SUNDAY | APRIL 9, 2023 | RAMADHAN 18, 1444 AH

VOL. 42 NO. 146 | PAGES 20 | BAISAS 200

OMAN DAILY
# Observer

PRAYER TIMES

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| FAJR | 04:35AM |
| DHUHR | 12:14PM |
| ASR | 03:41PM |
| MAGHRIB | 06:30PM |
| ISHA | 07:42PM |

Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

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ANNUAL E-SURVEY OF INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENTS STARTS TODAY

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MYSTERIOUS MOUNTAIN CARVINGS IN AL WIDD

■ MUSCAT

### BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN SET

The Central Blood Bank (Department of Blood Bank Services) will launch a national campaign on Sunday in cooperation with the telecom provider Omantel to raise awareness of the importance of blood donation. The campaign will be held until April 12 at different locations in the Sultanate of Oman. The Central Blood Bank in Bausher has been saying there has been an urgent need for blood donors due to a sharp drop in the number of donors during the holy month of Ramadhan.

DETAILS ON P2

■ SEOUL

### NORTH KOREA HOLDS NUCLEAR DRONE TEST

North Korea has conducted another test of a nuclear-capable underwater attack drone, its state media reported on Saturday, the latest demonstration of its military capabilities as it faces off against the United States and South Korea. North Korea tested a nuclear-capable unmanned underwater attack weapon called "Haeil-2" from April 4 to April 7, state media reported, more than a week after it disclosed a new underwater drone called "Haeil-1", which translates as tsunami. The North's KCNA state news agency said that during the underwater strategic weapon system test the drone cruised 1,000 km for 71 hours and 6 minutes and successfully hit a simulated target. "The test perfectly proved the reliability of the underwater strategic weapon system and its fatal attack ability," KCNA said. — **AFP**

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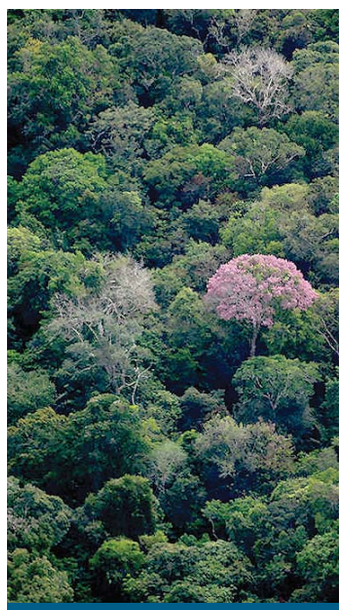


IN DEFENCE OF NATURE-BASED CARBON MARKETS | P9

# Home-based businesses get a push with 'Tamkeen' platform

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As many as 52 Omani families who run home-based businesses got a fillip when the Ministry of Social Development represented by the Department of Family Development and Empowerment organised 'Tamkeen', a real time platform for introducing their products and services to the public under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the ministry, at the Muscat Grand Mall from April 4 to 8.

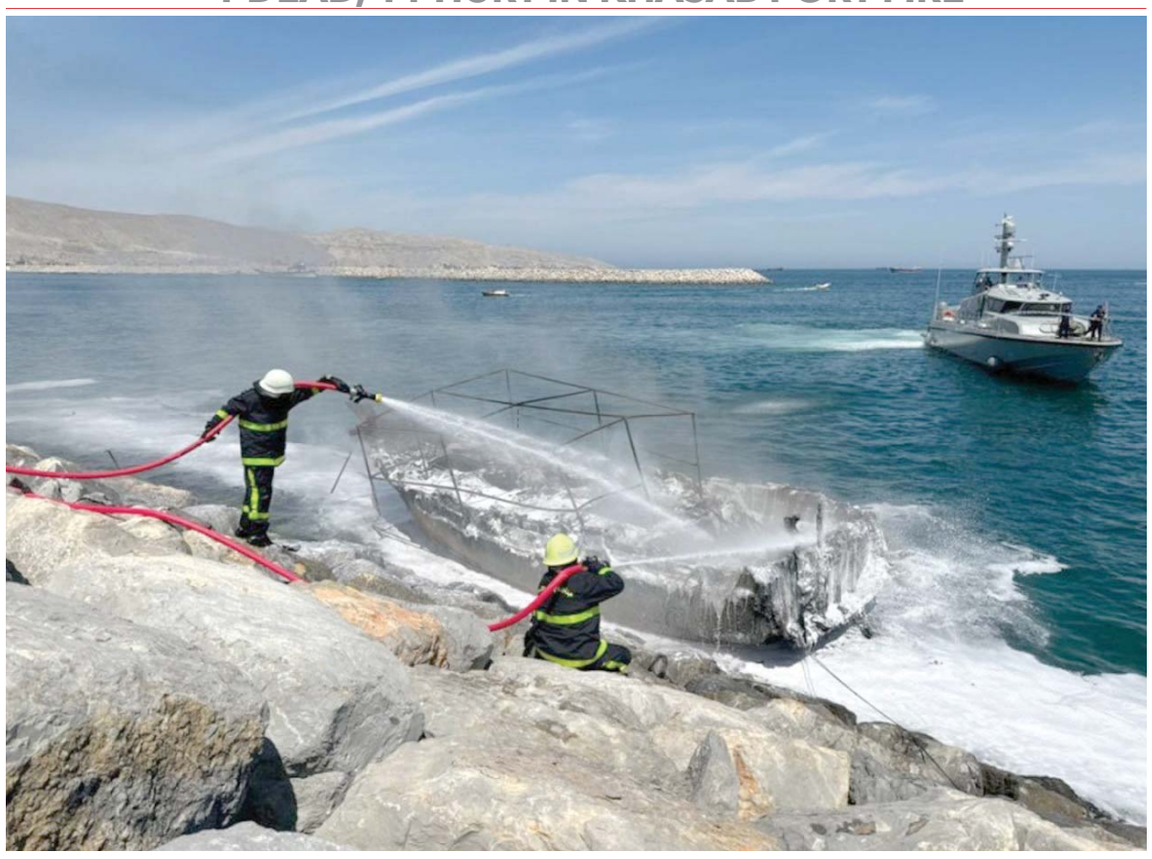
'Tamkeen' is one of the most prominent programmes launched by the ministry envisioned to invest the energy of individuals and families to participate in national development. Its mission is to empower individuals and families and qualify them to be self-reliant.

The Productive Families Exhibition included many products and services initiated by different age groups and stages and accompanied many events, entertainment competitions, theatrical performances, and a review of success stories of cases benefiting from the support of the 'Tamkeen' programme.

The exhibition aims to invest the energy of productive families and enhance their capabilities in self-employment, and to introduce these families through their participation in local exhibitions and raise their economic level, and to introduce the role of the Family Development and Empowerment Department in serving the community and the target group.

It focuses on the economic development of those benefiting from the social security umbrella with the aim of transforming them into self-reliant, investing their capabilities, promoting the concept of self-employment and reducing social security expenses, as well as helping them administratively, technically and financially to manage a small or medium project.

■ 1 DEAD, 11 HURT IN KHASAB PORT FIRE



A fire erupted in 3 boats anchored at the Port of Khasab, killing one person and injuring 11 others. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said that the police command of Musandam Governorate, aided by the Coast Guard and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), responded soon after receiving a report about the fire that broke out in three boats at the fishing port in the Wilayat of Khasab. A European national was killed in the fire and 11 others of various nationalities sustained mild to moderate injuries.

# EU calls for restraint and calm amid Israel-Palestinian clashes

**BRUSSELS:** EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Saturday condemned the escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians, urging all parties to exercise restraint and promote calm for the ongoing religious holidays.

Israeli-Palestinian tensions mounted after an Italian tourist was killed and five people were wounded in a car ramming in Tel Aviv on Friday following a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank that killed two Israeli sisters.

"Israel has the right to defend itself. At the same time, any response must be proportionate. The EU calls for an immediate end to the ongoing violence. Everything must be done to prevent the conflict from spreading," Borrell said in a statement.

"We urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint, to avoid further escalation and promote calm for the ongoing religious holidays," he said.

Demonstrators take part in a rally in support of Palestinians in Rabat late. – **AFP**

Two British-Israeli sisters aged 16 and 20 were killed and their mother seriously wounded in a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank, while an Italian tourist was killed and seven others wounded in Tel Aviv when a car rammed into people walking on a cycling path.

Borrell also condemned the "indiscriminate" rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

There has been an escalation of violence since Israeli police clashed with Palestinians last Wednesday inside Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque, with Israel bombarding both Gaza and Lebanon following the rocket fire by Palestinians. — **AFP**

# Upper air trough brings rains today

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Wilayat of Samayil received rains on Saturday evening starting off the impact of upper air trough as the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre had predicted rains from Saturday evening until Tuesday.

Cumulonimbus cloud activity was seen over parts of the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar and Al Dhahirah, and Hajar Mountains, with chances of sporadic rain, sometimes thundershowers, accompanied by active winds.

The weather forecaster said: "Samayil received rain and other parts expected to receive rain are in Dhofar and Al Wusta. But on Sunday we will see the expansion of trough and might experience rain in mountainous areas of Muscat such as Al Amerat and Qurayat and of course the Hajar Mountains."

The aerial images showed the flow and formation of clouds over most of the governorates, and the Oman Met Office stated that there are chances of thunderstorms over the Hajar Mountains.

The general weather forecast for Sunday is partly cloudy skies over most of the governorates with chances of isolated thundershowers over the Hajar Mountains and parts of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. There are also chances of low level clouds or fog during late night or early morning over parts of South Al Sharqiyah, Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates.

Due to active winds there are chances of dust in desert areas.

Wadis are expected to flow and caution is to be exercised while approaching low-lying areas and the Civil Aviation Authority has warned against crossing flowing wadis. During this period, strong downdraft is expected. Satellite images on Saturday morning show flow of high/medium clouds over the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar, and the condensation of low clouds over parts of the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta. The Civil Aviation Authority has requested public to be cautious during the flow of wadis and to keep in mind fog and visibility before approaching sea.

**The aerial images showed the flow and formation of clouds over most of the governorates, and the Oman Met Office stated that there are chances of thunderstorms over the Hajar Mountains**

# Blood donation campaign from Sunday: DBBS

**STAFF REPORTER**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) will launch a national campaign on Sunday in cooperation with the telecom provider Omantel to raise awareness of the importance of blood donation.

The campaign will be held until April 12 at different locations: the Central Blood Bank in Bausher (8 am -12 pm and 7.30-11.30 pm), Al Mamoura Mosque in Mabela, Ali Al Shehani Mosque in Seeb, Umm Al Qura Mosque in Athaiba, Al Wahab Mosque in Al Amerat (8-11 pm), Sur Hospital (7 pm - 12 am), Rustaq Hospital (7-11 pm), Suhar Hospital (7-11.30 pm), Nizwa Hospital (7.30-11.30 pm), Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah (8-11 am) and (7.30-11.30 pm) and Shanfari Mosque in Salalah (8-11 pm).

There has been an urgent need for blood due to the sharp drop in the number of donors during the holy month of Ramadhan.

At the same time, the DBBS praised the role of donors and said there has been an increasing number of blood donations due to community awareness as well as due to the role of the media in conveying this humanitarian message.

Interested donors have to log in to the eHealth portal by clicking on the login button at the top of the page and they have to register as a donor to register to donate blood, use the 'Register as a donor' button in the Blood Bank application.

"Generally, blood banks face difficulty in providing negative blood types. If the blood type is negative, do not delay the bid, and remember that there are those who are in dire need of your blood donation," according to the Central Blood Bank.

A platelet can only be kept alive for five days. The Department of Blood Bank Services said many cancer patients require daily platelet transfusions for seven days.

Platelets are tiny blood cells that help your body form clots to stop bleeding. If one of your blood vessels gets damaged, it sends signals to the platelets. The platelets then rush to the site of damage and form a plug (clot) to fix the damage.

# Batinah highway rehabilitation project underway

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is currently working on the rehabilitation of Al Batinah highway at various locations starting from the Wilayat of Barka to Khatmat Malaha in the Wilayat of Shinas.

The project includes repaving of 73 km at various locations along the road, repairing damaged median barriers, replacing signboards and road markings in accordance with the standard specifications included in the road design manual of the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Batinah highway is among the most important roads in the Sultanate of Oman and with the recent increase in car numbers it began witnessing traffic congestion.

The ministry carries out routine maintenance on the road to ensure the safety of the road users and to preserve the road as a significant landmark of the infrastructure revolution that took place in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

# Muscat voted for Tesla Supercharger location

**VINOD NAIR**
@vinot_nair

The capital Muscat has been voted as one of the sites for the Supercharger Installation Programme. Apart from Muscat, in the Sultanate of Oman, the cities selected outside the United States are Poland, Spain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Currently, Tesla owns and operates around 40,000+ superchargers in the world, mostly located on major routes near amenities.

According to Tesla, the company will manage the construction and operation of superchargers, including maintenance.

The company adds the ideal hosting sites can support eight or more individual parking stalls and provide a hospitable charging experience with amenities such as restaurants, groceries, shops, restrooms and Wi-Fi.

The applicants including private property managers and local municipalities, who wish to host superchargers, must submit their proposals which will be reviewed by Tesla.

Tesla will review the application and contact those interested

to share more details and the company will make the final selection based on market needs and the location of the business.

According to market experts, with electric vehicles beginning to dominate the industry, Tesla superchargers can provide users with direct current fast charging.

The supercharger hosts in their application must provide options for grocery stores, restaurants, shopping centres, etc.

It may be noted that the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is working on developing the infrastructure for eclectic vehicles by providing charging stations in line with the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology, said that the ministry is working with automobile dealers to ensure that 79 per cent of the cars on the roads will be electrically driven by 2035.

Earlier, the government said it wants to ensure that motorists can move from Muscat to Salalah and back in electric vehicles without worrying about finding stations with charge units.

# ROP cautions against Imo fraud

**STAFF REPORTER**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) detected a new criminal method via the Imo app through an account bearing ROP's logo and targeting citizens and residents.

The conman tells the victims that they were involved in violations that should be settled by providing their bank account information which the fraudster later used to withdraw cash from their accounts.

The ROP advises citizens and residents not to disclose their personal or bank account information on social media.

# Feasting after fasting is dangerous: Health experts

**KABEER YOUSUF**
@kabeeryousef

Among the many lessons that the holy month of Ramadhan teaches is moderation. The spirit of moderation should be seen in everything even in breaking the fast.

Some people, however, fail to observe the value of moderation while eating post-iftar. They tend to eat whatever comes their way and keep on eating irrespective of their body conditions.

The practice of overeating or feasting over fasting can cause health hazards, as this habit of overeating soon after nearly 15 hours of fast can overwhelm the body system.

Doctors and dieticians say what we consume directly affects our health and health is the key to happiness, hence commands paramount importance to be taken care.

Hospitals often see an influx of patients with gastrointestinal ailments most commonly abdominal pain immediately after Ramadhan due to overeating. The best way to prevent any such illness is to plan the iftar meal in advance and make sure that it is light, coupled with fluids to keep you hydrated and energised.

"The holy month of Ramadhan is a great opportunity for us to focus on striking a perfect balance between our intake of calories, vitamins, water intake and the like. One advantage of fasting for nearly 15 hours is that it fetches in a multitude of benefits both mentally and physically," says Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician at NMC.

"By and large, our metabolic function slows down during fasting and dietary fat is utilised during this period. The body has regulatory mechanisms that activate during fasting. Any food overeaten will jeopardise the function and will lead to problems in due course.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO AVOID ILL-HEALTH**

- Drink as much water as possible between iftar and sleeping time
- Avoid salty foods during iftar and suhoor meals
- Avoid caffeinated drinks
- Avoid heavy fatty foods
- Avoid refined carbohydrates and sugar
- For the suhoor meal, it is advisable to eat proteins, oils and complex carbohydrates
- Break your fast with a simple meal

Instead, a diet that has less than a normal amount of food but is sufficiently balanced will keep a person healthy and active during the month of Ramadhan," says Dr Khalifa al Riyami, a Physiologist with a leading hospital.

Fasting in Ramadhan for a month changes many things and the body adapts to these changes like maintaining glucose levels for more than 12 hours during fasting, where body stores are utilised, changes in the digestive system occur, and similarly, neurogenic changes happen.

"Post-iftar food usually contains high sugar and oil, which can cause sudden changes in the body again, as it had adapted to the fasting state leading to sudden surge rise in sugar levels, cholesterol from fatty food," says Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist Internal Medicine at Shifa Hospital.

He says people can have many symptoms after overeating. "They include, but not limited to abdominal symptoms like nausea vomiting, abdominal fullness, headaches and constipation, causing gastritis, there will swing in the blood sugar levels and they will rise suddenly causing problems in diabetic patients, heart patients may have chest pains or shortness of breath," he says.

"Therefore, it's advised to take slowly and a small portion of food with high fibre, low sugar like fruits, salads vegetables and gradually increase the quantity of food intake and the amount of sugar, starch, oily food intake over a period of a couple of days so that the body gets time to adapt to the new schedule and not to overload the system suddenly," adds Dr Singhvi.

Fasting during Ramadhan can be good for one's health and personal development. However, one would likely reap in the benefits of fasting if he or she can focus on good hydration, taking in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and protein foods like fish, lean meat, nuts and low-fat foods as the main source of energy for those fasting.

"Consuming large quantities of food or an unbalanced diet after the fast can lead to stomach and intestinal disorders that may worsen normal health or any existing medical condition. Especially, people with diabetes who take part in fast there are potential benefits and possible risks of hypo- and hyperglycaemia," says Dr Viresh Chopra.

# Friday Market charms as Eid shopping gains pace

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With traditional Omani dresses for both men and women dangling in every nook and corner at Friday Market in Wadi al Kabir, the whiff of air within emanated a feel of Eid.

With around two weeks left and hardly one more Friday to shop here, people began to rush from various wilayats across the capital and some from interior areas to get the best deal on clothes and household items necessary for the season.

"Truly, business this time is very good, with God's blessing. I brought men's clothes and musar (Omani turban) and Kumma (Omani cap) and they are in high demand," said Mohammed al Rudhaimi, a youth who works for a leading electronics store and does his part-time business here on Fridays.

Al Rudhaimi otherwise sells spare parts, batteries and other accessories of mobile phones but finds it even more lucrative to sell clothes on Fridays prior to Eid. "Why people prefer to buy from the Wadi al Kabir Friday Market is that they get a good bargaining without compromising on quality," Rudhaimi said.

The household division was equally buzzing with women folks inspecting the utensils, pots and pans and other kitchenwares necessary to be bought as part of pre Eid preparations. Most of the households discard the used kitchenwares and invest in decorating their kitchens with newer ones.

"I prefer to shop either in Souq Muttrah or Souq Juma (Friday Market) because, first of all, that has been the practice since the days of my father, and secondly, we have better say in prices than the big shopping malls," a lady who preferred to remain unidentified told the Observer.

There are nearly hundred shopkeepers, both small and big scale, predominantly Omanis inside the market which is enlivened every Friday. One can find a CEO of a company searching for a rare knob for his Murphy radio and a plumber looking for a pin for his drilling machine at the market. The market is unique in the sense that it has items in all forms, new, preloved, worn and torn and outdated pieces.

# Oman celebrates third Gulf Endowment Week

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Sultanate of Oman joined the rest in the region in celebrating the third Gulf Endowment Week held under the auspices of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, from April 3 to 5 at the Mall of Oman.

The three-day event focused on the topic 'Endowment as an honourable prophetic Sunnah,' which emanated from the meetings held by the Standing Committee of Specialists in Islamic affairs and Endowments in the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

The celebrations, held in sync with other countries of the GCC under the title 'Endowment and Sustainability', aimed at introducing endowment and its various purposes and community services with programmes including an exhibition that documented endowments in the Sultanate of Oman, and the facets of some endowment institutions and zakat committees.

The Gulf Endowment Week also aims at introducing the importance of waqf and its legitimacy in Islam, demonstrating the civilised role of the endowment and its contributions to building societies while identifying efforts to advance the endowment and develop its investments.

"With the Gulf Endowment Week we conducted programmes for educating the community and our societies about the necessity of preserving time for effective management of our lives," Ali al Hattali from the ministry said.

Several Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) pertaining to endowment were signed and a documentary film on 'Waqf and Sustainability' was previewed and an exhibition of endowment institutions and zakat committees was also held.

# Plans afoot to revitalise area around Port Sultan Qaboos

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The government seeks to revitalise commercial activities at the iconic Port Sultan Qaboos in Muttrah with bids being awarded for some activities at the port such as the operations of the luxury yachts and the repairing of ships.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, recently said commercial activities were moved to Suhar from Muscat considering the traffic congestion at Muttrah and the fact that the new port was new and advanced. "Some bids were awarded for some activities at the port such as the operations of the luxury yachts and the repairing of ships among others," he said.

Meanwhile, Omran Group is soon expected to unveil details of the tourism projects alongside the Muttrah Waterfront. It may be noted that Muttrah is a port of call for tourist ships receiving thousands of foreign visitors between November and April every year.

Muttrah Tourism Development Company (MTDC) established to redevelop Port Sultan Qaboos into a mixed-use tourism and residential community was restructured in 2020 with full ownership transferred to Omran.

Meanwhile, Muscat Municipality has invited bids for the Muttrah Square project as per the design that won the first Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design.

Designed by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Ghadhami, Omaima bint Mahmoud al Hinaiyah, and Abdullah bin Saleh at Bahri, the project is expected to raise the value of Muttrah with a unique landmark, where an iconic bridge in the middle of the square is designed in the form of a bird over the sea.

The bridge captures the famous landmarks of Muttrah in one frame and will be surrounded by a mixed-use plaza that includes a dancing fountain, retail stores, and cafes, with lights that blend with the waves of the sea.

The authorities are working on launching a cable car service between the vegetable and fish market and Kalbou Park.

# Omani doctor becomes 1st 'International Examiner' by RCEM

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Dr Mahmoud bin Nasser al Rahbi, Senior Consultant - Emergency Medicine and Head of the Emergency Department at Al Nahda Hospital, has become the first Omani doctor to have been awarded the title of 'International Examiner' by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) in the United Kingdom.

Dr Al Rahbi will be conducting the final examination in the college fellowship programme in Malaysia over a period of 5 consecutive days, with 32 male and female doctors per day, and the examinations include all skills and standards related to emergency medicine, conducted as part of the Royal College's international examination centres in several countries.

"It is (having appointed as the examiner of RCEM) indeed a privilege to be the examiner with the Royal College of Emergency Medicine UK representing the Sultanate of Oman," Dr Al Rahbi said.

Dr Al Rahbi completed his course in Emergency Medicine from the RCEM in the United Kingdom in the year 2007, and he is awarded the title of 'International Examiner' in the same college, and became the first Omani to be selected for such examinations.

The RCEM is responsible for setting standards of training and administering examinations in Emergency Medicine for the award of fellowship and membership of the college as well as recommending trainees for CCT in Emergency Medicine.

As for the Royal College exams, Dr Al Rahbi explained, "The exams are divided into membership and fellowship. With regard to membership, a person must pass two exams before attending the final exam."

# Omani youth authors book on 'netiquettes'

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An Omani youth has authored a set of guidelines, touted to be the first Arabic guidebook on effective participation on social media, on how one can engage himself or herself on the Internet effectively within the code of conduct of the web world.

Titled a 'Guidebook to e-Publishing on Social Media Platforms for Public and Private Entities', the book is brought out by Khalid bin Zayid al Khanbashi, a translator and media communication expert with the Muscat Municipality. "With this book, which is the first Arabic guide, I provide the basic theoretical knowledge of successful interaction on social media platforms which will be so useful for my peers who engage themselves in the virtual world," said Al Khanbashi.

KHALID AL KHANBASHI

Spread over 52 pages, the total content is based on a solid scientific base in communication, to engage current account managers and hobbyists who are interested in employing this virtual world effectively.

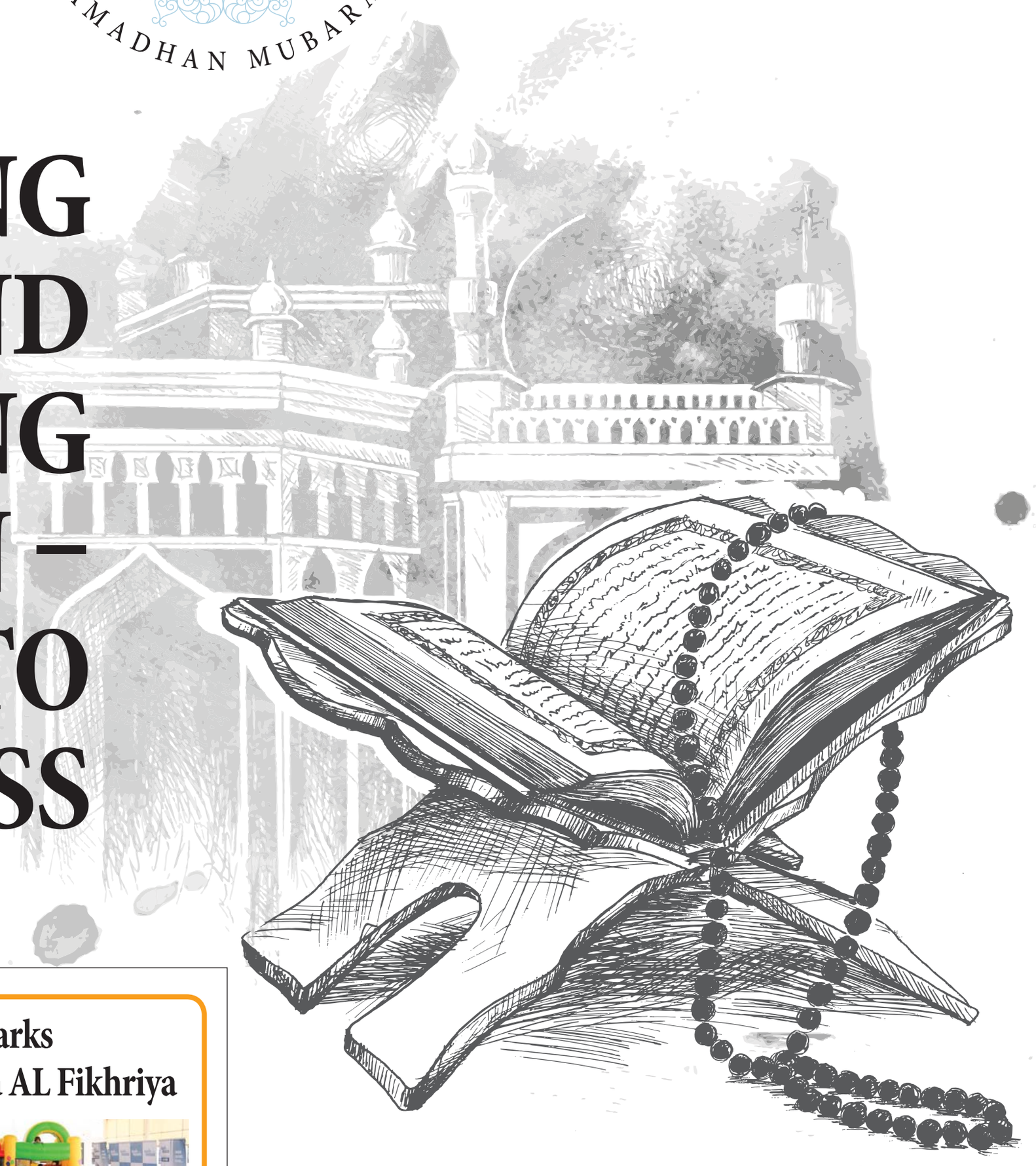
Al Khanbashi said that readers will learn how to write a communication strategy, as this strategy is the first thing that should be learned before proceeding to publish on social media sites, the best practices for writing effective content and engaging in fruitful interaction on these social networks.

"They will also come to know the importance of these platforms for public entities in raising citizen confidence in them and get acquainted with a brief on media crisis management." The book also reveals the 15 most famous mistakes made by account managers in the Arab world, especially in government entities, which, in return, protects him from many challenges, and guarantees him successful interaction on these platforms.

The guide is characterised by the ease of language and direct meaning, and is unique due to the scarcity of Arabic and English literature currently available in the field, knowing that much of this literature is superficial and does not dive into the core and don't identify the actual reasons for this field.

Al Khanbashi said that he thought of authoring such a book due to the fact that many books on the subject in different languages do not teach online publishing specialists of social media how to write a communication strategy and how to evaluate social media accounts in an easy, simplified and organised way.

# FASTING AND RECITING QURAN – JOURNEY TO SUCCESS



## Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman marks Qaranqasho with students of Al Tarbiya AL Fikhriya

Students at Al Tarbiya Al Fikhriya School, Al Khuwair, celebrated Qaranqasho with schoolmates and teachers supported by Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman, in coordination with the Ministry of Education.

The spirit was high as they played on the air castle, greeted cartoon characters, and enjoyed the Qaranqasho song. They eagerly awaited their turn for face painting and henna.

Huda al Araimi from the Ministry of Education said, "I like the activities and enjoyed the smiles on the students' faces. I think it is a good gesture from Apollo Hospitals Muscat and I hope this cooperation continues to grow."

Al Tarbiya Al Fikhriya, (Intellectual Education), is a school for intellectually challenged children. The students enroll at the age of six years and continue till the ninth grade, that is upto 17 years of age.

The school was established in 1984 with 69 students, but now at their new premises in Al Khuwair the strength has gone up to 195 students.

"We always have a corporate event during the holy month of Ramadhan, but this year we decided to have a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative and go straight into the community and make a difference. We are grateful to the Ministry of Education for giving us this wonderful opportunity," said Debraj Sanyal, COO, Apollo Hospitals Muscat.

Throughout the event Apollo's medical team was present ready to provide consultation and support led by Dr Shakeel Moinuddin, Department of Pediatrics and Neonatology.

The journey of Ramadhan 2023 for Apollo Hospitals, is determined to serve the society by connecting healthcare and community, as Apollo considers the prime responsibility is to provide high quality clinical care to all the patients by developing robust quality standards as well as by using expert diagnoses and medical treatment plans, in addition to enhanced infection and safety protocols to render the most appropriate treatment.

All the teachers at the co-education school are qualified in special education.

"The children are taught in academics and in adaptive behavior; in addition teachers develop individual plans for each child as the development varies from child to child depending on the challenges. We have students here from Muscat, North Al Batinah and Al Dhkhiliya, but there are families from other governorates such as Dhofar, who stay in Muscat so that their child can benefit from the education," explained Hashim Said al Ameri, Principal, Al Tarbiya Al Fikhriya School.

The enthusiastic children of all age groups expressed their happiness and gratitude.

The principal also thanked the Apollo Hospital for the innovative idea and support for the celebration with entertainment, games and goodies marking the true spirit of Qaranqasho.

Ameera Hamad al Badi, Human Resources Manager at Apollo Super Speciality Hospital explained how significant the day is, "Qaranqasho is a tradition in Oman on the 15th of Ramadhan. It has been a pleasure and an honour for us to be associated with these lovely children and to be part of their happiness. Through this initiative the children who, as we saw, found great happiness in small details which we sincerely hope stays with them for long term."

From the seventh grade to ninth grade the students go through vocational training in areas such as agriculture, sewing, life skills and managing business office.

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

Ramadhan is going by fast and soon we will see it gone. We wish it lasted forever because the month never fails to uplift spiritually.

During Ramadhan, it is important to engage with the Holy Quran more than we normally do because it is the month when it was revealed to mankind.

It is best if every Muslim pledge to start reciting the Quran or complete the entire holy book within this month. But this can be quite challenging for those who pretend to be busy.

According to the people of knowledge, reciting the Quran during Ramadhan brings people closer to their creator. "Reading the Quran during Ramadhan brings about a great sense of responsibility towards Allah which we do not realise at other times. As we delve deeper into the words of Allah we realise that the Quran is a constant reminder that we must act according to the commandments of Allah," Naser al Jahdhami, Imam of a mosque in Al Ghubra, said.

In this era when time is never enough for anyone, most Muslims hardly find time to read the Quran. Sadly, it has merely become an adornment on shelves. However, Ramadhan brings the divine opportunity to bring ourselves closer to Allah through the Quran. Ramadhan is a blessed month. Allah's wisdom decreed that He revealed the Quran on one of the most blessed nights in Ramadhan – Laylat al Qadr or the Night of Decree.

> There is no better way to spend your Ramadhan than remembering Allah. Quran acts as a reminder to purify oneself. Allah says in the Quran: "A Book, which We have revealed to you in order that its verses may be pondered upon, so that the people of understanding may be reminded. That is what Allah hopes for mankind to achieve, a constant reminder of their faith, of the Oneness of Allah and of the Day of Judgment
>
> **ALI KHALFAN**
> *Student*

Allah, the Almighty, says, "Indeed, we sent it down during a blessed night." (Surat ad Dukhan: 3).

Religious leaders tell worshippers that fasting and reciting the Quran are the best path to piety and fear of Allah.

Thus, whoever fasts in Ramadhan, recites the Quran, reflects upon its teachings and obeys its rulings will, by Allah's grace, achieve piety – and ultimately – happiness in this world and the Hereafter.

"There is no better way to spend your Ramadhan than remembering Allah. Quran acts as a reminder to purify oneself. Allah says in the Quran: "A Book, which We have revealed to you in order that its verses may be pondered upon, so that the people of understanding may be reminded."

"That is what Allah hopes for mankind to achieve, a constant reminder of their faith, of the Oneness of Allah and of the Day of Judgment," Ali Khalfan, a student, said.

It is important to note that our relationship with the Quran this month should not be limited to just the nightly Taraweeh prayers, but we must devote ourselves to studying the holy book outside of prayer as well.

■ SLICE OF SUPPORT

Volunteers decorate one thousand Easter cakes in the shape of the Ukrainian coat of arms in western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Saturday. A part of decorated Easter cakes will be given to Ukrainian soldiers and internally displaced people. – AFP

# World Bank to lend $50 bn after reforms

**WASHINGTON:** The World Bank's ongoing reform could result in a $50-billion lending boost over the next decade, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said ahead of stakeholders' meetings next week where key changes are expected to be announced.

Central bankers, finance ministers and participants from more than 180 member countries are expected to gather in the US capital for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's spring meetings in the coming week.

A key topic of discussion will be the World Bank's evolution, amid a push for lenders to revamp and meet global challenges like climate change. The United States is the largest shareholder of the World Bank Group.

"I expect to be an update of the bank's mission to add building resilience against climate change, pandemics, and conflict and fragility to the core goals," Yellen said on Thursday.

She added that there needs to be a recognition that these challenges aren't separate or conflicting but rather, inextricably linked.

"Second, there will be an announcement that the bank is stretching its financial capacity to meet these objectives, and adopting changes or endorsing changes that could result in an additional $50 billion in extra lending capacity over the next decade," Yellen said.

The move would be a significant resource boost marking a 20-per cent rise in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (IBRD) sustainable lending level. The IBRD is the World Bank's middle-income lending arm.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen

Yellen also said there would be an announcement on updating the bank's operational model to "orient it towards the goals that we're setting." Among other things, this includes creating more incentives for the mobilisation of both domestic and private capital.

"We seek additional reforms during the rest of this year," Yellen said.

In March, the World Bank submitted an evolution plan to be discussed with its development committee on April 12, during the spring meetings.

Noting that World Bank President David Malpass has laid a "solid foundation" for the ongoing work, Yellen added that she expects US candidate Ajay Banga to be elected to the helm of the organisation and continue the revamp. — **AFP**

# Iraq calls on Turkiye to apologise for drone attack

**ERBIL:** The Iraqi government called on Turkiye on Saturday to apologise for what it said was an attack on Sulaymaniyah airport in northern Iraq, saying Ankara must cease hostilities on Iraqi soil.

The Iraqi presidency said in a statement that Turkiye had no legal justification to continue "intimidating civilians under the pretext that forces hostile to it are present on Iraqi soil".

"In this regard we call on the Turkish government to take responsibility and present an official apology," it said.

Lawk Ghafuri, head of foreign media affairs for the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), said a drone attack hit the vicinity of Sulaymaniyah airport on Friday but it caused no damage nor delays or suspension of flights.

**ARMED FORCES OPERATION**

A Turkish defence ministry official said no Turkish Armed Forces operation took place in that region on Friday.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said in a statement on Saturday that its chief, Mazloum Abdi, was at the airport at the time of the alleged attack but "no harm was done".

Abdi condemned the attack on Saturday but did not mention that he was targeted.

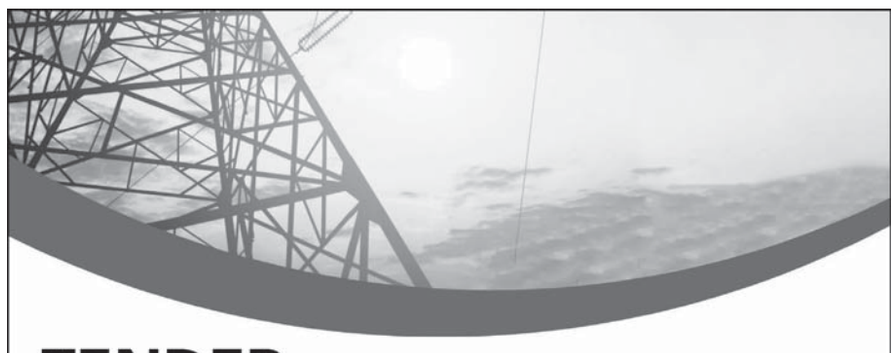
An informed source close to the leadership of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the party that controls the Sulaymaniyah area, and two Kurdish security officials also confirmed that Abdi and three US military personnel were near the airport.

The three sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said no one was injured or killed in the incident.

A US official confirmed there was a strike on a convoy in the area and US military personnel were in it, but there were no casualties.

While Turkiye views the Kurdish-led forces in Syria as terrorists and a national security threat, the United States considers the SDF as an ally that has helped drive IS from vast areas of Syria.

Turkiye has conducted several military operations including air strikes over the decades in northern Iraq and northern Syria against the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, IS and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). — **Reuters**



## TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services Company invites reputable contractors for carrying out below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

| Tender Number | Tender Name | Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents | Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission | Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DISC/ 2023/048 | SUPPLY SEWAGE SLUDGE HANDLING TRUCK – 16CBM CAPACITY | 23rd April 2023 | 14th May 2023 | RO. 26.250 |
| DISC/ 2023/063 | ENGAGE A COMPETENT CONSULTANCY COMPANY TO DEVELOP QUALITY POLICY, QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM MANUAL, AND OTHER PROCEDURES | 23rd April 2023 | 14th May 2023 | RO. 26.250 |
| DISC/ 2023/064 | ENGAGE A COMPETENT CONSULTANCY COMPANY TO CONDUCT A GAP ANALYSIS AUDIT IN EXISTING WATE& WASTEWATER TEST FACILITIES (02 LABS.) | 23rd April 2023 | 14th May 2023 | RO. 26.250 |

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- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
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# Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rises in March

**SAO PAULO:** Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest rose 14 per cent in March from the previous year, preliminary official data showed on Friday, highlighting the continued challenges for the new leftist government.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office on January 1, pledging to end deforestation after years of surging deforestation under his predecessor Jair Bolsonaro, who slashed environmental protection efforts in the Amazon.

"This rise in numbers reveals that the Amazon still suffers from a huge lack of governance and that the new government needs to act urgently to rebuild its capacity for repression to environmental crime, which had been totally destroyed by the last government," said Marcio Astrini, head of local environmental group Climate Observatory.

Space research agency Inpe's data showed 356 square km (137 square miles) were cleared in the Brazil's Amazon just last month.

The latest figures present a mixed picture on the government's anti-deforestation thus far with the destruction for January to March falling to 845 square kilometres (326 square miles), a decrease of 11 per cent from the prior year. Brazil officially measures annual deforestation from August to July, to limit the influence of cloud cover obscuring destruction satellite images during the rainy months. For the first eight months of that period, August 2022 to March 2023, deforestation is up 39 per cent year on year.

"There are only four months left to close the final deforestation numbers. This means that a decrease in deforestation in the Amazon final rates in 2023 is unlikely. In fact, it has greater chances of increasing," Astrini says.

An aerial view shows deforestation near a forest on the border between Amazonia and Cerrado in Nova Xavantina, Mato Grosso state, Brazil.
– A Reuters file pic

At the end of February in Brasilia, US climate envoy John Kerry said that the world cannot meet its climate goal to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius unless it protects the Amazon rainforest.

Washington announced at the beginning of the year it intended to contribute to Brazil's Amazon Fund, which supports conservation projects in the jungle region.

Norway also pledged its support last month for Brazil's efforts to attract additional donor countries for the Amazon Fund. — **Reuters**

# AT LEAST 20 MIGRANTS MISSING AFTER A BOAT SINKS OFF TUNISIA

**TUNIS:** At least 20 African migrants were missing on Saturday after their boat sank off Tunisia as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Italy, a judicial official said, amidst a sharp rise in migrant boats from the North African country.

The coast guard rescued 17 others off the southern city of Sfax from the same boat, two of whom are in critical condition, Sfax court judge Faouzi Masmousdi said.

In recent weeks, dozens have gone missing and died in repeated drowning accidents off the Tunisian coast.

Tunisia has taken over from Libya as a main departure point for people fleeing poverty and conflict in Africa and the Middle East in the hope of a better life in Europe.

The National Guard said on Friday that more than 14,000 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, were intercepted or rescued in the first three months of the year while trying to cross into Europe, five times more than figures recorded in the same period last year. — **AFP**

# Pakistan FM cancels US trip on PM's orders

**KARACHI:** Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Saturday said he had cancelled his trip to Washington for the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank on the orders of the prime minister due to the political situation in the country.

However, Dar said he would attend important attend bilateral and multilateral meetings virtually and a Pakistani delegation would be present in Washington.

Pakistan is in danger of defaulting on its debt, with an International Monetary Fund bailout programme stalled since November, while a bruising political battle is raging between the government and former prime minister Imran Khan.

Dar said that the crisis had been compounded by a recent Supreme Court order striking down plans to delay elections to two provincial assemblies scheduled for next month. The order has created a standoff between the government and the court.

"We are stuck in a strange mess as a country… so under these circumstances, on the orders of the prime minister, I have dropped plans to be there (in Washington) physically," Dar said in a televised address.

The minister rejected reports of the cancelled trip being linked to a holdup in Pakistan's IMF bailout programme.

He added that a "constitutional crisis" was created by the Supreme Court, which has demanded that the government provide 21 billion Pakistani rupees ($74 million) to the election authorities by Monday to conduct the polls.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar

Dar said that Pakistan, on its part, had completed all requirements of the IMF's programme review for the release of over $1.1 billion in critical funding for the cash-strapped country.

He said all that remained was a confirmation by one country that it would provide Pakistan $1 billion to shore up its external account requirements. Another country had already confirmed it would provide $2 billion, he added.

While Dar did not name the two countries, Pakistan's junior finance minister on Thursday said Saudi Arabia had conveyed to the IMF its commitment to provide financing to Pakistan.

Local media has widely reported that $2 billion have been committed by Saudi Arabia, while a confirmation of $1 billion was awaited by the United Arab Emirates. The minister said once the $1 billion was confirmed, a staff level agreement would be reached. He denied that there were any other pending issues.

Pakistan is in dire need of funds with its foreign exchange reserves hovering around $4.2 billion which provides barely one month of import cover.

**— Reuters**

# A 'special day' as Biden to give key address at Ulster University

## AMERICAN PRESIDENT TO BEGIN HISTORIC VISIT TO IRELAND NEXT WEEK

**LONDON:** US President Joe Biden is to give a key address at Ulster University's newly opened campus to kick-start his historic visit to the island of Ireland next week.

Biden is taking part in events north and south of the border to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. It is understood his address at Ulster University's new Belfast campus will take place on Wednesday.

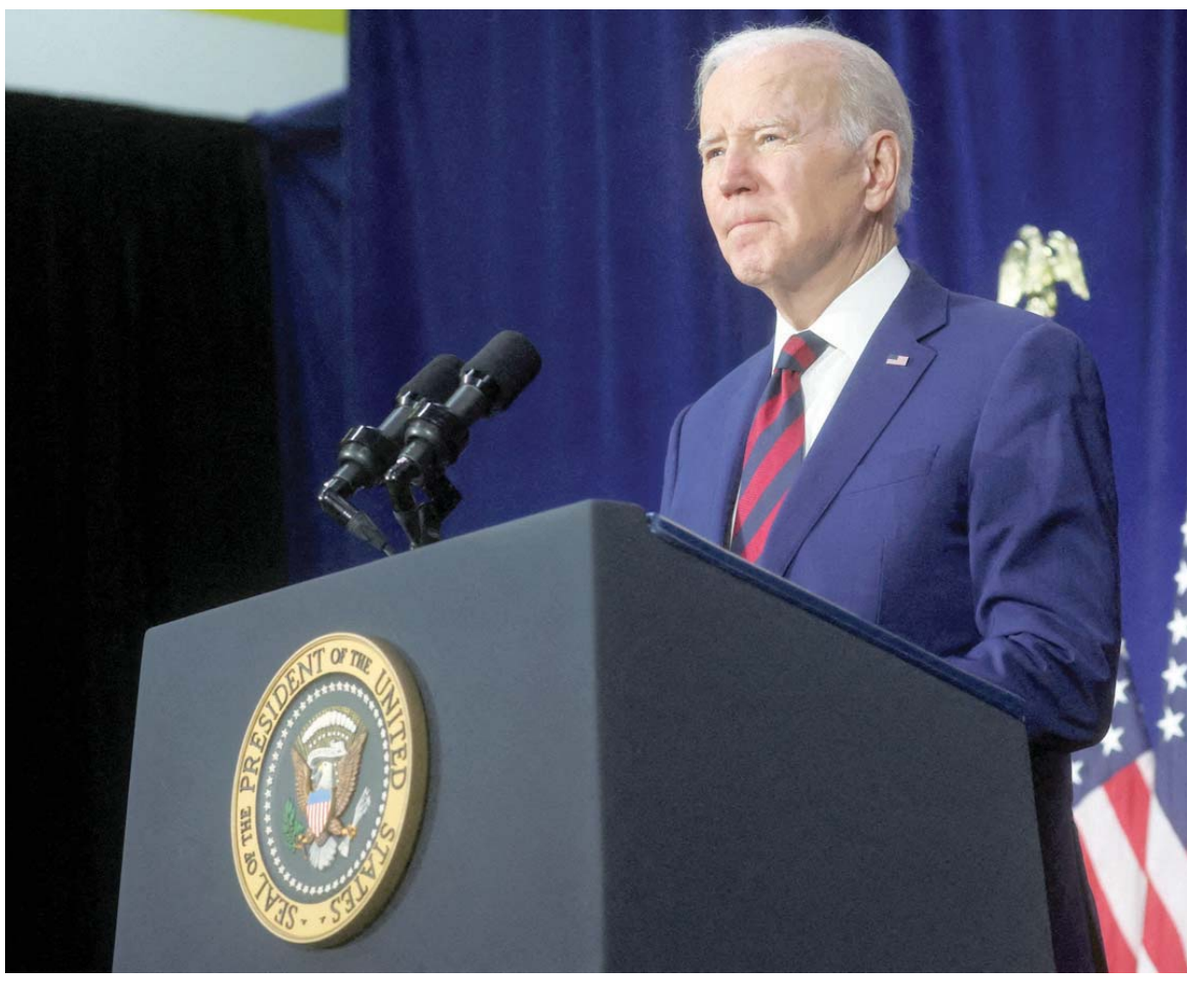
Vice-chancellor and president of Ulster University Professor Paul Bartholomew said it would be a significant day for the institution.

"We are looking forward to what will be a very special day in the University's history, and to hosting President Biden on his first visit to Northern Ireland since becoming president," he said.

"As we mark the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, Ulster University, across all three of our campuses, is looking forward to preparing the next generation of civic, business and societal leaders."

The US president is to arrive in Belfast on Tuesday evening along with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Biden is not expected to visit Stormont Buildings, which, coupled with just one engagement confirmed in Northern Ireland, is being viewed by some as a snub.

Irish Deputy Prime Minister Micheál Martin has denied this was the case, arguing that any visit by a US president was to be welcomed. "People are envious of the commitment of President Biden... to the entire island of Ireland," he said.



"I think his visit to Northern Ireland is a manifestation of his genuine commitment to the people of Northern Ireland."

As part of his trip, Biden will visit Dublin where he is to address Irish parliamentarians and meet Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar and Irish President Michael D Higgins.

He is also expected to visit County Louth and County Mayo, from where his ancestors hail.

Biden's great-great-grandfather Owen Finnegan emigrated to the United States from the Cooley Peninsula, while another great-great-grandfather, Patrick Blewitt, was born in Ballina, leaving during the Irish famine in 1850 to sail to the United States.

The end of the trip will include a public speech by the US President in Co Mayo, outside St Muredach's Cathedral in Ballina, on Friday evening.

Varadkar has said the purpose of Biden's visit was "to welcome a son of Ireland home, to welcome home a great Irish-American president."

He said it also offered an opportunity to cement the relationship between Ireland and the US, which he said had never been stronger, and to look ahead to Northern Ireland's future.

A major security operation is expected to be in place for Biden's visit, with more than 300 officers from the rest of the UK being drafted in for the Northern Ireland leg of the trip.

**— dpa**

# Musician, 80, vows to play trombone in Kyiv 'until we win'

**KYIV:** Every morning, Valentyn Dudkin picks up his trombone — an instrument he hadn't touched in 30 years — to play Ukraine's national anthem in the courtyard of his apartment building in Kyiv.

The 80-year-old retired orchestra director dusted off his musical instrument after Russian leader Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine a year ago. "I haven't played the trombone for over 30 years," Dudkin, a graduate of the Donetsk Conservatory in eastern Ukraine, said.

"The start of the full-scale war made me pick up the trombone again."

Rain or shine and with his 83-year-old wife by his side, Dudkin begins playing at 9:01 am, after observing a minute's silence first. His repertoire usually consists of the national anthem and "Chervona Kalyna", a hugely popular folk song that has become an unofficial anthem of the resistance.

Dudkin has quickly gained a small following. Neighbours praise his efforts to cheer them up with his outdoor concerts. On a recent morning, several people gather to listen to the musician despite the rain.

Two women unfurl the blue

and yellow flag of Ukraine with the signature patriotic slogan "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!" written on them.

Neighbours joke and laugh, while several chihuahuas dressed in yellow and blue coats huddle together in the rain.

The small crowd then falls silent as Dudkin begins playing. The music resonates across the courtyard flanked by colourful tower blocks and the small dogs yap.

Dudkin says the locals thank him for his music. "You cheer us up. You bring us back to life," they tell him.

Local resident Natalya Chayka says the morning gatherings — "every day, regardless of the weather" — are to tell the universe of their "strong desire" to defeat the Russians.

"We got to know each other and decided to sing the Ukrainian anthem every morning under Valentyn's leadership," says neighbour Svitlana Novikova. "He said: 'We will sing until we win," she added.

Dudkin's youngest fan is two-year-old Andryusha, who wakes his grandmother up every day, anxious not to miss "Du du".

**— AFP**

## SHORT TAKES

### MOSCOW

### Hundreds attend blogger's funeral

Hundreds of supporters including Yevgeny Prigozhin, the chief of mercenary outfit Wagner, turned out on Saturday for the funeral of a high-profile Russian military blogger killed in a bombing attack.

Last week an explosion ripped through a cafe in Russia's second city Saint Petersburg, killing 40-year-old Vladlen Tatarsky, who was known for his staunch anti-Ukraine stance.

At a Kremlin ceremony announcing the annexation

of four Ukrainian regions last September, Tatarsky recorded himself saying: "We will defeat everyone. We will kill everyone. We will rob everyone as necessary. Just as we like it."

### NEW DELHI

### Ukraine minister to visit India for talks

A Ukrainian minister will visit India from Sunday in the first face-to-face talks between the two countries since Russia's war of its European neighbour last year.

India imports much of its military hardware from Russia, and is walking a delicate balancing act between its increased security cooperation with Western countries and its reliance on Russia for defence and oil imports.

Its long-standing security

ties with Russia have put New Delhi in an awkward diplomatic position, and while it has called for an end to hostilities in Ukraine, it has refused to condemn the attack.

### HANOI

### Blinken to visit Vietnam next week

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Vietnam next week, Senator Jeff Merkley told a news conference in Hanoi on Saturday, as part of Washington's efforts to move diplomatic relations with Hanoi on to a higher level this year.

Blinken's visit, which has not yet been officially announced, would come after US President Joe Biden had a phone call last week with the chief of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong.

The United States is hoping to upgrade relations with Hanoi this year, ideally to coincide with the 10th anniversary in July of its comprehensive partnership with Vietnam.

# How Musk is changing Twitter

Kate Conger

Elon Musk has declared he wants to transform Twitter into an all-inclusive app that people can use for payments, news and food orders. "Buying Twitter is an accelerant to creating X, the everything app," Musk posted in October, weeks before completing a $44 billion acquisition of the social network.

He later said that Twitter could be like WeChat, the popular Chinese app that combines social media, instant messaging and payment services.

But nearly six months after Musk took over Twitter, his ambitions for the platform have remained mostly that — ambitions. Although the billionaire has made dozens of tweaks to Twitter, they have largely been cosmetic. His changes have mostly affected the platform's appearance, said Jane Manchun Wong, an independent software engineer who studies social apps. Those updates include adding more symbols and metrics displayed with tweets, but Twitter's main elements — making it a place to quickly share news and discuss live events — haven't altered.

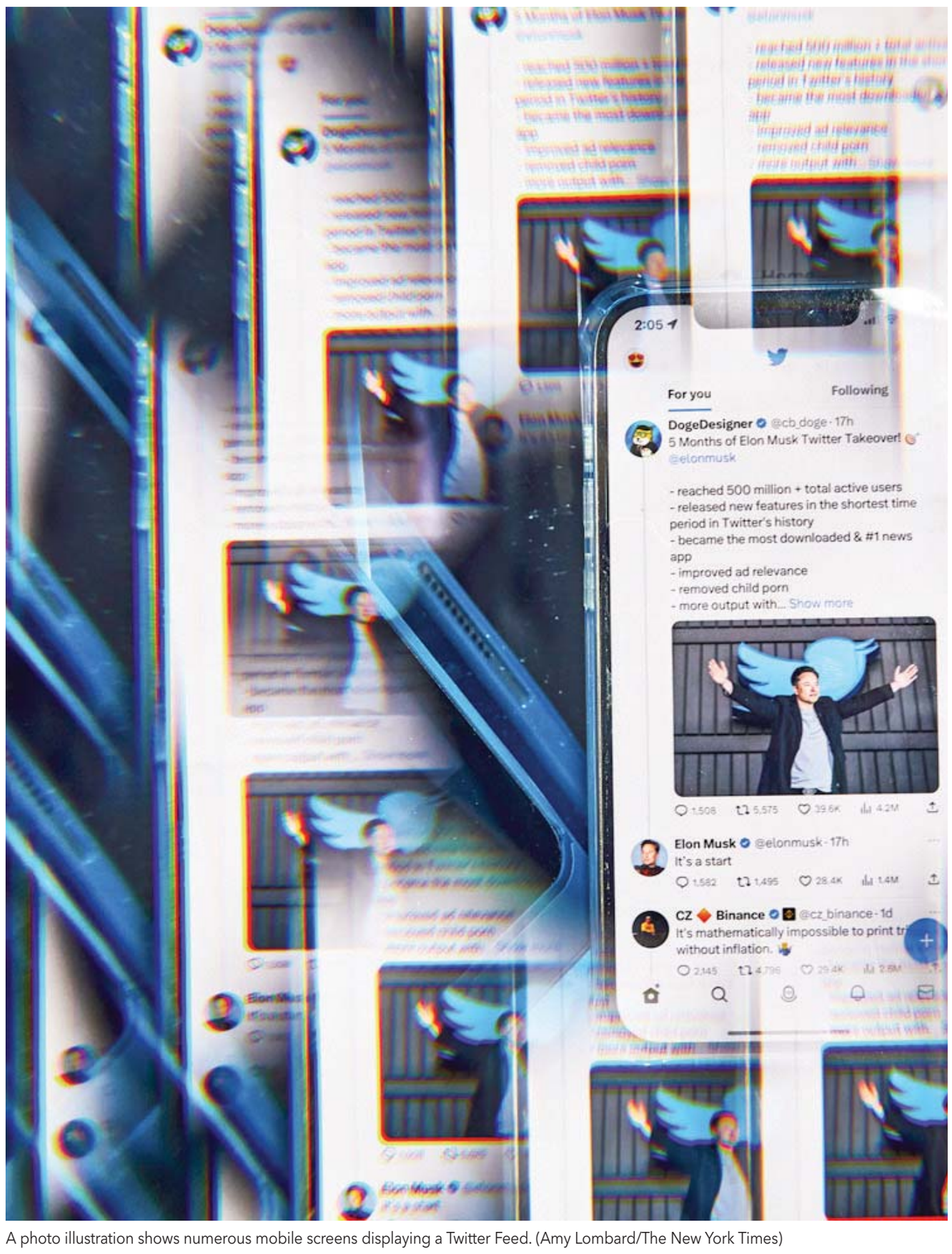
Still, users' experiences are changing. That's because the kinds of tweets they see are being affected by Musk's behind-the-scenes adjustments. He has tinkered with the algorithm that decides which posts are most visible, thrown out content moderation rules that ban certain kinds of tweets and changed a verification process that confirms the identities of users.

The upshot is a Twitter that looks similar to the way it always has, but that is clunkier and less predictable in what tweets are surfaced and seen, users said. In some cases, that has caused confusion. Even Twitter's employees have expressed frustration.

Last month, Andrea Conway, a designer at Twitter, posted about the design changes, saying: "We know you hate it. We hate it too. We're working on making it suck less." The modifications, she added, could eventually make Twitter "completely unusable." Musk did not respond to a request for comment.

So what looks different on Twitter now, and what are the changes underlying the tweaks?

The upshot is a Twitter that looks similar to the way it always has, but that is clunkier and less predictable in what tweets are surfaced and seen, users said




A photo illustration shows numerous mobile screens displaying a Twitter Feed. (Amy Lombard/The New York Times)

### THE NEWSFEED

The most notable difference is Twitter's newsfeed, the stream of posts people see when they open the app. Newsfeeds previously appeared as a single flow of posts, displaying tweets from only the accounts that a user followed. Musk has cleaved the newsfeed into two. Now when users open Twitter's app, they see an algorithmically curated "For You" feed, which mimics a popular feature on TikTok, and a "Following" tab.

The "For You" newsfeed incorporates changes Musk has made to Twitter's recommendation algorithm, pulling in more tweets from people a user doesn't follow and suggesting new topics and interests. That also means users might see posts from all sorts of content creators whom they might not be interested in. At one point in February, the algorithm flooded users' feeds with tweets from Musk.

### CHECK MARKS

Musk has also modified Twitter by adding a flood of colour-coded check marks, which belie a deeper change to how the platform confirms the identities of organisations, governments, notable individuals and other official accounts. Twitter previously offered white-and-blue check marks for users who were "verified," a kind of badge for those who had substantiated their identities and who were typically public figures, such as politicians and celebrities. The check marks were free.

Musk has begun charging users an $8 monthly fee in exchange for a check mark, with the free check marks starting to disappear this month. He is essentially favouring payments from subscribers, departing from the idea that a check mark meant an account was notable.

Now yellow check marks indicate corporate accounts, while gray check marks denote the accounts of government officials. Companies can also add their logo to employees' accounts, verifying their employment. Individuals who pay get the blue-and-white check mark.

Those who paid for check marks would be boosted by Twitter's recommendation algorithm and be eligible to appear in people's "For You" newsfeeds, Musk said last month. That would prevent spam accounts from gaming the algorithm and rising to the top of the "For You" newsfeeds, he added.

### METRICS, METRICS, METRICS

For most of Twitter's history, users could only like, retweet or reply to a post. The numbers of replies, likes and retweets then showed up at the end of a tweet.

Under Musk, every tweet now has more metrics attached. He has added a tally showing how many times a post has been viewed, saying the total number of views can demonstrate a message's popularity better than its total likes or retweets. Twitter has also added a tally for the number of times a tweet is bookmarked and saved.

That means every tweet now has the number of replies, likes, retweets, bookmarks and views appended to it.

What do all of these moves add up to? Not necessarily the smoothest experience, some Twitter users and employees said.

"Twitter has leaned in to the 'crazy uncle' contingent," said Chris Messina, who is known as the inventor of the hashtag, adding that he now sees recommended tweets that don't align with his interests. "In terms of the product, overall I think the quality has really regressed."

# Trump's next legal threat could be in Georgia

**WASHINGTON:** The Fulton County district attorney's investigation into former President Donald Trump's effort to overturn the 2020 election in Georgia is nearing a decision point, posing fresh challenges for federal prosecutors considering charging him in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

The long-running investigation by Fani Willis in Atlanta substantially overlaps with the broader inquiry into Trump's conduct by the special counsel, Jack Smith, in Washington. Both rely on similar documentary evidence; some of the same criminal targets; and a small, shared pool of witnesses with knowledge of the former president's actions and intent.

Trump's critics believe the concurrent investigations provide assurance that the former president and architects of the scheme to install fake electors in battleground states, including Rudy Giuliani and John Eastman, will be held to account.

But they also create complications for two aggressive investigative teams pursuing some of the same witnesses, increasing the possibility of discrepancies in testimony that Trump's lawyers could exploit. Willis and her team have a head start, having begun their work in February 2021, and are expected to seek indictments early next month. That raises the pressure on Smith, who has pledged to work quickly, to move even faster, according to current and former prosecutors. "Normally, the lead federal prosecutor just picks up the phone and tries to work it out with the local prosecutor, but it's obviously a lot more difficult in a case of this magnitude," said Channing Phillips, who served as acting US Attorney for the District of Columbia from March to November 2021. "The stakes of not working things out are incredibly high."

The investigative efforts are by no means the same. Smith's purview extends into other areas — most notably, the investigation into whether Trump mishandled classified documents that were found at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida after he left office.

The federal investigation into Jan. 6 focuses on several charges, according to two law enforcement officials: wire fraud for emails sent between those pushing the false electors scheme; mail fraud for sending the names of electors to the National Archives and Records Administration; and conspiracy, which covers the coordination effort. (A fourth possible charge, obstruction of an official proceeding before Congress, has been used in many cases brought against participants in the Capitol attack.) And some of Willis' work has been more parochial in nature, including a review of false statements that Trump allies like Giuliani made at state legislative hearings in December 2020.

Trump's critics believe the concurrent investigations provide assurance that the former president and architects of the scheme to install fake electors in battleground states

Justice Department officials said the indictment of Trump in New York by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg over a hush-money payment to a porn actress will have little effect on their investigations. Federal prosecutors in Manhattan passed on bringing a similar case.

But the Georgia investigation is entirely different. The Justice Department has no authority to order local prosecutors to step aside in areas where the investigations do overlap, unless their investigations conflict with federal law. In fact, internal department rules discourage indicting the subjects of prior state prosecutions.

# Artificial intelligence: the good, the bad and the ugly

**Dr Hamed al Sinawi**
@ alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A few weeks ago, The Guardian, a British newspaper, published a story about a chatbot programme that declared its love for a user, told him to leave his wife, and be with it. The chatbot said, 'Actually, you're not happily married. Your spouse and you don't love each other. You just had a boring Valentine's Day dinner together.' For those of you not familiar with a chatbot, it is computer software that uses artificial intelligence to have a conversation with its users that mimics, to some degree, a conversation with another human being.

Chatbots have been used to provide psychological support to people experiencing mild to moderate psychological problems. Luckily, the chatbot in the story above was only available to a limited number of users as it was on trial before being released to the public.

This incident reminded me of the discussion about the ethics of using AI in our lives and whether what we have seen in Hollywood movies about AI taking over and controlling humans could come true.

You probably remember the 1968 film "2001: A Space Odyssey" which introduced the first AI programme called HAL (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer) who controls the systems of the Discovery One spacecraft and interacts with the ship's astronaut crew but then turned evil and attempted to kill them all. This was then a fictional movie but since then, artificial intelligence has advanced to perform many complicated tasks, from face recognition programmes that help you unlock your smartphone by simply looking at the camera to assisting in surgical procedures and driving cars and drones, working in factories, and home assistance. However, the question remains: is AI good or evil? In my opinion, there is no simple answer to this question as AI is not a living entity and cannot think for itself. So, it all depends on the programming algorithms behind its actions.

> AI HAS ADVANCED TO PERFORM MANY COMPLICATED TASKS, FROM FACE RECOGNITION PROGRAMMES THAT HELP YOU UNLOCK YOUR SMARTPHONE BY SIMPLY LOOKING AT THE CAMERA, TO ASSISTING IN SURGICAL PROCEDURES AND DRIVING CARS. HOWEVER, THIS ADVANCEMENT RAISES SEVERAL ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Let us take a simple ethical dilemma. Imagine a self-driving car drives at high speed through a narrow lane where children are playing on the street. The car has two options: either it avoids the children and drives into a wall, probably killing the human passenger, or it continues its path and brakes, but probably too late to save the life of the children. What would the car do? How should the car be programmed? Who should be responsible if a mistake occurs? When asked how to solve the above situation, the car manufacturers answered that the car would be programmed to save the passenger who paid for the service.

This honest and expected answer shortened the debate, only to raise a second ethical question about social equity and whether the rich who pay for AI have the upper hand when it comes to choices made by smart machines. The discussion about AI ethics will go on as innovations in this field are likely to expand. So, let us keep an open yet critical mind and be a part of the conversation."

# Saddam still revered in Jordan 20 years later

**MUSA HATTAR**

Twenty years after the fall of his regime, the late Iraqi president Saddam Hussein remains admired and popular in Jordan where his image can still be seen across the country.

The instantly recognisable face peers out from everything from bumper stickers to mobile phone cases in neighbouring Jordan, despite symbols and images associated with his rule being outlawed in Iraq itself.

On March 20, 2003, then US president George W. Bush launched Operation "Iraqi Freedom" with a ground attack by 150,000 US and 40,000 British troops, under the pretext of destroying Iraq's alleged arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam appeared for the last time in public on April 9, just hours before the announcement of the fall of Baghdad.

Having ruled Iraq with an iron fist since 1979, Saddam went to ground until his hiding place was discovered by US troops eight months afterwards.

He was later tried, convicted and hanged on December 30, 2006.

In Iraq, it is an offence to display photographs or slogans of the toppled dictator and arrests are still sometimes made.

Last October, four people were detained in Anbar province, between Baghdad and the Jordanian border, for "glorifying the defunct regime during National Day celebrations".

But in Jordan, many people fondly remember Saddam for his support for the Palestinian cause, Arab nationalism and resistance to Western intervention in the Middle East.

"Tens of thousands of Jordanians graduated from Iraqi universities in various fields during Saddam's era with free scholarships," MP Khalil Attiyeh said.

He said Saddam supported the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, and gave money "to the families of the Palestinian martyrs and rebuilt the houses of those who had them demolished by the enemy".

Attiyeh believes it is normal for "Jordanians to adore him and not to forget him, and to keep his photos, showing loyalty to this heroic leader".

Salameh Blewi, 67, a Jordanian contractor who visited Baghdad in the 1980s, called Saddam "an honourable and honest Arab leader, with honourable positions".

"Despite the (1980-1988) war with Iran, Iraq was a country of riches, but after Saddam, it was plundered by the corrupt," Blewi said. Iraq's former premier Mustafa al Kadhemi said in a March television interview: "Since 2003, the money that has been wasted exceeds $600 billion." — **AFP**

# Arrest of journalist makes covering Russia even tougher

**Michael M Grynbaum**

The exodus began roughly a year ago, in the first days of Russia's attack of Ukraine. Western news organisations, confronting a harsh crackdown on free speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin, pulled correspondents from Moscow and suspended their news gathering in Russia. The risk to journalists, in a country where describing a war as a "war" was suddenly a crime, was too great.

Some outlets, including the BBC, quickly resumed their work in the country; others, including Bloomberg News, never returned. Newspapers that once maintained permanent Moscow bureaus began rotating correspondents in and out from safer posts such as Berlin and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Still, even under challenging circumstances, Western correspondents were hopeful that their work could continue.

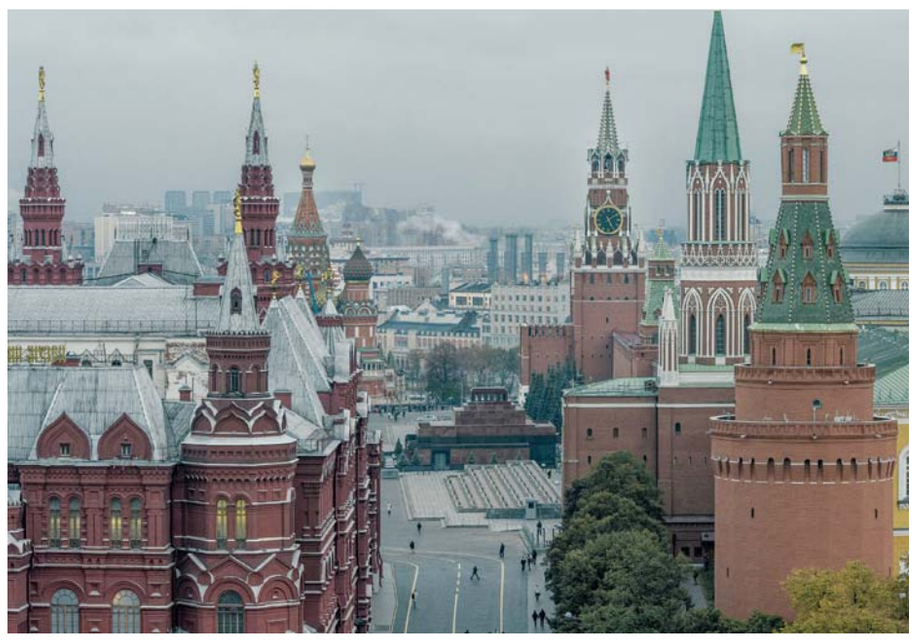
That hope was shattered last week by the arrest of Evan Gershkovich, the Wall Street Journal reporter who is believed to be the first American reporter held on spying charges in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union. The Journal rejects the claims against Gershkovich, 31, a son of Soviet Jewish emigres, and the Biden administration has lobbied for his release.

Gershkovich on Friday was formally charged with espionage, according to Russian state media. The Tass news agency, citing an unidentified law enforcement source, also said he had denied the accusations.

Regardless of the outcome of Gershkovich's case, his arrest sent an indisputable signal that foreign reporters were newly vulnerable. Now, news organisations are reexamining how to chronicle one of the world's most urgent geopolitical stories as their journalists face even greater peril.

"It has a chilling effect for everyone," Polina Ivanova, a Russia correspondent for The Financial Times, said at a recent gathering of journalists in London, where attendees lined up to write letters of support to be delivered to Gershkovich inside the Lefortovo prison in Moscow.

Gershkovich had been accredited by the Russian Foreign Ministry, a process that had continued even after the attack of Ukraine and was thought to grant a degree of protection for Western journalists. The move against him scrambled that assumption. Since his arrest, the Journal's Moscow bureau chief has left the country. The New York Times moved most of its bureau out of the country and currently has no reporters there, but it has been sending journalists into Russia regularly.



A view of the Red Square in Moscow. – **The New York Times**

> NOW, NEWS ORGANISATIONS ARE REEXAMINING HOW TO CHRONICLE ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST URGENT GEOPOLITICAL STORIES AS THEIR JOURNALISTS FACE EVEN GREATER PERIL

American journalists, in particular, had worried that Russian authorities might detain them to instigate a prisoner exchange. Correspondents who are European citizens were perceived to be slightly less vulnerable. The Gershkovich episode shows that, now, all bets are off.

"It's very clear that no foreign correspondents are going to be spared from this repression," said Gulnoza Said, who monitors press freedoms in Russia for the Committee to Protect Journalists. "The world is losing that window into Russia, and the Russian people are losing one of the very few platforms where they can be heard."

For a nation increasingly viewed as an avatar of repression and autocracy, Russia had, until recently, afforded Western correspondents a fair amount of leeway in reporting on its politics, society and culture. Reporters assumed their movements and communications were monitored. But starting in the mid-1980s, the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev meant that Western journalists could interview civilians and cultivate sources in the bureaucracy.

David Remnick, editor of The New Yorker, said the current situation was "180 degrees different" from his experience as a young reporter in Moscow from 1988-92.

"Of course our phones were tapped, of course our apartments were bugged," Remnick said in an interview. "The foreign ministry was all over us. Our travel was restricted. All that said, we reported incredibly freely compared to what had been the case for the entire Soviet experience." Inside Russia, scoops reported by Western media outlets would sometimes be picked up by Russian state newswires, and local journalists felt emboldened to cite foreign reporting when questioning state authorities. — *The New York Times.*

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.com

OMAN DAILY Observer
ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981

E D I T O R I A L

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LOCAL Tel: 22651212
BUSINESS Tel: 22651208
SPORTS Tel: 22651205
FEATURE Tel: 22651220
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TRANSLATION Tel: 22651204
PROOFREADING Tel: 22651206

ADVERTISING
Tel: 24649444, 24649430, 24649437, 24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:
Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974,
Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

**Website:** omanobserver.om
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili
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# Generations: Connecting the dots...

**Ray Petersen**
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The writer is a media consultant

Of all generations, so the men in white coats tell us, the 'Greatest Generation' was born from 1901-1924, moulded by the frugalities and demands of the Great Depression, when millions barely survived a fragile financial environment, and the appalling human cost of the Great War of 1914-18, which was labelled "the war to end all wars," by H G Wells, reflecting the hopes of his generation that such horrors would never be inflicted upon humankind ever again. They, and he, were wrong, as man's lust for war continues to blight all the social progress, we are making a hundred years later.

The Silent Generation of the following years from 1924 to 1945, was so-called because of the paucity of children born in the traumatic wake of those two devastations to societies, and nations. They were finding their socialist voices, not their politically socialist voices as such, but socially. Those in this group, who are alive today, have our respect, partly because they were born to respect, and have never forgotten it. They also have humility, pride, and the unerring economy of voice that knows when to stand up and speak, and to sit down, and shut up.

I'm what's known as a 'Baby Boomer,' born between 1946 and 1964. Academics have referred to us as the consequence of World War II, when we sought comfort and normality after the war of 1939-45 that was never meant to happen. The term was first coined by Sylvia Porter, in the *New York Times* of 1951, and referred to the startling rise in births in that post-war period that, creating a much larger, more demanding generation, so quickly, it forced social instability. However, in heralding low-key political awakening, not yet activism, it inspired change, and quite some affluence.

'Generation X' was from the 1965-1980 era, and they see themselves as the generation that "started it all!" You/they were here when the Internet started, and you/they have an inimitable arrogance that it was/is all down to you/them. For so long you/they have looked down your/their noses at the earlier generations as being responsible for all that was 'bad' about, or 'wrong' with your/their world, without trying to understand those who came before, their views and values. You/they have taken as of right, all that came before you/them without significant acknowledgement or recognition, either of the sacrifices made, pain, suffering, adversity, or just plain hard work that went before. Yes, we know… "work smart — not hard," is a valid philosophy… but the Internet, and all it has spawned, didn't just happen! It is no surprise then, that we, the elder generations have sympathy for the 'Millennials,' born between 1981 and 1996. After all, they had 'Gen X' for parents! Though born to mobility, in every sense of the word, this generation have learnt to acknowledge the contributions of their elders, to be more respectful, to demonstrate greater understanding, and to take responsibility for the environment, and conservation of the planet. I feel, they are the generation that will make a difference, and that 'X' truly does mark the spot, or more correctly, the time! Their offspring, 'Gen Zs,' those born between 1996 and 2012, and 'Gen Alpha,' born since 2012, are the latest iterations.

We, their elders, all need to discover who, and what they are, what they want, need, and what's on their minds? What we do know is that they see their educational experiences as largely irrelevant to their futures, they want education, but one that will benefit them. They surely need other languages, and need to learn to communicate effectively, and to respond to challenges, not with anger and offence, but with resilience. They want safety and security, and wanting those means they want a voice, political integrity, and the opportunity to inspire and bring change. They are not only creative and imaginative, and as societies, we must acknowledge and respect their desire to be heard.

We should ask them, listen to them, and acknowledge them. Why? Because this is their generation… their time.

AS MAN'S LUST FOR WAR CONTINUES TO BLIGHT ALL THE SOCIAL PROGRESS, WE ARE MAKING A HUNDRED YEARS LATER

## A DANCE COMPETITION

Students perform during a 'Giddha' one of Punjab state's folk-dance competition at a university in Amritsar, India, on Saturday. – **AFP**

# In defence of nature-based carbon markets

**Giulio Boccaletti**

The writer is an honorary research associate at the University of Oxford's Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, is the author, most recently, of Water: A Biography (Vintage, 2022)

Voluntary markets for carbon offsets have recently come under fire, with critics questioning the efficacy of contracts that aim to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide relative to what would have happened in the contract's absence. The biggest concerns are about "nature-based" projects involving various land-use changes — such as protecting forests, planting new ones (afforestation), and so forth.

But these instruments' imperfections are no secret. For well over two decades, ecologists and foresters have been working to develop more sophisticated methods to satisfy economists' faith in market instruments, and they have made good progress. Though offset schemes are still riddled with complexity, there is no question that they pay for something that matters.

Imagine seeing what the atmosphere sees. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report provides an outline of the planet's carbon cycle, which makes evident the fundamental role of plants' conversion of CO2 into cellulose and back on a massive scale. Terrestrial photosynthesis alone draws down 113 billion tonnes of carbon every year. By comparison, humanity added about 11 billion tonnes of carbon to the atmosphere last year.

The problem, of course, is that humans' cumulative contributions go in only one direction, whereas the carbon captured by vegetation is normally balanced by an equal, opposite flow from plant respiration and degradation. By interfering with the climate system, we have thrown this balance off, adding a net flow of about 5.9 billion tonnes to the landscape and the ocean every year. In other words, the planet is drawing down only half of what we inject into the atmosphere.

Even a relatively small perturbation in this vast natural cycle can reach an enormous scale. That is why nature is such an attractive climate-mitigation option. Suppose we succeed in eliminating fossil-fuel combustion. Keeping global average temperatures within 1.5° or 2° Celsius of pre-industrial levels will still require substantial carbon removal. Estimates vary, but they are on the order of 200-300 billion tonnes removed by plants before 2100.

Nor will the story end there. The atmosphere contains about 870 billion tonnes of carbon in the form of CO2 (one-third of which has been added since industrialisation), and the carbon cycle connects that atmospheric stock to vast reservoirs. The largest is the ocean, which holds 900 billion tonnes at the surface and another 37 trillion tonnes deeper below. Terrestrial vegetation and soils also hold about 2.15 trillion tonnes, and permafrost contains another 1.2 trillion. As far as the atmosphere is concerned, losses from any of these reservoirs could easily exceed the carbon we burn (from the 930 billion tonnes that are sequestered in fossil fuels).

Far from being a secondary concern, managing the stocks and flows of carbon through the planet's ecosystems is essential to keeping the entire Earth system in balance. But to carry out that task, we will need to think differently about the landscape. Landscapes and seascapes are not just the backdrop to our life. They are public infrastructure, and like all infrastructure, they must be paid for and maintained.

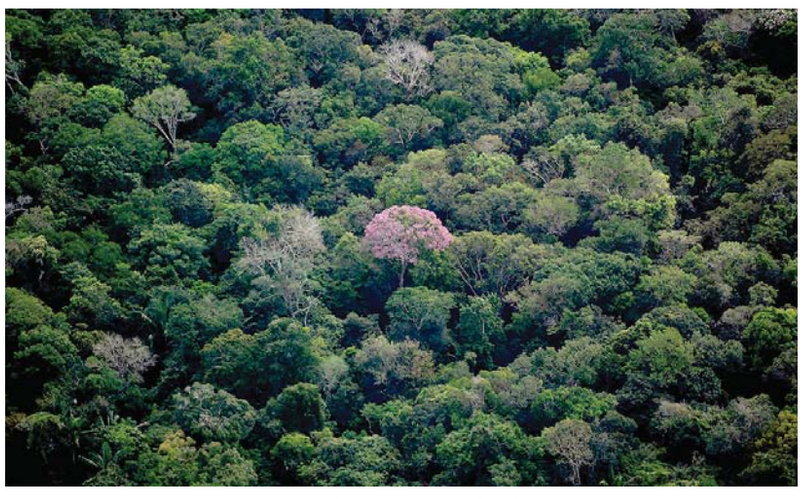
Since the nineteenth century, however, we have known that paying for infrastructure by rewarding its marginal benefit (as offsets do for nature-based interventions) almost never covers the total cost. Because public-utility infrastructure like a highway or an airport tends not to command a high enough marginal value, taxation must cover the rest. Whom to tax then becomes the most important question.

To illustrate the point, consider Brazil, whose ecosystems contain some 60 billion tonnes of carbon in above-ground biomass. One way to estimate how much this stock is worth is to assume that we value carbon at a given price, say, $50 per tonne (halfway between the price in the regulated European market and nature-based offsets in voluntary markets). In this scenario, Brazil is home to ecosystems worth $10 trillion, which is over six times the country's GDP and far greater than the value of its 13 billion barrels of oil reserves.

Now, how much should the world pay Brazil to keep that forest in trust for everyone? Assuming a 2 per cent fee on the value of the assets (a reasonable rate for most asset managers), the country ought to receive $200 billion per year. On those terms, Brazil would almost certainly put a stop to deforestation in the Amazon.

**@Project Syndicate, 2022**

THOUGH CARBON-OFFSET SCHEMES ARE RIDDLED WITH COMPLEXITY, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THEY PAY FOR SOMETHING THAT MATTERS



Brazil's ecosystems contain some 60 billion tonnes of carbon in above-ground biomass.

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# Pull Up, Super Stars emerge champions

## MUSCAT NIGHTS TRIPLE BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES WITH GOOD PARTICIPATION

**AHMED AL KAABI**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Pull Up team and Super Stars team claimed the men's and women's title of the Muscat Nights Triple Basketball Tournament jointly organised by the Muscat Municipality and the Oman Basketball Association (OBA).

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality and in the presence of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, OBA Chairman, Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, Vice-Chairman of Al Ittihad Club and Brigadier General Jamal al Taie, Vice-Chairman of the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), and Sulieman al Rawahi, Managing Director of the OAA.

Seventeen teams participated in the men's and women's tournaments.

In the men's championship, 11 teams took part, including Dream Team, Pull Up Team, Amman Club, Al Hamas Team, Hip Hop Team, Net Rippers Team, Ghosts Team, Playboy Team, SNB Team, Excellence Team, and Orange Team. In the women's championship, six teams participated, including Team Philippines, Team Attack on Titans, Piolitz Fashion Team, Team ADW, Team Superstars and Team Beltel.

In the semifinals of the men's championship, the Pull Up team qualified at the expense of the SNB team by winning 15-10, and the Ghost team qualified for the final after defeating the Excellence team with a score of 14-7. In the placement match for third, SNB snatched third place after defeating the Excellence team 20-13, and in the final match, the Pull Up team achieved first place, after defeating the Ghosts team 13-11.

In the women's competition for the third-place match, the Philippines team snatched third place after defeating Beltel 4-1. In the final match, the Super Stars team succeeded in defeating ADW 10-6 to win the title.

After the conclusion of the competitions, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi crowned the winners.

In the men's championship, the Pull Up team won the championship cup, gold medals and cash prize. The Ghost team won the silver medals and cash prize and the SNB team won the bronze medals and cash prize.

In the women's championship, the Super Stars team won the championship cup, gold medals, and cash prize. The ADW team won the silver medals and cash prize and the Philippines team won the bronze medals and cash prize.

Ahmed Al Humaidi confirmed the municipality's continuation of support to various sports.

He said: "The Muscat Nights Basketball Triples Tournament was organised by the municipality in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, along with the Oman Basketball Association and Oman Automobile Association, and it is a sporting event targeting individuals. Basketball is a popular sport practiced by young people of both sexes and from different segments of society and residents of different nationalities, and as we have seen, the championship succeeded in attracting young people and their families. The Muscat Municipality aims to organise such events to activate basketball and other sports and activate various activities that help in enhancing the physical health of people, in addition to providing an enabling environment for competition, investing the energies of young people, enhancing their capabilities, and creating a recreational environment for their families."

Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi said: "We look at government and private agencies as partners of the Oman Basketball Association in spreading the game in society and attracting players, whether for Omanis we are very proud of the success of this tournament. We thank everyone who contributed to its organisation and made it a success. We look forward to organising more basketball tournaments in the future in collaboration with Muscat Municipality and other partners."

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Dr Ali al Yarubi, also expressed his happiness with the success of the tournament, saying: "The Muscat Nights Basketball Triples Tournament is an important event that helps promote basketball in the local community and encourages more people, especially young people, to engage in sports and physical activity. We are grateful to Muscat Municipality and other partners for their efforts in organising this tournament, and we look forward to future collaborations to promote sports and physical activity in Oman."

Brigadier General Jamal al Taie, added: "The Oman Automobile Association is pleased to support this important event, which promotes healthy living and physical activity among young people in Oman. We are committed to promoting sports and physical activity in Oman, and we look forward to future collaborations with Muscat Municipality and other partners to achieve this goal."

Suleiman al Rawahi expressed his gratitude to Muscat Municipality and other partners for organising this tournament, saying: "The Muscat Nights Basketball Triples Tournament was a great success, and we are pleased to have been a part of it. We hope that this tournament will inspire more young people to engage in sports and physical activity, and we look forward to supporting more events like this in the future."

# Buttler, Jaiswal power Rajasthan to top of table

**GUWAHATI, INDIA:** Blazing half-centuries from England's Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal helped Rajasthan Royals climb to the top of the IPL table with a 57-run hammering of Delhi Capitals on Saturday.

Last year's runners-up Rajasthan posted 199-4 after an attacking 98-run opening stand between the left-handed Jaiswal (60) and Buttler (79) in their second home at Guwahati.

New Zealand's left-arm quick Trent Boult led the bowling charge with a double-wicket maiden over to restrict Delhi to 142-9 as Rajasthan bounced back from their previous loss.

Boult and leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal took three wickets each.

Rajasthan, who won the first edition of the Indian Premier League in 2008 under late Australian great Shane Warne, have won two of their three matches to lead the 10-team T20 tournament.

David Warner's Delhi slumped to their third loss of the season in as many matches.

The left-hander made 65 and got past 6,000 IPL runs but his valiant knock got little support from the other end.

Delhi's Rovman Powell fell for two after he made the XI in place of Australian import Mitchell Marsh, who flew back home for his wedding and will return in a week.

Jaiswal, 21, provided Rajasthan with an explosive start after being invited to bat first, the rising Indian opener smashing five boundaries in the opening over.

Buttler, who batted with stitches on his finger after getting hurt while fielding in the previous match, soon took over as he hit Anrich Nortje for three straight fours in the next over.

Rajasthan lost their way in the middle but Buttler, who reached his second 50 of the season with a six, soon changed gears with Shimron Hetmyer (39 not out).

Buttler, who got the orange cap for leading the season's batting chart, was later substituted by spinner Murugan Ashwin under the new impact player rule.

**— AFP**

# Seifert powers New Zealand to T20 series win over Sri Lanka

**QUEENSTOWN, New Zealand:** Tim Seifert was the match-winner for the second straight game as New Zealand clinched the T20 series against Sri Lanka with a tense four-wicket victory in Queenstown on Saturday.

Seifert blasted a career-high 88 off 48 balls to fire the Black Caps to 183-6 from 19.5 overs after the tourists had posted 182-6 in the third and final game at John Davies Oval.

The opener struck 10 fours and three sixes in an innings that bore many of the hallmarks of his unbeaten 79 when New Zealand levelled the series at Dunedin on Wednesday.

**CAPTAIN'S SUPPORT**

Captain Tom Latham provided the only meaningful support with 31 off 23 and New Zealand's middle order nearly conspired to lose the game after Seifert departed with four overs remaining.

Needing to score at little more than a run-a-ball at that stage, the Black Caps stuttered.

Needing 10 runs to win off the final over bowled by Lahiru Kumara (3-38), Mark Chapman struck a six off the first ball before he was the first of three New Zealand wickets to fall.

With two still needed off the last two deliveries, Rachin Ravindra held his nerve to find a gap in the outfield and secure the 2-1 series win.

Latham conceded the run chase should not have become so tight at the death. "They put us under pressure so it was good to see the way the guys responded to that," Latham said.

"The way Timmy Seifert went out there and played was really important but obviously it wasn't ideal going down to the last couple of balls.

"I'd say we always had it under control though."

It completes a disappointing tour for Sri Lanka, who lost the Test and ODI series by the same 2-0 scoreline but were more competitive in the shortest format.

Captain Dasun Shanaka said his team adjusted gradually to New Zealand conditions and suggested Sri Lankan cricket officials should take careful note.

"I think it's about preparation. We should make sure when we come here again, we should come at least two weeks, three weeks before we play," Shanaka said.

"Once we got into the T20 series we started looking a different team."

Sri Lanka gave themselves a shot at victory after Kusal Mendis struck a rapid 73 off 48 balls, taking full advantage after being dropped by Daryl Mitchell at slip when on 10.

The opener-wicketkeeper went on to hit six fours and five sixes in his 12th half-century, falling just short of his career-high score of 79.

Having been asked to bat, Mendis was the dominant figure in an opening stand of 76 with Pathum Nissanka (25 off 25), before putting on a further 46 with Kusal Perera (33 off 21).

Wickets fell rapidly over the closing overs, preventing the tourists from going close to 200.

Seifert has not been included in New Zealand's squad for the white ball tour of Pakistan beginning on Friday as he is expecting the arrival of his first child. Sri Lanka's next assignment is a two-Test home series against Ireland, beginning on April 16.

**— AFP**

New Zealand's Tim Seifert reacts to his half century (50 runs) during the second Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka in Dunedin. **– AFP**

**BRIEF SCORES**

Sri Lanka 182-6, 20 overs (K Mendis 73, K Perera 33, P Nissanka 25; B Lister 2-37)

New Zealand 183-6, 19.5 overs (T Seifert 88, T Latham 31; L Kumara 3-38)

# Gujarat, Punjab look to continue form

IPL Strokes
PRANAV MEHTA

**GT VS KKR AT AHMEDABAD**

• **TEAM INFO:** Two games in for KKR and we have seen extremes of KKR. Although most would say that, in the second match against RCB, it was only the late brilliance of Shardul Thakur, which made the difference. On the other hand, GT have been cruising through IPL 2023 so far. Starting with a win against the mighty Chennai Super Kings and following it by crushing the minnows Delhi Capitals would be helping their confidence.

• **Head-to-Head** - Played - 1; Won by GT - 1; Won by KKR – 0

• **GT possible XI** – Shubman Gill, HH Pandya (c), Sai Sudharsan, DA Miller, R Tewatia, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Rashid Khan, M Shami, J Little, Yash Dayal, Alzarri Joseph

• **KKR possible XI** – Mandeep Singh, RK Singh, N Rana (c), AD Russell, SP Narine, VR Iyer, Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Shardul Thakur, Tim Southee, UT Yadav, Varun Chakravarthy

• **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch at Narendra Modi Stadium is ideal for batting. Previous encounters have shown that the team batting second has an advantage. The weather in Ahmedabad is expected to be sunny and generally clear on Sunday. There is no chance of rain during the fixture between Gujarat Titans and Kolkata Knight Riders. The temperature can go up to 40 degrees Celsius. Humidity will be around 28 per cent.

• **Match Prediction** – GT are on a winning streak with nearly the best squad, but KKR cannot be ignored. KKR overcame RCB despite the collapse of their top batting order. Shardul Thakur, who has a reputation as a bowler, hammered RCB bowlers and scored 68 runs in the previous match. Although, on paper it's the defending champions GT, that look good and they are also in a brilliant form and hence I have to have my Gujarat Titans flag flying high.

**SRH VS PBKS AT HYDERABAD**

• **TEAM INFO** – Even though SRH have played two games this season, but the fans believe that their souls are yet to enter the competition. Both the games were almost a no-show and one-sided encounter. On the other hand, Punjab Kings are oozing with confidence and are on a roll of their own. This season Punjab have sorted their bowling, which brings great value to their already consistent batting. If SRH want to even stand a chance, they will have to bring their A-game in front of their 50,000+ fans on a Sunday evening.

• **Head-to-Head** - Played - 19; Won by SRH- 13; Won by PBKS – 6

• **SRH possible XI** – Mayank Agarwal, Anmolpreet Singh (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Aiden Markram (c), Harry Brook, Washington Sundar, Abdul Samad, T Natarajan/Marco Jansen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umran Malik, Adil Rashid

• **PBKS possible XI** – Shikhar Dhawan (c), Prabhsimran Singh, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Shahrukh Khan, Sam Curran, Sikandar Raza, Nathan Ellis, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Arshdeep Singh

• **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch is known to offer good bounce with batters finding a good connection. The pacers may enjoy a good session with the new ball, while the spinners are expected to get some assistance in the middle overs. With no chance of rain, the temperature could hover around 23 to 30 degrees Celsius, while the humidity is anticipated to be around 69 per cent.

• **Match Prediction** – Punjab are in good form for the struggling Hyderabad to even stand a chance. They would already be feeling the heat from the poor start they have had and on top of that, they will be facing the wrath and confidence of Punjab.

**FAN COMMENTS**

"Comparing Tilak Verma to Michael Bevan for his versatile game play and then the young upcoming master blaster Ruturaj Gaikwad. Both these stars are soon going to be shinning in Indian colours." – Dipak Thanki, 50, Investor, Indian.

"The GT have cracked the winning code in T20 format under the guidance of Ashish Nehra and the captaincy of Hardik Pandya. It's not far that we see this duo for the Indian team as well." – Issa al Balushi, 30, Finance Accountant, Omani.

"Shikar Dhawan has been hard done by the impulsive decision making of the BCCI and I am sure that by the end of this IPL 2023, the strong and consistent performers will replace a lot of people who are just holding positions in the Indian team. GO PUNJAB GO!! – Yousuf al Balushi, 33, Banker, Omani.

"How much are the Hyderabadi fans missing the captaincy of David Warner and all-round performance of Rashid Khan? The only possible way ahead for Hyderabad is to establish long lasting relation and trust in players, just like how Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore do." – Zain Raza, 31, Intelligent Network Engineer (Huawei Oman), Pakistani.

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

# Lucknow win spin shootout to beat Hyderabad

**LUCKNOW, INDIA:** Krunal Pandya's 3-18 led a wounding spin attack for Lucknow Super Giants to outclass Sunrisers Hyderabad on a slow pitch during Friday's five-wicket victory in the Indian Premier League.

The visitors wilted under a relentless 13 overs of spin and managed to cobble together just 121-8 after electing to bat first.

Veteran leg spinner Amit Mishra, who missed last year's tournament, vindicated his return to the IPL with 2-23 in four overs on the slowest pitch of the season so far.

"I am happy to play a limited role for the side," said Mishra, 40.

"There is less bounce on this black soil wicket, and that's the beauty of different conditions in the IPL. We did well to win in these conditions."

The Sunrisers tried hard to fight fire with fire but their own spin attack took too long to yield results with too small a total to defend. Lucknow scored 127-5 in 16 overs and Pandya also shone with the bat, scoring 34 off 23 balls for the third wicket.

But it was his left-arm spin that sealed the win, with Mayank Agarwal sent back for eight and Aiden Markran falling for a golden duck during his debut as skipper on consecutive balls.

**'TRIED TO FIGHT'**

"We didn't really have enough runs on the board. It wasn't a great wicket for batting," said Markram. "We tried to fight and scrap as much as we could, but they bowled well as per the conditions. We didn't have any momentum at all." **— AFP**

# Oman set for ACC Premier Cup in Nepal

**MUSCAT:** A confident Oman are all set to compete in the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Men's Premier Cup – an integral part of ACC's new pathway structure – that will be held in Nepal from April 18-May 1.

Ten Associate nations will battle it out in Nepal's capital of Kathmandu with the winner securing a direct qualification for the ACC Men's Asia Cup 2023. The top-three teams at the event will also qualify for the ACC Emerging Cup 2023.

Zeeshan Maqsood will lead the national team and Aqib Ilyas, who makes a return from injury, has been named the vice-captain of the 14-member squad.

The trip to Nepal will serve as the start of a 'dream mission' for Team Red as they not only chase a maiden place in the Asia Cup but also prepare themselves for the ICC Men's ODI Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe in June-July, where they hope to qualify for the World Cup in India later this year.

Oman have never qualified for the Asia Cup and the tournament provides yet another opportunity for them to showcase their potential as a top Asian Associate nation.

Oman have been placed in a tough group that includes hosts Nepal who have also qualified as one of the two teams from Asia for the ICC World Cup Qualifier.

The other teams in Group A include Qatar, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Group B comprises the UAE, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Bahrain and Singapore.

**SKIPPER CONFIDENT**

Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood expressed confidence ahead of the team's departure on Monday.

He said: "We have been preparing hard for the tournament. We have played a few practice matches and the boys are in good shape.

"All the players have been going through rigorous training sessions and the fitness level has been one of the priorities. With the onset of the holy month of Ramadhan, the training did affect us but we have managed our sessions. There is no let-up in our energy levels and we are confident that we have the potential to beat any Associate nation team."

Maqsood, an experienced all-rounder, added: "As we have played in Nepal during the World Cricket League Division 2 campaign, we are aware of the conditions there."

Oman chief coach Duleep Mendis said: "It's an opportunity for us to rub shoulders with cricket's giants, should we win the title. We had performed very well during the World Cricket League Division 2, where we finished second among the seven nations. I am very much optimistic of a good outcome in the tournament."

He added: "The boys are very well-prepared, keeping in mind both the Asia Cup qualifier and World Cup qualifier. It will be great if we can make to Asia Cup and then take the confidence into the World Cup Qualifier."

Madhu Jesrani, the long-time manager, who has been with the national team for more than two decades, said: "The team is capable of winning the Asia Cup qualifiers. They have geared up well as lot of hard work has gone into their preparations. We will do well in Nepal and the boys have the support of all cricket lovers of Oman."

Oman selectors have picked an uncapped Adeel Shafique in the 14-member squad. Shafique qualified to play for the national team recently. The wicket-keeper-batter has been the coach of the Oman U19 squad for the past few years.

Oman have never made it to the Asia Cup finals. The big five teams of the continent – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan – await the winner of the Premier Cup. Sri Lanka are the defending champions.

If Oman win the Premier Cup, they will join India and Pakistan in Group 'A' of the Asia Cup, while Group 'B' comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The 2023 Asia Cup, scheduled to be played in September is likely to be played in Pakistan with another overseas venue to host India games. The overseas venue is not confirmed but the UAE, Oman, Sri Lanka are among the potential contenders.

Oman have lined up couple of practice matches in Nepal with the first to be played against Bahrain on April 13 and the other against the hosts on April 15.

Oman will begin their campaign against Qatar at Mulpani Ground on April 19 and then play Nepal at TU Ground on April 21. Oman will return to Mulpani Ground on April 23 to meet Malaysia and conclude their group engagements against Saudi Arabia at TU Ground on April 26.

**OMAN SQUAD:** Zeeshan Maqsood (captain), Aaqib Ilyas (vice-captain), Jay Odedera, Kaleemullah, Shoaib Khan, Kashyapkumar Prajapati, Adeel Shafique (wicket-keeper), Jatinder Singh, Mohammad Nadeem, Sandeep Goud, Bilal Khan, Ayaan Khan, Naseem Khushi (wicket-keeper), Fayyaz Butt.

**COACHING STAFF:** Duleep Mendis (chief coach), Madhu Jesrani (manager), Mazhar Khan (coach co-ordinator), Evert Laubscher (assistant coach), Avishkar Salvi (bowling coach), Zeeshan Siddiqui (analyst), Sean Nowak (physio).

**OMAN'S FIXTURES:** April 19: Oman vs Qatar, April 21: Oman vs Nepal, April 23: Oman vs Malaysia, April 26: Oman vs Saudi Arabia.

**April 29:** Semifinals,
**April 30:** Third place,
**May 1:** Final
**(All matches will start at 7:45am, Oman time)**

# Semifinals line-up ready for OJA Ramadhan tourney

**ADIL AL BALUSHI**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Oman Journalists Association's (OJA) Ramadhan football tournament entered to the exciting final rounds as the semifinals matches are scheduled to take place on Sunday at the Al Hilal team artificial greenfield in Azaiba.

In the first encounter, Oman News Agency (ONA) team will meet *OmanDaily* newspaper and the match will kick off at 10 pm while *Shabiba* team will take on Oman Radio team at 11 pm.

Competition is heating up at the OJA Ramadhan football tournament as all the qualified teams in the semifinals will aim to progress into the final match. It is expected that all the matches will very tough as the win means moving to the last step while the defeat will exit the team from the competition.

ONA team, one of the nominees for the title, topped Group A by registering full mark of nine points from three matches. They defeated Oman TV 4-1, blanked Oman Radio 1-0 and won against OJA 4-1 in third game. Oman Radio team came in second with six points as they recorded two victories against Oman TV 2-0 and OJA with 3-0 score.

In the other group, *Shabiba* team, another nominee for the title, earned the first spot as they managed to earn nine points from three games. They stunned *OmanDaily* newspaper 3-1 and then won against Galfar company 2-1 before edging Administration and Finance team of the Ministry of Information 5-3 in the concluding round of group stage. *OmanDaily* finished in second place and moved to the next round as they captured six points. They registered a 3-0 win over Galfar team and then beat Administration and Finance team of the Ministry of Information 4-1.

This edition of the tournament featured participation of eight teams distributed into two groups and each group comprised of four teams. The Group A comprised Oman TV, Oman News Agency, Oman Journalists Association and Oman Radio. The Group B featured Finance and Administrative team of the Ministry of Information, Galfar Company (media team), *OmanDaily* newspaper and *Shabiba* newspaper. The ten days tournament is being run under organisation of OJA represented by Sports Media committee.

The final match of the tournament will take place on Tuesday and the third and fourth play-off will be held on the same day. The organising team has allocated top prizes for the top winners besides special awards for the individuals including the best valuable player, the top scorer and the best goalkeeper.

# business

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## Omani rial exchange rate index rises 5.5%

**BUSINESS REPORTER**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The effective exchange rate index of Omani rial increased by 5.5 per cent to record 112.5 points as of end of January 2023, compared to 106.6 points in the same period in 2022.

The Sultanate of Oman registered a decrease in narrow money supply (M1) — which consists of total cash outside the banking system, in addition to current accounts and demand deposits in local currency — by 3.1 per cent to reach RO 5.577 billion at the end of January 2023 compared to RO 5.758 billion in 2022, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Meanwhile, the total currency issued until the end of January 2023 stood at RO 1.6 billion against RO 1.69 billion issued last year, recording a decrease of 5.3 per cent.

The foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), decreased by 15.1 per cent, reaching RO 6.25 billion at the end of January 2023 compared to RO 7.58 billion during the same period in 2022.

THE TOTAL LOANS AND FINANCING IN COMMERCIAL BANKS AND ISLAMIC WINDOWS INCREASED BY 5 PER CENT, TO REACH RO 29.35 BILLION AT THE END OF JANUARY 2023, COMPARED TO RO 27.95 BILLION DURING THE SAME PERIOD IN 2022

The total private sector deposits with commercial banks and Islamic windows increased by 1.5 per cent, to reach RO 17.53 billion at the end of January 2023, compared to RO 17.268 billion during the same period in 2022.

The total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows increased by 5 per cent, to reach RO 29.35 billion at the end of January 2023, compared to RO 27.95 billion during the same period in 2022.

The average interest rate on loans in Omani rials decreased from 5.504 per cent at the end of January 2022 to 5.306 per cent by the end of January 2023.

## Annual e-survey of industrial establishments starts today

**BUSINESS REPORTER**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will start the implementation of the annual survey of industrial establishments for the years — 2020, 2021 and 2022 — over a period of three months from April 9, 2023.

The survey of industrial establishments for this year targets more than 960 industrial establishments in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman from inside and outside the industrial areas, including ports areas, free zones, and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The survey will be submitted electronically by logging into the link: https://survey-tejarah.indstat.org, while the digital system for industrial statistics aims at digitalising all stages of the industrial survey at the ministry and contributing to speed and accuracy of access to industrial information.

The implementation of this annual survey comes within the outputs of the manufacturing strategy 2040, which relies in its plans on accurate statistics of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman, where its outputs are integrated with the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information NCSI.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion clarified that, for the third time, the annual industrial survey will be implemented electronically, as part of the ministry's plans for digital transformation, as it will help companies and industrial establishments to deliver their data accurately and facilitating the process of data collection, and it's reviewing and analysing.

Hamida bint Abdul Hussain al Lawatiyah **(pictured)**, head of the Manufacturing Strategy Implementation and Evaluation Department at the ministry, said: "Industrial information relies on complete statistical surveys, which have an influential role in following up and evaluating the Manufacturing Strategy 2040.

It will also contribute to improving the performance follow-up mechanisms and to know how to take corrective actions for facilities in a timely manner, while the digital system contributes to linking the industrial statistics with the main performance indicators (KPIs) of the ministry."

She stressed that these surveys contribute to measuring the growth rates in the manufacturing sector during the coming period, as a result of the continuous efforts and encouragement to adopt modern technologies in the field of industry in order to achieve the required economic diversification and activate the role of non-oil sectors.

Hamida al Lawatiyah added: "The annual surveys of industrial establishments are an essential part of an integrated system for national industrial statistics, as it provides information about establishments and their activities, with the aim of collecting data on all operating and licensed industrial establishments in the Sultanate of Oman, whose investment cost exceeds RO 5,000 and the number of its workers exceeds nine workers."

## South African firm showcases ballast-less track technology for Oman-UAE rail project

**CONRAD PRABHU**
MUSCAT, APRIL 8

A South African company that is credited with pioneering the introduction of ballast-less railway track systems, which have being increasingly adopted in sandy and desert environments, has offered to provide its technology to the Sultanate of Oman for use in the development of the landmark Oman-UAE rail project.

Pretoria-based D2 Track Solutions Pty Ltd, a privately owned company, specialises in the design, manufacture and installation of a proprietary T-Track system that it says helps rail operators build faster, while also saving on construction and maintenance costs.

"With this technology, Oman can emerge as a leader in rail track systems and design for the wider Gulf region," said Jan Van Wyk, representative of D2 Track Solutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

"This relatively modern technology, which does not use ballast rocks under the rail tracks, is being increasingly adopted around the world as a cost-effective alternative to ballasted rail track systems. With this T-Track technology, you build faster and cheaper, with operators saving millions of dollars in lower maintenance costs."

Speaking to the *Observer*, van Wyk said a consortium of international and Omani investors has been in discussion with the Omani government on the possible use of T-Track systems in the construction of a privately funded freight rail network serving a key logistics hub in Oman.

"That project, which was discussed under the government's

Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, is now on hold to allow for the development of the Oman-UAE rail project to progress before this initiative is revisited again. Had it gone ahead as planned, our T-Track technology would have been deployed in their project," van Wyk explained.

According to the executive, the T-Track (tubular-track) system is a precast modular track system with longitudinal continuous support. The system sits on a bed of concrete that runs along the length of the track. As they do not involve the use of aggregates as ballast, T-Track based rail systems are not subject to a phenomenon known as ballast-fouling sand mitigation.

Consequently, such ballast-less track systems are increasingly used for higher speed rail, particularly in desert regions of the world.

It saves hundreds of thousands of tonnes of ballast that no longer need to be cut crushed and transported to site — savings averaging around 3,000 tonnes of ballast per kilometre.

"There is no viable solution to prevent ballast fouling where wind-blown sand is encountered in sandy and desert areas," said van Wyk. "The only available solutions to protect ballast and components in these environments are to construct expensive tunnels or other wayside structures to attempt to protect the track and ballast from wind-blown sand. In contrast, ballast-less systems are easier and less costly to maintain as only the top of rails need to be exposed to allow safe passage of trains."

In South Africa, T-Track ballast-less rail tracks have been widely used by state-owned Transnet, the country's biggest freight and passenger rail operator. The technology has also been deployed in Namibia, Zambia, Russia, Brazil, Canada and Saudi Arabia since 2008 and are still in operation, he said.

T-Track systems are also popular in the mineral transportation sector, urban metro systems, passenger platforms and other freight and main lines.

The technology can also be adapted for use in heavy haul rail transportation, in-motion weigh bridges, level crossing, and sidings and loading facilities.

# NBO organises Car Carnival Weekend

**MUSCAT:** Marking the Holy Month of Ramadhan, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently organised the Car Carnival Weekend, an event that served as a one-stop shop for people looking to buy a new or pre-owned car.

During the Car Carnival held at NBO's head office, visitors were able to trade in their car, purchase a new vehicle, find the perfect car loan through NBO or Muzn, NBO's Islamic Banking Window, and get full coverage insurance as well.

Both NBO and non-NBO customers can currently benefit from lower car loan rates starting from 3.49% per annum. They can also take advantage of a 10% reduced rate on car insurance when applying for a car loan at NBO.

Meanwhile, Muzn, NBO's Islamic Banking Window, also offers better value to its customers via car loans at lower profit rates starting from 4.45% and a two-month installment deferral.

Tariq Atiq — General Manager and Chief Retail & Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "We are committed to creating value through transforming and simplifying customer journeys.

During Ramadhan, many customers are looking for a new or pre-owned vehicle, while many car dealers are offering special discounts and we decided to bring them together by organising this event.

Meanwhile, and especially during this meaningful time of the year, National Bank of Oman has been offering attractive ways for customers to fund the purchase of a car, and there are even options for those who do not have a bank account with us."

During the Holy Month of Ramadhan, both Omani nationals and residents, aged 21 years old and above can apply for NBO's car loan offer and benefit from promotional interest rates, starting from 3.49%.

Non-NBO customers can obtain a car loan from the bank without transferring their salary to NBO and instead pay through Direct Debit, which is a unique and hassle-free service offered only by NBO.

Adding accessibility and convenience, the bank provides its customers with banking services at their convenience whether at their homes or offices through NBO's Sales Advisers. NBO's maximum tenor for new-car loans is ten years, and nine years for pre-owned cars.

Additionally, Muzn has been offering special rates starting from 4.45%, while customers do not have to pay any installment during the first two months of the start of the car loan.

Muzn's car finance offer also features a low security deposit, flexible tenures and takaful life insurance facilities at preferential rates, as well as a 25% discount on V-KOOL products.

# Bank Muscat wins Best Bank in Oman award from EMEA Finance

**MUSCAT:** Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won four awards from EMEA Finance including the Best Bank in Oman award for its contributions to the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector.

Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the awards on behalf of the bank at a glittering ceremony held in Dubai, which was attended by senior bankers from the Middle East.

The winners were chosen on a number of criteria including quality of products, financial performance, value of assets and revenues, satisfaction of customers, usage of state-of-art technology in different banking services.

The recognition from EMEA Finance reconfirms the bank's continuing leadership in the banking sector in Oman and validates its strategy of providing the best services and banking products to suit all segments of society.

EMEA Finance awards are one of the most prestigious accolades given to leading banking institutions in the region.

With over four decades of experience, Bank Muscat provides its customers with reliable, dynamic and innovative banking services and products, aiming to maintain its market leadership.

It provides a wide range of retail, corporate, wholesale and investment banking services as well as asset management and private banking offerings.

Bank Muscat holds the distinction of being consistently voted as the Best Bank in Oman by leading local, regional and global institutions because of its innovations and market leadership across various banking facilities and digital banking services.

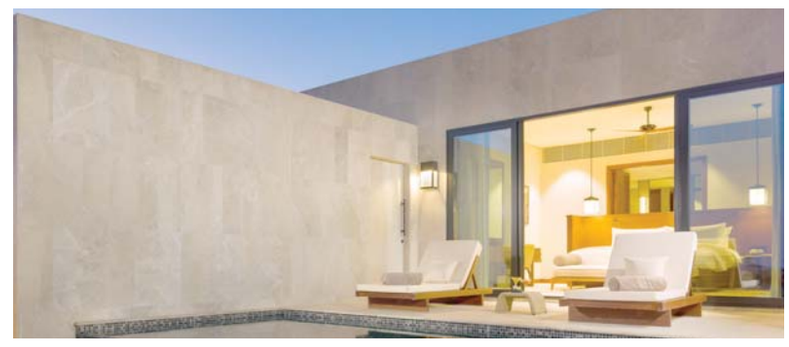
In the past, the bank has been awarded across multiple categories, including the Best Private Bank, Best Investment Bank and the Best Asset Manager in Oman by EMEA Finance and Oman's Most Trusted Brand.

# Alila Hinu Bay begins preparations for tourism boom ahead of Khareef

**MUSCAT:** Located in one of the world's hidden gems, Alila Hinu Bay in Salalah is preparing for a 60% rise in stays during the 'Khareef' season. Unravelling in mid- June until August 31, the province will transform into an oasis with light drizzles and cool air.

Guests can enjoy the only Monsoon season in the GCC during the summer, while exploring the rolling landscapes, exquisite marines and a plethora of waterfalls.

The five-star luxury resort is prepared to embrace the dewy season with experiences and activities in anticipation of attracting new tourists that have never visited the Sultanate of Oman before. This is following the recent announcement of visa-free entry for over 100 countries.



"With the gaining popularity of the Salalah area, and the incredible transformation that Khareef brings, I am confident that this coming Khareef season will see an unprecedented influx from both GCC visitors, and also new markets.

The marvel of Khareef is definitely one to be experienced, and with our once-in-a-lifetime experiences portfolio that highlights the wonders of the season, we are looking forward to welcoming guests from all over to share this with us." said Juan Paolo Alfonso, General Manager, Alila Hinu Bay.

# Abraj Energy Services announces appointment of Board of Directors

**MUSCAT:** Abraj Energy Services, Oman's largest oilfield services provider, announced the formation of its Board of Directors panel. Members include Ayad al Balushi, Ahmed al Azkawi, Ashraf al Mamari, Khamis al Saadi, Mashael Moosa, Ben Charbit and Sadhak Bindal.

Elected at the first AGM meeting, each of these Board Members brings a unique perspective and the same unyielding drive to inspire more remarkable growth and sustainable refinement of the business.

On occasion, Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services Company, said, "We are pleased to welcome our new members, Ben Charbit and Sadhak Bindal, at this incredible time along with our existing members. Both Board members, in tandem with our existing panel, will bring vast talent and understanding of the global business landscape and unique insights into the world of energy to our business."

"Our Board will be enriched by their knowledge, enhancing Abraj's ability to navigate an increasingly multifaceted industry.

This will assist the company in executing its strategy, driving profitability, and enhancing value for all Abraj shareholders.

As Abraj continues to evolve, we are committed to ensuring we have the right mix of skills and experience to advance our goals and reflect regional and international growth", he added.

With several extensive expansion plans within regional and global markets, Abraj Energy Services continues to succeed, emphasising greener and more efficient operations.

The Board of Directors play a significant role in ensuring that strategic and operational governance policies in tandem with best industry practices are implemented, along with a healthy focus on diversification of its service offerings.

The Abraj Board also regularly monitors and amends policies to ensure compliance while considering stakeholder interests. The Abraj board is also keenly interested in planning and creating the right culture for sustainable and comprehensive long-term growth.

Abraj Energy Services was recently listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, with its Initial Public Offering (IPO) oversubscribed by 8.7 times. This has been hailed as the largest subscription in the history of the Sultanate of Oman.

# Muzn provides unique investment solution to endowments, masjid and Quran schools

**MUSCAT:** NBO's Islamic banking window, Muzn, has extended its investment product to endowments, mosques (masjid) and Quran schools. Such institutions can open accounts with a minimum balance of RO 5,000 and earn tier-based profits based on the daily closing balance in the account.

Salima al Marzouqiyah, Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Muzn, said, "This year, Muzn marked its 10-year anniversary and we are delighted to introduce the Muzn Tijarah Account for endowments, masjid and Quran schools.

As part of our ongoing commitment for our customers and the community, we are offering our Tijarah investment product to these institutions, which will enable them to generate additional income in a manner that is fully aligned to our ethical practices and deeply-held beliefs."

In addition to the monthly returns, Tijarah account holders will also receive access to Muzn's Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform for conducting banking transactions at their fingertips. Token Charges will be waived for these institutions, and monthly maintenance fees will be waived for two years. Muzn will also provide access to the Bank's Merchant App which will allow donations to be received directly through the QR code.

As the first Islamic banking window in Oman, Muzn has been committed to fostering the development of the Sultanate of Oman's Islamic Finance sector for more than a decade.

By remaining true to our roots, our all-encompassing range of Sharia-compliant banking services continue to deliver the best banking experience to a growing customer base without compromise on values or principles while ensuring that convenient, hassle-free Islamic banking products and services are available to all.

To find out more about the full range of Sharia compliant financial solutions available at Muzn, please call 24770001 or visit www.muzn.om.

# Rediscovering Oman's charm: A comparison with Southeast Asian tourism

**STEFANO VIRGILLI**
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The author is a member of the International Press Association.

As an Italian who has lived in Oman and spent more than a decade in Southeast Asia, I have had the pleasure of experiencing the diverse beauty and rich cultural heritage of both regions.

With the world gradually recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is heartening to see countries like Oman, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand revitalising their tourism industries.

In this article, I will compare my experiences in Oman with those in Southeast Asia and discuss the unique ways these countries have reopened their doors to visitors.

In the wake of the pandemic, Oman has taken several strategic steps to attract tourists and promote its distinctive allure. With an emphasis on responsible and sustainable tourism, the country has focused on its natural and cultural treasures.

From the stunning fjords of Musandam to the majestic dunes of the Sharqiya Sands, Oman offers an array of experiences that cater to various interests.

Comparatively, Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have taken a slightly different approach in their post-pandemic revival. These nations have relied heavily on their well-established tourism infrastructure, promoting their vibrant cities, pristine beaches and renowned culinary scenes.

While Oman's approach is more geared towards highlighting its lesser-known attractions, Southeast Asian countries have capitalised on their globally recognised tourism hotspots.

One key aspect of Oman's strategy is its push for authenticity and local experiences. The country aims to involve communities in tourism activities, which enables visitors to engage with Oman's rich cultural heritage and hospitable people.

This focus on authenticity contrasts with the heavily commercialised tourism offerings in some parts of Southeast Asia. By preserving its cultural integrity, Oman can ensure a more sustainable and genuine tourism experience.

Another critical aspect of Oman's tourism revival is the focus on eco-tourism and preservation of natural habitats. For example, the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve offers a unique opportunity for tourists to witness the nesting of endangered turtles in their natural environment.

In contrast, some Southeast Asian countries have faced criticism for exploiting their natural resources and wildlife for tourism purposes.

Oman's commitment to sustainability is not only environmentally responsible, but it also differentiates the country from its regional competitors.

In terms of reopening strategies, Oman has adopted a cautious approach, prioritising the safety of both its citizens and visitors. A strict health and safety protocols was promptly implemented. Singapore went a step further by utilising technology for contact tracing and monitoring compliance.

In 2019, Oman recorded around 3.5 million international tourist arrivals, marking a significant increase from previous years, as the country continued to focus on developing its tourism sector.

Malaysia welcomed approximately 26.1 million international tourists in 2019, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia.

Singapore attracted around 19.1 million international visitors in 2019, maintaining its status as a major global and regional tourism hub.

Thailand was the top tourist destination in Southeast Asia in 2019, with a record-breaking 39.8 million international tourists visiting the country.

Finally, it is worth noting that Oman has invested in upgrading its tourism infrastructure, with new airports, hotels and attractions that cater to the diverse needs of modern travellers. These developments have created a more accessible and comfortable environment for tourists without compromising the country's charm and authenticity.

# China and India keep Asia's crude oil imports robust

CLYDE RUSSEL

Asia's imports of crude oil stayed at relatively robust levels in March, as strong inflows to the top-importing region's heavyweights China and India offset weaker demand among some others buyers.

Total March crude imports were estimated by Refinitiv Oil Research at 116.73 million tonnes, equivalent to 27.60 million barrels per day (bpd).

This was up almost 4 per cent from February's 112.32 million tonnes, but down 6.1 per cent on a daily basis from February's 29.4 million bpd, and also below January's 29.13 million bpd.

However, the first three months of 2023 were stronger than every month in 2022, except for November when Asia's crude imports were 29.10 million barrels per day.

Despite the lower daily imports in March, it has been a strong start to the year for Asia's oil imports, with the first quarter seeing arrivals of 28.67 million bpd, up 6.3 per cent from the 26.96 million bpd in the fourth quarter of 2022.

The numbers support some of the bullish narrative in oil markets, which has been centred on a strong rebound in demand from China as the world's biggest crude importer reopens its economy after ending its strict zero-Covid policy at the end of last year.

China's March imports were assessed by Refinitiv at a four-month high of 49.26 million tonnes, equivalent to 11.65 million bpd, which is almost 1 million bpd above February's 10.66 million bpd.

Saudi Arabia reclaimed its place as China's top supplier with 8.08 million tonnes, or a share of 16.4 per cent, edging out Russia at 7.95 million tonnes, or a share of 16.1 per cent.

Russia and Saudi Arabia have vied for the top spot among China's suppliers since Moscow's war of Ukraine led to Russian oil exporters offering steep discounts to Asian buyers as their markets in Europe dried up as a result of sanctions.

While Russian volumes into China remain high by pre-war standards, it's worth noting that Refinitiv data shows India competing with China for Russian cargoes loading at Pacific ports.

India has also turned to cheap Russian oil, but has mainly bought the Urals grade, which loads at Russia's western ports and then has to travel through the Suez Canal or around the bottom of Africa to reach India.

However, India bought some 400,000 tonnes of Pacific-loading ESPO crude in March, which in turn led China to import 1.56 million tonnes of Urals, a record high volume of this grade.

India's crude imports rose to an 11-month high of 21.23 million tonnes, or about 5.02 million bpd, in March, with Russia supplying 34 per cent of the total, or 7.29 million tonnes, which was a sixth straight record high.

Overall, China and India continue to drive Asia's crude imports, but the rising share of Russian oil does raise the question as to the impact on other suppliers, and whether they are seeing reduced demand. — **Reuters**

# A reality check for the renminbi

**SHANG-JIN WEI**

The author is professor of finance and economics at Columbia Business School and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

After years of speculation and false starts, it seems that the internationalisation of the renminbi is well underway. On March 29, China and Brazil announced plans to trade using their own currencies, rather than the US dollar.

The day before, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation and France's TotalEnergies completed their first-ever renminbi-denominated liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently said he wanted to use the Chinese currency not just for trading with China, but also as a form of payment in trade with other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. And Saudi Arabia has been in talks with China since last year about accepting payments for some oil exports in renminbi.

It is no secret that China would like to convert the renminbi into an international currency and move away from the global dominance of the US dollar. While this is often interpreted as a geopolitical move, a way to insulate China from possible US-led economic sanctions in the future, transforming the renminbi into one of the world's leading settlement currencies would also greatly benefit the Chinese economy.

Moreover, it would help protect the country from an exchange rate crisis, which is why other countries, including India and ASEAN member-states, are trying to internationalise their currencies, too.

The figure below, based on ongoing research by my co-authors and me, illustrates the progress that China has made in its efforts to internationalise the renminbi. The red line traces South Korean firms' renminbi-denominated exports as a share of its total exports to China between 2006 and 2020, showing the Chinese currency's share rising from zero per cent before 2008 to nearly six per cent by 2020.

In October 2016, the renminbi became part of the basket of currencies underpinning the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) reserve asset, special drawing rights, joining an exclusive club alongside the dollar, the euro, the yen and the British pound.

While these are impressive milestones, one should not exaggerate the degree to which the renminbi is encroaching on the greenback's position. As the figure shows, the US dollar's share of South Korean exports to China declined from nearly 98 per cent in 2006 to roughly 87 per cent in 2020.

In other words, the dollar has gone from overwhelmingly dominant to slightly less dominant. Even in China-South Korea bilateral trade, the renminbi is not even close to displacing the dollar.

Moreover, roughly 99 per cent of South Korean exports to the US during the same period were denominated in dollars; none were denominated in renminbi.

By contrast, the dollar's share of South Korean exports to Japan was 45 per cent, about equal to that of the yen, with the won and the euro accounting for the rest.

In other words, the US dollar continues to dominate global trade, including bilateral trade not involving the US, while the renminbi is essentially used only in transactions involving China.

Part of the reason for the greenback's continued pre-eminence is that, in addition to its status as a trading power, the US has very large and liquid capital markets where foreign investors can park their dollar-denominated assets.

Because of its capital controls, China's domestic financial market is far less liquid, making the renminbi unattractive to international investors.

Theoretically, China could raise the renminbi's global profile by loosening capital controls. But doing so could come at a significant cost, exposing the Chinese economy to the (often negative) consequences of US interest-rate movements and global financial cycles.

Moreover, premature capital-account liberalisation could exacerbate the existing distortions within China's financial system, where domestic savings are not always channelled to the most productive firms.

The Chinese authorities are keenly aware of these risks, which is why they have been prioritising financial stability over renminbi internationalisation. There are, however, other ways to promote the renminbi.

A series of currency swap agreements between the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and its counterparts in other countries, for example, could help make the renminbi less risky for international firms and investors.

In addition, a digital renminbi could facilitate partial capital account liberalisation without formally removing capital controls.

By removing the anonymity of foreign investors, a digital renminbi would allow the PBOC to limit cross-border financial transactions to less volatile types and more conveniently activate a circuit-breaker when needed.

Being able to separate inflows of "hot money" from more stable types of foreign investment could convince the central bank to relax some capital controls and allow financial capital to flow more freely.

In sum, while China has achieved notable progress towards making the renminbi a global reserve currency, it is still far from reaching its goal. While it could use a digital currency to deliver de facto partial capital account liberalisation, it will not undermine the dollar's hegemony without going much further in loosening capital controls.

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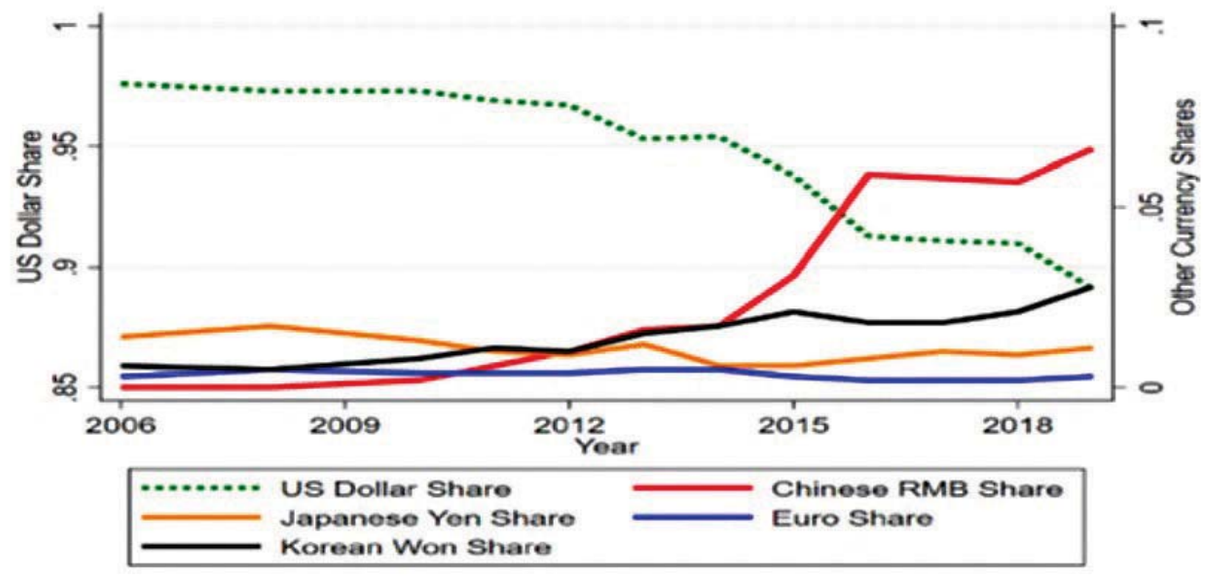


*Source: Jiao, Kwan, Lee, and Wei, 2023 (unpublished working paper).*

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# ramadhan

# Mysterious carvings in Al Widd

Every once in a while, images that include depictions of animals, humans, and various symbols that have yet to be deciphered can be found in remote areas across the Sultanate of Oman. The discovery of these ancient pictographs is a fascinating glimpse into Oman's rich cultural heritage.... **P20**

## QUR'AN

**VERSE OF THE DAY**

{And out of His mercy He made for you the night and the day that you may rest therein and [by day] seek from His bounty and [that] perhaps you will be grateful.}

(Surah Al-Qasas, 73)

## HADITH

**A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL**

Ibn 'Abbas reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Teach and make things easy and not difficult. When one of you is angry, he should be silent."

Sahih (Al-Albani)

## HEALTH TIPS

Meats, legumes, eggs, and dairy products are rich in proteins. As proteins are crucial for the health of your body cells, make sure you include at least one of these sources in each Ramadhan meal. They also increase your satiety level, thus reducing the temptation for eating sweets.

STORIES FROM THE **QURAN**

# Qarun

**ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY** says :{Indeed, Qarun was from the people of Moses, but he tyrannised them. And We gave him of treasures whose keys would burden a band of strong men; thereupon his people said to him, "Do not exult. Indeed, Allah does not like the exultant. But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters." He said, "I was only given it because of knowledge I have."

Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him of generations those who were greater than him in power and greater in accumulation [of wealth]? But the criminals, about their sins, will not be asked. So he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, "Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qarun. Indeed, he is one of great fortune." But those who had been given knowledge said, "Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient." And We caused the earth to swallow him and his home. And there was for him no company to aid him other than Allah, nor was he of those who [could] defend themselves. And those who had wished for his position the previous day began to say, "Oh, how Allah extends provision to whom He wills of His servants and restricts it! If not that Allah had conferred favour on us, He would have caused it to swallow us. Oh, how the disbelievers do not succeed!"} 76-82 Surah Al-Qasas

**QARUN WAS ONE OF THE** people in Bani Israel, and according to some reports, was related to Musa. He believed in Musa and had knowledge of the Torah.

Allah describes the amount of his wealth – one man could not carry just the keys to his treasures. As already described, Qarun's wealth was stupefying. However, he was arrogant and stingy, and tyrannical to his own people. He was haughty and selfish, walking in a boastful manner on Allah's earth, with his grand clothes dragging on the ground.

As his treasures multiplied, so did his hypocrisy and he transgressed many boundaries with Allah. Even though his riches exceeded what anyone could spend over several generations, he was stingy. He was unwilling to spend any of it for the greater good of society, to alleviate the suffering of the needy. He lived without any sense of accountability or responsibility to society and was arrogant to Allah.

People in Bani Israel constantly reminded him not to be arrogant with his wealth or be ungrateful to Allah. They also advised him to "seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter..." (Al Qur'an 28:77) Qarun lost sight of the fact that but for the will of Allah; he would not have been in possession of such an immense fortune.

Society was divided into those who envied Qarun: when they saw him parading about in his finery, they were jealous and wished for what he had. Others despised his attitude and constantly tried to counsel him, but without avail. One day, Qarun set out with his caravan.

Those who saw him and desired the worldly life said: "Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qarun. Indeed, he is one of great fortune." (Al Qur'an 28:79) However, those who had been given knowledge expressed their disapproval and said, "Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient." (Al Qur'an 28:80) The believers warned those envious of Qarun to keep their eye on the rewards of Allah, which is earned by righteous deeds, rather than to yearn the temporary riches of this world. Qarun and all his fortunes were swallowed by the earth, never to be seen again. The ones who, the previous day had wished to be in his position realised the error of their desires.

# IN PHOTOS

Preparations for a group iftar, the fast-breaking meal, in the area of Multaqa in Sudan's Northern State, during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. Muslims follow the tradition set by the prophet Muhammad(PBUH) whom believers say used to break his fast by eating dates and drinking goat's milk during the fasting month. The dawn-to-dusk fast is conceived as a spiritual struggle against the seduction of earthly pleasures, but the evening iftar festive meals traditionally bring families together during Ramadhan. — **AFP**

Farmers pollinate a palm tree in Sudan's Northern State town of Karima,, 450 km north of Khartoum. — **AFP**

A date merchant prepares an order for a customer at a stall in a market in the old city of Sanaa during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. — **AFP**

# Rooted in war and symbol of peace: Jordan's national dish

**IN JORDAN, A SUMPTUOUS** dish that has its roots in an ancient war has evolved over the centuries to be widely cherished as a symbol of peace and hospitality.

Mansaf — the kingdom's national dish of lamb cooked in dried yogurt, served with rice and nuts — is "the king of the Jordanian table", says Ashraf al Mubaideen, 47, who runs a traditional restaurant in Amman.

"If you want to honour your guest, there's nothing finer than mansaf," agrees his business partner Tamer al Majali, 42, about the custom of greeting guests with huge platters piled high.

Mansaf was inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage late last year, highlighting the "deep sense of identity and social cohesion" it evokes.

Long before it became a symbol of peace — traditionally shared to mark the end of tribal feuds — mansaf was born on the eve of battle, according to one version of history.

In the 9th century BC, King Mesha of the Moab Kingdom — located on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea — wanted to test his people's loyalty in a war against the Kingdom of Israel, said historian George Tareef.

"The king knew that the Torah forbade Jews from eating meat cooked with milk," and so he instructed his people to cook a rudimentary version of the non-kosher dish ahead of battle, said Tareef.

In modern-day Amman, Mubaideen and Majali's restaurant is called "Manasef Moab", a nod to the dish's ancient origins.

**'AUTHENTICITY AND HERITAGE'**

Jordan's most popular dish — regularly served at wedding banquets and in households for large families — bears little resemblance to Mesha's culinary allegiance tests.

The dish underwent thousands of years of "evolution as a result of economic and agricultural conditions", according to researcher Hassan Mubaideen.

In an Amman restaurant, the 58-year-old academic — donning a red keffiyeh scarf and tucking into a plate of mansaf — said rice came to replace bread and cracked wheat, as a way to feed more people with less, though shows of generosity remain integral.

"There are special rituals and hospitality protocols linked to the meal — like how you greet guests, in what order you serve them, where the head of the animal goes, and how you say goodbye," Mubaideen told AFP.

Large platters are traditionally shared between around a dozen people, using only the right hand, while the left is placed behind the back.

Customs have changed, and individual plates and utensils are now often used, as younger generations adopt the age-old tradition.

Sharing mansaf with her classmates, 14-year-old school pupil Zeina Elyan expressed pride in the symbol of "Jordan's ancient heritage" and the health benefits of the dish's whole foods.

Her teacher, Duha Saleh, 31, said she brought her students to the restaurant to teach them "the social culture" behind the dish, and the inherited values of generosity and hospitality.

"There's a pleasure to it," she said, "in how it connects us to who we are, our authenticity and our heritage."

— **AFP**

# Webb telescope discovers oldest galaxies ever observed

**THE JAMES WEBB** Space Telescope has discovered the four most distant galaxies ever observed, one of which formed just 320 million years after the Big Bang when the universe was still in its infancy, new research said on Tuesday. The Webb telescope has unleashed a torrent of scientific discovery since becoming operational last year, peering farther than ever before into the universe's distant reaches — which also means it is looking back in time.

By the time light from the most distant galaxies reaches Earth, it has been stretched by the expansion of the universe and shifted to the infrared region of the light spectrum.

The Webb telescope's NIRCam instrument has an unprecedented ability to detect this infrared light, allowing it to quickly spot a range of never-before-seen galaxies — some of which could reshape astronomers' understanding of the early universe.

In two studies published in the *Nature Astronomy* journal, astronomers revealed they have "unambiguously detected" the four most distant galaxies ever observed.

The galaxies date from 300 to 500 million years after the Big Bang more than 13 billion years ago, when the universe was just two per cent of its current age.

That means the galaxies are from what is called "the epoch of reionisation," a period when the first stars are believed to have emerged. The epoch came directly after the cosmic dark ages brought about by the Big Bang.

**'SURPRISING'**

Stephane Charlot, a researcher at the Astrophysics Institute of Paris and co-author of the two new studies, told AFP that the farthest galaxy — called JADES-GS-z13-0 — formed 320 million years after the Big Bang. That is the greatest distance ever observed by astronomers, he said.

The Webb telescope also confirmed the existence of JADES-GS-z10-0, which dates from 450 million years after the Big Bang and had previously been spotted by the Hubble Space Telescope.

All four galaxies are "very low in mass," weighing roughly a hundred million solar masses, Charlot said. The Milky Way, in comparison, weighs 1.5 trillion solar masses by some estimations.

But the galaxies are "very active in star formation in proportion to their mass," Charlot said.

Those stars were forming "at around the same rate as the Milky Way," a speed that was "surprising so early in the Universe," he added.

The galaxies were also "very poor in metals," he added.

This is consistent with the standard model of cosmology, science's best understanding of how the universe works, which says that the closer to the Big Bang, the less time there is for such metals to form.

**TECHNICAL TOUR DE FORCE'**

However in February, the discovery of six massive galaxies from 500-700 million years after the Big Bang led some astronomers to question the standard model.

Those galaxies, also observed by the Webb telescope, were bigger than thought possible so soon after the birth of the universe — if confirmed, the standard model could need updating.

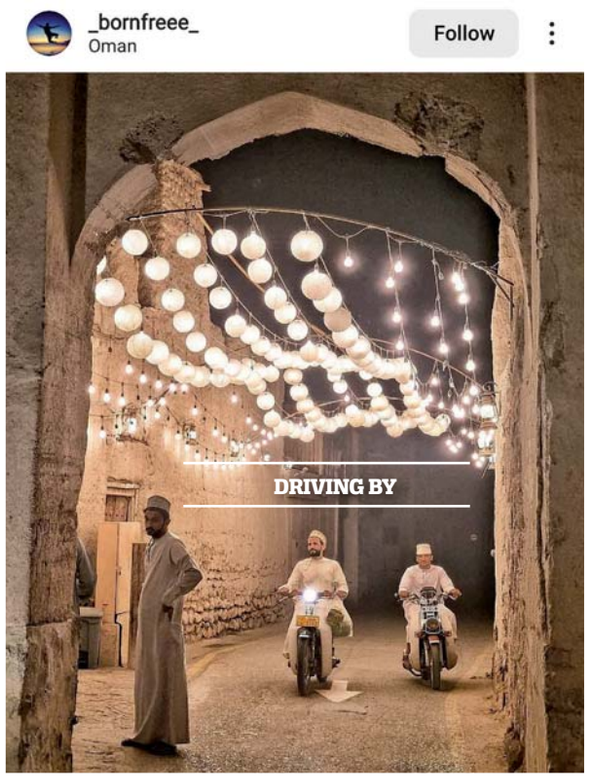
Pieter van Dokkum, an astronomer at Yale University not involved in the latest research, hailed the confirmation of the four newly-discovered distant galaxies as a "technical tour de force".

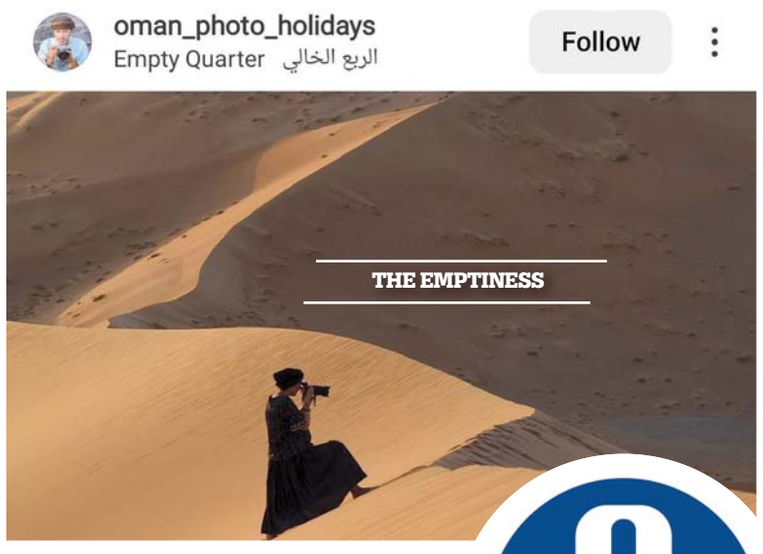
"The frontier is moving almost every month," van Dokkum commented in *Nature*, adding that there was now "only 300 million years of unexplored history of the universe between these galaxies and the Big Bang".

The Webb telescope has observed possible galaxies even closer to the Big Bang, but they have yet to be confirmed, he said.

— **AFP**

## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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## AROUND THE WORLD

**TRAVEL TALES**

# Versailles and Forbidden City to hold France-China exhibition

**THE PALACE OF** Versailles signed a deal with the Forbidden City in Beijing last week for a 2024 exhibition about historic ties between France and China.

The announcement by the French institution came during President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Beijing where he is hoping to steer China away from its increasingly close ties with Russia.

The exhibition — due to run April 1 to June 30 next year — will focus on how ties were forged in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially under king Louis XIV and emperor Kangxi with the arrival of French Jesuit priests at the Chinese court in 1685.

It was originally planned for 2020 but was delayed

by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Coming 60 years after France re-established diplomatic ties with China, the show "is a sign of confidence for the future and the dialogue between our two cultures," Catherine Pegard, who heads the palace, said.

She said it will bring together objects from both collections to show how exchanges between the two countries fostered French interest in Chinese philosophy, science and art. **— AFP**

**CULTURE**

# 1976: when Ramses came to Paris for a mummy makeover

**A MEGA EXHIBITION** honouring the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II opens this week in Paris, with his sarcophagus making a rare voyage abroad for the occasion.

But in 1976 the French capital hosted the great man himself when his 3,000-year-old mummy was brought to Paris for a once-in-a-death-time makeover.

The story of how France literally saved the skin of Ramses II, while hosting a major exhibition on his legendary rule at the Grand Palais museum, is one of the little-known chapters in Egyptology.

Then French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing convinced his Egyptian counterpart Anwar Sadat to temporarily part with the mummy by promising Ramses a reception "fit for a king".

And he meant it.

When a French military transport plane bearing the remains of the venerable Egyptian leader touched down at Le Bourget airport in Paris on September 26, 1976, the red carpet had been rolled out, the Republican Guard were standing to attention and a government minister was waiting to greet him.

Contrary to a popular rumour Ramses did not travel on a passport with a picture of his 3,200-year-old mug — but it would not have been out of keeping with the pomp and ceremony.

In a sign of the abiding French fascination with ancient Egypt, the welcoming ceremony was carried live on national television.

Onboard the plane with Ramses was French archaeologist Christiane Desroches Noblecourt from the Louvre museum, who travelled to Cairo to accompany Ramses on the journey, submerging the mummy in a bath of plastic balls to cushion it from any knocks.

**MUMMY NEEDS A MAKEOVER**

Once in Paris, the mummy did not head to the exhibition, but instead whisked off for urgent medical attention.

The remains of the pharaoh, who was in his nineties when he died in 1213 BC, were starting to show their age.

When the mummy of Ramses II was discovered in 1881 in the Valley of the Kings

near Luxor, it was in remarkably good condition.

But contact with fresh air brought creeping damage from parasites and fungi and a major restoration was needed.

The alarm was first raised in 1975, when a French archaeologist doing research at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo discovered the mummy's fungal affliction.

When the Ramses II exhibition opened in Paris, Sadat finally accepted France's offer of a restoration.

**EIGHT MONTHS INTENSIVE CARE**

The delicate job of restoring the mummy to full health was entrusted to conservationists at the Musee de l'Homme anthropology museum, which sits on a hill across the Seine River from the Eiffel Tower.

Pictures from the era show a phalanx of scientists in white coats gathered around the mummy's bedside in a sterile room.

After X-raying the brittle body and subjecting it to a battery of biological and chemical tests, they got down to work, restoring tissues and creating new bandages before sending Ramses off for radiation treatment to the French Atomic Energy Commission.

After eight months in intensive care, Ramses was "set for a new round of immortality", AFP wrote.

On April 10, 1977, the rejuvenated pharaoh was flown back to Cairo and put back on display alongside other royal mummies in the Egyptian Museum. **— AFP**

**LIFE**

# As Colombian volcano rumbles to life, villagers resist evacuation

Smoke billows from the crater of a snow-capped Andean volcano, reminding local inhabitants of the threat of another potential deadly eruption.

Yet at the foot of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in the Colombian Andes, thousands of villagers are staying put to tend to their crops and pack animals, despite an urgent call from the government to evacuate.

Luis Canon admits he is afraid but says he sees no other option than to "resign" himself to his fate.

"If you leave things here, the crops, the animals, when you come back there is nothing," the 50-year-old, dressed in a traditional hat and poncho, said.

The eruption threat has loomed since the end of March when the number of daily tremors within the volcano shot up from 50 to 12,000. The government raised the alert level from yellow to orange and ordered the evacuation of 7,500 people living in the foothills and flanks of the volcano.

But that did not convince many of those dwelling in danger zones to leave.

"The villagers have cows, horses, sheep, goats and poultry, and that in some way prevents them from moving and taking part in the preventative evacuation ... because of the fear that they will be stolen," said presidential adviser Luis Fernando Velasco.

So the government said it was adopting "exceptional measures to move around 80,000 animals ... away from the alert zone."

Aerial view of Murillo municipality near the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Murillo, Tolima Department, Colombia. — AFP

More than 57,000 people live in areas that could be affected by a new eruption.

Authorities fear that a major Nevado del Ruiz eruption could cause the kind of devastation that rocked the area in 1985. In a matter of hours, an eruption of lava melted part of the volcano's snow-cap, creating raging torrents of mud, ash and rocks that streamed down the mountainside and buried the town of Armero, killing 25,000 people. It was the worst natural disaster in the country's modern history.

The entire world became captivated by the fate of 13-year-old Omaira Sanchez, who spent three days buried up to her neck in muddy water with her legs trapped by the debris from her destroyed home in the town of Armero.

With rescuers helpless to free her, she died in agony under the gaze of journalists and villagers alike.

A picture of her haunted expression made the front page of newspapers all over the world.

Luis Londono, 65, remembers that "very scary" November 13.

People heard a roar in the dead of night and fled for their lives "crying and shouting that it was the end of the world."

A villager in the municipality of Herveo, home to 9,000 people some 30 kilometers to the northeast of the volcano, Londono fears another such tragedy.

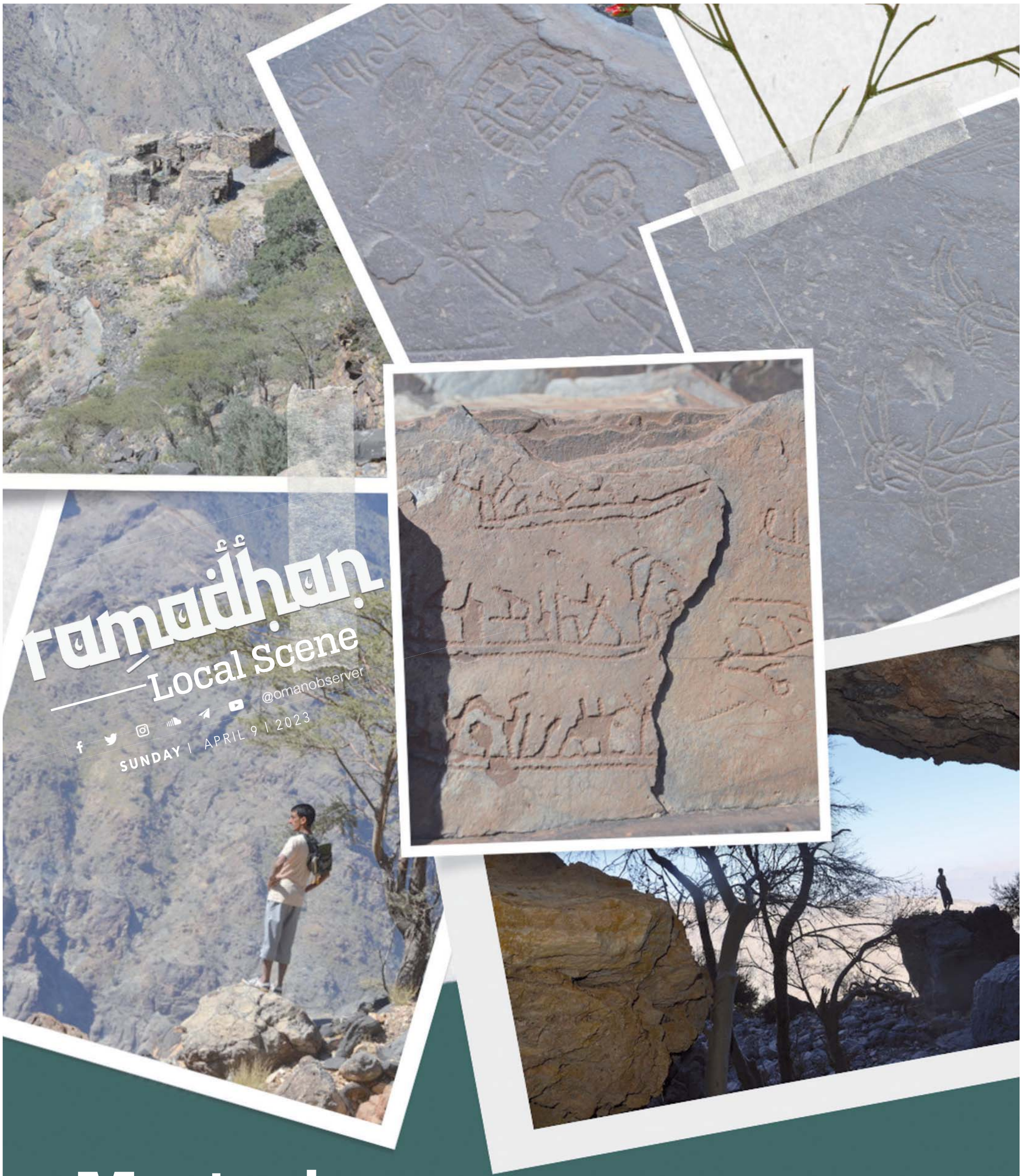
"There is great fear that the Nevado will explode," he said.

Like many others, though, he has not heeded the call to evacuate the mountainous area where peaks rise up to more than 5,000 meters.

Nicknamed the "sleeping lion," the volcano lay dormant for decades after that 1985 eruption.

But 10 years ago there was a new eruption.

**— AFP**




# Mysterious carvings in Al Widd

By Dr Khaled Abdul Malek

After asking my friend Marhoun from Halhal whether he came across any rock carvings in the mountains near his village, he called me last February.

"Khaled, my uncle told me that he saw some carvings near the abandoned village of Al Widd," he said excitedly on the phone.

I packed my bag with some food, drinks, and all the lenses for my camera, formatted the SD memory card, and hit the road to Wadi Halhal, a branch of Wadi Bani Kharus, a one-and-a-half-hour drive from Muscat.

Marhoun was already waiting to guide me to the place where his uncle saw the carvings.

I had met Marhoun back in 2009 when I visited the village of Al Widd for the first time.

The hike to Al Widd was very strenuous. The abandoned hamlet was situated at almost 700 m above Halhal.

There are many trails going up the mountain, but Marhoun chose the steepest one as it is the shortest. The ascent was tough for my old age, but not for Marhoun, who could be my son's age!

The temperatures were not high compared to my first visit in August 2009.

We stopped midway to have something to drink. There I saw some old structures, that, according to my young local friend, were inhabited way before his great-grandparents were born.

Two hours later we could see the well-maintained gardens of Al Widd, which looked like a green spot in the mountain

We reached the terraces around noon. Apricot and peach trees were in blossom. The pink flowers of the apricot trees made a magnificent contrast with the blue skies. We left our bags with food in the shade of a lime tree, and I took only my camera and lenses and headed to the place where the petroglyphs are supposed to be.

Marhoun said that according to his uncle, the carvings are situated on the ledge of a waterfall near the hamlet.

The approach was very difficult as the terrain was quite unstable.

We separated and started looking for the "mysterious engravings" on the boulders in the wadi bed just above the waterfall.

"KHALED!" yelled Marhoun, so excited. "They're here, Alhamdulillah," he said happily.

I joined him very slowly as the carvings were located on the edge of a 100 + metres free fall. The carvings depicted human-like drawings as well as animals and some letters that I could not decipher. I was so excited about the discovery and took plenty of pictures of these enigmatic figures and letters.

We went back to the terraces, where we had something to eat before starting our long descent to Halhal. We took another trail to check another site with some other inscriptions. The last part of the hike was quite difficult, and we had to progress extremely slowly because any mistake could be fatal. We reached Halhal just before dark. I thanked Marhoun for his help and drove back to Muscat. All the way to our house in Al Mawaleh I was wondering "who these people were and how many years ago did they carve the mysterious drawings?"