

GAZA: When an Israeli shell struck Gaza’s largest fertility clinic in December, the explosion blasted the lids off five liquid nitrogen tanks stored in a corner of the embryology unit.

As the ultra-cold liquid evaporated, the temperature inside the tanks rose, destroying more than 4,000 embryos plus 1,000 more specimens of sperm and unfertilised eggs stored at Gaza City’s Al Basma IVF centre.

The impact of that single explosion was far-reaching — an example of the unseen toll Israel’s six-and-a-half-month-old assault has had on the 2.3 million people of Gaza.

The embryos in those tanks were the last hope for hundreds of Palestinian couples facing

infertility.

“We know deeply what these 5,000 lives, or potential lives, meant for the parents, either for the future or for the past,” said Bahaeldeen Ghalayini, 73, the Cambridge-trained obstetrician and gynaecologist who established the clinic in 1997.

At least half of the couples — those who can no longer produce sperm or eggs to make viable embryos — will not have another chance to get pregnant, he said.

“My heart is divided into a million pieces,” he said.

Three years of fertility treatment was a psychological roller coaster for Seba Jaafarawi. The retrieval of eggs from her ovaries was painful, the hormone injections had strong side-effects and the sadness when



Nitrogen tanks, where embryos were stored, lie at Al Basma IVF Centre, Gaza’s largest fertility clinic which was struck by an Israeli shell. – Reuters

two attempted pregnancies failed seemed unbearable.

Jaafarawi, 32, and her husband could not get pregnant naturally and turned to in vitro fertilisation (IVF), which is widely available in

Gaza.

Large families are common in the enclave, where nearly half the population is under 18 and the fertility rate is high at 3.38 births per woman, according to the

Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. Britain’s fertility rate is 1.63 births per woman.

Despite Gaza’s poverty, couples facing infertility pursue IVF, some selling TVs and jewellery to pay the fees, Ghalayini said.

In September, Jaafarawi became pregnant, her first successful IVF attempt.

Two days before her first scheduled ultrasound scan, Hamas launched the October 7 attack on Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 253 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

“I got very scared and there were signs that I would lose (the pregnancy),” she said.

Jaafarawi bled a little bit after she and her husband left home and moved south to Khan Younis.

The bleeding subsided, but her fear did not.

They crossed into Egypt on November 12 and in Cairo, her first ultrasound showed she was pregnant with twins and they were alive.

But after a few days, she experienced painful cramps, bleeding and a sudden shift in her belly. She made it to hospital, but the miscarriage had already begun.

Ghalayini said a single Israeli shell struck the corner of the centre, blowing up the ground floor embryology lab. He does not know if the attack specifically targeted the lab or not.

“All these lives were killed or taken away: 5,000 lives in one shell,” he said.

— Reuters



In brief

ROME



ITALY OFFERS TUNISIA \$111.7 MILLION TO BOOST ECONOMY

Italy will help Tunisia with 105 million euros (\$111.7 million) in state cash and credit lines, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's office said on Wednesday, part of Rome's efforts to boost economic ties with African countries and curb irregular immigration to Europe.

"Energy is one of the matters on which the collaboration between Italy and Tunisia must continue to strengthen," Meloni said following a meeting with Tunisian President Kais Saied.

As part of several agreements, Rome offered Tunis 50 million euros in state cash to help it promote energy efficiency and renewables projects, an official from Meloni's office said.

PARIS



BIOPIIC SERIES OF FRENCH FIRST LADY IN THE WORKS

Brigitte Macron's "fairytale journey" from schoolteacher to first lady is to be recounted in a French TV series, the producers said on Tuesday.

"Gaumont is developing a series titled 'Brigitte, A Free Woman' in six episodes of 45 minutes," they said.

Brigitte Macron, 71, was a French and drama teacher until 2015. She used to work at a school in Amiens, northern France, where she famously met Emmanuel Macron when he was still a pupil 24 years her junior. She has kept a low profile since her husband was first elected in 2017, but has made fighting school- and cyber-bullying one of her personal causes.

LONDON



RUSSIAN DISSIDENT FACES BRUTAL PRISON TRANSFER

Russian dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza faces a long and arduous transfer from a Siberian penal colony to a Moscow court to appeal against his 25-year sentence on treason and other charges, his lawyer said on Wednesday.

Maria Eismont said that the conditions of the transfer would amount to torture for Kara-Murza, 42, who suffers from a serious nerve condition. Convicts are normally moved across Russia's vast distances in a series of railway journeys with stops at prisons en route. Transferring Kara-Murza from Omsk to Moscow was likely to take at least three weeks.

Rains claim scores of lives across world

Burundi floods displace 100,000

70 killed as Afghanistan hit by heavy rains

Lightning, downpours kill 65 in Pakistan

Dubai reels from floods after rains

117,000 people evacuated in Kazakhstan



People ride a boat across a flooded area in Nowshera district, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan on Monday. — AFP

NAIROBI, KABUL, PESHAWAR & DUBAI: Rains wrecked havoc and claimed many live in Burundi, UAE, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

The government of Burundi and the United Nations have launched an appeal for financial aid to cope with the "devastating effects" of months of relentless rainfall that has displaced nearly 100,000 people.

East Africa has been experiencing torrential rains in recent weeks that have cost the lives of at least 58 people in Tanzania in the first half of April, and 13 people in Kenya.

Burundi, which the UN says is one of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change, has

been pelted by almost non-stop rain since September, with its main city of Bujumbura ravaged by floods.

AFGHANISTAN & PAKISTAN Around 70 people have been killed by heavy rains lashing Afghanistan over the past five days, the government's disaster management department said on Wednesday.

Afghanistan was parched by an unusually dry winter which desiccated the earth, exacerbating flash-flooding caused by spring downpours in most provinces.

Disaster management spokesman Janan Sayeq said "approximately 70 people lost their lives" as a result of rains between Saturday and Wednesday.

Fifty-six others have been injured, he said, while more than 2,600 houses have been damaged or destroyed and 95,000 acres of farmland wiped away.

Giving a smaller death toll last week, Sayeq said most fatalities at that point had been caused by roof collapses resulting from the deluges.

Neighbouring Pakistan has also been hammered by spring downpours, with 65 people killed in storm-related incidents as rain falls at nearly twice the historical average rate.

DUBAI

Dubai's giant highways were clogged by flooding and airport passengers were urged to stay away on Wednesday as the glitzy



Cars are stuck on a flooded road in Dubai on Wednesday. — Reuters



People try to avoid getting wet as they cross a flooded street following heavy rains in Sharjah on Wednesday. — AFP



Road workers and rescue crew close a section of Al-Fateh Highway in Bahrain's capital Manama after rainwater flooded it on Tuesday. — AFP

financial centre reeled from record rains.

Huge tailbacks snaked along six-lane expressways after up to 254 millimetres of rain — about two years' worth — fell on the desert United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. At least one person was killed after a 70-year-old man was swept away in his car in Ras Al Khaimah, one of the country's seven emirates, police said.

Passengers were warned not to come to Dubai airport, the world's busiest by international traffic, "unless absolutely necessary", an official said.

"Flights continue to be delayed and diverted... We are working hard to recover operations as quickly as possible in very challenging conditions," a Dubai

Airports spokesperson said.

Climatologist Friederike Otto, a specialist in assessing the role of climate change on extreme weather events, said it was "high likely" that global warming had worsened the storms.

Official media said it was the highest rainfall since records began in 1949, before the formation of the UAE in 1971.

KAZAKHSTAN

Almost 117,000 people have been evacuated due to floods in Kazakhstan, the Central Asian nation's emergencies ministry said on Wednesday. About 16,000 people have already returned to their homes, the ministry said in a statement, as water has receded in some regions. — Agencies

Ethiopia's Harari celebrate centuries-old festival

HARAR: Chanting and clapping as they dance to the haunting rhythm of drums, the inhabitants of Harar, a fortified Ethiopian city seemingly frozen in time, celebrate the festival of Shuwalid, keeping centuries-old traditions alive.

Shuwalid — which means the "feast of Shuwal", the month which follows Ramadhan in the Muslim calendar — marks the end of six additional days of fasting observed by some Muslims at the end of the holy month.

On Tuesday evening, men, women and children poured into the two public squares at the centre of the festivities, eager to celebrate Shuwalid for the



Young women dressed in traditional attires chant and dance during the celebration for the Shuwalid festival in Harar on Tuesday. — AFP

first time since it was added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list late last

year.

Shuwalid enables "community elders to share their knowledge

and experiences and to give blessings to the next generations" and ensures "the transmission of performing arts, oral traditions, traditional dress and other cultural elements", according to Unesco.

As the festivities got under way in the walled city, devotees dressed in white joyfully chanted from the Holy Quran, high on religious fervour and on khat, a mildly narcotic shrub consumed in the Horn of Africa.

Buoyed by khat, the celebrations continued into the early hours.

The Harari claim to be Sufis, followers of a mystical movement in Islam. Their religious practices include repeating, singing and

dancing to phrases from the Holy Quran.

"Shuwalid is our tradition," said Aicha Abdurahman, a 19-year-old teacher, whose hands were decorated with henna.

"This year is special. It's the first Shuwalid since it was listed by Unesco," she said. "We are really happy and very proud."

The women attract attention with their colourful embroidered tunics and veils, their foreheads adorned with jewellery.

Young people in particular take special care of their appearance in line with traditional beliefs that Shuwalid offers the ideal opportunity to meet a future life partner. — Reuters

Declutter for a more harmonious life



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

In today's fast-paced world, clutter seems to accumulate effortlessly. From physical possessions to mental baggage, clutter can certainly weigh us down.

By embracing the practice of decluttering, we can create space for creativity, productivity and mental clarity, allowing us to reclaim a sense of balance and harmony.

Begin by evaluating your physical surroundings. Look at your living space, workspace and other areas where clutter tends to accumulate. Identify items that serve no practical purpose or hold no sentimental value. Start small by decluttering one area at a time, whether a drawer, closet or room.

Once you have assessed your environment, proceed with reorganising your possessions. Adopt a minimalist mindset and prioritise quality over quantity. Keep only the items that add value to your life and let go of the rest. Donate or recycle items that are in good condition, but no longer serve you.

Consider implementing storage solutions to organise belongings efficiently in order to prevent future clutter build-up. The goal is not to eliminate everything, but to create space for the things that

truly matter.

In addition to physical clutter, mental clutter can also impede our ability to focus and thrive. Take time to declutter your mind through mindfulness practices such as meditation, journalling or simply taking a walk in nature.

Set aside a designated time each day to quieten your thoughts and reflect on what is significant to you. Identify any negative thought patterns or distractions that are holding you back and work towards letting them go.

Cultivate a mindset of gratitude and positivity, focusing on the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

Decluttering your life is about simplifying your surroundings while establishing healthy habits that support your well-being. Incorporate regular exercise, nutritious eating, adequate sleep and meaningful social connections into your daily routine to enhance your physical, mental and emotional health.

Practice time management techniques to prioritise tasks and to avoid procrastination. Set boundaries to protect your time and energy all the

THE GOAL IS NOT TO ELIMINATE EVERYTHING, BUT TO CREATE SPACE FOR THE THINGS THAT TRULY MATTER.

while saying “no” to commitments that don't align with your values or goals.

By cultivating a lifestyle that nourishes your body, mind and spirit, you will create a solid foundation for a clutter-free life.

Decluttering has proven to reduce stress, increase productivity, enhance mental clarity, improve our overall mood and boost creativity, whilst enriching our sleep, increasing our energy levels and providing financial benefits.

Remember that decluttering is not a one-time event, but an ongoing journey. Stay committed to maintaining a clutter-free environment by periodically reassessing your surroundings and making adjustments as needed.

Celebrate your progress along the way, no matter how small and be gentle with yourself during setbacks. By embracing the journey of decluttering, you will continue to experience the transformative power of simplicity and create space for a life filled with joy, purpose and fulfilment.

So why wait? Start decluttering today and embark on your voyage towards a happier, more balanced existence.

French far right gets youthful vibe with Bardella

TONI CERDA

France's far-right National Rally is banking on its youthful and charismatic party leader to be a major asset as it scents massive gains in upcoming European elections.

Jordan Bardella, 28, took over in 2021 as party leader from Marine Le Pen who has been trying to rid the party of the racist and anti-Semitic imprint left by her father and party founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

She is still widely expected to be the party's candidate in the 2027 presidential elections, her fourth bid for the Elysee, which is widely seen as her best chance to become head of state.

But since taking over as National Rally (RN) party leader, Bardella has become an increasingly visible presence in French politics and forming an effective tandem with Le Pen who leads its MPs in parliament.

A recent election rally in the southwestern coastal city of Royan highlighted the appeal of Bardella, a major presence on the TikTok platform, with adoring fans queuing for selfies.

“I got it, I got it,” shouted a happy young voter, holding up his smartphone, after getting his idol to pose with him for a snapshot.

Bardella has not revolutionised the party's belief system, experts point out. It still stands against what it says is unacceptable mass immigration, a purported decline of civilisation in France, and “a punitive ecology” that hurts farmers.

But as he presented the party's programme for the June EU parliamentary vote, his Royan audience seemed grateful for the freshness he brings.

“He represents youth,” said Agnes, in her 60s, withholding her last name. “I never voted for any Le Pen. But there's been a renewal, and that's a very good thing,” she said.

“One advantage that Jordan Bardella has over Marine Le Pen is that his name is not Le Pen,” agreed Mathieu Gallard, a political scientist at the Ipsos market research and consulting firm.

Le Pen has laid much of the groundwork for Bardella's success. She was runner-up in two presidential elections, losing to Emmanuel Macron on both occasions, and won the highest number of seats ever for her party in parliamentary elections in 2022.

Opinion polls ahead of the June 9 European elections — seen in France as a key test for the government — have pointed to a severe drubbing for Macron.

An Ifop-Fiducial poll this week found that 32.5 per cent of voters intend to cast their ballot for the Bardella-led National Rally list, and only 18 per cent for Macron's allies.

— AFP

The bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man



Karim Easterbrook

The author is former School Principal Cambridge UK

The quote which serves as the title to this article has been attributed to a member of a Zionist fact finding mission who visited Palestine during the 1890s when Theodor Herzl and the Zionists were searching for a land to occupy and become a Zionist State.

Herzl also looked at other destinations in the north and south of America and in Azerbaijan. However with Herzl's death in 1904, and the rise of his successors, Zionism homed in on Palestine and the Zionists, though wishing to establish a secular State, saw the Bible as an even greater asset than before as proof of a divine Jewish right to the land of Palestine.

In the annals of history, the tale of Palestine is not one of emptiness awaiting cultivation and colonisation but a rich tapestry of diverse cultures and traditions on the cusp of modernisation. Before the rise of Zionism, Palestine was a land inhabited by a thriving population, with Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisting peacefully within its borders. The vast majority being Muslim Arabs. There is a false assumption, often propagated in some Zionist western media, that Palestine was nothing more than an empty desert with no national identity when the first Zionists began to occupy it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Records from the Ottoman era before Zionism was established in 1897 reveal a populace numbering in the hundreds of thousands, with Muslims forming the majority, followed by Christians and Jews.

These communities lived in villages and cities, each with its own distinct identity and way of life. The land was far from barren; it was a fertile region poised for progress and development.

The emergence of Zionism in the late 19th century transformed Palestine's trajectory. What began as a Christian project of colonisation evolved into a Zionist endeavour, fuelled by a convergence of ideologies — Zionism, Protestant millenarianism, and British imperialism. Under British



People move a car next to buildings destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Khan Yunis, on the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

YET, THIS NARRATIVE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE OBSCURED THE SUFFERING INFLICTED UPON THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. DISPOSSESSED OF THEIR LAND AND LIVELIHOODS, THEY BORE THE BRUNT OF COLONIAL AMBITIONS AND GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS.

auspices, the infrastructure for a Zionist state took shape, protected by military might and political alliances.

The British campaign against the Ottoman Turks in World War I marked a pivotal moment in Palestine's history. The subsequent British military occupation ushered in an era of upheaval and oppression, as Zionist aspirations clashed with the indigenous Palestinians' rights and sovereignty.

Central to the Zionist narrative was the biblical claim to the land of Palestine, a narrative that served political ends rather than religious conviction. Theodor Herzl, the movement's atheist founder, envisioned alternatives to Palestine, yet the allure of biblical legitimacy to both Christian Zionists and Jews proved too powerful to resist. With Herzl's successors, the focus on Palestine intensified, intertwining the Zionist project with divine providence.

However, this vision of divine sanction masked a darker reality — the displacement and dispossession

of the Palestinian people. Zionism's push for Jewish settlement in Palestine served not only as a means of fulfilling religious prophecy but also as a solution to Europe's “Jewish question.” European anti-Jewish sentiment culminated in the Nazi Holocaust and without this it is unlikely that Israel would have attracted sufficient numbers of Jews to establish itself in Palestine. The expulsion of Jews from Europe and their resettlement in Palestine served dual purposes – alleviating Europe of its Jewish population while fulfilling a biblical prophecy of the Jews' return to the promised land. Yet, this narrative of divine providence obscured the suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian people. Disposessed of their land and livelihoods, they bore the brunt of colonial ambitions and geopolitical interests.

In conclusion, the history of Palestine is a testament to the intertwining of religion, politics and power. The Zionist project, borne out of colonial aspirations and religious fervour, reshaped the fate of a nation and its Palestinian people.

As we reckon with the legacy of Zionism and the current genocide taking place in Palestine, it is essential to confront the myths and narratives that justify Zionist oppression and injustice, and strive for a future Palestine grounded in justice, equality, and peace for people of all races and religions.

Citizen journalism and the outpouring of emotions

The recent images circulating on social media platforms of cars and people being swept away or rescued as a result of torrential rains are proof of our changing times.

With photos and an outpouring of emotions being spread like fire, there is no time for blame games or shallow excuses. Mainstream media narratives tailored to fit purposes become sources of rage, dissatisfaction, or sarcasm.

Those setting the media narrative and rhetoric could well look into the history of online reporting. When Abraham Lincoln, the then president of the United States, was assassinated in 1865, many Americans didn't learn of it for weeks.

In contrast, most Americans learned of the 1945 death of Franklin D Roosevelt within hours of the event, though details may have been sketchy.

Radio had stitched together a nationwide audience that could be informed of any news quickly and efficiently, making the best use of technology at the time.

By 1963, when John F Kennedy was assassinated, millions of Americans had learned about the shooting before Kennedy was even declared dead.

Television spread the breaking news instantly, though satellite technology was not advanced enough to allow for immediate live coverage from Dallas, the location of the shooting. Despite limitations, television helped turn Kennedy's death and its aftermath into an all-encompassing four-day event.

By the time Princess Diana died in a car accident in 1997, news technology had advanced to a new level. On both television and the Internet, the world saw live video of the crash scene and received minute-by-minute updates on Diana's condition for hours before her death was announced.

On September 11, 2001, when a hijacked commercial airline crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Americans learned about it within minutes. Television and radio stations ran live coverage. Internet outlets updated their information regularly, and many newspapers produced extra editions based on



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JOURNALISTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY MUST NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF MODERN SOCIETY AND HOWEVER, THEY ALSO HAVE UNPRECEDENTED RESOURCES FOR BETTER REPORTING

pictures and accounts from ordinary citizens. People started uploading their videos and photos online, competing with news organisations that were pushed not only to update, but also to give context and explanations.

These historical facts show that the concept of news timeliness has been fundamentally redefined. In the twentieth century, reporters' toolkits expanded beyond pen, paper, and typewriters.

As smartphones and network connections got faster and news editors realised the potential of online journalism, news sites started to evolve. Citizens turning into reporters had an impact because news organisations had to take into account that a new way of journalism was on the cards – and still is.

Though technology has enabled reporters and news organisations to transmit information not only instantly, but also thoroughly, I have noticed that during severe weather, citizens and civil defence teams are outperforming news organisations by posting videos and photographs on social media platforms, with each side using different rhetoric. The problem is that it is all scattered around the Internet.

Journalists in the twenty-first century must navigate the complexities of modern society; however, they also have unprecedented resources for better reporting. Tools for gathering news have evolved from observation and interviews to include government records, archives and databases. However, when natural disasters strike, what is most visible are officials justifying shortcomings.

As technology has advanced, expectations have risen. People are better educated and aware of missteps in governance. And the media plays an important role! It is no longer sufficient to jot down notes and write a text. One of the issues is when official information is released later than needed or is worded in ways that are unclear to people. The avoidable consequences of natural disasters need to be tackled in ways that there are no blame games, and that is when skilled journalism practice can create a healthy media landscape for the benefit of citizens.

VOTE FOR THE NATION!



■ An art school student, dressed as an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), walks along a street to encourage people to vote in India's upcoming general elections, in Mumbai, on Wednesday. – AFP

Development-project implementation gap

This week's World Bank spring meetings will kick-start the replenishment of the International Development Association — the largest source of development finance for the world's poorest people. The event cannot come soon enough. With extreme poverty, climate change, and a worsening debt crisis jeopardising progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), IDA is more important than ever.

For many recipient countries, IDA often represents the only reliable, sustainable source of development finance. For donors, it offers good value for money: for every dollar mobilised through IDA, recipient countries receive around \$4 to support their development. But as governments seek an ambitious replenishment of IDA's resources this year, we must maximise the impact of IDA dollars already in circulation. With up to two-thirds of those living in extreme poverty expected to reside in fragile and conflict-affected countries by 2030, successful implementation of IDA-supported development projects in challenging contexts is vital. But, as new research by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) shows, disbursing IDA funds to projects that positively affect people's lives must overcome



Jorge Moreira da Silva

The writer is Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services

THIS WEEK'S WORLD BANK SPRING MEETINGS OFFER A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION'S CRITICAL ROLE AS A SOURCE OF HOPE FOR THOSE MOST IN NEED

major barriers. During one recent IDA cycle, around 50 per cent of its financing commitments in conflict-affected least-developed countries were not disbursed. The IRC's research highlights limited institutional capacity, especially in conflict-affected countries.

Such gaps can be explained largely by the World Bank's low risk threshold and an operating model that works primarily with and through national governments. This model can lead to project delays and suspensions, especially in conflict-affected countries, not least because of limited institutional capacity and a lack of relevant expertise and experience.

This highlights a crucial point. Too often, discussions about development goals like the SDGs focus on two gaps — in financing and policy — while failing to recognise the implementation gap. But finance and policy alone cannot overcome implementation bottlenecks; technical assistance and other support is also vital. This is a key focus of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which I have led for exactly one year.

UNOPS runs operations in over 80 countries on behalf of the

UN system and global partners, such as the World Bank. The majority of our work takes place in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and we are a major channel for implementing IDA-financed projects, among other humanitarian, development and peace-and-security initiatives. We also help recipient governments make the most of the IDA funds they receive, working alongside other UN agencies to accelerate project delivery, overcome delays and ensure the intended results.

Our experience, particularly in conflict zones, demonstrates the overwhelming positive impact IDA funds can have when we get implementation right. In South

Sudan, for example, IDA and UN agencies worked together to implement a project focused on increasing poor and vulnerable households' access to temporary income opportunities. Since then, the security situation has improved sufficiently to begin handing full ownership of projects — which has reached over 420,000 people across ten counties — back to the South Sudanese government and local communities.

In Mozambique, UNOPS is working alongside the World Bank and the national government to restore basic services for 680,000 people who have been internally displaced as a result of the conflict in the country's north or who are

hosting displaced communities and returnees. In Yemen, where the Bank cannot work through the government, the World Bank, with IDA financing, has worked with UN partners on the ground to deliver access to basic services. One project, implemented by Unicef, the World Health Organization, and UNOPS, provided health and nutrition services to more than eight million Yemenis at more than 2,000 locations and by relying on mobile outreach teams. Such engagement helps to preserve pre-crisis human-capital gains and a degree of institutional stability, both of which are essential to the eventual post-conflict recovery.

This capacity to implement projects even in crisis-affected areas, including conflict zones like Yemen, is essential to deliver on the SDGs. But so are efforts to prevent crises. These are particularly cost-effective interventions: for every dollar invested in prevention, around \$16 are saved in the long term. With any intervention, timing is key. As the World Bank has pointed out, it is imperative to invest IDA funding early, especially in fragile contexts.



For many recipient countries, IDA often represents the only reliable, sustainable source of development finance.

sport

OMAN RAISE MEDALS TALLY TO 12 AT GCC YOUTH GAMES



Oman's medal winners at the GCC Youth Games pose with the officials.

WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 17

The Sultanate of Oman raised their tally to 12 medals, including five gold and seven silver, after the second day of the first GCC Youth Games being held in the UAE from April 16 to May 2, with participation of more than 3,500 male and female athletes competing in 24 games.

Oman teams succeeded in winning seven medals on the second day. Oman sailing team won a gold medal in the Optimus team category. The taekwondo team was able to win six medals on the second day after the taekwondo players bagged five medals on the first day, four gold and a silver.

On Wednesday, Oman taekwondo team's medals came with Shahnaz al Maawali winning gold in the 44 kg after defeating Saudi Arabia's Seyouf Hassan. Al Ezz al Maawali claimed gold in 68 kg after defeating Kuwait's Othman Faris. Qaboos al Balushi won a silver in 68 kg category after losing to UAE's Mohammed Khaled. Fida al Barwani won gold in 52 kg. Hind al Balushi took silver after losing against Saudi Arabia's Amam Abdullah. Abdulrahman al Jabri earned a gold in his category.

Oman U-17 national football



Oman taekwondo players celebrate their gold medals.

team defeated hosts UAE 2-0 in the opening match of the football competition. The first goal of the match was scored by Osama al Maamari in the 59th minute, while Ibrahim al Tamimi scored the second goal for Oman in the 84th minute.

Omani sailing team won gold in the Optimus category on Wednesday, at the opening day on the waters of the Abu Dhabi Sailing Club, where the competition witnesses the participation of four Gulf teams in various categories.

After an exciting competition witnessed by the race, Oman sailors won a gold medal, which lasted for more than an hour in winds. The team was able to win in the first round against the Qatari team, then faced the Emirati team in the final round. Oman sailors were able to win all the rounds to win the gold



medal, UAE won the silver and Qatar took the bronze medal.

Oman team was represented in the Optimus category by sailors Tamim al Balushi, Hood al Nofali, Tarteel al Hassani, Mohammed al Qasimi and Khamis al Mashaykhi. While Alka 4 team was represented by Abdullatif al Qasimi and Firas al Hashimi. Alka 6 team includes Hatim al Araiimi and Elias al Fadhi.

On Thursday, the Optimus class competitions continue, with a number of Oman sailors participating in the individual competitions.

The delegation of Oman national junior handball team arrived in UAE on Wednesday. The technical meeting for the competition will be held on Thursday, during which the schedule of matches that will start on Friday will be approved.

Oman handball delegation consists Anwar al Balushi, team manager, Ahmed al Jassasi, administrator, Hassan al Maamari, in addition to 18 players, namely Issam al Balushi, Saeed al Hassani, Ghassan al Maashari, Fahd al Maashari, Waleed al Balushi, Luay al Sulaimani, Wahhaj al Balushi, Umair al Balushi, Maitham al Owaisi, Ali al Hassani, Ali al Hassani, Al Maamoun al Hassani, Mohammed al Hassani, al Khattab al Hassani, Ziyad al Hassani, Fatik al Balushi and Issa al Sharqi.

The organising committee of the chess competition postponed the start of competitions until Friday, due to the non-arrival of some of the Gulf teams, including Oman, whose flight was postponed due to weather conditions.

Oman national chess team is participating with 12 players: Ahmed al Rahbi, Firas al Lawati, Mohammed al Riyami, Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Mohammed al Riyami, Mohammed al Balushi, Doaa al Muqbali, Hoor al Shukaili, Maryam al Balushi, Nour al Ghafri, Reem al Balushi, and Reem al Shukaili.

Also, athletic competitions were postponed due to weather conditions, scheduled to begin on Wednesday.

Oman drub Kuwait to storm into semis of ACC Men's Premier Cup

MUSCAT: Oman stormed into the semifinals of the ACC Men's Premier T20I Cup on Wednesday with a commanding 46-run win over Kuwait in a Group B match at the Oman Cricket Academy ground.

Oman's victory propelled them into the semifinals with an impeccable record of four consecutive wins, accumulating a maximum of eight points in the group stage.

All-round display by skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (4/29 and 35) and Aqib Ilyas (3/14 and 34) and a record seventh-wicket stand between Ayaan Khan (45) and Rafiullah (23*) powered Oman's march into the semifinals where they will take on Hong Kong on Friday.

Chasing 201 to win after Oman had put up a challenging total of 200/9, Kuwait were off to a flyer as Clinto Anto and Ravija Sandaruwan shared a 45-run stand in just 4 overs. Shakeel Ahmed got the breakthrough as he cleaned up Sandaruwan for 23 before Fayyaz Butt had Anto caught by wicketkeeper Pratik Athavale in the next over to stem the run flow.

Anto departed after a quickfire 34 off 15 balls that included three fours and three sixes.

Ilyas struck off the first ball after powerplay as he had Adnan Idrees leg before and Maqsood picked his first of the four victims in the tenth over as Kuwait slumped from 61/2 to 88/4.

Ilyas got the key wicket of Meet Bhavsar in the 12th over to trigger a collapse as Kuwait batters went back in procession except for Bilal Tahir who stayed unbeaten on 33.

Captain Maqsood removed his counterpart Mohammed Aslam and Sayed Monib in the same over and then bowled Nimish Lathief in his final over to have Kuwait down to 143/9 as they ended up at 154/9.

Besides Maqsood and Ilyas, Fayyaz Butt and Shakeel Ahmed took a wicket apiece

Earlier, Oman were put to bat and lost two early wickets with openers Kashyap Prajapati and Naseem Khushi back in the hut with the total 22/2 in the third over. Skipper Zeeshan Maqsood and Aqib Ilyas then rebuilt the innings with a 50-run third-wicket partnership as Oman finished the powerplay at 47/2.

The 50-run stand came off 42 balls before Ilyas was dismissed for 34 in the 10th over. Maqsood was next to go for 35 with Oman at 92/4. Khalid Kail and Pratik Athavale were out for 15 each as Oman were struggling at 130/6.

A brilliant record-breaking



Zeeshan Maqsood - MoM (Oman) seventh-wicket partnership between Ayaan Khan and Rafiullah took the attack to the rival camp as they shared a 63-run stand, the highest for seventh-wicket in T20Is. They bettered the previous stand of 57 between Khurran Nawaz and Naseem Khushi. Their 50-run stand came off just 15 balls with Ayaan on 27 and Rafiullah on 21.

Ayaan was out for 20-ball 45 that included four sixes and two boundaries and Rafiullah stayed unbeaten on 23 off 11 balls with three hits to the ropes and one maximum as Oman finished at 200/9.

Three of Oman batters – Khushi, Athavale and Fayyaz Butt were run out, something coach Duleep Mendis would be worried about.

Adnan Idrees and Mohammed Aslam picked two wickets each.

In the semifinals, Oman will take on Hong Kong after the latter finished second in Group A behind Nepal.

Both Hong Kong and Qatar were tied with four points each after four games, but Hong Kong's seven-wicket win over Malaysia on Wednesday helped them gain a better net run-rate and scrape into the semis.

Nepal won their fourth successive match on Wednesday with a six-wicket win over Saudi Arabia in a rain-curtailed match of eight overs a side.

UAE will take on Nepal in the other semifinal, with both matches scheduled on Friday.

UAE handed Cambodia a lesson as they won by nine wickets, racing to 79/1 in just 5.1 overs after bowling the rivals out for paltry 76 in 19 overs. UAE finished with six points while Kuwait came third with four points.

Brief scores: Oman 200/9 (Aqib Ilyas 34, Zeeshan Maqsood 35, Ayaan Khan 45, Rafiullah 23*; Adnan Idrees 2/31, Mohammed Aslam 2/32) beat Kuwait 154/9 (Clinto Anto 34, Bilal Tahir 33*; Zeeshan Maqsood 4/29, Aqib Ilyas 3/14).

Al Ahed take advantage after edging Al Nahda

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Oman's Al Nahda suffered to a 1-0 defeat against Lebanon's Al Ahed in the first leg West Zonal Final on Tuesday at Karbala International Stadium. The only goal in the match was scored by Mohammed al Halaq in the 46th minute.

The triumph meant, Al Ahed will have better advantage in the second leg match which will be held in Muscat on Tuesday. The winner of the West Zonal Final will meet the winner of the Inter-Zone finalists between Central Coast Mariners and Abdysh-Ata

Kant in the AFC Cup final.

Both teams began the match looking for an early goal as Al Nahda head coach Hamed al Azani was depending on Abdulaziz Khalfan and Ahmed al Kaabi in the left and right sides to create the scoring attempts. Al Ahed's Waleed Shoor and Mohammed al Halaq were the active players from the opponents side as they tested the Al Nahda defence.

Al Ahed were the better side in the first half as Karim Darweesh was very close to score the opening goal after 30 minutes from the first half but Al Nahda's



Al Nahda and Al Ahed players fight for the ball at Karbala International Stadium.

goalkeeper saved many scoring attempts. Karim Darweesh scored a goal prior to the completion of the first half but his goal was cancelled by the main referee due to an off side decision. After resumption, the Lebanese side were very focused to score and moved on the right track to rekindle their memories as they were the champions in 2019. And it was a strong start as they managed to break the deadlock by scoring the opening goal in the 46th minute as Mohammed al Halaq found the target after receiving a perfect assistance from Waleed Shoor.

Al Nahda's response was very weak as there were no actual movements and attempts to score the equaliser. The most active man in Al Nahda side, Walter Bwalya, tried from one occasion but his header was easy for Al Ahed's goalkeeper in the 60th minute.

Another header from Ahmed al Matrooshi in the 78th minute failed to find the net after a cross from Ahmed al Kaabi. The match ended in favour of Al Ahed at 1-0. Now, Oman's representatives will have to wait for the second leg match to bounce back and secure slot in the AFC Cup final.

Buttler ton powers Rajasthan to record IPL chase of 224

NARINE HAMMERS CENTURY IN KOLKATA'S BIG TOTAL



KOLKATA: Jos Buttler smashed an unbeaten 107 to trump Sunil Narine's first T20 century as Rajasthan Royals pulled off a joint record IPL chase against Kolkata Knight Riders off the final ball on Tuesday.Chasing 224 for victory, Rajasthan looked in trouble at 121-6 in the 13th over but Buttler moved through the gears in his 60-ball blitz to achieve the target with two wickets to spare at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

Rajasthan equalled their own record from 2020 when they chased down 224 against Kings XI Punjab in Sharjah.

Buttler, who came in as an impact substitute, reached his second ton of the season in 55 balls with a six off Varun Chakravarthi at the start of the last over.

Buttler, struggling with cramp, then played out three dot balls before a two and a single on the final delivery ensured Rajasthan held on to top spot in the table with six wins in seven matches.

"Keep believing, that was the real key today," Buttler said.

"I was struggling a bit for rhythm. At times you feel frustrated or you are questioning yourself. I tell myself 'It's okay, keep going, you'll get your rhythm back

	Team	P	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR	
1	RR	7	6	1	0	12	+0.677	▼
2	KKR	6	4	2	0	8	+1.399	▼
3	CSK	6	4	2	0	8	+0.726	▼
4	SRH	6	4	2	0	8	+0.502	▼
5	LSG	6	3	3	0	6	+0.038	▼
6	GT	6	3	3	0	6	-0.637	▼
7	PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.218	▼
8	MI	6	2	4	0	4	-0.234	▼
9	DC	6	2	4	0	4	-0.975	▼
10	RCB	7	1	6	0	2	-1.185	▼

and try to stay calm."

He said, "There's been plenty of times throughout the IPL, you've seen crazy things happen. Guys like (MS) Dhoni and (Virat) Kohli, the way they stay till the end and keep believing and I tried to do the same."England's Buttler, who

hit nine fours and six sixes, moved ahead of Chris Gayle with seven IPL tons and is only behind Kohli's eight in the T20 tournament.

NARINE HEROICS AND BITTER PILL

Buttler built key partnerships

including 50 runs with Riyan Parag (34), 57 with Rovman Powell (26) and then an unbeaten 38-run stand with Avesh Khan (0 not out).Spinners Narine, Chakravarthi and fast bowler Harshit Rana took two wickets each for KKR."Emotions were a roller-coaster, certainly didn't think we will get into this situation," said Kolkata captain Shreyas Iyer.

"It's a funny game at the end of the day, he was striking the ball cleanly and timing them so well, have to take it on the chin and move on."Narine hammered 109 off 56 balls to guide Kolkata, who stay second in the 10-team standings, to 223-6.

Narine put on 85 runs for the second wicket with Angkrish Raghuvanshi, who hit 30, and got together for a 51-run stand with Andre Russell.Narine, playing his 504th T20 match, reached his ton from 49 balls with a six and a four off Yuzvendra Chahal for Kolkata's third hundred in the IPL as he jumped for joy.He was finally bowled by a Trent Boult yorker before he returned to a standing ovation.Narine moved into the top three in the batting charts led by Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Kohli (361) with 276 runs. — AFP

LAKERS BOOK PLAY-OFF DATE WITH NUGGETS

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers held off a furious late rally to beat the New Orleans Pelicans 110-106 on Tuesday and book a first-round NBA play-off clash with the defending champion Denver Nuggets.

Four-time NBA champion James scored 23 points with nine rebounds, nine assists and three steals to lead the Lakers in the play-in game victory that secured the seventh seed in the Western Conference.

The Pelicans, rocked by a late injury to star forward Zion Williamson, will have another chance to advance on Friday when they take on the Sacramento Kings.

The Kings ended the Golden State Warriors' play-off aspirations with a resounding 118-94 victory in the second Western Conference play-in game.

At 39, James is in the playoffs for the 17th time in 21 seasons. He'll get another shot at Nikola Jokic and the Nuggets, who swept the Lakers in the Western Conference finals on their way to the title last season.

Williamson scored 40 points and keyed the Pelicans' rally from an 18-point third-quarter deficit.

His alley-oop dunk tied it at 93-93 but after he drove for a basket that made it 95-95 with 3:19 remaining, Williamson grimaced in pain and was soon out of the game, throwing a towel in disgust as he headed to the locker room for good.

The Pelicans kept the pressure on. They tied it twice more, but D'Angelo Russell's three-pointer with 51.3 seconds remaining pushed the Lakers lead to four points and Los Angeles, with a timely rebound and a pair of free throws from Anthony Davis, held on for the win.

Russell drilled five of the Lakers' 14 three-pointers on the way to 21 points. Davis scored 20 points and grabbed 15 rebounds in the victory, which followed the Lakers' win over the Pelicans on the final day of the regular season on Sunday.

"We understood after how we had played the last game that they were going to give us everything they had — the whole kitchen sink and the toolbox — and they did

that," said James. "So it was a gritty win for us and we punched our ticket to the post-season."

The Lakers will open their best-of-seven series against second-seeded Denver on Saturday.

"We like where we are, we like where the spirit of our group is," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "Everybody is excited about this challenge."

Pelicans coach Willie Green said Williamson, who also had 11 rebounds and five assists, left the game with "left leg soreness."

"He's going to get some imaging tomorrow and we'll figure out more," Green said.

The 23-year-old power forward, whose career has been hindered by injuries, remains in search of his first playoff appearance since he entered the league as the top pick in the 2019 draft.

TOTAL DOMINATION

His status will be key against a Kings team riding high after their blowout victory over the Warriors and Stephen Curry.

"It was total domination," Warriors coach Steve Kerr admitted."The offensive rebounds early in the game set a tone. They didn't let us get into our offence."

The Warriors narrowed a 16-point deficit to four at halftime, but were helpless as the Kings pulled away again in the second half.

Keegan Murray led the Kings' scoring with 32 points. De'Aaron Fox added 24 and Domantas Sabonis had 16 points and 12 rebounds.

Curry shook off a slow start that saw him score just five points in the first half to finish with 22. But Klay Thompson failed to score a point as he missed all 10 of his shots.

Golden State surrendered 15 offensive rebounds and coughed up 16 turnovers in the face of the Kings' energetic defence as Sacramento eased the memory of their heartbreaking loss to the Warriors in game seven of their first-round series last season.

"It doesn't take away what they did to us last year at all," Murray said."That still stings to this day, but it kind of peels the Band-Aid off a little bit. They got us last year. We got them this year." — AFP



Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James (23) shoots against New Orleans Pelicans during the 2024 NBA play-offs at Smoothie King Centre. — USA Today Sports

Nadal cool on expectations after winning on injury return

BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal said he had limited expectations at the Barcelona Open as he made a triumphant return from injury on Tuesday, beating Italy's Flavio Cobolli 6-2, 6-3.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion had not played a competitive match since January but eased past the 62nd-ranked Cobolli in 85 minutes to reach the second round.The former world number one has seen his ranking slip to 644 after missing all of the 2023 season following the Australian Open. His comeback at the start of this year hit a stumbling block when he felt a hip injury flare up in Brisbane.

For Nadal, a 12-time winner in Barcelona, it was his first

appearance on clay since he won the French Open almost two years ago, but the Spaniard was keen not to get ahead of himself.

Stefanos Tsitsipas, last week's Monte Carlo Masters champion, said earlier this week he wouldn't be surprised to see Nadal to reach the final on a court named after him.

"Today to say that I am favourite I think is stupidity, Tsitsipas knows that it's not the case," said Nadal, who turns 38 in June.

"I understand what he says as respect for what I have done in this tournament. Everybody knows I am not favourite to win a tournament."

"I didn't have the slightest idea if I was favourite today, I know tomorrow I will not be," added



Spain's Rafael Nadal plays a return to Italy's Flavio Cobolli during the ATP Barcelona Open at the Real Club de Tennis in Barcelona. — AFP

Nadal, who plays fourth seed Alex de Minaur on Wednesday for a place in the last 16."But it doesn't matter, I will go out and play and it will be an experience against a top level player."

After a double fault to fall 30-0

behind Nadal found his rhythm, with Cobolli intimidated by the fervent support for the Spaniard on the court named after him.

Nadal converted his third break point in the fourth game for a 3-1 lead, with Cobolli surviving four

more to hold at 4-2 down.

The Spaniard broke again to claim the set in 43 minutes, clenching his fist in celebration.

Cobolli handed Nadal a break for 2-0 in the second set with two more unforced errors but finally put some pressure on Nadal's serve in the third game to break back.

However Nadal broke again for 3-1 after Cobolli's third double fault and served it out to triumph.

"It was a good start — when you return you can't get rid of the doubts in one day, above all, on a physical level," Nadal told TVE.

"Within what it could be, it was a good first round. He made mistakes and I think I played the game that I had to play."

Brandon Nakashima dumped

a raging Andrey Rublev out in the first round with a 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) victory. The American, ranked 87th, ousted the world number eight, who made five double faults and only forced one break point in the match. Nakashima edged the first set by breaking the Russian in the ninth game for 5-4 and then surviving a break point before serving out. Rublev, second seed at the tournament, saved four second-set break points but tumbled to defeat in the tie-break after sending a backhand long.The Russian smashed his racket repeatedly on the ground before storming off.

Carlos Alcaraz, champion in Barcelona in 2022 and 2023, withdrew on Sunday with a forearm injury.— AFP



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe heads the ball during the Uefa Champions League quarterfinal second leg match against FC Barcelona at the Estadi Olympic Lluís Companys in Barcelona. — AFP

MBAPPE’S PSG PUNISH 10-MAN BARCA TO REACH SEMIS

BARCELONA: Kylian Mbappe struck twice as Paris Saint-Germain battled back to beat 10-man Barcelona 4-1 and book a place in the Champions League semifinals with a 6-4 aggregate triumph on Tuesday.

Raphinha fired Barcelona ahead early on but Ronald Araujo’s 29th-minute red card turned the tide in PSG’s favour, despite the Spanish champions leading by two goals following a 3-2 quarterfinal first-leg win.

Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha levelled the tie for PSG and the deadly Mbappe hit a brace to put them into the final four for the first time since 2021, setting up another meeting with Borussia Dortmund, who they played twice in the group stage.

“Hats off to Kylian, look at how he pressed, that’s how you lead a team,” said PSG coach Luis Enrique, noting the striker’s all-round contribution.

“When Kylian can give that we are much, much better.”

The French champions have never won the trophy despite huge investment but demonstrated they have the attacking weapons in their squad to do so.

“I dream of winning the Champions League with Paris, it’s another step overcome against a great team,” said Mbappe, who has his sights set on this year’s final.

“We’re going to try and go to Wembley.”

Luis Enrique, who led Barca to the 2015 Champions League, said he believed his PSG team would turn things around despite never having managed to after a first-leg home defeat, and so it proved.

“It looked bad but the team concentrated -- whatever happened, we had to beat Barcelona,” said Dembele,

whistled heavily by fans of his former club.

Five-time winners Barcelona were dreaming of a first semifinal return since 2019 but Araujo’s red card for pulling down the relentless Bradley Barcola undermined their grip on the tie.

It became another in a series of European nightmares for the Catalans, who last won the trophy in 2015, with Xavi blaming the referee.

“With 11 against 10 it’s practically impossible,” said the coach.

“I think the red card is not necessary, it’s unfair and needless.”

The visitors started with determination and penned Barcelona back in their own territory, but it was the hosts who took the lead.

Explosive 16-year-old starlet Lamine Yamal ripped past Nuno Mendes and crossed to the near post where Raphinha turned home his third goal in the tie.

The other PSG forwards found the net but it was Barcola who tilted the match in PSG’s favour.

The winger teed up Mbappe but Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen denied him well, before Araujo was sent off for bringing him down.

The Uruguayan centre-back pulled Barcola back as he burst into the area, leaving Barca with 10 men.

Dembele struck after 40 minutes from another Barcola cross, which raked across the area to the back post where he was arriving to fire into the roof of the net.

Barcelona sacrificed Yamal for defender Inigo Martinez after Araujo’s red card and it left them with few outlets in attack.

NO ESCAPE

With PSG controlling the game, Barcelona soon paid the price. Vitinha was given far too much space on the edge of the box and he drilled into the bottom corner to put PSG ahead on the night.

Ilkay Gundogan hit the post at the other end for Barcelona before their coach Xavi was sent off for a show of dissent on the touchline.

“Since I’ve been here we’re not getting any refereeing decisions, they’ve all been bad for us,” added Xavi.

“The refereeing was very strange.” — AFP

The French champions have never won the trophy but demonstrated they have the attacking weapons in squad to do so

Dortmund edge Atletico to book PSG clash

DORTMUND, Germany: Borussia Dortmund fought back to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 in their quarterfinal second leg on Tuesday, securing a 5-4 aggregate victory and a first Champions League semifinal since 2013.

Trailing 2-1 from the first leg, goals from Julian Brandt and Ian Maatsen had Dortmund 2-0 up at half-time.

Visiting coach Diego Simeone made three changes at half-time including bringing on Angel Correa and his energy told immediately, Mats Hummels conceding a poor own goal before the Argentine netted to put Atletico back ahead in the tie.

But those goals brought a sluggish Dortmund back to life, with Niclas Fuellkrug and Marcel Sabitzer each scoring in a three-minute period to send the Bundesliga club through.

“It was magical. I try not to go overboard in interviews, but it

was really magical. The stadium was on fire today,” Fuellkrug told DAZN.

Former winners Dortmund, fifth in the German top flight and struggling to qualify for next season’s Champions League, will next face Paris Saint-Germain for a place in the final at Wembley on June 1.

“We did give them chances and goals in the 15 minutes after half-time, we have to improve that for sure, but our response to it was sensational,” said Brandt.

Atletico were bidding to reach the last four for the first time in seven years, but fell at the quarterfinal stage for the third time in five seasons.

“It was tough,” Atletico captain Koke told Movistar. “Their goals hurt a lot — the fact that they got them so quickly after each other.

“We are angry because we wanted to get through. This is football and it can be cruel.”



Dortmund’s German forward Niclas Fuellkrug celebrates scoring his team’s third goal during the Uefa Champions League quarterfinal second leg match against Atletico Madrid in Dortmund, western Germany. — AFP

FAST START

The home side should have been level in the tie after three minutes but Sabitzer took an extra touch with the goal beckoning, allowing Atletico to cover.

Just moments later, Atletico had a major chance of their own, as Alvaro Morata raced through one-on-one with the goalkeeper but chipped the ball well wide of the post.

Buoyed by an 80,000-strong home crowd trying to one-up last week’s atmosphere in the Spanish capital, Dortmund pushed and prodded, with Karim Adeyemi shooting straight at Jan Oblak.

Dortmund broke through on 34 minutes, Brandt collecting a Hummels chip and shooting on the turn, the ball bouncing through Oblak’s hands.

The Germans were ahead in the tie just five minutes later, Maatsen threading in from an acute angle after he was given space to run in the Atletico box.

With Simeone sensing his chances of qualifying for the semis for a fourth time as Atletico boss slipping away, he shuffled his deck at half-time, making three changes including hooking the ineffective Morata for Correa.

Dortmund’s wobbles suddenly returned, letting the visitors back into the tie.

Hummels turned Mario Hermoso’s header into his own net from an Atletico corner under little pressure and with goalkeeper Gregor Kobel waiting to save.

Atletico smelt blood and could have levelled when Correa dragged the ball just wide.

The World Cup winner made up for his miss on 64 minutes when he lashed a loose ball inside the box in off the crossbar, putting Atletico in front on aggregate.

The goal jolted Dortmund back into action and Edin Terzic’s men scored twice in three minutes to retake the overall lead.

Fuellkrug headed in a Sabitzer cross and the Austrian midfielder then got a goal of his own, shooting through the Atletico defence and into the bottom corner from the edge of the box, grabbing Dortmund a famous victory. — AFP

Oman exports 52 million oil barrels by end-February



MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in Oman released data indicating the extent of the Sultanate of Oman’s oil exports and production by the end of February 2024.

The total quantity of oil exports reached approximately 52.43 million barrels, with each barrel priced at an average of \$80.2. These exports constituted 87.2% of the total oil production, which amounted to 60.07 million barrels.

A comparison between February 2024 and February 2023 revealed a 5.5% increase in oil exports and a 4.3% decrease in production.

Crude oil production saw a significant decline of 6.8%, reaching 46.03 million barrels, while oil condensates experienced a growth of 5.2% to 14.05 million barrels. The average daily oil production was reported to be 1.01 million barrels by the end of February 2024.

Among the importing countries, China stood out as the largest importer of Omani oil, receiving a total of 51.43 million barrels, marking a notable 15.6% increase from February 2023.

Following closely behind was Japan, importing 1.6 million barrels, representing a decline of 21.1%. — ONA

Pact worth RO 79 million signed for Phase 1 of Al Batinah Coastal Road project

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), signed an agreement worth RO 79 million yesterday, Wednesday, April 17, for the completion of the first phase of the Al Batinah Coastal Road project.

The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, with Mohammed Abdul Latif, General Manager of the project at Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) Oman. Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, was also present.

Speaking to the press, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali highlighted the economic



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, signing the agreement with Mohammed Abdul Latif, CCC Oman General Manager.

significance of the project. He stated that the primary goal of the project was to “maximise the economic benefits for the wilayats.” He added that the project would also aim to serve tourism in those areas and would include walkways and other “components” to boost tourism.

Several Ministry officials

Barka, Al Suwaiq and Khazaen Economic City with national roads.

The Al Batinah Coastal Road Project begins in the Wilayat of Barka and ends at Khatmat Milaha, covering a total length of 224 km.

The agreement will cover the execution of 30 km, including paving 22 km from Barka to Al Suwaiq Port, and paving 8 km of the road from Sohar Port to Khatmat Milaha.

Additionally, the project will include the construction of four wadi bridges and 67 box culverts. It will also involve dualising the connection to Barka Market over 4 km and the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq link over 6 km, as well as building the Al Suwaiq bridge on the Al Batinah highway.

The project is scheduled to begin in two weeks and is expected to be completed in 63 months.

21.8 % growth in passenger traffic at Oman airports

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has seen a significant increase in the number of passengers travelling through its airports, according to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). As of the end of February 2024, there were a total of 2,717,835 passengers, marking a 21.8 per cent increase from the previous year’s 2,231,451 passengers.

Muscat International Airport played a significant role in this growth, with a total of 2,463,856

passengers passing through by February 2024, representing a 22.9 per cent increase.

These passengers travelled on 16,996 flights, a 16.4 per cent rise from the previous year.

The airport saw 15,678 international flights carrying 2,288,119 passengers, as well as 1,318 domestic flights catering to 175,737 passengers.

Indian nationals topped the list of passengers, with 75,521 arrivals and 70,951 departures, followed by Bangladeshi and Pakistani

nationals.

Meanwhile, Salalah Airport also experienced growth, with 232,77 passengers and 1,572 flights, marking a 10.1 per cent increase in passengers and a 6.1 per cent rise in flights. International flights at Salalah Airport totalled 840, carrying 115,060 passengers, while domestic flights amounted to 732, serving 117,017 passengers.

Sohar Airport saw 11,410 passengers on 110 flights, while Duqm Airport had 10,492 passengers on 104 flights. — ONA

Al Hosni advocates tech investments in airport development

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 17



Shaikh Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports Management Co (Oman Airports), recently shared his insights on airport innovation, technology, and the future growth of the aviation industry in an interview with International Airport Review.

In the discussion, Al Hosni highlighted the pivotal role of technology in shaping the future of airports and enhancing the passenger experience.

Central to Oman Airports’ strategy is a strong emphasis on investing in technology and IT infrastructure. Al Hosni stressed the importance of prioritising technological advancements over traditional infrastructure, stating, “Invest in technology and IT and invest less in your infrastructure.”

This forward-thinking approach underscores Oman Airports’ commitment to leveraging innovation to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly evolving industry landscape.

Moreover, Al Hosni shed light on Oman Airports’ proactive measures to embrace a culture of innovation within the organisation. By establishing an innovation lab and actively engaging with startups, Oman Airports seeks to harness cutting-edge ideas that can revolutionise airport operations and elevate the overall passenger experience.

Al Hosni remarked, “We’re building on that investment to get lots of good ideas from the market and to implement

Using technology to create a seamless travel experience is key to ensuring passenger satisfaction and operational excellence in the future

SHAIKH AIMEN AL HOSNI
CEO, Oman Airports

Oman LNG signs major LNG sale and purchase pact with Shell Trading

MUSCAT: In a groundbreaking move for the energy industry, the Oman LNG has officially inked a lucrative LNG sale and purchase agreement with Shell Trading Company (Middle East) yesterday in Muscat.

The agreement outlines the supply of up to an impressive 1.6 million metric tonnes of LNG annually to Shell, with deliveries slated to commence in 2025 and extend over a remarkable 10-year period.

This significant step marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing collaboration between the two esteemed companies.

Shell Trading Company stands out as the primary importer of energy from the Oman LNG Company, underscoring the robust partnership between the entities.

The agreement underscores the Oman LNG Company’s unwavering commitment to enhancing its commercial endeavours, thereby playing a crucial role in the global energy supply chain.

Hamed bin Mohammed al Numani, CEO of the Oman LNG,



This significant step marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing collaboration between the two esteemed companies.

expressed his satisfaction with the agreement, emphasising the pivotal role it plays in solidifying the partnership with Shell, a key player in the energy sector.

The accord attests to Shell’s trust in the Oman LNG Company as a premier LNG supplier, heralding new avenues for collaboration on the global stage.

Al Numani highlighted that the agreement reinforces the Oman LNG Company’s standing as a reliable LNG provider, renowned

for its adept management of business operations to ensure a secure and sustainable energy supply to clients worldwide.

Notably, this agreement builds upon previous collaborations, with Shell now holding the title of the largest shareholder in the Oman LNG Company.

Walid Hadi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shell in Oman, lauded the agreement as a significant boost to the company’s LNG and integrated gas portfolio,

reinforcing its capability to meet the escalating demand for flexible and dependable energy from its international clientele.

The industrial complex of the Oman LNG Company in the Wilayat of Sur stands out for its operational efficiency, enabling an impressive production rate of 11.5 million metric tonnes annually of liquefied natural gas, mirroring the enhanced production capacity achieved by the company.

— ONA

them in Oman Airports.”

The interview also delved into the impact of the pandemic on passenger expectations and airport operations. He emphasised the significance of cleanliness, hygiene, and efficient processes in responding to the evolving needs of travellers.

He noted, “After the pandemic, passengers are keen on cleanliness, hygiene, and streamlined security checks.”

Furthermore, Al Hosni outlined Oman Airports’ strategy for driving future growth and expansion. With a vision to own and manage airports outside Oman, he expressed his ambition for the company’s international expansion. — TURN TO P15

First blended crude oil delivery from MAF to Duqm Refinery

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Asyad Shipping, part of Asyad Group, has achieved a first in Oman's maritime and energy history with the successful delivery of the first blended crude oil by an entirely-Omani supply chain.

This inaugural shipment, embarked by Asyad Shipping's fleet, VLCC Saiq, set sail from Mina Al Fahal to Ras Markaz, destined to the Duqm Refinery (OQ8), a promising economic project in Oman.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping, said: "Our partnership with OQ8, a burgeoning refinery within our own nation and a valuable addition to the global energy market, mirrors the pioneering nature of our innovative maritime solutions in delivering efficient competitive services.

Our success in delivering the first blended crude oil shipment managed entirely by an Omani company underscores our commitment to raising the local supply chain and creating



sustainable logistic solutions that support the diversification goals of the nation and solidifies Oman's position on the global trade map."

He added, "This accomplishment is a testament to Asyad Shipping's comprehensive service capabilities and our role in transforming the region's logistics landscape and driving socio-economic growth.

Highlighting the importance of the partnership, David

Bird, CEO of OQ8, said: "We deeply value Asyad Shipping's technical expertise and advanced infrastructure.

Their skilfulness and exceptional operational capabilities are in perfect harmony with OQ8's goals, forging a strong partnership that sets new standards in the industry. This joint effort reflects our shared commitment to advancing Oman's maritime and energy sectors to unprecedented

levels." With a fleet of over 83 diverse vessels, boasting a total Deadweight capacity (DWT) of over 9 million, Asyad Shipping is a major player in maritime transportation services.

This extensive fleet, encompassing a variety of carriers, ensures high-quality, efficient shipping solutions to a distinguished and global clientele, ensuring reliability and excellence in maritime operations.

OAB General Assembly approves to issue bonds worth RO 10 million

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank's (OAB) Board of Directors held two meetings, the extraordinary general assembly and the annual ordinary general assembly, headed by Chairman Rashad al Zubair, in the presence of board members, executive management and a number of shareholders.

At the extraordinary general assembly meeting, they approved the issuance of mandatory convertible bonds worth RO 10.016 million, which will be converted into shares two years from issuance date.

The mandatory convertible bonds will have an interest rate of 6 per cent annually, payable at the discretion of the bank, and the issuance will be subject to regulatory approval.

At the ordinary general assembly meeting, the shareholders approved the report of the Board of Directors of Oman Arab Bank for the year ending on December 31, 2023, the auditor's report, and the budget, profit and loss account for the same



year. They also agreed to employ an auditor for the fiscal year 2024 and appoint a new member to the Board of Directors.

The ordinary general assembly approved the Board of Directors' decision to distribute dividends of 6 baisas per share in the form of

compulsory convertible bonds with a total value of RO 10 million.

The mandatory convertible bonds will carry an interest rate of 6 per cent annually, paid at the bank's discretion, and will be converted into shares after two years from the date of issuance.

In a statement, Al Zubair, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Arab Bank, expressed his deep appreciation to the bank's shareholders and customers for their continuous confidence in OAB.

He applauded the great accomplishments the bank has achieved, as it won many awards during 2023 for its contributions, excellence, provided initiatives and programmes, stressing that the bank will continue its relentless journey to meet the ambitions of shareholders.

The Chairman also appreciated the efforts and constant support of the Central Bank of Oman and the regulatory authorities in the Sultanate of Oman.



BankDhofar: A key contributor to government initiatives

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is presently dedicated to bolstering governmental directives and diverse developmental strategies aligned with Oman Vision 2040, particularly emphasising the employment sector and the provision of job opportunities for citizens.

This commitment significantly contributes to the revitalisation of the national economy, with a particular impact on the banking sector.

Over the past months, the bank has facilitated over 250 employment opportunities for Omanis across various fields and academic backgrounds, resulting in a notable rise in the Omanisation rate to 92 per cent.

Furthermore, BankDhofar is steadfast in its efforts to perpetually enhance its digital channels, in harmony with the government's vision for digital transformation aimed at fostering a sustainable knowledge society and advancing the information technology industry in the Sultanate of Oman. The bank has

successfully broadened its digital footprint by enabling customers to open bank accounts through smartphones and other digital platforms, facilitating convenient and timely banking transactions. This initiative has driven an 85.5 per cent surge in total digital transactions in 2023, coupled with a 55.3 per cent increase in transaction values.

Recently, the bank introduced 'Dhofar Pay', an innovative service marking a first in the Sultanate of Oman, allowing customers to easily and securely make payments via smartphones, eliminating the need for traditional debit cards.

In 2024, BankDhofar continues its customer centric momentum by prioritising the delivery of superior customer service, enhancing the branch network and introducing bespoke product and services.

Additionally, BankDhofar also provides tailored products to diverse segments of society, including small and medium enterprises, children, youth, women, and minors.

TRA report reveals premium download speeds on Ooredoo's 5G network

MUSCAT: Say goodbye to Internet slowdowns, as Ooredoo's ultrafast 5G speeds are delivering and exceeding customer expectations across Oman.

A recent report by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) confirmed that Ooredoo's 5G network provides unparalleled average download speeds of up to 294 mbps in the wilayats of Qurayat and Al Amerat.

These recent TRA results show that Ooredoo has requirements of households covered; the homes of many gamers, streamers and downloaders but also smaller businesses looking to improve their efficiency and productivity regardless of their location.

During the monthly TRA survey in Qurayat, the average download speed of Ooredoo's 5G network reached 193 mbps.



The TRA also confirmed that in Al Amerat, the average download speed was 236 mbps.

Ooredoo has repeatedly demonstrated an awesome 5G network performance and its ability to make the Internet more accessible to customers, including in more remote areas.

Ooredoo's 5G boosts reliable connectivity and provides an excellent, hassle-free, uninterrupted online experience for anyone, anywhere.

The telco has relentlessly worked to upgrade its network infrastructure, collaborated with leading product and service providers, and harnessed the power of 5G to upgrade the worlds of all its customers further.

RCREEE taps Omani firm to hold Cairo Sustainable Energy Week

MUSCAT: Oman-based events and energy intelligence agency Birba has announced a strategic partnership with the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE) to support the joint hosting of the 'Cairo Sustainable Energy Week - CSEW'.

An agreement to this effect was signed at RCREEE's headquarters in Cairo recently. RCREEE, a non-profit intergovernmental organisation, is committed to advancing renewable energy and energy efficiency across 17 Arab countries, including the Sultanate of Oman.

CSEW, the annual flagship event of RCREEE, is solidifying its regional presence following the success of its inaugural edition. The event aims to bolster communication and international collaboration in sustainable energy and promote renewable energy adoption across the Middle East and North Africa



Dr Jauad el Kharraz, Executive Director - RCREEE (right) signing the agreement in Cairo with Birba Chairman Abdullah al Harthy.

region. The MENA region is one of the most energy-intensive region globally and faces significant challenges in transitioning towards sustainable energy production methods.

In line with its mission to foster knowledge exchange and innovation in sustainable energy, RCREEE partnered with Birba, a distinguished institution

dedicated to promoting sustainable economic growth through the fusion of ideas, business intelligence, marketing, media and communication strategies.

This collaboration aims to facilitate cooperation, enhance trade relations, and drive positive economic outcomes among regional and global stakeholders.

CSEW will feature a three-

day programme showcasing the latest trends and cutting-edge technologies in the renewable energy market from solar, wind, CCUS and renewable hydrogen.

The programming will include a three-day conference, side events, specialised training courses masterclass workshops, and a dynamic exhibition. The event will also provide a platform for startups and entrepreneurs to showcase their innovative solutions to potential investors and partners.

By organising CSEW, BIRBA and RCREEE aim to raise public awareness about the importance of advancing renewable energy utilisation, implementing energy efficiency measures, and transitioning towards a more sustainable energy landscape.

The event will support technical knowledge exchange, foster strategic partnerships, and drive collaborative efforts towards achieving sustainable energy goals.



Event held to highlight cybersecurity in communications



The event was a significant gathering focusing on cybersecurity within the field of communication.

MUSCAT: The National Telecommunications Security Exercise event was held yesterday in Muscat. This exercise was a significant gathering focusing on cybersecurity within the field of communications.

Key players in the telecommunications sector, such as Omantel, Ooredoo and Vodafone Oman, all came together to participate.

The event was inaugurated by Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

In his address, he emphasised the importance of cooperation among all stakeholders to assess the sector's capabilities in addressing vulnerabilities, evaluating infrastructure readiness and ensuring compliance with regulations.

Al Ismaili highlighted that the exercise represented an advanced experience, providing an opportunity to identify and rectify gaps.

He noted the rapid evolution and continuous change in the communications and information technology sector, underscoring the necessity for collaborative efforts from both government institutions and private sector entities in delivering services effectively.

Dr Ahmed bin Hammad al Kalbani, Dean of the Advanced Cyber Security Academy, explained that the exercise revolved around a simulated scenario encompassing various elements, including aspects of electronic security breaches, regulatory compliance and managing public perceptions linked to the scenarios.

Eng Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, emphasised that the exercise was a vital component of the Oman Cybersecurity Conference. He stressed that such simulations were crucial in preparing for potential cybersecurity threats, highlighting the need for coordinated efforts among relevant authorities to achieve optimal outcomes.

As part of the overarching initiative, the fourth session of the "Oman Cybersecurity Conference" is scheduled to commence under the theme "The Cybersecurity Revolution in the Communications Sector."

The event will be conducted in collaboration with the Cyber Defence Centre, the Advanced Cybersecurity Academy, and Oman Data Park, underscoring the collective dedication to enhancing cybersecurity practices within the telecommunications industry.



Guests attend the National Telecommunications Security Exercise held in Muscat yesterday.

OQ-owned OARC to contest US anti-dumping measures

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 17

Oman Aluminium Rolling Company (OARC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman's integrated energy group OQ, has vowed to challenge anti-dumping penalties imposed by the US Department of Commerce on its exports into the United States.

The Suhar-based rolling mill, set up in 2011 with an initial investment of \$385 million, manufactures aluminium coils of various thicknesses and specs that are used in the production of, among other items, food containers, ceilings, building and construction materials, heat exchangers, and coatings for an array of household appliances and industrial goods.

Located adjacent to Sohar Aluminium's smelter, the 140,000-tonne capacity rolling mill receives its feedstock requirements in the form of hot metal directly from the smelter.

According to OQ Group, OARC has been facing antidumping (AD) duty proceedings linked to its common alloy aluminium sheet (CAAS) and aluminium foil, in addition to countervailing duty (CVD) on aluminium foil from Oman.

Following a ruling by the US Department of Commerce, published in the Federal Register on April 21, 2022, an antidumping duty cash deposit rate of 5.29 per cent was levied on common alloy aluminium sheet shipped by OARC into the US market.

"That rate remains in place as on December 31, 2023 and will not change until such a time in the future that the Department of Commerce re-determines the Company's AD rate through an administration review," said OQ



Suhar-based OARC is the biggest producer of rolled aluminium sheets and foil products.

THE SUHAR-BASED ROLLING MILL, SET UP IN 2011 WITH AN INITIAL INVESTMENT OF \$385 MILLION, MANUFACTURES ALUMINIUM COILS OF VARIOUS THICKNESSES AND SPECS THAT ARE USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF, AMONG OTHER ITEMS, FOOD CONTAINERS, CEILINGS, BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS, HEAT EXCHANGES, AND COATINGS FOR AN ARRAY OF HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES AND INDUSTRIAL GOODS.

in its 2023 Financial Results.

In addition, following a similar antidumping order on aluminium foil, published in the Federal Register on November 12, 2022, OARC was penalised with an antidumping duty cash deposit rate of 3.89 per cent.

More recently, on November 20, 2023, US aluminium foil producers whose complaints led to the antidumping action against OARC initiated a request for an administrative review of the antidumping order on aluminium foil from Oman.

"As on December 31, 2023, it is unknown if the US producers will maintain or withdraw their request for administrative review of OARC.

"If they maintain it, DOC will proceed with an administrative review of OARC, and will determine a new AD rate," OQ stated.

As for the proceedings related to CVD (countervailing duty) on aluminium foil, the order imposing a CVD duty cash deposit rate of 1.93 per cent was subject to an administrative review.

This review was initiated by the Department of Commerce

on December 29, 2023, marking the start of what is typically a 12-18-month long process.

"In this case, the review will establish a duty assessment rate on imports of aluminium foil made during calendar year 2022.

"As previously noted, such duties are the responsibility of the US importer.

"OARC is presently engaged in that review, is responding to requests for information from the US Department of Commerce and is vigorously defending the case.

"A final determination in the review is not anticipated until June 2025," OQ added in conclusion.

Significantly, the US represents an important market for aluminium foil from Oman. Other target markets include the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Australia, and North and South America.

Al Hosni advocates tech investments in airport development

FROM PAGE 13

He commented, "I want Oman Airports to own and manage airports outside Oman. And this is my dream since three years ago or four years ago." In a bid to foster innovation and diversity in decision-making, Oman Airports has established a board of directors comprised entirely of Gen Z members.

Al Hosni highlighted the board's role in bringing fresh perspectives and driving innovative solutions within the organisation.

He shared, "Youth board members provide unique insights and ideas that cater to the preferences of the younger generation of travellers."

Al Hosni expressed his enthusiasm for the evolving travel experience and the

transformative potential of technology in reshaping airport operations.

He underscored the importance of leveraging technological advancements to enhance the efficiency and convenience of travel processes. Al Hosni concluded, "Using technology to create a seamless travel experience is key to ensuring passenger satisfaction and operational excellence in the future."

LONDON

Oil falls as demand worries outweigh supply risks

Oil prices slipped more than \$1 on Wednesday as likely higher US commercial inventories weighed, while weaker economic data from China and dimmed prospects of interest rate cuts stoked worries about global demand.

Brent futures for June were down \$1.21, or 1.3 per cent, to \$88.81 a barrel at 1330 GMT, while US crude futures for May were down \$1.11, or 1.3 per cent, to \$84.25 a barrel. Both were on track for their biggest fall since March 20 if losses hold.

Oil prices have softened this week as economic headwinds curb gains from geopolitical tensions, with markets eyeing how Israel might respond



to Iran's weekend attack. Analysts do not expect Iran's unprecedented missile and drone strike on Israel to prompt dramatic sanctions from the United States on Iran's oil exports.

"Oil prices go about their business of unwinding some of the war premium that has been priced-in," said John Evans at oil broker PVM, adding that they also faced "a setback in interest rate cut hopes". — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

Biden pushes to triple tariffs on Chinese steel

US President Joe Biden is urging a tripling of tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium as he visits Pittsburgh on Wednesday, citing "unfair competition" while seeking to win blue-collar votes in November's election.

Biden's call comes as the US Trade Representative (USTR) announced it is launching a probe into China's trade practices in the shipbuilding, maritime and logistics sectors in response to a recent petition by five US unions.

The president is preparing to address steelworkers in Pittsburgh, the second day of a three-day trip through the crucial swing state of Pennsylvania.

Both Biden and his election



rival Donald Trump are competing for vital blue-collar voters, promising to revive American manufacturing.

"Chinese policies and subsidies for their domestic steel and aluminium industries mean high-quality US products are undercut by artificially low-priced Chinese alternatives produced with higher emissions," the White House said in a statement. — **AFP**

TOKYO

Japan records best-ever monthly visitor numbers

More than three million foreigners visited Japan in March, a record for a single month, government data showed on Wednesday in a major boost for its tourism sector.

The total of 3.08 million represented an increase of 69.5 per cent from March 2023 and a 11.6-per cent gain compared to March 2019 before the pandemic battered global tourism, the Japan National Tourism Organisation said.

"This was the highest single month on record and the first time the number of visitors exceeded three million," the government agency said. On top of generally rising tourism demand, factors like the



spring cherry blossom season and the Easter break helped boost visitor numbers.

Record numbers arrived from overseas including from India, Germany, Taiwan and the United States.

Tourism to Japan has been booming since pandemic-era border restrictions were lifted and the government has been working hard to boost visitor numbers. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

Layoffs looming amid fierce competition in global EV car market



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

Nobody denies that China competes with America and European countries in manufacturing many products, including Chinese cars, which have also become ubiquitous on Gulf streets, and in other continents of the world.

Inevitably, it has led to the layoff of workers at some international car producing companies, including the American company Tesla, which produces electric cars.

Tesla is currently preparing to lay off more than 10 per cent of its workers employed at facilities around the world because of a decline in its sales of electric cars amid an escalating price war for these cars, according to Reuters.

Tesla's latest report indicates that the company has around 140,473 employees worldwide. It is considered one of the largest car manufacturing companies in the world in terms of its market value.

There is no doubt that the upcoming layoffs will affect many workers and their families, as it is expected to impact around 14,500 workers.

Layoffs, as we know, mean dismissal from work for several reasons, most of which relate to the employees' behaviour and competency.

However, the issue of competition today falls within this framework, as companies try to settle their administrative and financial capabilities with their production conditions and

annual sales.

Some companies are forced to make layoffs in certain cases, including financial matters.

When the Covid-19 pandemic spread, the Middle East region and many international companies were subjected to layoffs, with some affected people still looking around for new job opportunities.

This is what happened to us in the Sultanate of Oman as a result of some contracting, real estate and industrial companies laying off national workers.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk indicated in his memo to Reuters that the company is currently preparing for the next stage of growth, in terms of reducing costs and increasing productivity, which led the company to

conduct a comprehensive review and decide to lay off 10 per cent of its workers globally.

The process of layoffs in the world over the past years has been clearly visible, especially among technology companies, in addition to making new changes and improvements in new jobs.

Most of these issues result from companies' desire to reduce annual costs and respond to rising inflation and rising interest rates, in addition to taking precautions against any fears related to recession and severe contraction in the markets.

In January of last year, layoffs in technology companies reached 90,000 workers, with 277 companies working in this field taking such steps.

This is the case today with

some car companies, including Tesla, which are reducing the number of jobs in order to reduce expenses and stimulate global demand, in addition to updating new models of cars, so that people can buy them in a way that suits their financial circumstances in light of the high interest rates of financing institutions.

Tesla's latest report indicates that the number of electric cars it provided to the market during the first quarter of this year is less compared to the same period last year, which also reduced its production.

In general, China is considered a strong competitor in this field, and in other manufacturing fields that consumers need in many parts of the world.

Opportunity Oman: Real estate market – A flourishing frontier for investors



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

The author is the Founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board advisor & business transformation mentor.



Artist's perspective of the Al Khuwair Downtown Project

Fuelled by an ambitious economic vision, a youthful demographic, and robust government support, Oman's real estate sector has emerged as an irresistible frontier for investors seeking uncharted territories rife with promise.

This burgeoning market presents an enticing blend of untapped potential and sustainable growth prospects, underpinned by the nation's commitment to diversification and development.

Under Oman Vision 2040 agenda, the nation has embarked on a transformative journey, prioritising economic diversification, sustainable practices, and strategic infrastructure investments.

This forward-looking approach has cultivated a stable and attractive environment for real estate development, positioning Oman as a hidden gem for savvy investors.

One of Oman's most compelling advantages is its remarkably low land costs compared to other GCC countries.

This affordability, coupled with Oman's breathtaking landscapes and welcoming culture, makes it an enticing option for those seeking to establish a peaceful and fulfilling life in the region.

Whether you're drawn to the serene beaches, majestic mountains, or vibrant cities, Oman offers a diverse range

of lifestyles and investment opportunities.

At the heart of Oman's real estate renaissance lies a demographic boom, with a staggering 60 per cent of the population under the age of 30.

This youthful demographic has ignited a surge in demand for quality housing across all segments, from luxurious residential enclaves to affordable housing projects, fuelling a construction frenzy to meet the aspirations of a growing and affluent population.

The government's proactive initiatives, such as the Oman Real Estate Development Fund and land grant programmes, have catalysed this burgeoning market, stimulating homeownership and creating fertile ground for investment opportunities through joint ventures with local developers.

Beyond residential real estate, Oman's vision for Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs) presents a unique proposition for investors.

These ambitious, eco-friendly, and culturally sensitive mixed-use developments seamlessly

blend hospitality, residences, retail, and recreational components, catering to the nation's flourishing tourism industry while offering a diverse array of investment prospects.

As Oman diversifies its economy away from hydrocarbon dependence, the demand for modern commercial spaces has surged.

Muscat, the capital, and other thriving cities like Sohar are witnessing the rise of business districts, office complexes, and contemporary shopping malls, catering to the needs of both local and international companies seeking a foothold in this dynamic market.

Recognising the immense potential of its real estate market, Oman has implemented a range of investor-friendly policies to attract foreign capital.

These include streamlined licensing processes, offering approvals within a remarkable

10-day window, coupled with the opportunity for 100 per cent foreign ownership in designated zones.

Additionally, the nation's tax incentives, such as zero corporate tax for up to 30 years in special economic zones, further sweeten the deal for prospective investors.

Oman's commitment to innovation and sustainability is exemplified by its National Space Strategy, a testament to the nation's ambitious vision for the future.

This forward-thinking approach extends to the realm of urban development, with the rise of smart cities across the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Vision 2040, Oman's national development strategy, prioritises the creation of smart cities that utilise technology and innovative urban design to enhance sustainability, improve quality of life, and drive economic growth.

SEVERAL EXCITING PROJECTS ARE ALREADY IN THE PIPELINE, INCLUDING:

1. Sultan Haitham City:

A state-of-the-art urban development that showcases the latest in smart city technologies and sustainable design principles.

2. Omani Mountain Destination:

A breathtaking mountain resort that seamlessly blends luxury, sustainability, and natural beauty.

3. New City Salalah: A modern, eco-friendly city that leverages smart infrastructure and green spaces to create a vibrant and livable urban environment.

4. New City Suhar: An innovative industrial hub that integrates smart technologies and sustainable practices to drive economic growth and diversification.

5. New City Nizwa: A historic city reimagined as a smart, culturally rich destination that celebrates Oman's heritage while embracing the future.

6. Al Khuwair Downtown: A bustling city centre that combines cutting-edge technology, modern amenities, and a vibrant cultural

scene. As Oman continues to invest in smart city development, the opportunities for real estate investors are set to multiply.

By embracing this visionary approach, the Sultanate of Oman is positioning itself for a future of economic diversification, environmental sustainability, and improved living standards.

In the words of a prominent economist, "Oman's real estate sector presents a unique blend of affordability, growth potential, and a clear focus on the future."

With its stunning natural beauty, friendly populace, and commitment to smart city development, the Sultanate of Oman is poised to become a major player in the regional real estate market.

Investors seeking hidden gems and sustainable opportunities would be wise to explore Oman's vast potential."

As the tides of change sweep across the country, Oman's real estate market emerges as a hidden gem, beckoning investors to discover its untapped potential and be part of a nation in the throes of an economic and urban renaissance.

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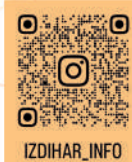
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CULTURE

People, wearing a traditional costume of the New Year's tradition in Appenzell known as 'Silvesterchlausen', leave after a snowman prepared with explosives was not set on fire due to strong winds during the Sechselutten. — AFP

MUSIC

Lebanese pianist Michel Fadel performs during the 7th edition of the Beirut International Women Film Festival in Beirut. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

US singer Adam Levine arrives at the Tenth Breakthrough Prize Ceremony at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

TRAVEL

A photo taken from Doha cornice shows a view of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Jimadores (persons who work in the agave plant) carry agave pineapples at an agave plantation in Tequila, Jalisco State, Mexico. — AFP

art & life

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SHARING THE SECRETS OF ROSE DISTILLATION IN AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

In the beautiful mountains of Oman, people pick roses every year turning them into special products like rose water and oil. Visitors come to see this and learn about it. Locals like Al Laith al Tobi think it's important to share this tradition... P20

Elias AL-fahdi | @5wx0

FASHION

Dior looks to Marlene Dietrich in New York fall show

FRENCH FASHION HOUSE

Christian Dior unveiled a fall line inspired by actress Marlene Dietrich at a catwalk show in New York on Monday evening. Nodding to Dietrich's personal style, Dior designer Maria Grazia

Chiuri dressed models in white shirts, sometimes with ties, pleated trousers and black blazers. Belted or cowl-neck dresses looked to 1940s silhouettes while some frocks sparkled with beading. There were also nods to New York, with prints of the Statue of Liberty featuring on some designs. Others were adorned with depictions of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, where Dior is based. Chiuri worked with artist Claire Fontaine on designing the show space, with pairs of illuminated hands adorning the catwalk's backdrop. "These hands represent positively and in an empowering way the female sex and they are the hands of the seamstresses, of the creators, myself, of Maria Grazia and the hands of the women that made this project possible," Fontaine said in an interview. Among the celebrities attending the show were actors Anya Taylor-Joy, Michelle Williams, Naomi Watts, Rosamund Pike and Charlize Theron. — Reuters



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GAZA'S HISTORIC TREASURES SAVED BY 'IRONY OF HISTORY'

GAZA'S ANCIENT GREEK site of Anthedon has been bombed, its "Napoleon's Palace" destroyed and the only private museum burned down: the war has taken a terrible toll on the rich heritage of the Palestinian territory. But in a strange twist of fate, some of its greatest historical treasures are safe in a warehouse in Switzerland.

And ironically, it is all thanks to the blockade that made life in the Gaza Strip such a struggle for the past 16 years.

Based on satellite images, the UN cultural organisation reckons some 41 historic sites have been damaged since Israel began pounding the besieged territory after the October 7 Hamas attack.

On the ground, Palestinian archaeologist Fadel al-Otol keeps tabs on the destruction in real time.

When he has electricity and internet access, photos pour into a WhatsApp group he set up with 40 or so young peers he mobilised to watch over the territory's vast array of ancient sites and monuments.

As a teenager in the 1990s, Otol was hired by European archaeological missions before going on to study in Switzerland and at the Louvre Museum in Paris.

"All the archaeological remains in the north have been hit," he said by phone from Gaza.

The human toll since the October 7 Hamas attack has been chilling.

A total of 1,170 people were killed in the unprecedented raid on Israel, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Almost 34,000 have died in Gaza in unrelenting Israeli retaliation, according to the territory's health ministry.

The damage to Gaza's history has also been immense.

NAPOLEON'S HQ FLATTENED

"Blakhiya (the ancient Greek city of Anthedon) was directly bombed. There's a huge hole", said Otol.

He said part of the site, near a Hamas barracks where "we hadn't started excavating", was hit.

The 13th-century Al-Basha palace in Gaza City's old town "has been completely destroyed. There was bombing and (then) it was bulldozed.

"It held hundreds of ancient objects and magnificent sarcophagi," Otol added as he shared recent photos of the ruins.

Napoleon is said to have based himself in the ochre stone edifice at the disastrous end of his Egyptian campaign in 1799.

The room where the French emperor supposedly slept was full of Byzantine artefacts.

"Our best finds were displayed in the Basha," Jean-Baptiste Humbert of the French Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem (EBAF) said.

But we know little of their fate, he said. "Did someone remove the objects before blowing the building up?"

Nerves were frayed even further when the director of Israeli Antiquities, Eli Escusido, posted a video on Instagram of Israeli soldiers surrounded by vases and ancient pottery in the EBAF warehouse in Gaza City.

Much of what has been unearthed in digs in Gaza was stored either at the Al-Basha museum or the warehouse.

Palestinians quickly accused the army of pillaging. But EBAF archaeologist Rene Elter said he has seen no evidence of "state looting".

"My colleagues were able to return to the site. The soldiers opened boxes. We don't know if they took anything," he said.

However, he added: "Every day when Fadel (al-Otol) calls me, I'm afraid he'll

tell me that one of our colleagues has died or that such and such a site has been destroyed".

Archaeology is a highly political issue in Israel and the Palestinian territories, with discoveries often used to justify the claims of the two warring peoples.

While Israel has an army of archaeologists who have unearthed an impressive number of ancient treasures, Gaza remains relatively untouched by the trowel despite a rich past stretching back thousands of years.

ANCIENT CROSSROADS

The only sheltered natural harbour between the Sinai and Lebanon, Gaza has been for centuries a crossroads of civilisations.

A pivot point between Africa and Asia and a hub of the incense trade, it was coveted by the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Ottomans.

A key figure in excavating this glorious past over the last few decades has been Jawdat Khoudary, a Gazan construction magnate and collector.

Gaza, with its "seafront real estate", had a property boom in the 1990s after the Oslo peace accords and the creation of the Palestinian Authority.

When building workers dug up the soil, they came across lots and lots of ancient objects. Khoudary amassed a treasure trove of artefacts that he opened up to foreign archaeologists.

Marc-Andre Haldimann, then curator of MAH, Geneva's art and history museum, couldn't believe his eyes when he was invited to have a look around the garden of Khoudary's mansion in 2004.

"We found ourselves in front of 4,000 objects, including an avenue of Byzantine columns," he said.

Quickly an idea took shape to organise a major exhibition to highlight Gaza's

past at the MAH, and then to build a museum in the territory itself so that the Palestinians could take ownership of their own heritage.

At the end of 2006, around 260 objects from the Khoudary collection left Gaza for Geneva, with some later going on to be part of another hit show at the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris.

But geopolitics changed along the way. In June 2007, Hamas drove the Palestinian Authority from Gaza. And Israel imposed its blockade.

As a result, the Gazan artefacts could no longer return home and remained stuck in Geneva, while the archaeological museum project fizzled out.

But Khoudary did not give up hope. He built a museum-hotel called Al-Mathaf, museum in Arabic, on the Mediterranean coast north of Gaza City.

But then came the Israeli ground offensive after the Hamas attack on October 7, which began in Gaza's north.

ANYTHING BUT A BLACK HOLE

"Al-Mathaf remained under Israeli control for months," Khoudary, who fled Gaza for Egypt, said. "As soon as they left, I asked some people to go there to see what state the place was in. I was shocked. Several items were missing and the hall had been set on fire.

His mansion was also destroyed during fierce fighting in the Shaikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City.

"The Israelis flattened the garden with bulldozers... I don't know whether objects were buried (by the bulldozers) or whether the marble columns were broken or looted. I can't find words," he added.

The Israeli military did not comment on specific sites. But it accused Hamas of systematically using civilian structures like cultural heritage sites, govern-

ment buildings, schools, shelters and hospitals for military purposes.

"Israel maintains its commitments to international law, including by affording the necessary special protections," the army added in a statement.

While part of Khoudary's collection has been lost, the treasures held in Switzerland remain intact, saved by the blockade and the red tape that delayed their return.

"There were 106 crates ready to go" for years, said Beatrice Blandin, the MAH museum's current curator.

Safely far from the war raging in Gaza, "the objects are in good condition", she added. "We restored some of the bronze pieces that were slightly corroded and repacked everything.

"We just had to be sure that the convoy would not be blocked," she said. "We were waiting for that green light."

But with any return impossible for the moment, Blandin said "discussions are under way" for a new Gaza exhibition in Switzerland.

Khoudary is excited by the idea.

"The most important collection of objects on the history of Gaza is in Geneva. If there is a new show, it will allow the whole world to learn about our history," he said from Cairo.

"It's an irony of history," said Haldimann, who is trying to get his friend Fadel al-Otol safely out of Gaza.

"A new Gaza exhibition would show once again that Gaza... is anything but a black hole."

— AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

'Sunset Boulevard' and Scherzinger shine at UK's Olivier awards

A REVIVED VERSION OF "Sunset Boulevard," the musical based on the 1950s film, and its leading actress Nicole Scherzinger were among the big winners at the Olivier Awards on Sunday, picking up seven prizes at Britain's top theatre ceremony.

The show's lead duo of US singer Scherzinger, who rose to fame with pop band The Pussycat Dolls, and Britain's Tom Francis were named best actress and actor in a musical, while Jamie Lloyd won the award for best director.

The Broadway-bound show, with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, also clinched the musical revival category,



ry, along with the best lighting design, musical contribution and sound design awards at the ceremony at London's Royal Albert Hall.

Scherzinger, who was born in

Hawaii and raised in Kentucky, portrays Norma Desmond, a one-time film star who longs for a comeback, in the 1993 reinvention of the 1950 film, which featured Gloria Swanson.

Australia's Sarah Snook followed up on her recent success starring in the television series "Succession" by winning the award for best actress for her role in "The Picture Of Dorian Gray," which also claimed best costume design.

London's National Theatre won three awards, including best new play for "Dear England," a portrayal of the English national soccer team's perennial heartbreak, and best actor for Mark Gatiss in "The Motive And The Cue," as director John Gielgud in a difficult professional relationship with actor Richard Burton.

"Stranger Things, The First Shadow," a stage adaptation of part of the hit Netflix series "Stranger Things," won the best new entertainment or comedy play and set design categories. The best new musical prize went to "Operation Mincemeat," which tells the story of British military subterfuge during World War Two. — Reuters

FILM

'Rebel Moon' sequel offers more action, backstory of warriors

ZACK SNYDER SAYS "Rebel Moon - Part Two: The Scargiver" shows his full vision for the franchise.

The second instalment of the sci-fi adventure picks up from where "Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire", released four months earlier, left off.

It sees Sofia Boutella's character Kora and a group of rebel warriors team up with the people of Veldt, a peaceful farming moon, to ward off an attack from the tyrannical Motherworld and its resurrected, ruthless military leader Atticus Noble (Ed Skrein).

"I always knew that this was going



to be like half a movie. Our whole idea was to get the movies out right next to each other so people could have the complete experience. And I think that's what we're really hoping for with this is that people get a chance to see the entire thing," Snyder said as he premiered the film in London on Tuesday.

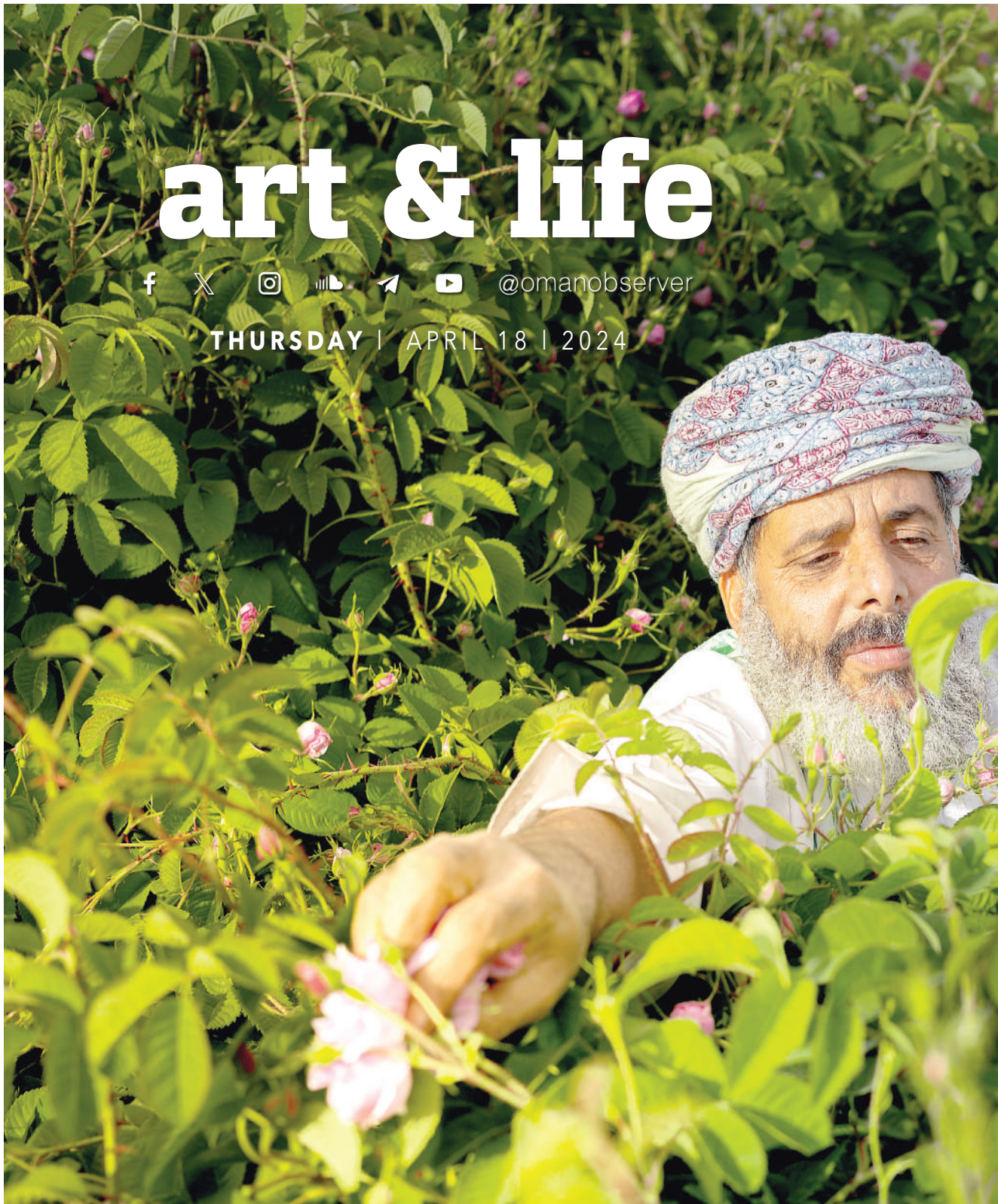
Part Two also sees actors Djimon Hounsou and Bae Doona reprising their roles as General Titus and Nemesis and Anthony Hopkins lending his voice to Jimmy the sentient

robot.

The movie delves into the backstories of the warriors, laying out their motives to join the rebellion.

"It's going to be a lot more action and you get to go deeper with the characters and find out more about their pasts and what drew them to fight for this cause," said Boutella.

Director's cuts of the two films are expected in August, Snyder said, adding that he and writers Shay Hatten and Kurt Johnstad had also continued developing the story. — Reuters



SHARING THE SECRETS OF ROSE DISTILLATION IN AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY ELIAS AL FAHDI

Of the more than 60 villages spread across Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the villages of Saiq, Wadi Bani Habib and Al Ain become tourist magnets between March and May as visitors flock to these areas to witness the time-honoured rose harvest season.

These guests are met with the sight of villagers delicately plucking the fragrant blooms, their hands moving with practised precision to preserve the petals' essence.

The harvested roses are then ushered into a meticulously orchestrated process of transformation, where they yield a wealth of precious byproducts. Traditional distilleries, some of the oldest in the region, come to life as the petals are carefully loaded into 'Al Duhjan', ancient mud ovens where the alchemy of distillation takes place.

From these time-honoured practices emerge an array of coveted treasures. Prized among them is pure rose water, extracted drop by drop through a labour-intensive process that captures the essence of the blooms in its most pristine form. Visitors have the opportunity to witness this age-old craft in action, as skilled artisans navigate each stage of production with unwavering expertise.

Other than this, rose oil, distilled from the mountain's blooms, emerges as a prized essence coveted by perfumers and aromatherapists alike. Its fragrant allure is matched only by its versatility, finding its way into cosmetics, fragrances and holistic remedies.

"Growing roses is not only a livelihood, but also a craft that brings love back home," shared Al Laith al Tobi, one of the members of a family that has been running Bait Al Sarh, an ancestral home that was transformed as a living museum where people can come in to see the whole process of distillation.

"The rose season in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar begins in March and continues until mid-April, where the green terraces are covered with more than 5,000 rose bushes with an area estimated at between 7 to 10 acres.

This is exactly what makes this season very thrilling and eagerly awaited," Al Laith shared.

"It's a precious season that lasts for only a month. Locals enjoy hosting trips for rose cultivation," he added.

Due to the large number of tourists who visit Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during the rose season, locals have gotten accustomed to welcoming guests on organised trips to live the experience of picking roses and learn more about the process of making rose water that is well-known in Oman as one of the most used fragrances.

"There had been a lot of interest regarding the process, including the rose picking. It is for this reason that Bait Al Sarh wants to open its doors so that we can share to people this inherited craft," Al Laith said.

"Tourists do not only enjoy picking roses on such a trip, but they also receive a lot of information such as how to pick the roses, how rose water is made, how it is stored and why it is a little bit more expensive than any other rose water made in the world," Al Laith said.

Al Laith shared that for those organising trips to the mountains, the programme usually includes allowing the tourists to enjoy the scenery in the farms and picking the roses.

"The rose harvest season has become a very popular mountain activity that a lot of tourists and people in Oman await every year," he said.

Ali bin Saif al Shukaili, Assistant Director of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, said that the rose harvest season in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar ushers in a state of tourism diversity and allows tourists to have a close look at traditional and modern methods of distilling rose water.

He pointed out that the ministry attaches great importance to encouraging investment in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, notably by attracting tourism projects like tourist resorts, hotels and guesthouses. Such projects augment the local community's gains from the tourism movement's activity, he observed.

Al Shukaili said that the Tourist Services Centre on Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Road guides how best a tourist can benefit from the rose harvest season.

