

P12

ITALIAN DIEGO ULISSI TAKES OVER YITTI HILLS



P13

VALE OMAN BECOMES 100% FOREIGN-OWNED FOLLOWING OQ STAKE SALE



P20

AN OMANI EDUCATOR'S COMPREHENSIVE FOSSIL COLLECTION IS READY FOR THE PUBLIC



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO SERBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Aleksandar Vucic of the Republic of Serbia, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Vucic, and the friendly people of Serbia further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Haj REGISTRATION FROM FEBRUARY 21

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced that pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman wishing to perform Haj this year (1444 AH) can register online from February 21 to March 4. The ministry said that the registration should be made directly via the electronic link (www.hajj.om), only during the mentioned period. The website allows for registration by entering a pilgrim's civil number or identity card or mobile phone number if the ID card and mobile chip are PKI-supported. **DETAILS ON P2**

INSIDE



NIKKI ANNOUNCES 2024 US PRESIDENTIAL BID

P7



WILL UKRAINE'S ZELENSKY GET JETS NOW?

P9



THE TWINNING OF IDEAS

A collection of art presented at a unique location has brought curiosity and excitement. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, inaugurated the exhibition titled 'Kullon Menna' (Each of Us), at Muttrah Fish, Vegetables and Fruits Market. The exhibition includes several artworks by contemporary artists of different nationalities, including Omani artists, highlighting the twinning of ideas reflected in the artworks presented to depict the Arab world and the interpretation of oriental culture. **DETAILS ON P3**

HM GIVES AUDIENCE TO WTO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace to Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

At the outset of the audience, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the guest. His Majesty valued WTO's efforts to streamline global trade and ensure its stability. His Majesty also lauded its remarkable role to overcome challenges facing the global economy.

On her turn, the WTO Director-General expressed the organisations' pride about its distinguished relations with the Sultanate of Oman. She commended the open trade and investment policies espoused by Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

The audience was attended by Dr Hamad bin Said al Aafi, Head of the Private Office, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Ambassador Eloy Lauro, Senior Adviser to the WTO Director-General. — ONA



WTO reviews efforts to support economic growth

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Tuesday organised a meeting with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The meeting exchanged views on issues related to the WTO tasks and efforts in support of international trade liberalisation and economic growth. It also touched on ways to support the global trade system, achieve stability in the trade movement and maintain the best rates of its flows around the world. It also discussed enhancing the benefit of the organisation in building specialised capabilities and public awareness in a way that enhances common interests and benefits within the framework of international trade.

A visual presentation on green hydrogen in the Sultanate of Oman was presented during the meeting, which was attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, WTO Director-General. — ONA

Sayyid Badr to preside over HM Cup final

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, will preside over the final match of His Majesty the Sultan's Football Cup for the sport season (2022-2023). The final will be played on Thursday (March 9) at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher, Governorate of Muscat.

In the first leg of the semifinal of the tournament, Al Seeb Club, reigning champions, will take

on Al Suwaiq Club on Monday (February 20) at Al Seeb Stadium. In the second leg of the semifinal, Al Rustaq Club, the runner-up, will face Al Nahdha Club at Al Rustaq Complex.

In the second leg of the semifinal, Al Nahdha Club will take on Al Rustaq Club at Al Buraimi Complex on Saturday (February 25), whereas Al Suwaiq Club will encounter Al Seeb Club at Al Rustaq Complex on Sunday (February 26). — ONA



Draft Social Protection Law referred to Council

PROTECTION AGAINST ALL LIFE-CYCLE RISKS

MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers has approved the referral of the draft law on Social Protection to the Council of Oman to complete its legislative session.

The step was taken within the context of the Council of Ministers' keenness to finalise procedures linked to the restructuring of retirement and social protection systems.

The Council of Ministers commended the new social protection system designed in line with the best international practices, standards and experiences based on transition from case-study programmes to a comprehensive system of coverage.

It also introduces a transition from providing assistance to needy families to a concept of protection against life-cycle risks for all segments of society.

The overall objective is to achieve social and economic stability in line with Oman Vision 2040. The draft law allocates new social benefits to the elderly, children, the orphans, widows and low-income families. It also caters to old-aged retired personnel and to the designing of

SOCIAL PROTECTION DRAFT LAW

(A MONTHLY CASH BENEFIT)

Assistance to the Elderly

Assistance to the Children

Persons with Disability

Orphans and Widows

Family Income Support

Old Age, Inability to Earn and Death Programme

SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMMES

Work-related Injuries

Job Security Risks

Maternity Leave

Sick Leaves and Non-scheduled Leaves

unified retirement systems for all sectors of the labour market, both government and private.

Such a process is envisaged to cover the stage of retirement, death and disability risks, labour injuries, occupational diseases

and job security. An additional sum of RO 400 million has been introduced in 2023 to implement programmes and benefits endorsed for the social protection system. — ONA

SEE ALSO P4



HM gives audience to WTO Director General



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq gave on Tuesday an audience at Al Barakah Palace to Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). – ONA

Online registration for Haj to begin on February 21

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The online registration for Haj pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman intending to perform the holy ritual this year (corresponding to Hijri year 1444) will open on February 21 and end on March 4, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Accordingly, both citizens and residents in the Sultanate above 18 years of age can register their interest on www.hajj.om during the specified period and use the three methods for direct

registration provided by the system.

The registration can be completed by entering the civil number, the personal ID card, or the mobile phone number if the identity card chip and the SIM card is supported by the electronic authentication system.

Speaking to the Observer, Sultan al Hinai, in-charge of the Haj pilgrimage proceedings from Oman, said that anyone who is not less than 67 years of age if he is a man or any woman who is less than 65 years old or who has a visual or motor disability is entitled to obtain a companion for the Haj.

This year, as many as 14,000 pilgrims from Oman will be able to perform Haj which is likely to be held end of June and beginning of July, based on an agreement signed by the ministry and the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

“As many as 14,000 pilgrims from Oman will be able to visit the holy land during the Haj season 2023 for the rituals based on an agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of Awqaf of Saudi Arabia where we agreed to maintain the status quo of pre-Covid time,” he told the Observer.

SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

He further said that the ministry has entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Social Development regarding the special social beneficiaries who wish to perform Haj.

Those falling in the special categories such as cancer patients or other suffering from chronic diseases can register through the same portal and indicate their disability or disease.

It is to be noted that online registration in the system is not to be considered as a guarantee for travelling to the holy land but a scrutiny, shortlisting and

finalising based on eligibility criteria, identifying those who are eligible for Haj will take place after the registration closed.

CHOOSE AN APPROVED AGENCY

The ministry spokesperson further stated that one should choose a Haj company from the system and his choice is an acknowledgment of the agreement to contract with the Haj company, and he has the obligation to pay the dues as stipulated in the system.

In 2020, Haj rituals were suspended in the wake of the

growing number of Covid cases and urged all to perform only symbolic pilgrimage for those currently present in the country. The ministry had also urged all citizens and residents to abide by the decision and not to try to visit the holy land and to limit their prayers inside their homes.

Further details of the Haj pilgrimage this year can be had by submitting a report via the communications screen on the electronic system for registering pilgrims www.hajj.om/contact or by dialling the toll free number of the ministry 80008008 during official working hours.

‘Observer Roundtable’ series to focus on contemporary issues

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

‘Observer Roundtable’ organised by the Oman Daily Observer will begin at the Ministry of Information premises at 10 am on Wednesday.

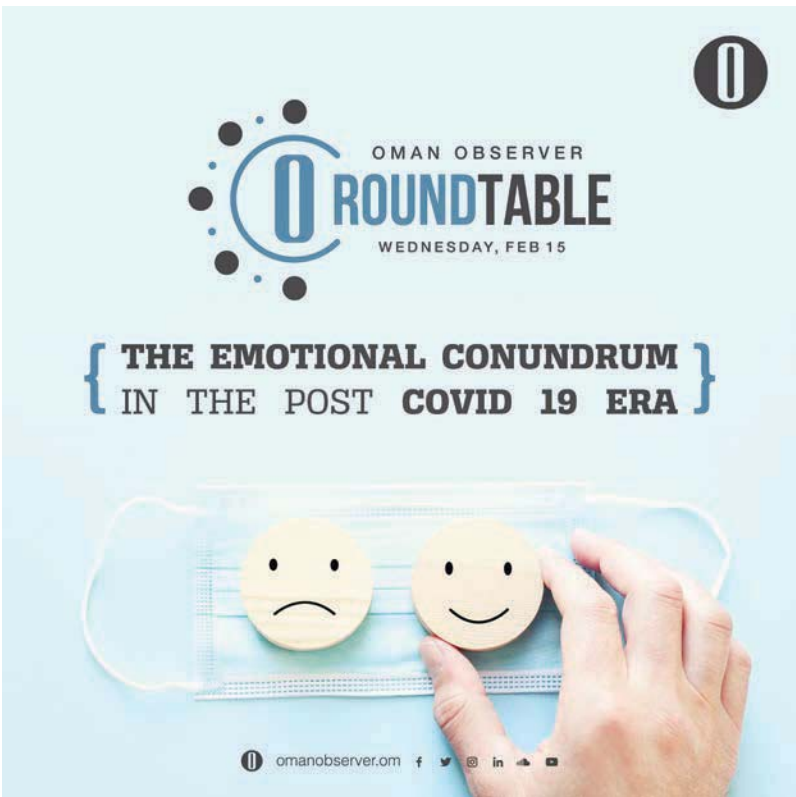
The debate will have deliberations on contemporary issues by experts every month, in which experts from different sectors will take part and shed light on them.

The key speakers of Wednesday’s debate are Dr Hamed al Sinawi, eminent psychiatrist; Sarah Said, educationist; and Davis Kallukkaran, auditing specialist and finance personnel.

ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUEILI, Editor-in-Chief of Oman Daily Observer, will be the Guest of Honour, while Lakshmi Kothaneth will be the presenter.

The topic of the first ‘Observer Roundtable’ is ‘The emotional conundrum in the post-Covid-19 era.’

Eminent panel: DR HAMED



AL SINAWI is a senior consultant and old age psychiatrist at SQU and the chairman and founder of Oman Alzheimer’s Society. He completed his residency and higher psychiatry training

in London and established a memory clinic in Oman in 2011. Along with his clinical work, Dr Al Sinawi is a trainer for the residents at the Omani board of psychiatry, a columnist with

Oman Observer and a research supervisor for residents and medical students.

SARAH SAEED currently holds the position of Academic Director at Global Education Services (GES) in Muscat. Born and raised in the UK, Sarah has completed her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the UK, specialising in Business, Management and Education. Sarah has presented workshops to equip senior leadership members, teachers, and administrators within the classroom and effective leadership strategies to accomplish SMART outcomes.

DAVIS KALLUKKARAN is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and is the Founder and Managing Partner of Crowe Oman, a firm of Auditors and Business advisors established in the Sultanate of Oman in 1995. He has over 35 years of experience in audit, business advisory and taxation services for banks, financial institutions and other corporate entities.

State Council discusses water resources governance

MUSCAT: The State Council Office on Tuesday held its 2nd meeting of the 4th annual sitting of the 7th term under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the Council.

The meeting discussed a study presented by the Economic Committee on Governance of Water Resources in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also touched on a study presented by the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee on Arts and their Role in Supporting National Economy. — ONA

RCA SHOOTING COMPETITION



MUSCAT: The Royal Court Affairs (RCA) shooting competition 2023 wrapped up at the Royal Guard of Oman shooting field in Halban, on Tuesday. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of Royal Court Affairs. The Directorate-General of Transportation lifted the shield whereas the Social Affairs Security Unit claimed second place and the Royal Camel Corps came third. – ONA



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WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 15 | 2023

3

Muttrah Fish Market catches art lovers with unique exhibition

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A collection of art presented at a unique location has brought curiosity and excitement. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, inaugurated the exhibition titled Kullon Menna (Each of Us), held at Muttrah Fish, Vegetables and Fruits Market. The exhibition will continue until March 2, 2023.

The exhibition includes several artworks by contemporary artists of different nationalities, including Omani artists, highlighting the twinning of ideas reflected in the artworks presented to depict the Arab world and the interpretation of oriental culture.

The selection of the Wilayat of Muttrah came due to its strategic location, its historical past and the artistic culture it reflects, in addition to the presence of its distinctive traditional markets that attract visitors from all over the world, which enhances the objectives of holding the exhibition in this vibrant heart of the city.

The exhibition reflects the country's cultural, artistic, art and architectural values. Through art forms, Kullon Menna exhibition depicts forms of hostility, collective, protracted cruelty inflicted on certain groups of people and the impact of wars.

Having witnessed first-hand, a core group of artists have come together to represent the scares and scars of war and displacement.

Although the artists have been fortunate to have witnessed but



not experienced the brutality of the war, all three artists live with the sense of the devastating toll of human suffering. Through their art, they wish to speak for the wounded, the uprooted and the perished.

"Theirs is an expression of empathy and human kindness that comes from a position of privilege; the privilege of normalcy which, when juxtaposed against surrounding misery, often breeds feelings of inadequacy and helplessness," said the organisers.

Kullon Menna is organised by RASMA Art Consultancy and curated by Rasmia Noor Mohammed al Zadjali.

Born in Tétouan, Morocco, Safaa Erruas studied fine arts at INBA in Tétouan, and lives and works in Tétouan.

Safaa is a multidisciplinary abstract artist whose work focuses on the complexity and the permanent tension between sensation, perception and experience. Her artwork is dictated by the colour white, upon which soft materials and sharp objects clash in a nod to the silent, open wounds that we carry deep within and spark a powerful consciousness of the body, be it present or absent, whole, pain-racked or landless.

She considers her art a personal journey of interpretation and understanding, a quest through which she hopes to grasp the world and society she operates in.

Safaa had her work exhibited globally in Morocco, France, Sweden, Spain, Australia, UAE, Cuba, the United States, Egypt and

Belgium and now in Muscat.

Elmira Abolhassani was born in Mashhad, Iran, and studied Fine Arts at the University of Lisbon, Portugal. She now lives and works in Lisbon.

Elmira is a visual artist whose artistic journey attempts to understand the underlying structures of human networks and identities of each person's role and position as an individual node in this complex web.

According to the artist, "The body of work stems from her belief that one must first attain a clear vision of oneself in order to fully comprehend significant aspects of the world we live in."

She chooses glass as her primary tool, and in mastering this versatile component, she tries to find and understand herself.

Bait Al Zubair reading Initiatives contest begins third edition

MUSCAT : Bait Al Zubair Foundation, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, launched the third edition of the Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Reading Initiatives under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, at the Bait Al Zubair Museum in Muscat.

In his speech, Dr Ambusaidi emphasised the importance of the reading competition for school students in enhancing reading awareness and skills among students. He also hoped that the partnership between the Ministry and the Bait Al Zubair Foundation would extend to other aspects in the future.

The competition aims to achieve various goals in line with Oman Vision 2040, including strengthening community partnership with educational institutions, instilling values of initiative and creativity, and discovering student talents to encourage and refine them.

The guide for the competition will be circulated to all schools in Oman and includes the definition of the initiative, forms and types of reading initiatives, objectives of the Bait Al Zubair competition for school reading initiatives, and the conditions and criteria of the competition. The guide also outlines the steps of the competition, mechanisms for applying for participation, and the arbitration committee, which consists of specialists concerned with reading initiatives from the cultural community, a representative from Bait Al Zubair Foundation, and a representative from the Ministry of Education.

The prizes for the competition are RO 1000 for the first place, RO 700 for the second place, RO 600 for the third place, RO 500 for the fourth place, RO 400 for the fifth place, and RO 200 as encouragement prizes for student initiatives. The deadline for receiving the initiatives is April 15, 2023.



Omani, US officials explore efforts to achieve peace in the region



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received at the general diwan of the ministry here on Tuesday Robert Malley, US

Special Envoy to Iran.

The meeting touched on the bilateral relations between the two countries in various fields. The two sides also touched on a spectrum of regional and

international issues of mutual interest, as well as the efforts exerted to achieve peace and stability in the region.

The meeting was attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

QUAKE PUTS PRE-BOOKED TRAVELLERS IN A FIX

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Earthquake in Türkiye has put a section of tourists and airlines in the Sultanate of Oman in a fix, because pre-booked tickets have to be rescheduled or cancelled.

There have been advisories for the travellers to follow the guidelines and check status with travel operators before travelling.

Travel industry sources mentioned that the earthquake did not affect places like Istanbul and Ankara and the airports operated normally.

"With tickets booked for a Türkiye tour next week, I have been worried about travelling to

Istanbul for a week's tour. Even though my agent told me those places are safe and unaffected by the earthquake, flights operating normal, I am still worried," said Hilal Ahmed.

He added, "Even though my Türkiye destinations are safe, what counts now is my individual decision on to go this time around for fun or not. At the same time, tourist visits would be helping the country's local economy."

Replying to a query, a source in SalamAir said, "Air travel is normal to Türkiye cities unaffected by the quake, but we urge our customers to follow advisories from travel operators and local authorities to avoid

any problems."

"Airlines will have their own rules on refunds in case of cancellations or change of dates. It is good to have complete details of their policies before making any decision."

As per reports, three airports — Adana Sakirpasa Airport (ADA), Hatay Airport (HTY) Gaziantep Oğuzeli International Airport (GZT) — have been closed for various reasons including damage to the infrastructure.

Several governments and travel operators have advised their citizens to stay away from the affected areas as getting there and getting out of there will be difficult.

Symposium on French archeologists' discoveries

MUSCAT: The National Museum on Monday hosted a symposium on the latest discoveries of French archaeological missions the Sultanate of Oman.

The symposium is organised by the French Embassy in Oman in conjunction with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the French Center for Research in the Arabian Peninsula.

The symposium highlighted remarkable discoveries of four French researchers in the field of archaeology within the Sultanate of Oman. It also focused on relevant research development and promoted the richness of the Omani archaeological



heritage.

Further, the symposium showed that archaeology is essential in promoting cultural tourism in Oman, and raising awareness on the importance of heritage conservation and restoration.

Véronique Aulagnon, French Ambassador to Oman said that historically, France is Oman's first partner with Italy, encouraging and supporting excavations missions in the country. Their presence dates

back to the years 1980's. Five French archaeological missions are active today in Oman, covering the map of the country from Al Dakhiliyah to Al Sharqiyah coastline and down the Governorate of Dhofar.

The French ambassador commended the fruitful collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and with the local authorities, as well as their work hand in hand to guarantee the preservation of such an ancient heritage and its environment.

Christophe Sévin-Allouet, Director of the mission, presented the latest discoveries on the necropolis of Khor Jarama, located in the Wilayat of Sur, Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.



Indian Social Club Oman

NOTICE CALLING THE AGM

Members are hereby notified that the Annual General Body Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Oman is scheduled on Friday, 17th March 2023, at 6.00 p.m. at the Indian Social Club hall, Darsait.

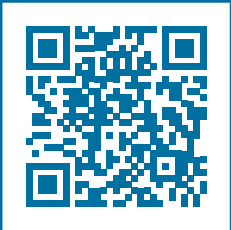
The following will be the agenda for the meeting:

Agenda:

1. Reading of notice calling the meeting by the Hon. General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the Chairperson.
3. Approval of the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting.
4. Hon. General Secretary's Report.
5. Discussion and approval of audited accounts for the year 2022 and appoint auditors for the year 2023.
6. Election of the Managing Committee for the year 2023 and 2024.
7. Any other points raised by the members with the permission of the Chair.

Members whose name appears in the voters list, only may attend the meeting.

HON. GENERAL SECRETARY
INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB OMAN



S O C I A L P R O T E C T I O N D R A F T L A W

ASSISTANCE AND INSURANCE PROGRAMMES



1 ASSISTANCE TO THE ELDERLY BENEFIT
The "Assistance to the Elderly Benefit", which is a monthly cash payment for every Omani citizen. It seeks to compensate for a decline in an elderly person's ability to earn a living.



2 CHILDHOOD BENEFIT
The "Childhood Benefit", which is a monthly cash benefit for each child and targets risks that some face during the childhood stage.



3 PERSONS WITH DISABILITY BENEFIT
The "Persons with Disability Benefit", which is a monthly cash payment disbursed to persons with disability whose condition requires care and support, including disabilities incurred from birth or due to an incident or a symptom developed at a later stage.



4 ORPHANS AND WIDOWS' BENEFIT
The "Orphans and Widows' Benefit", which is a monthly cash payment. It targets orphans and widows who are not covered by the social insurance systems or who receive pension shares less than the level of entitlement specified in this new system of benefits.



5 OLD AGE, INABILITY TO EARN AND DEATH PROGRAMME:
This programme deals with risks posed to the elderly, inability to earn and death (within the context of the unified retirement system). It is a basic, unified retirement programme that covers all sectors in the labour market, whether government or private.
It has been designed in a manner that provides suitable insurance coverage for various groups, jobs and occupations in the labour market. The programme grants the right for voluntary retirement to the group of employees who completed 20 years of actual service and fulfil the conditions for retirement in the current regulations by the date of the law comes into force.
The target employees can avail this right without committing themselves to the years of service required in the new law.
The value of their retirement pension is secured on the date this law comes into force.

6 SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMME FOR WORK-RELATED INJURIES AND OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES:
This is an insurance programme that covers the insured during a work-related injury. It provides a cash allowance in the case of injury, as well as cash compensations in case of inability to work, in accordance with the percentage of disability resulting from the injury or occupational disease. It also stipulates a retirement pension in cases of total disability or death due to work-related injuries or occupational diseases.



7 SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMME FOR JOB SECURITY RISKS:
This is an insurance programme that covers the insured in cases of termination of service for reasons beyond the insured's control. It replaces the job security system. It has been designed to deal with some of the challenges facing the current job security system.

8 SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMME FOR SICK LEAVES AND NON-SCHEDULED LEAVES:
This programme, which deals with sick leaves and unscheduled leaves, is an insurance programme that modifies job entitlement from sick leaves and unusual or unscheduled leaves. It entitles the beneficiaries/the insured to avail an insurance protection and transfer the cost from the employer to the Social Protection System.



9 FAMILY INCOME SUPPORT BENEFIT
The "Family Income Support Benefit", which is a monthly assistance that depends on social research and is intended to support families with the least chances for having sufficient earning. This depends on the number of family members and total income.



10 SAVINGS PROGRAMME:
This is an optional programme for Omanis designed to achieve several objectives, including the possibility of planning additional benefits upon retirement or scheduling benefits for several years prior to the retirement age specified in the law or determining retirement benefits in excess of the wage subject to the prescribed subscription ratio of insurance for the elderly. It should be noted that the opinion of a number of specialists, stakeholders and international houses of expertise was sought when compiling the draft law. It was designed to keep pace with best practices and international standards.



11 SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMME FOR MATERNITY LEAVE:
This is a new insurance programme dealing with maternity leave and it is introduced in consideration for the period of childbirth. It is aimed at covering the income of working women during the period of childbirth under a collaborative social insurance system to enhance social protection for the family.

MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers' referral of the draft law on social protection to the Council of Oman reflects the Royal attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the welfare of Omani people in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and Oman Vision 2040.

The social protection draft law establishes a system that covers instruments and programmes benefiting all segments of society and proposes extending social protection and retirement benefits to citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Social Protection System provides for designing an integrated system by introducing monetary social benefit programmes and social insurance programmes, as well as the development of comprehensive basic social protection programmes that target different segments and life-cycle stages.

These provide a minimum level of social protection for individuals and society, besides developing the current social insurance programmes based on subscriptions, enhancing their financial sustainability and expanding them to cover all segments of the labour market.

The programmes will cover various risks to which an insured

person might be exposed, notably the risks of decreased ability to earn due to old age, disability, work-related injuries, occupational diseases, sick leaves and other cases.

Also envisaged is the establishment of a central management and a unified community database for providing cash assistance programmes and social insurance programmes, making them easily accessible to target groups, with clear-cut and unified terms entitlement.

This is in addition to ensuring that the Social Protection System is capable of accommodating economic and social variables. The new Social Protection System's programmes were designed according with the principles guiding the state's policy stipulated in the Basic Law of the State and national and other priorities included in Oman Vision 2040.

This provides for devising retirement systems and social security programmes in line with economic and social developments and international practices on the application of social insurance programmes, social protection benefits and the ability of funding parties to contribute to the Social Protection System in a manner that realises optimal distribution of available financial resources.

— ONA

The draft law includes the endorsement of several monetary benefits extended within social protection programmes where "the entitlement of most cases does not necessarily depend on social research". The benefits also cover social insurance programmes and savings programmes. The benefits are stated as follows:

The new system aims to ensure the availability of social protection programmes to different segments of society and promote social welfare in accordance with Oman Vision 2040



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5

TANZANIAN CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES LEAVES



General Jacob Mkunda, Chief of Defence Forces in the United Republic of Tanzania, and his delegation left here on Tuesday after an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman lasted several days. He was seen off at Muscat International Airport by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Tanzanian Ambassador to Oman and the Military Attaché at the Tanzanian Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

US Capstone Programme delegation arrives



MUSCAT: A delegation of the US Capstone Programme led by retired general John Kelly, Director of the programme,

arrived here on Tuesday.

The delegation was received at Al Seeb Airbase by Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroun,

Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, and the Military Attaché at the US Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) invites following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 5/2023	Management of Diesel Power Plants. For Rural Areas Electricity Company	2500/=	Professional local and International Companies	07/03/2023	28/03/2023

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized local and International Companies and Registered Establishments may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- Offers Submission:**
 - Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tenders to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Major Tender Committee**.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787



Tanweer

PO Box 1166, P.C. 133, Al Seeb, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800, Fax: +968 24250892
info@tanweer.nama.om | www.tanweer.om



Overwhelming support from Oman for quake victims

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

People from all walks of life are joining hands to support the earthquake victims of Türkiye and Syria. The scene at the embassy collection centre is overwhelming. Humanity is prevailing over calamity.

Men, women and children bring provisions and other necessities in trucks and deliver them to the volunteers, ready to take them to the sorting centre. These collected items would be moved to Türkiye and Syria for the needy in earthquake-hit areas.

The embassies of Syria and Türkiye have renewed their call

for humanitarian aid from the Sultanate of Oman and updated on the items that the affected people need.

There is a great need for winter tents, generators, sleeping bags and blankets.

"Thanks to all who have come forward and extended their help and support to the quake victims until today. At present, we are in great need of tents to use at the minus degree temperature, heaters and generators for power, sleeping bags and blankets at the spot," said Manar Allouzi of the Embassy of Türkiye.

"Money would be the easiest way to reach out to the victims as a government agency back in Türkiye has been assigned to

purchase all necessary materials for the affected people."

"We are collecting all necessary things and funds to support the victims of the disastrous earthquake that affected our motherland, and one can easily support by calling 91252279," informed Samer Bakour, a representative of the Syrian Embassy. "We receive all your cash and in-kind donations from 8 am to 8 pm at the headquarters of the Syrian Embassy in Al Khuwair and through a bank account, the number of which can be had from the embassy.

The officials have requested the donors to follow embassy websites and social media handles while sending money.

Online registration begins for Indian schools

MUSCAT: The online registration for admission in Indian Schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2023-2024) is in progress and the last date to register is February 28. Parents seeking admission of their wards may visit www.indianschoolsoman.com for more details.

In addition to the CBSE curriculum, Indian School Wadi Kabir and Indian School Al Ghubra provide international curriculum.

Parents can approach directly Indian School Wadi Kabir for admissions in the international wing (IGCSE/AS Level/A Level Cambridge Syllabus).

Indian School Al Ghubra International provides Advanced Subsidiary (AS Level) and Advanced (A Level) Cambridge curriculum as well.

Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven capital area Indian schools — Bousher, Muscat, Darsait, Wadi Kabir, Al Ghubra, Seeb and Mabela.

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
278/2021/MAFWR/HQ-32-Recall-3	Maintenance Works of Storage Dam in Wadi Athashkes, Jebal Samhan in Wilayat Mirbat Governorate of Dhofar	25/-	Fourth	Sunday 19/2/2023	Tuesday 28/2/2023
93/2023/MAFWR/HQ-11	Providing Cleaning Services for Fishing Ports in Muscat Governorate (Al-Seeb/Qurayyat)	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 2/3/2023	Wednesday 22/3/2023
100/2023/MAFWR/HQ-12	Maintenance Works of Storage Dams in Wadis Meda (1, 2) and Baal Dhad, Shahab Asaib in Wilayat Rakhuyat Governorate of Dhofar	25/-	Fourth	Thursday 2/3/2023	Wednesday 22/3/2023

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, And the bidders can contact the Esnad technical support team at the number listed below to find out how to request electronic guarantees from local banks.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on / Before 09:00 am Tuesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-5/569/2023	Supply, Installation and End User Training of Total Body Cooling System and CFM Monitor for SCBU at Khoula Hospital.	27/February/2023	14/March/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



RESCUED
CHILDREN
FIND LIFE IN
SHAMBLES



MORE THAN
7M CHILDREN
AFFECTED BY
QUAKE: UN



Quake was Europe's worst
natural disaster in 'a century'

COPENHAGEN: The World Health Organization said that the massive earthquake, the epicentre of which was in Türkiye, constituted the "worst natural disaster" in 100 years in its Europe region. The 7.8-magnitude earthquake, followed by a major aftershock, on February 6 has now killed more than 35,000 people in Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. "We are witnessing the worst natural disaster in the WHO European region for a century and we are still learning about its magnitude," Hans Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe, told a press conference. The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including Türkiye. Syria is a member of the WHO's neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean region. Kluge also said the health body had "initiated the largest deployment of emergency medical teams" in the 75-year history of the WHO European region. "Twenty-two emergency medical teams have arrived in Türkiye so far," Kluge noted, adding they would integrate into "Türkiye's ongoing health response". — **AFP**

GENEVA: More than seven million children have been affected by the massive earthquake and a major aftershock that devastated Türkiye and Syria last week, the United Nations said on Tuesday, voicing fear that "many thousands" more had died.

"In Türkiye, the total number of children living in the 10 provinces hit by the two earthquakes was 4.6 million children. In Syria, 2.5 million children are affected," James Elder, spokesman for the UN children's agency Unicef, told reporters in Geneva.

"Unicef fears many thousands of children have been killed," Elder said, warning that "even without verified numbers, it is tragically clear that numbers will continue



Children play at a makeshift shelter that hosts about 250 people following the deadly earthquake in Mersin, Türkiye. — **Reuters**

grow." He said he feared the final toll would be "mind-boggling."

Given the catastrophic, and ever-increasing, death toll, he said it was obvious that "many, many

children will have lost parents in these devastating earthquakes." "It will be a terrifying figure," he warned. Among the rubble, hundreds of thousands of homeless people face cold and hunger.

Families with children were "sleeping in the streets, malls, schools, mosques, bus stations and under bridges, staying with their children in open areas for fear of going home," he said.

"Tens of thousands of families are exposed to the elements at a time of year when temperatures are biting cold, and snow and freezing rain are common," he said, pointing to reports of rising numbers of children suffering from hypothermia and respiratory infections. — **AFP**

First UN team since quake
crosses into northwestern Syria

SARMADA: The first UN delegation to visit rebel-held northwestern Syria since last week's earthquake crossed over from Türkiye on Tuesday, a correspondent reported, as anger simmers at the world body's slow response.

More than 35,000 people were killed when the quake devastated swathes of Syria and neighbouring Türkiye on February 6, at least 3,600 of them in Syria, according to government officials and emergency services.

"A multi-agency mission left from the Türkiye side across the border crossing... It's largely an assessment mission," the World Food Programme's Syria director, Kenn Crossley, said. The delegation comprised deputy regional humanitarian coordinator David Carden and Sanjana Quazi, who heads the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Türkiye. Activists and emergency teams in the northwest have decried the UN's slow response in rebel-held areas, contrasting it with the plane-loads of humanitarian aid that have been delivered to government-controlled airports. — **AFP**



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WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 15 | 2023

7

In brief

■ LONDON



CAMILLA TO AVOID KOHINOOR DIAMOND AT CROWNING

The controversial Kohinoor diamond will not feature in the coronation of the Queen Consort on May 6 in London, with Camilla opting to reuse the crown it was once set in instead.

The famous gem was first set in a cross at the front of Queen Mary's crown when it was worn at her coronation in 1911 but it was replaced by a replica in 1937 when the original was moved to the Queen Mother's crown for her and George VI's coronation.

But neither the original nor the replica will be used in the coronation of the King and Camilla, with diamonds from the late Queen's personal collection used instead, a Buckingham Palace spokeswoman said. — dpa

■ NEW DELHI



TAX OFFICIALS RAID BBC INDIA OFFICES

Indian tax authorities raided the BBC's New Delhi and Mumbai offices on Tuesday, weeks after the broadcaster aired a documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's actions during deadly sectarian riots in 2002. The opposition Congress party condemned the raids, saying there was an "undeclared emergency" in the country.

A spokesman for the ruling BJP accused the broadcaster of engaging in "anti-India propaganda", but said the raids were lawful and the timing had nothing to do with the government. "India is a country which gives an opportunity to every organisation," Gaurav Bhatia told reporters. — AFP

■ GAZA



NO RUSH FOR FLOWERS IN GAZA FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

For Gazans, Valentine's Day business was slower than usual on Tuesday at those shops selling red roses, fluffy hearts and teddy bears.

Wasim Abdu, owner of the Safer El Hub flower shop in Gaza City, said sporadic clashes with Israeli troops and the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria had cast a shadow over celebrations.

"The people of Gaza love life and freedom and they like to celebrate all occasions (but) the turnout isn't as was expected or desired," he said. They are unable to ship their blooms to Europe because of Israeli export restrictions. — Reuters



Police officers surround a scene where the suspect was located as they respond to a shooting at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. — Reuters

Three killed in Michigan State University shooting

EAST LANSING: A gunman opened fire on Monday night on the main campus of Michigan State University, killing three people and injuring five, before an hours-long manhunt for the suspect ended with his death, apparently from a self-inflicted gunshot, police said.

The 43-year-old gunman had no known affiliation to the university, and his motive remained a mystery, police said at an early morning news briefing more than five hours after the violence began on the sprawling East Lansing campus, about 90 miles northwest of Detroit.

Details about the sequence events remained sketchy, but Chris Rozman, interim deputy chief of the university police, said shots were fired in two locations - an academic building called Berkey Hall and the Michigan State University (MSU) Union building.

Police swarming the campus in response to the shooting, which began shortly after 8 pm,

found victims at both locations, Rozman told reporters at the televised briefing.

Rozman said investigators had no information about the motive, adding that the university was not aware of any threats made to the campus before Monday's bloodshed.

Rozman said three victims were killed and five were taken to a hospital in the nearby city of Lansing, the state capital, all of them listed in critical condition. Two of the dead were at Berkey Hall and the other at the MSU Union.

Officials declined to provide any details about the victims, some of whose identities and relationship to the university were still being determined, Rozman said.

The name and other information about the suspect were not immediately released, and police said they remained baffled by what precipitated the shooting. "We have no idea why

he came to campus to do this tonight," Rozman told reporters. The gunman was confirmed dead, from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot roughly four hours after the bloodshed had started, Rozman said.

"There is no longer a threat to campus. We believe there to be only one suspect in this incident," he said. Rozman also said the suspect "was contacted by law enforcement off campus" at one point, adding, "that scene is being investigated as a crime scene."

It remained unclear whether the gunman was found dead after he was confronted by police, or whether he may have taken his own life during such an encounter.

About an hour earlier, MSU police had released two still images of the suspect from surveillance video that showed him walking into a building, then mounting a short flight of stairs, wearing a jacket, a baseball cap and a black mask over his lower face. — Reuters

Russian artillery forces batter Bakhmut city

KYIV: Russian forces bombarded Ukrainian troops and towns along front lines in the eastern Donetsk region on Tuesday in what appeared to be early salvoes of a new offensive, as Western allies met in Brussels to discuss sending more arms for the Kyiv government.

Bakhmut, a city in Donetsk province and a principal target for Russian President Vladimir Putin's invading army, was in a precarious position.

"There is not a single square metre in Bakhmut that is safe or that is not in range of enemy fire or drones," regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko told Ukraine's national broadcaster.

He said Russian artillery was hitting targets all along the front lines in Donetsk, which along with Luhansk province makes up the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland and a major objective for the Russians.

With the first anniversary of Russia's war nearing, the Kremlin has intensified operations across a broad swathe of southern and eastern Ukraine and a big new offensive has been widely anticipated.

Before a meeting of Nato defence ministers in Brussels, the alliance's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Western countries needed to boost ammunition supplies to Kyiv.

"We see no signs that President Putin is preparing for peace. What we see is the opposite, he is preparing for more war, for new offensives and new attacks," he told reporters.

Ukraine has also appealed to West for fighter jets.

Ukraine's military said on Tuesday its forces had repelled attacks in five settlements in Luhansk and six in Donetsk, including around Bakhmut, over



Ukrainian servicemen gather around a BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicle on a road outside the frontline town of Bakhmut, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Donetsk region. — Reuters

the past 24 hours.

They had also beaten back an attack on a town in the Kharkiv region, which borders Russia in northeast Ukraine.

Britain said on Tuesday mercenaries from the Wagner group, who have spearheaded the Russian assault on Bakhmut, had made small gains in the northern outskirts in the past three days but an advance to the south seemed to have made little progress.

A regional road and rail transport and logistics hub, Bakhmut has endured months of shelling and many districts are in ruins.

Only about 5,000 civilians are left there out of a pre-war population of about 70,000, Governor Kyrylenko said. Troops have fortified positions in anticipation of street fighting.

Authorities hope to reduce the number of people there to a minimum and will try to evacuate the wounded, he said.

— Reuters

Indian govt goes all out to popularise millets

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

India has taken the challenge of food security in the right earnest and has taken all possible steps to boost the production of millets (Jowar, Bajra and Ragi) in line with the UN declaration of 2023 as the 'International Year of Millets'.

Millets constitute important nutritious cereals in many Indian provinces, but over the year, their production decreased due to focus on other food products and cereals. Jowar, Bajra and Ragi accounted for approximately 40 per cent of all crop cereals prior to India's Green Revolution but fell to approximately 20 per cent in the years that followed, an ANI report said.

Since millet production proved non-profitable despite their high nutritional values, farmers switched over to other crops like pulses, oilseeds and maize.

Recognising the value of the cereals, which are not new to India and were used even during the Indus Valley Civilization, the Indian Government declared the National Year of Millets in 2018 and decided to achieve nutritional

security in the country. On the initiative of India, the UN declared 2023 the 'Year of Millets'.

According to the Indian Ministry of Agriculture, India produces approximately 1.80 crore metric tonnes of millet, accounting for approximately 20 per cent of global production.

More than 80 per cent of the millets produced in Asia are produced in India.

Besides being nutritious, the millets are resistant to challenging agro-climatic conditions.

Millet is acknowledged scientifically as a superfood, and the Government of India is creating awareness to raise demand to make the production of millet profitable for farmers.

Generally, small farmers grow

millet mostly on unirrigated land, and they are known as "organic cereals" due to minimal use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Keeping in mind millets' importance in addressing the food security of the world, there is a move to raise awareness and indigenous and global demand.

According to reports, the Government is making an effort to better serve nutritious food cereals from India at all events hosted by agencies and embassies.

"Its speciality should be communicated to the public; this process will continue throughout the year.

India, which is chairing the G-20, will also serve at least one millet-based dish at all of its events."



Of women guile



Rasha al Raisi
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The writer is a certified skills trainer and author of *The World According to Bahja*

Growing up as a woman in the Arab world, means that you'll always hear people repeating the Quranic verse from Surah Yusuf (the 12th chapter of Prophet Joseph): "For your guile is great!".

There is great misunderstanding of the verse of course, as Al Azeez -Potiphar in Hebrew Bible, Pharaoh's guard who bought Joseph as a slave and made him the master of his household - is only describing his wife's cunning plan to seduce Joseph that when failed, she accused him of abusing her.

Of course, what saved Joseph was that his shirt was torn from the back as he was escaping her attempts and not from front. Throughout history, this verse became a synonym for any clever action women would do, especially when exploiting men.

My Islamic studies teacher told us

once that guile was gifted to women by God, as they lacked men's power and size. Whatever the case may be, our heritage is full of stories that displays women's guile theory that I'll be gladly sharing with you in the coming weeks.

1) Once while some tradesmen were resting in their usual spot in the market, a woman passed by them and pointed at one. He got up from his place and went to her, asking if she needed any help.

She said that she needed a favour from him and that she'll pay him 20 Dirhams for it. Her husband has gone to war 10 years back and never returned. She wanted the tradesman to go with her to the judge and pretend to be her husband so that she could get a divorce and be free.

The tradesman agreed and they both went to the judge. The woman

WHATEVER THE CASE MAY BE, OUR HERITAGE IS FULL OF STORIES THAT DISPLAYS WOMEN'S GUILLE THEORY THAT I'LL BE GLADLY SHARING WITH YOU IN THE COMING WEEKS

told the judge that this was her husband whose been missing for the past 10 years and that he wants to divorce her. The judge asked the tradesman to confirm the story and when he did the judge asked him to divorce her.

The tradesman said the magic words: "I divorce you!" and the woman smiled saying: "Oh great judge! This man was missing for

10 years and never cared or spent a penny on me! Now he wants to divorce me just like that? I want a monetary compensation for the past 10 years and an alimony too!"

The judge reproached the tradesman who was between the hammer and the anvil; if he denied everything he'll be accused of perjury and hence whipped and prisoned.

So, he claimed in self-defence "I was busy and couldn't reach her!" The judge ruled that he pays 2,000 Dirhams for alimony. The tradesman paid the amount to the woman before leaving the court, out of which she paid him the promised 20 Dirhams.

2)There was a storyteller who was interested in researching stories of women's guile. A woman of beauty and shrewdness heard of

him and invited him to visit her.

They sat chatting for almost an hour when they heard the door knocking. The storyteller panicked when the woman announced that it was none but her jealous husband. She asked him to stay calm and gave him an empty chest, ordering him to place it on his head.

The husband stormed in furiously, asking the storyteller who he was and what he was doing in his house.

The wife shouted to leave the porter alone and that she was leaving the house as she had had enough of his suspicious jealousy. Immediately, the husband paid the storyteller to leave the chest and go. The storyteller couldn't believe his luck and that he'd witnessed women's guile demonstrated.

(To be continued...)

Once home to civilisations, fabled Antioch left in ruins

JORIS FIORITI

The smashed dome of the ancient mosque, considered to be Turkiye's oldest, covers rubble that used to be a prayer hall.

Once a home to a myriad of civilisations, the southern city of Antakya lies in ruins after last Monday's 7.8-magnitude quake.

Fourteen centuries of history were ravaged in less than two minutes in Antakya, a fabled ancient Greek centre known throughout most of its history as Antioch.

Erected in AD 638, the Habib-i Neccar was "the first mosque built within modern-day Turkiye's borders", according to the government's culture portal.

Only its walls have survived, leaving delicate yellow, red and blue paintings and calligraphy exposed to the winter sky.

"A bit of the Prophet Mohammed's beard was once preserved in a box" at the mosque, said Havva Pamukcu, a 50-year-old woman wearing a headscarf. "I'm heartbroken," she said.

A few hundred metres away, a Greek Orthodox church erected in the 14th century — and rebuilt in 1870 after another earthquake — is also gone. A white cross that once stood on its pointed roof now lies atop shattered walls and broken pieces of wood.

"All the walls have fallen. We're in despair," said Sertac Paul Bozkurt, a member of the council managing the church.

Antakya is in Hatay, a province tucked between the Mediterranean Sea and Turkiye's border with Syria.

It was one of the worst affected by the earthquake and its aftershocks, which have claimed more than 35,000 lives across the region.

In the old city, several streets are still inaccessible, blocked by buildings flattened like pancakes and cars trapped under the debris.

Across more than two millennia, the city was home to Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arab and Ottoman empires.

It was even placed under a French mandate between the end of the First World War and 1939, when the city became a part of modern-day Turkiye.

A former general of Alexander the Great founded Antioch in 300 BC. The city has suffered several earthquakes — almost one every 100 years — and is no stranger to rebuilding.

There were devastating quakes in 37 BC, 115 AD and 458 AD. A quake in AD 526 is thought to have killed 250,000 people. In 1054, 10,000 are thought to have died. — AFP

Man between civilisation and culture



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

The two terms 'civilisation' and 'culture' are inextricably interrelated. No civilisation would ever exist without culture. Civilisation is linked to humans by means of science, reason, discovery and norms whereas culture is linked to human identity. We have ethnic identity, religious identity, sectarian identity and the traditional identity.

Cultures refine themselves, but they do so within the framework of a civilisation. Allah Almighty says in the holy Quran: (And among His signs is the creation of the heaven and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are signs for those who know) —22 Ar Room.

Disclosing the Quranic verses (containing the laws of the universe) and starting from them has something to do with civilisation. The differences in languages and colours (natural variations) both of which have an impact on culture. Culture is refined when construed through the framework of civilisation.

Ethnic and religious conflicts occur when culture is interpreted separately from civilisation. The building of the civilisation lies in the purification of cultures and utilising them in the building of humans and civilisations. Civilisation is based on the values of existence and the greater human principles.

The value that lies in existence is the discovery of its laws and utilising them in land amelioration and serving humankind by mimicking those laws to invent machines and instruments. Humans invented aircraft by imitating birds. Likewise, by means of imitation man managed to invent the telephone, television and printing press, among other inventions.

This would not have been possible if man could not understand the laws of nature.

That didn't happen in one fell swoop meaning civilisation and along with it the transformation of the humankind did not emerge out of the blue nor did it descend from heaven.

But rather it resulted from man's travel on the land and his attempts to detect and imitate tools that make his life easier which resulted in the invention of the machines that were used for farming, cooking and construction of houses. Each civilisation represented a push-forward for the next one leading

THE DISPLACEMENT FROM WAR IN SOME ARAB COUNTRIES AND THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN WAR ARE ALL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CULTURAL NARROWNESS AND CULTURAL WARS

up to our contemporary civilisation. The greater human values are represented by the human commonalities in terms of the essence of existence.

These values represent innateness. "So set your purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright—the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He has created mankind. There is no alteration to (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not" (chapter 30 Surat Ar-Rum).

People were originally born equally with no essential differences which is why the reading of civilisation from the perspective of the natural laws would realise human dignity and achieve justice, equality, freedom and the avoidance of tyranny.

Civilisation is interrelated to the laws of nature, mind and discovery, however it spawns varied cultures some of which may affect civilisation continuity whether traditional values or customs. Consequently, cultures should be critically construed away from bigotry.

Today as the parts of the world

are coming closer together in one civilisation, all people regardless of race or religion contribute to developing that civilisation.

However, some parts of the human world still degrade to a degree closer to animals and consequently their cultural narrowness prevails over civilisational broadness. Such people wage wars that result in poverty, famine and inhuman conditions.

The major famine that reoccurs in close time proximity in Somalia, the primitiveness in some parts of Black Africa and the poverty and diseases that kill hundreds of people in parts of Asia and Latin America as well as the displacement from war in some Arab countries and the repercussions of the Ukrainian war are all manifestations of the cultural narrowness and cultural wars.

We are still experiencing clash of cultures, egocentricity and the arrogance of the politicians and the opportunism of the religious men.

All that's because we are living in a state of cultural narrowness and lack of civilisational wideness.

Finally, the humanitarian and civilisational reading of culture moves us directly to the utilisation of the 'existence for man as essence', rather than the man belonging to a specific identity be it religious, ethnic or cultural.

It is pointless that the wealth of nations be confined to a segment of people who are not different from others.

It is absurd that the riches of nations are stolen while the people are left in abject poverty.



A man looks at destroyed Russian military equipment in Mykhailivska Square in downtown Kyiv amid the Russian war on Ukraine. — AFP

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.com

A book fair packed with knowledge!

oman Convention and Exhibition Centre will once again glow in the glory of books of all genres and subjects offering something for readers across all ages!

In this digital era when electronic media has replaced the space of traditional reading practices, the 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair starting from February 22, 2023 with as many as 533,063 titles and publications aims at promoting traditional reading practices.

A book is like a best friend who will never walk away from you. To quote the great author Charles W Eliot, “books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counsellors, and the most patient of teachers”.

I believe that everyone would agree with this as books have become inevitable to mankind as they are packed with knowledge.

Books give you lessons about life, and they teach you about hardships, love, fear, and every little thing that is a part of life.

Often books act as our best friends who inspire us to become the best versions of ourselves.

They enrich our minds just like a good friend. We can learn a lot from books and they can help us in overcoming our failures as well as help us shape our minds!

Book fairs help in inculcating reading habits among people of all age groups. Book fairs give a chance to publishers to showcase their front-list as well as generate interest in their backlist. Readers can browse through books and buy books of their choice, which they might not pick up online.

Readers aren't the only ones impacted by book fairs. Besides, book fairs are now educational and cultural events. Educators see an invigorated passion for learning in their students during book fair season!

Many schools bring their students to book fairs, which helps in creating interest among children to pick up



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

BOOK FAIRS LIKE THE MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR ARE THE PERFECT PLATFORMS FOR BRINGING TOGETHER THOSE WHO LOVE BOOKS AND LITERATURE

books of their choice. Unfortunately, many of the book fairs across the world are shrinking in size but they are still flourishing, if not in terms of size, then in terms of the quality of visitors to the fair and the business deals sealed at the venue.

So book fairs like the Muscat International Book Fair are the perfect platforms for bringing together those who love books and literature.

Every year we find the emergence of new Omani writers and new publications with the participation of Arab and international publishing houses.

Events to be held in conjunction with Muscat International Book Fair, including a Children's Corner where an area has been allocated for family activities, a theatre, scholarly theses, and reading corners and workshops.

This is in addition to the establishment of cultural cafes in a number of pavilions, which is another attraction for visitors.

A special corner will be dedicated to Omani authors and publications, including those written in Zanzibar, Arab countries, or European countries.

It's necessary as a parent, teacher, or citizen to introduce the habit of reading to young children, and book fairs like this are a very good initiative, to begin with.

We can know which genre our children like and guide us through them that way when we make them here.

Children get attracted to visuals and the book fair is the best place to offer it!

With a plethora of books including literature, history, mythology, general knowledge, science, spirituality, philosophy, academic books, culture, religion, and so much more, the Muscat Book Fair is definitely a positive step that will promote the practice of reading books amongst people of all age groups to gorge in and explore!

After all, the Muscat Fair is after the spectre of the Covid-19 pandemic, which loomed during last year's fair, is almost completely gone!

POSING WITH A PLANE



Tourists pose for picture on Mai Khao Beach as a plane lands at Phuket International Airport in Phuket province, Thailand, on Tuesday. – AFP

Will Ukraine's Zelensky get jets now?

Volodymyr Zelensky's whirlwind 'surprise' visit to three European capitals – London, Paris and Brussels – was an immensely successful trip despite the fact that he could not get any clear-cut pledge from his friends for “jets”, a top priority in his agenda at the moment, but he returned home with a full bag.

For two key reasons, the timing of this trip was strategically very poignant. One, the impending anniversary of the Russian war as an emotional signpost, and two, the much-awaited spring offensive by the Russians in the coming weeks – while some Russia watchers believe that it has already started.

After a failed bid to inflict a dark and harsh winter on Ukraine, Putin is now desperate to win more territories to generate momentum for his spring offensive. The ferocious Russian attacks on Bakhmut, which has held out for months in bloody defiance against invading forces, is a part of Putin's new war plan.

He wants to utilise the fall of Bakhmut to prompt his dispirited forces to unleash a massive spring offensive to further annex more territories inside Ukraine to put pressure on Kyiv.

President Zelensky chose the right time to embark upon his second foreign trip since the Russian war. Apparently, Zelensky's trip had two main objectives: revitalise the moral support of the Europeans at this



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

PRESIDENT ZELENSKY CHOSE THE RIGHT TIME TO EMBARK UPON HIS SECOND FOREIGN TRIP SINCE THE RUSSIAN WAR

crucial phase of the war when Moscow is almost ready to start its spring assault, and to gain commitment for more warfare and renew its request for fighter aircraft particularly British Typhoon jets or similar machines.

Except for some rudimentary success on the question of fighter jets, he put up a great show during his short stay in Europe. In his speech to the European Parliament, President Zelensky said Ukrainian soldiers are battling the “most anti-European force” in the world as he reiterated requests for military support in the fight against Russia, linking Ukraine's fate to that of Europe as a whole.

“Free Europe cannot be imagined without free Ukraine,” he implored. He touched the right chords at the right time, but he could not find many sympathetic ears for his request for warplanes. It took him almost one year of intensive canvassing to get a positive nod from the Europeans and Washington for the supply of battle tanks. His case was strong, but Nato leadership was hesitant to yield to his demand on the assumptive pretext of possible direct collision with Moscow.

Now, after getting green signal for tanks, he is seriously pleading for fighter jets too. Zelensky warned that supplies were running out, and without fighter jets or longer-range missiles there was a risk of “stagnation” in his

country's fight against Russia.

According to a report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), at the beginning of the conflict, Ukraine had a modest air force consisting of Soviet-era jets, estimated to be around 120 combat-capable.

Due to the ongoing war, the number of aircraft has shrunken drastically, and considering the presence of Russian aircraft and air defence systems, experts claim that Ukraine possesses a limited air capacity.

Another important factor is that the battle tanks recently promised by the US, Germany and UK will not be able to perform better unless they have a reasonable air coverage. With

a meagre air force, Ukraine will not be able to utilise these sophisticated battle machines at the optimum level. Ukraine certainly desperate to acquire these warplanes to counter the incessant aerial attacks by the Russian air force.

But the jets request is not likely to find a positive response anytime sooner with a firm no from US President Joe Biden, and an even firmer rejection by the German Chancellor Scholz. The ostensible excuse being presented by Sunak is that Typhoon jets are “very sophisticated pieces of kit” and it could take “three years” to train a pilot to fly one. He has further pointed out the logistical handicaps and that there is a

“supply chain around the aircraft”.

Apart from this technical problem, fissure are appearing within the European leadership on the question of quantum of military aid to Ukraine. German Chancellor Scholtz is particularly cautioning about the on-going race among the European countries to outcompete each other on provision of military package to Ukraine.

However, another reassurance for the Europeans is that they – and the United States – have already reasonably fortified the Ukrainian air defence system by providing sophisticated surface-to-air missiles – including the recent pledge by Washington to provide the Patriot System.

Zelensky also knows this very well. The last one year has taught him how to manoeuvre the simmering internal frictions of the European leaders.

During this trip, Zelensky excessively pushed for the fighter jets in a hope to find some inroads as a starting point. Eventually he was successful in getting a promise for the training of Ukrainian pilots by the RAF. The British offer to train Ukrainian pilots on modern Nato fighter jets is a carefully couched hint to the rest of Nato that at some point it may have to provide modern jets to help Ukraine defend its airspace from the Russian air force.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses the US Congress as US Vice President Kamala Harris (L) and US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) applaud at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. – AFP

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Seeb crowned volleyball first division champions

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Seeb were crowned 2022-23 first division title of the Oman Volleyball League after beating Oman Club 3-0 at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday night.

In a historic record, Seeb ended their campaign in the league with no defeat. Seeb finished as

runners-up in the last edition. Al Bashayer claimed the third place as they edged Suhar 3-1 in the third and fourth play-off.

Seeb and Oman Club will clash again on Wednesday night in the final of the Ministry's Volleyball Shield Championship for 2022-23 season. The match will kick off at 6:30 pm at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

In the thrilling final match

of the first division league, Seeb players ended the scoreline at 25-22, 27-25 and 25-19. Despite Oman Club leading in the first set, Seeb's Younis al Amri and his team-mates bounced back strongly as they managed to win the set by 25-22. Oman Club tried very hard in the following set to make a return to the match but Seeb spikers secured their lead to end the set again for their side by 27-

25. In the deciding set, Seeb players were much focused in the game while Oman's spikers and setters made mistakes. Seeb won the set and title comfortably at 25-19.

Among individual awards, Ibrahim al Toobi from Al Bashayer was named the best libero player. Seeb's Adam al Jalboubi grabbed the best setter award. Oman's Saud al Mamari and Ahmed al Toobi claimed the best player award in

position (3). Al Bashayer's Ahmed al Yahyaei and Seeb's Younis al Amri won the best player award in position (4). Seeb's Khamis al Jabri bagged the best spiker honour in position (2) while Oman Club's Falah al Jaradi clinched the Most Valuable Player award (MVP) of the championship.

Eng Bader bin Salim bin Marhoon al Mamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, was

the chief guest for the final and gave away the medals and trophies. Al Bashayer players received the bronze medals while Oman Club players were awarded the silver medals. Seeb players were handed the gold medals and the title from the chief guest. Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali, Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), presented a memento to the chief guest.

‘Nahb’, ‘Awaied’ clinch Al Bashayer Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

The second day of the sixth edition of the annual Al Bashayer Festival for Arab camel Races was held on Tuesday at Al Bashayer Camel Racetrack in Adam.

The second day included 20 rounds for the category of Al Laqaya, for a distance of 5 km. The races were divided into two periods, the 15th race in the morning with a cash prize and the five in the evening with cars, cash and other prizes.

‘Nahb’ and ‘Awaied’ won the Al Bashayer Cup and car in the first and second rounds in the evening session.

AL LAQAYA MORNING RACES

In the first round, ‘Smha’, owned by Saud al Jabri, claimed the first spot.

The second round was won by ‘Marzaiah’, owned by Jaber al Wahaibi. In the third round, ‘Hamloul’, owned by Sultan al Habsi, won the top spot with the best timing of 7:37.28.

In the fourth round, ‘Hajar’ came on top, owned by Awad al Balushi.

‘Zahor’ was top-ranked in the fifth round, owned by Rakan al Hashemi.

In the sixth round, ‘Saiaf’ claimed the top spot, owned by Hamoud al Wahaibi.

‘Tawa’ won first place in the seventh round, owned by Badar al Nusairi.

In the eighth round, ‘Al Dabi’ was top ranked, owned by Amer al Owaisi.

The ninth and the last round was claimed



AL BASHAYER FESTIVAL DAY 2 RESULTS			
Morning session			
1. Smha	Saud al Jabri	7:44.60	
2. Marzaiah	Jaber al Wahaibi	7:39.70	
3. Hamloul	Sultan al Habsi	7:37.28	
4. Hajar	Awadal Balushi	7:42.96	
5. Zahor	Rakan al Hashemi	7:47.38	
6. Saiaf	Hamoud al Wahaibi	7:40.78	
7. Tawa	Badar al Nusairi	7:37.86	
8. Al Dabi	Amer al Owaisi	7:44.86	
9. Shabran	Mohd al Owaisi	7:42.92	
10. Motaibah	Awad al Balushi	7:49.82	
11. Al Hatherah	Zaher al Maliki	7:44.50	
12. Parrot	Hamdan al Jahafy	7:44.10	
13. Salalah	Abdullah al Wahaibi	7:47.28	
14. Ealan	Ahmed al Moghiri	7:46.72	
15. Shaheen	Hamoud al Jahafy	7:43.66	
EVENING SESSION			
Round - Camel name - Owner - Time - Prize			
1. Nahb - Rashid al Ghilani - 7:31.63 - Al Bashayer Cup and car			
2. Awaied - Ateeq al Qubaisi - 7:29.62 - Al Bashayer Cup and car			
3. Adham - Ateeq al Qubaisi - 7:26.48 - Al Bashayer rifle and car			
4. Balshah - Salem al Ghilani - 7:29.88 - car			
5. Samha - Ateeq al Qubaisi - 7:36.18 - car			

by ‘Shabran’, owned by Mohammed al Owaisi.

‘Motaibah’ won the 10th round, owned by Awad al Balushi.

In the 11th round, ‘Al Hatherah’ owned by Zaher al Maliki came on top.

In the 12th round, ‘Parrot’ won the prize, owned by Hamdan al Jahafy.

‘Salalah’, owned by Abdullah al Wahaibi, claimed the 13th round.

In the 14th round, ‘Ealan’ came on top, owned by Ahmed al Moghiri. ‘Shaheen’, owned by Hamoud al Jahafy came on top in the 15th round.

AL LAQAYA EVENING RACES

In the first round ‘Nahb’, owned by Rashid al Ghilani, snatched the Al Bashayer Cup and a car.

‘Awaied’, owned by Ateeq al Qubaisi, claimed the second round honours to take Al Bashayer Cup and a car.

In the third round with a prize of a Al Bashayer rifle and a car, ‘Adham’, owned by Ateeq al Qubaisi, was ranked top with the best timing in the evening race (7:26.48).

In the fourth round with a prize of a car, ‘Balshah’, owned by Salem al Ghilani, came first.

‘Samha’, owned by Ateeq al Qubaisi, won the fifth and the last round of the evening races with a prize of a car.

The competitions of the sixth annual Al Bashayer Camel Race Festival will continue on its third day, with 15 rounds for the Al Yathaa category, morning and evening period, for a distance of 6 km.



England, South Africa gain key wins

PAARL, South Africa: England and South Africa overcame the distractions of a player auction in India and pulled off important wins on the fourth day of the Women's T20 World Cup at Boland Park in Paarl.

England took command of Group Two, beating Ireland by four wickets to notch their second successive win, while South Africa played themselves back into contention in Group One with a 65-run win over New Zealand.

Monday's double-header was played while the auction in India's Women's Premier League was being held in Mumbai, with potential life-changing deals for players from both teams, as well as those from New Zealand.

England captain Heather Knight said her players were able to focus on the cricket. She said they left their hotel in Cape Town while hearing shouts of excitement from Indian players who were the main focus of bidders from Indian franchises.

"Whatever happens in the IPL doesn't affect the value of the players in our team," she said.

Left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone showed why she was bought by the Uttar Pradesh Warriorz franchise for the equivalent of about US\$220,000 when she sparked an Ireland collapse to 105 all out. Ecclestone took three for 13.

Another WPL target, Alice Capsey, bought by Delhi Capitals for \$91,000, set up an early finish by hitting 51 off 22 balls in England's reply.

Nat Sciver-Brunt, who attracted



South Africa players celebrate after winning the Group A T20 women's World Cup match between South Africa and New Zealand at Boland Park in Paarl. — AFP



England's Amy Jones (L) plays a shot as Ireland's wicketkeeper Mary Waldron (R) looks on during the Group B match at Boland Park in Paarl. — AFP

the joint-highest price for an overseas player, had a quiet day, bowling two overs which cost ten runs and being dismissed for five. She was bought by Mumbai Indians for \$390,000.

"She probably won't like all the

attention," said Knight. "She's very humble. She's just very good at cricket."

Knight herself was unsold in early bidding but was later picked up by Royal Challengers Bangalore for \$49,000. She only found out

after the match.

"I'm looking forward to it but my focus now is on captaining England in the World Cup," she said.

Most of South Africa's players went unsold but vice-captain Chloe Tryon, who was the team's match-winner against New Zealand with 40 runs and two wickets, was bought by the Mumbai Indians for \$37,000.

Fellow all-rounder Marizanne Kapp secured a \$183,000 deal from Delhi Capitals. Her wife, Dane van Niekerk, who was controversially omitted from the World Cup squad on fitness grounds, was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for \$37,000.

Fast bowler Shabnim Ismail was the only other South African to be signed up, with UP Warriorz gaining her services for \$122,000.

"I didn't feel I needed to watch it," Tryon said about the auction. "I didn't want to think about it, although someone told me about it. I wanted to concentrate on the game."

"It was do or die," Tryon said of the New Zealand match.

South Africa struggled to 132 for six in their 20 overs but bowled out New Zealand for 67.

Left-arm spinner Nonkululeko Mlaba struck twice in the first three overs of New Zealand's innings and the White Ferns were unable to recover. It was effectively a must-win game for both teams after they both lost their opening games. Mlaba finished with three for ten in her four overs - her best figures in T20 internationals.

— AFP



Coach Adeel Shafique talking to the Oman U19 boys during a practice session.

Oman U19 side hopes to put up strong show against Hong Kong

MUSCAT: Oman U19 cricket team coach Adeel Shafique is hopeful of his boys gaining lot of experience and match exposure when they tackle the visiting Hong Kong U19 team during the four-match 50-over-a-side series, beginning on Wednesday, at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

Ahead of the series, Shafique said: "Such series helps the boys to gain exposure and experience match situations that will do a world of good for these youngsters."

The first of the four-match series begins on Wednesday while the other three games will be played on Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday.

Shafique added: "I think it is another great opportunity for our boys to showcase their talent. After a brilliant showing in the World Cup qualifiers that took place in October 2022 where we fell just short in the semifinal, I think it's great that the boys can play some more cricket together as a group."

"After the last tournament, there wasn't much cricket planned or scheduled for the U19 boys. During the World Cup qualifiers, we had a close game against Hong Kong. There is a mutual respect between both sides and an appreciation that our boys are extremely competitive."

Shafique, who has spent eight months in Hong Kong before taking up the assignment in Oman, said: "Our close

relationship with Hong Kong Cricket has made it possible to convince them to visit Oman for the series."

The Oman U19 coach said that "plans and talks are in place to have an annual bilateral series in Oman and Hong Kong for the youth team."

Aditya Gurumukhi has been named the skipper of Oman squad with Tanuj Sivakumar appointed his deputy for the series.

Shafique said: "The boys have been active and have been playing in the league as our current season is going on since September 2022. They have also been playing for their respective schools. They have had a lot of game time which is excellent for preparation. Besides that we have been in camp since the end of November and had a mix of fitness sessions along with practice matches and skills sessions."

He said: Our boys have performed well in the men's premier division, with Mohammad Arafat Islam (AER) performing brilliantly in the Oman D10 league. Tanuj Sivakumar (Zawawi Powertech) also had some good performances and Lakshmi Narayana has done well in a few games. All three of them are playing in all formats for their respective Premier Division sides which is beneficial for their development as they are playing with and against current Oman national team players."

Oman Veterans hockey team to play with star-studded Pakistan Veterans team

MUSCAT: Oman will be hosting a bevy of Pakistani hockey greats as a star-studded Pakistan Veterans hockey team will be playing a hockey series with Oman national Veterans hockey team at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex - Hockey Ground. The three matches are scheduled to be played at 7.00 pm on February 23, 25 and the final match will be on February 27 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex Bausher.

According to Oman Hockey Association, these matches are a part of Oman Veterans hockey team's preparation for



the upcoming Masters hockey tournament in Hong Kong.

Legendary hockey star — Olympian Islahuddin Siddiqui will be coming to Oman as team manager, with many former Olympians and International

hockey players will be part of the Pakistan team. Hockey enthusiasts will have a great opportunity to meet and greet the former hockey Olympic gold medallists and world champions. "The event is being held under

the patronage of Oman Hockey Association (OHA) with the support of Syed Fayyaz Group, Stars Light, Khurshid Trading & Contracting Est, Mohammed Riaz and Partner LLC and Sohar Polly Industry LLC.

BGO clinch OPBL basketball championship

MUSCAT: Despite all odds stacked against them, Barangay Ginebra Oman (BGO) sponsored by Dominos Pizza and Elevate Personal Fitness overcame a tremendous challenge from Muscat Duty Free to eke out an 85-79 win to reclaim the 2022-23 OPBL Basketball Championship, Division B, on February 10.

The tournament sponsored by Al Asm New LLC was held at the Oman Club basketball courts in Al Khuwair.

After a tumultuous start, the BGO found themselves in the lower tier third place in the eliminations standing behind the league leading Muscat Duty Free Team and second place Team Wasalak.

The BGO found a resurgence when they were joined by their

vital cogs Joshua Alcarde and Shelby Drey Gobris going into the eliminations. The team included by Austin Parole, Mark Anthony Israel, Ronnie Hernando, Garner Ramos, Aaron Barredo, Sonny Boy Pagaling, JR Saliba, EJ Gatabonton, Chester Sacdalan and Dave Fermin became the opposing coaches' worst nightmare with their depth heading into the semifinals and then the championship round.

BGO dispatched Little Manila Shoppe in the step ladder match up. LMS Team was followed by an uphill climb versus Team Wasalak whom BGO needed to defeat twice in a row because of their twice to



beat advantage. This made Team Wasalak confident of their odds having also defeated BGO by three points in the elimination round going into their match up. However, BGO pounced on them from start to finish of game one to blow out Team Wasalak by a record 37 points 87-50.

The BGO team finally dispatched Team Wasalak moving

on to the championship final round to face undefeated Muscat Duty Free Purushottam Kanji Exchange Team.

As expected, the match up and game one was a classic, between these Titans, MDF was led by their playing coach CJ Macaspac, tournament MVP, MJ Reyes, Joedel Ramos, Jayson Maribibi, Mac Ngo and Marco Vicente against the

Magnificent Seven of BGO, Austin Parole, Mark Anthony Israel, Karl Lorion, Ronnie Hernando, Joshua Alcarde, Drey Gobris and Garner Lazo headed by their coach Allan Minoza.

MDF seemingly had the game in the bag with 14 seconds left and the score tied 80 all. Mark Israel made a crucial steal taking the ball away from MJ Reyes and sprinting across the court for the game winning two-point basket.

Game two began with MDF again taking an early lead 10-4 until the BGO team bounced back.

The last one minute and forty 1:40 seconds of the game proved to be the decider as after the last 3 point shot of Marco Vicente, the BGO team clamped up on defence and shackled the MDF leading scorer and tournament MVP, MJ

Reyes. BGO's Ronnie Hernando made a basket despite being fouled going for a 3 point play. Drey Gobris and Joshua Alcarde made free throws to deliver the championship to BGO 85-79.

BGO pulled off an almost impossible task by winning 5 five straight games en-route to regaining its championship pride.

BGO's famed coach Allan Minoza, and assistant coach Joey Ramos, stated that this was a testament to the resilience of the team and the players.

MJ Reyes of Muscat Duty Free was named tournament MVP, while Mark Israel was awarded a Guard Mythical Five Trophy and Karl Lorion was the Best Center Mythical Five. The tournament was organised by OPBL and Al Asm New LLC, supported by FMB.



Italian Diego Ulissi of UAE Team Emirates celebrates after winning the fourth stage of the 2023 Tour of Oman, from Izki to Yitti Hills. – AFP

ITALIAN CLIMBS UP TO SECOND OVERALL BEHIND LEADER JORGENSEN

Ulissi takes over Yitti Hills



TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 4 RESULTS

1.	Diego Ulissi (ITA)	UAE Team Emirates	04:36:48
2.	Axel Zingle (FRA)	Cofidis	+ 00
3.	Ide Schelling (NED)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 00
4.	Jordi Warlop (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	+ 00
5.	Louis Bendixen (DEN)	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team	+ 00
6.	Jenthe Biermans (BEL)	Team Arkea-Samsic	+ 00
7.	Andrea Vendrame (ITA)	AG2R Citroën Team	+ 00
8.	Maxim Van Gils (BEL)	Lotto Dstny	+ 00
9.	Jesus Herrada (ESP)	Cofidis	+ 00
10.	Alexey Lutsenko (KAZ)	Astana Qazaqstan Team	+ 00

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1.	Matteo Jorgenson (USA)	Movistar Team	16:02:36
2.	Diego Ulissi (ITA)	UAE Team Emirates	+ 05
3.	Mauri Vansevenant (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	+ 05
4.	Geoffrey Bouchard (FRA)	AG2R Citroen Team	+ 14
5.	Maxim Van Gils (BEL)	Lotto Dstny	+ 15
6.	Jesus Herrada (ESP)	Cofidis	+ 16
7.	Rein Taaramae (EST)	Intermarche-Circus-Wanty	+ 18
8.	Victor Langelotti (MON)	Burgos-BH	+ 18
9.	Cian Uijtendbroeks (BEL)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 18
10.	Cristian Rodriguez (ESP)	Team Arkéa-Samsic	+ 18

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Italian puncheur Diego Ulissi claimed success in his third attempt when he triumphed over Yitti Hills in the fourth stage of Tour of Oman on Tuesday.

The UAE Team Emirates rider had come close to victory in the Qurayat and Al Hamra stages earlier.

“I’m delighted with this first victory of the season. It was a hard stage. Ackermann attacked with 8 km to go and on the final climb, Laengen and Formolo did the perfect job for setting up the sprint. Ackermann’s attack softened up the bunch well and we took a great victory. We’ve started the season very well as a team,” Ulissi said.

The peloton faced an explosive finale in Stage 4, the longest of the Tour of Oman 2023 (204.9 km), with a couple of ascents in the last 10 km. UAE Team Emirates’ Pascal Ackermann took the charge in these up and down sections before he was caught with 2 km to go. Ulissi took over then in show of command to take victory ahead of Axel Zingle (Cofidis) and Ide Schelling (Bora-Hansgrohe).

Stage 3 winner Matteo

Jorgenson (Movistar) retained the leader’s red jersey with a 13th place finish in Stage 4 and overall timing of 16:02:36. Ulissi moved up to second overall after the win to stay 5 seconds off the leader. Mauri Vansevenant of Soudal Quick-Step is third (+05).

Geoffrey Bouchard of AG2R Citroen Team (+14), Maxim Van Gils of Lotto Dstny (+15) and Jesus Herrada of Cofidis (+16) are other riders in contention for the overall title as the Tour concludes with the final challenge with the mighty climb up Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) on Wednesday. The final stage 5 is from Samayil to Jabal Al Akhdhar (152.2 km).

UAE Team Emirates’ Ryan Gibbons said his team is ready for battle on the final day of the Tour of Oman. “Today is a good day for Ulissi, maybe Ackermann can make it as well. And tomorrow, Green Mountain separates the boys from the men.”

Dversnes overtakes Meijers The stage started in Izki with Josef Cerny (Soudal Quick-Step) making a strong effort and Jeroen Meijers (Terengganu Polygon) looking to defend his golden jersey as the leader of the most aggressive rider classification.

Ahead of the first intermediate sprint (52.4 km), Fredrik Dversnes seized the opportunity



Italian Diego Ulissi of UAE Team Emirates poses in the green jersey on the podium after winning the fourth stage of the 2023 Tour of Oman, from Izki to Yitti Hills. – AFP

to take 3 points and lead the virtual standings against Meijers (13 pts vs 11).

The bunch of attackers including U23 World Champion Yevgeniy Fedorov (Astana Qazaqstan), Urko Berrade (Kern Pharma) and the winner of the African Games, Youcef Reguigui (Terengganu Polygon) raced for two hours at 47.3km/h to eventually catch up with Dversnes.

In the last 100 km with the lead at 3’40”, Matteo Jorgenson’s Movistar drove the bunch to defend the red jersey and they quickly received support from Arkea-Samsic and Cofidis. They control the gap of around 2 minutes. Reguigui dominated the second intermediate sprint (49.2 km to go) ahead of Dversnes. Reguigui dropped back to the bunch as his breakaway companions entered the last 20 km with a lead of 1’10”.

ACKERMANN ATTACKS, ULISSI DELIVERS

Dversnes, Fedorov and Berrade are caught at the bottom of the penultimate climb of the day, in Al Jissah (2.5 km at 6.9 per cent). Maxim Van Gils (Lotto Dstny) and Alexey Lutsenko (Astana Qazaqstan) set a brutal pace on the ascent and a small group emerges at the front.

Pascal Ackermann (UAE Team Emirates) attacks on the downhill and manages to open a gap of 25” but was caught inside the last 2 km. Ivan Cobo (Kern Pharma) then launched a counter-attack on the final ascent (1.6 km at 6.6 per cent). He was caught right at the summit, inside the last kilometre. Ulissi showed his expertise to prevail over the reduced bunch in a sprint for the stage win.



Vale Oman becomes 100% foreign owned following OQ stake sale

VALUE ADDITION: Proposal for new briquetting plant awaits Board sanction

MUSCAT: Brazilian mining giant Vale SA has announced that it has acquired 30 per cent of Vale Oman Pelletising Company (Vale in Oman) from OQ, Oman's global integrated energy company. This is in line with OQ's efforts to attract foreign investments and enter partnerships that maximise the utilisation of Omani natural resources.

The ownership transfer is expected to conclude in Q2 of 2023 with the full support of both parties as Vale in Oman continues to make meaningful investments and expand its business in Oman and the region. On conclusion of the transfer, Vale in Oman will be 100 per cent owned by Vale SA.

Vale in Oman was established in 2007 with a 70-30 partnership between Vale SA and OQ. The company owns a sophisticated iron ore pelletising plant with a production capacity of over 9 million tonnes, in addition to a distribution centre with a capacity



of 40 million tonnes.

Vale is experiencing growth in the region with the introduction of a briquetting plant in Suhar, to be approved by Vale's Board in the middle of 2023, which will significantly contribute towards employment opportunities in Oman and enhance cross-border trade.

Guilherme Reinisch Neves, Chairman of Vale in Oman, said: "OQ has been an invaluable partner in Oman guiding Vale through several successful business decisions and investments in the region. Our company is incredibly grateful for our long-lasting

cooperation. In line with our strategic objectives to be a leader in sustainable mining and a talent-driven organisation, Vale in Oman continues to bolster its expansion in Oman and the region in line with global net-zero objectives, while investing in local human capital and in-country value initiatives."

Talal bin Hamed al Aufi, CEO of OQ Group, said: "Selling OQ's stake in Vale in Oman is in line with OQ's shareholder, Oman Investment Authority objective is to attract and increase foreign direct investments. We are proud to have been part of Vale's success

in the Sultanate of Oman and look forward to witnessing the company's growth in the coming years." He added, that the deal re-emphasises Oman's position as an attractive destination for foreign investors.

As an active corporate citizen in Oman, Vale supports in-country value (ICV) initiatives, including local supply chain development and CSR projects, with investments topping \$1.4 billion to date. Aligned with the global sustainability policy of the company, Vale in Oman continues to build a positive legacy in the country. — ONA

Oman-India bilateral trade surpasses \$10bn

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

An Oman-India Business Forum was held at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Tuesday, February 14, 2023 as part of the Chamber's 'Global Connected' initiative.



In attendance were Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, OCCI Chairman and Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. Also present were members of a visiting Indian business delegation representing the PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

In remarks to journalists, Ambassador Narang said the forum would contribute to rapidly growing trade and economic ties between the two countries. "As you are aware, we have a very strong trade and investment relationship between India and Oman," he said.

"Bilateral trade is growing at a very healthy pace. We have crossed \$10 billion of bilateral trade last year, and Inshallah, it'll be much higher this year. Investments are also growing. There is a lot of interest from Indian investors to come and look at Oman as an investment destination. We are actively promoting them."

Private sector business leaders from the two countries also explore opportunities for cooperation across several sectors, namely ITC, mining and minerals, and plastics manufacturing, in addition to beauty, health and health care, herbal tea, and textiles.

Leading GCC energy sector testing centre sets up Oman presence

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in cooperation with the National Centre for Standardisation, organised a workshop to introduce the Gulf Laboratory Company and its unique services, which contribute to realising the vision of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in localising industry and building the knowledge economy for the energy and industry sectors.

The Gulf Laboratory Company is a company specialised in the fields of examinations, inspections, tests, calibration and engineering studies.

Its work was launched in 2016 with joint cooperation between a group of leading entities in its fields, led by Aramco, the Saudi Electricity Company, the Investment Fund, the Gulf Interconnection Authority representing the GCC countries and a group of energy pioneers in the market.

TURN TO PAGE 14

PDO receives first of its kind dual-fuel crude carrier

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 14

A mega crude carrier with dual-fuel propulsion systems, among other unique capabilities, called at the Mina Al Fahal Crude Oil Export terminal off Muscat recently in the first such visit of its kind to the Sultanate of Oman, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has revealed.

In a post, the majority state-owned energy company described the Eagle Vallery as a massive crude carrier (a Very Large Crude Carrier) built in 2022. It is also "one of the world's first dual-fuel ships with built-in volatile organic compounds (VOCs) mitigation technology," said PDO, adding: "With one of the smallest carbon footprints among crude-



carrying vessels, the ship represents a major step towards sustainable shipping practices."

Built by Korean shipbuilder Samsung Heavy Industries last April, the 300,000-dwt capacity crude oil tanker was delivered to AET, a Singapore-headquartered global energy logistics solutions provider.

The roughly 330-metre long, Malaysian-flagged vessel is currently on long-term charter to TotalEnergies, along with sister ship Eagle Valence, which is similarly LNG powered as part of its dual fuel propulsion capabilities.

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is the principal fuel source powering dual-fuel ships, enabling ship-owners and charterers to dramatically cut planet-warming carbon emissions typically associated with bunker fuel based fuel. AET's Eagle Valence and Eagle Vallery are among the first dual-fuel LNG powered ships to have been operationalised last year.

Abraj Energy sees post-listing market cap of around \$500m

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Abraj Energy Services SAOG (under transformation) announced on Tuesday the publication of the prospectus and details of the subscription period and process for its initial public offering (IPO) on the MSX.

Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj, said: "As one of the leading providers of onshore oilfield drilling and well services in Oman, we are confident in our leading domestic position and strong regional growth opportunities. Since announcing our intention to float on the MSX, we are extremely pleased to have received strong interest from investors.

Amid robust sector fundamentals, a favourable market and with our diverse service offerings, including drilling, workover and well services, we believe that Abraj



presents an attractive proposition for investors."

The IPO will be offered in a parallel offering as follows: Category I: Category I Offer (large investors) represents a maximum

of 85 per cent of the total Offering and will be made available to eligible large and institutional investors in Oman and eligible international institutional investors outside the United States.

The Category I subscription price range for the Offering has been set at between Bzs 242 and Bzs 249 per share. The total Offering size is expected to be between RO 91.33 million

to RO 93.97 million (c.\$237.22 million to \$244.08 million), implying a market capitalisation at listing of between RO 186.39 million and RO 191.78 million (c.\$484.13 million and \$498.13 million).

The Category I Offer is expected to run from February 20, 2023 to March 2, 2023. Category II: Category II Offer (small investors) represents a minimum of 15 per cent of the total Offering, and will be made to eligible retail investors in Oman. The subscription price is discounted maximum price of Bzs 224 per share, calculated as the maximum price of Bzs 249 per share less a discount of 10 per cent.

If there is excess demand in Category II, the allocation to Category II Investors may be increased up to a maximum of 35 per cent of the Offer size. If the aggregate demand in Category

II is less than 15 per cent of the Offer size, then after full allocation to Category II Investors, the balance of the Shares will be made available to Category I Investors for allocation at the Offer Price, if there is oversubscription in Category I.

Category II Offer is expected to run from February 20, 2023 to March 1, 2023 All shares will be issued and allotted to investors at the same Offer Price, which will be determined based on the Category I bookbuilding process.

The Offer Price will be decided by the selling shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and the CMA on the pricing date, expected to be on or around March 6, 2023.

Any refunds due to Category II Investors will be calculated based on the difference between (i) the Discounted Maximum Price and (ii) the Offer Price less a discount of 10 per cent. TO PAGE 14

Al Mouj Muscat launches the only golf and ocean-side business park in the Middle East

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat launched Al Mouj Business Park, with a vision to reimagine how business success is delivered. The new business destination is situated within Al Mouj Golf, one of the World top 100 golf courses, with an exemplary location not seen anywhere else in the Middle East.

At the launch, a group of esteemed business leaders from across the Sultanate of Oman were presented with the premier lifestyle destination's vision for a park where its occupiers will enjoy an oceanfront setting and a delightful outlook across the golf course.

They will also benefit from superb connectivity and transport links and the support of Al Mouj Muscat's world-class leisure, commercial and tourism amenities.

The state-of-the-art complex offers 39,000 square metres of office space within eight mid-rise buildings set across two districts, three in Business Park East and five in Business Park West.

Built to exacting Grade A standards, the buildings are separate yet seamlessly connected by beautifully landscaped gardens and outdoor spaces designed to be convivial to business networking.

Offices range from 3,990 to 5,320 square metres with flexible floor plans and where the average



floor plate is 1,300 square metres.

There will be rooftop gardens and each building will have controlled access basement car parking of between 115 and 148 spaces per office block, one of the most generous in Muscat.

Companies choosing to locate at Al Mouj Business Park can take advantage of a sophisticated meetings and events ecosystem within neighbouring 4- and 5-star hotels and event spaces including those at Al Mouj Golf which has both a restaurant and an events marquee.

The Okura Hotel and S. Regis Al

Mouj Muscat Resort are adjacent to the park and the Kempinski, the Mysk and Rotana are in close proximity.

Al Mouj Muscat CEO, Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani (pictured), said: "It is a great honour to launch our Business Park, a unique destination where business can be reimaged. We are looking forward to seeing Omani companies take their enterprises to the next level by choosing a base that, unlike traditional business parks, provides staff with a high-tech working environment which also supports their well-being and

productivity."

In addition to providing a top-quality environment inside and out, transport links are excellent as the park is directly accessible through the Muscat International Airport's intersection and only 10 minutes to Muscat City Centre, and 15 minutes to the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

He added, "The launch of Al Mouj Business Park clearly shows that it is possible to mix business with pleasure and we are confident of its success and how it will build on the extraordinary impact Al Mouj has had over the last 17



AL MOUJ BUSINESS PARK IS A UNIQUE AND INSPIRATIONAL BUSINESS DISTRICT OF 8 CUTTING EDGE OCEAN AND MOUNTAIN-VIEW OFFICE BUILDINGS SET WITHIN AL MOUJ GOLF

years as an engine for growth across tourism, employment and development."

A joint venture between the Oman government and Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Al Mouj Muscat is a dynamic and diverse community, now home to 8,000 residents and which attracts 4.9 million annual visitors to its coastal setting, boulevard style retail and dining experiences, luxury hotels, 400-berth marina and multi award-winning golf course.

Abraj Energy sees post-listing market cap of around \$500m

FROM PAGE 13

Around 377,398,000 shares, equivalent to 49 per cent of the total issued share capital of Abraj, are being made available via the Offering, with the selling shareholders reserving the right to amend the size of the Offering at any time prior to the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA.

The admission of the shares to listing and trading on the MSX is expected on or around March 14, 2023.

On February 7, 2023, Abraj entered into anchor investment agreements with the Saudi Omani Investment Company (a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund), Royal Court Affairs and Schlumberger Oman & Co LLC. In aggregate, the Anchor Investors have committed RO 37,588,840 to the IPO, representing 40 per cent of the offer size, with their shares subject to a 90-day lock-up arrangement, following admission.

Leading GCC energy sector testing centre sets up Oman presence

FROM PAGE 13

The company has established the largest laboratories complex in the world on an area of 170,000 square metres in the city of Dammam, and includes under its umbrella the latest and largest renewable energy, high voltage and calibration laboratories in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Despite the company's recent age, it has contributed pivotally to enhancing the reliability of the energy sector by conducting conformity and calibration tests for smart meters in Saudi Arabia and enabling a Gulf factory to export solar panels to three European countries by providing



accreditation tests in addition to contributing as a neutral party in related investigations accidents in the power sector.

The company is interested in transferring knowledge and developing the national human resources of the GCC states. It

also seeks to enable them to carry out their jobs after completing the required qualification and training.

The company also operates a group of specialised laboratories that are operated by experts at the highest levels.

The company has recently opened its office in the Sultanate of Oman to enable industries and services to contribute to the creation of meaningful jobs for Omani youth.

On the sidelines of the workshop, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Gulf Laboratory Company for Renewable Energy and the National Centre for Standardisation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Souvenirs were also exchanged between the representative of the Gulf Laboratory Company and Saleh al Balushi, Assistant General Manager for the Board of Directors Affairs of OCCI.

Kia's stunning SUV range now with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: Kia customers can now own their favourite Kia SUV with exclusive benefits. On buying either a Telluride, Sorento, Sportage, Seltos, or Sonet, customers will get comprehensive service up to 50,000 km, 1 year insurance and cash gift. The campaign will end on February 16, 2023 (Conditions apply).

For details customers can visit Reliable International Automotive showrooms.

Kia Telluride makes a fine mark with its impressive design, space, comfort and range of features that contribute to making every experience amazing.

The Telluride is loaded with a power-packed 3.8L GDI engine that produces 291 hp and 36.2 kg.m. torque. Complementing this powerful SUV is the 8-speed automatic transmission.

The first vehicle to be based on Kia's new-generation midsize SUV platform, the Sorento's redefined exterior and attractive cabin set it apart as much more than a work of engineering efficiency. Powering the all-new Sorento SUV is the 3.5L engine with 268 hp and 33.8 kg.m. torque.

The fifth-generation Sportage challenges design norms and moves the Sportage identity to the next level, while paying homage to its rich heritage. The Sportage is equipped with comprehensive range of powerful, responsive and efficient powertrains.

The Kia Seltos SUV combines advanced technical features, class-leading space and a suite of world-class safety features. The Seltos is equipped with a 1.6-litre gasoline engine producing 121 HP paired to a six-speed automatic transmission (6AT).

The Kia Sonet with its advantage of space, power, fuel-efficiency and more, is a good choice for daily drives. Kia Sonet is equipped with a powerful 1.5L engine that is paired to a CVT transmission. Offering comfortable space to passengers with its 5-seater capacity, this SUV goes the distance giving an impressive average of 17.5 kmpl.

Customers looking to experience a Kia SUV can visit any Reliable International Automotive showroom.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman, provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Fitch takes rating actions on HSBC Oman, Sohar International

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 14

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has placed HSBC Bank Oman SAOG's (HBON) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) of 'BB+' and 'bb-' Viability Rating (VR) on Rating Watch Negative (RWN). The 'bb+' Shareholder Support Rating (SSR) has also been placed on RWN.

The rating action follows the Central Bank of Oman's approval of the merger between HBON and Sohar International Bank SAOG (SIB) on February 5, 2023. The closing of the transaction is subject to approval by other regulatory bodies as well as the shareholders of both banks and is expected to take place in 2H23.

"The RWN on the SSR and IDR reflects that upon completion of the merger, Fitch will



cease to factor potential support from HSBC Holdings plc (HSBC; A+/Stable) into HBON's ratings, which is likely to result in a downgrade and withdrawal of HBON's SSR and Long-Term IDR as HBON will be liquidated as a legal entity after the merger completion.

Without the benefits from HSBC and as part of the merger with SIB, Fitch expects HBON's standalone credit profile to converge towards SIB's, as reflected in the RWN on HBON's

VR," the London-based ratings agency said. Separately, Fitch Ratings affirmed Sohar International Bank SAOG's (SIB) Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) at 'BB-' with Stable Outlook. Fitch has placed SIB's 'b+' Viability Rating (VR) on Rating Watch Positive (RWP).

The RWP follows SIB's announcement on February 5, 2022 that it has received approval from the Central Bank of Oman for its proposed merger with HSBC Bank Oman SAOG (HBON). Fitch expects the transaction to have a positive impact on SIB's credit profile.

"Fitch will resolve the RWP upon the conclusion of the transaction and once it obtains more clarity on the business and financial profile of the merged entity, which may extend beyond the usual six-month review cycle," it stated.

Brexit pushes high earning bankers from UK to EU



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The number of European Union bankers earning more than one million euros has reached new highs after Brexit, as lenders shift more key staff to the continent.

The number of high-earning bankers in the EU increased by 41.5 per cent in 2021 to reach 1,957, according to new figures from the European Banking Authority — the highest since the regulator started, in 2010, tracking those earning more than 1 million euros.

The watchdog said that some of this was down to an increase in bonus payments, as banks hauled in record fees from dealmaking and trading revenue swelled during a bumper year. But Brexit was also big factor, the EBA said.

“The relevant increase of the number of high earners is

linked to the good performance of institutions in the area of investment banking and trading and sales, as well as to further relocations of staff after Brexit from the UK to the EU, and also to overall salary-level increases,” the EBA said.

The UK has typically been the centre for high-earning bankers in the EBA figures, but the country has been excluded from the report since it left the EU in 2020. The number of bankers earning more than 1 million euros has continued to grow, however, as banks have moved top staff away from the City.

Germany now houses the most high-earning bankers, with 589, according to the EBA data, followed by France with 371 and Italy with 351. The highest proportion of those earning more than 1 million euros work in investment banking (38 per cent),

followed by those in management functions.

On a separate issue: London dominates clearing despite EU bid for market share. British clearing house group LCH (London Clearing House) continues to dominate the market for interest rate derivatives, despite efforts by the EU to bring business back onto the mainland from the UK after Brexit.

LCH, which is part of the London Stock Exchange Group, cleared 50.9 trillion in Euro-denominated swaps referencing the Euribor rate last year – some 94 per cent of the market – according to data from research firm Clarus.

Eurex Clearing, which is operated by Deutsche Borse and is its biggest EU competitor, took most of the remaining 6 per cent, with just 3.5 trillion’s worth of clearances.

Last January, the European

Commission extended its equivalence deal for UK clearing houses until June 2025. This allowed cross-border business to continue temporarily after Brexit removed British firms’ automatic access to EU markets.

But the Commission is now beginning to push EU-based banks to move volume to EU clearing houses. In December, it proposed that a portion of euro-denominated derivatives traded by EU firms should be cleared in the UK.

It added that “EU authorities would not be in the driving seat for taking the relevant decisions” during times of crisis, as clearing is conducted predominantly outside the bloc.

The EU did not say what proportion would need to be cleared in the EU, only that the threshold would be determined by the European Securities and

Hydrogen is elemental to US-EU green compromise

REBECCA CHRISTIE

Heated trade tensions could cool if the United States and the European Union make concessions on hydrogen.

Washington’s Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) includes subsidies that could slash the cost of the element’s sustainably produced “green” version by 2030.

If the EU can negotiate better access to America’s production chain while attractively managing its future import needs, it could help defuse a wider transatlantic spat.

EU leaders on Friday promised action, but aren’t much nearer to a robust answer to the IRA.

Either way, both the United States and the EU want to jump-start domestic production of green hydrogen, to reduce future emissions and to prevent China from dominating an increasingly important global market, as it has for solar panels.

Right now, 99% of the near 100 million tonnes of annual commercial hydrogen output comes from old-fashioned fossil fuel energy sources.

By 2030, the International Energy Agency envisages over 175 million tonnes of global production, with 35% coming from green hydrogen.

This uses zero-carbon renewable electricity to split water via electrolysis, producing the same element but without harmful emissions.

Both Europe and the United States understand the role green hydrogen can play in decarbonising tricky areas like heavy industry and steelmaking.

That’s why Europe has made it a centrepiece of a new range of “important projects”

EITHER WAY, BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE EU WANT TO JUMP-START DOMESTIC PRODUCTION OF GREEN HYDROGEN, TO REDUCE FUTURE EMISSIONS AND TO PREVENT CHINA FROM DOMINATING AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT GLOBAL MARKET, AS IT HAS FOR SOLAR PANELS.

subsidies.

Yet Europe needs to import the same amount again as the 10 million tonnes it aims to produce domestically by 2030.

This opens the door for a bargain: if the United States will help EU manufacturers contribute a wider range of parts and machinery to the supply chain, Europe could reciprocate by providing a ready market for the end product.

Europe needs a solution to keep its big companies from simply relocating factories and capital across the Atlantic to tap the full range of American benefits.

The future market for electrolyzers and other environmentally friendly gear will be huge, given the anticipated demand.

The US incentive to cooperate is more strategic. Easing tensions with Brussels would smooth diplomatic relations and prime a wealthy market full of customers.

Because hydrogen is a future industry more than a current source of jobs and growth, both sides can make concessions and claim victory at the same time.

With the war in Ukraine and China’s rise as a global competitor, the United States and the EU have more incentives than ever to remain on friendly economic terms.

A deal on hydrogen could be the breath of fresh air that strained trade relations need.

— Reuters

Putting America’s debt in its place



BARRY EICHENGREEN

The author, Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, is a former senior policy adviser at the International Monetary Fund. He is the author of many books, including In Defence of Public Debt (Oxford University Press, 2021).

The ruckus in the United States over the federal debt ceiling has redirected attention toward soaring public borrowing. Against the backdrop of monetary tightening by the Federal Reserve, piling up more debt is reinforcing concern about the explosive growth of the government’s interest obligations.

It’s a terrifying narrative, redolent of impending crisis. The only problem is that virtually every element of it is wrong.

First, government debt is not soaring. The Congressional Budget Office forecasts that debt held by the public will rise from a bit less than 100% of GDP in 2022 to slightly more than 110% in 2033.

While worth watching, this increase is by no means catastrophic. And while the CBO sees the debt ratio, fuelled by entitlement spending, rising more quickly after that, there are more pressing problems to attend to today than what happens after 2033.

Urgent needs include renewing US infrastructure, averting a climate disaster, and providing education and training for the young.

Cutting essential public programmes now to address a debt problem that won’t even begin to materialise for a decade would be shooting ourselves in the foot.

Second, interest costs are not exploding. To be sure, inflation remains elevated, which pushes up short-term interest rates.

But, because the US Treasury issues long-term bonds, debt-

servicing costs depend on long-term rates, which have risen by less.

Currently, the interest rate on ten-year government bonds is 3.6%, while the CBO’s inflation forecast for that horizon is 2.4%, so the real (inflation-adjusted) interest rate relevant for calculating the interest burden is still only 1.2%.

And as the former IMF chief economist Olivier Blanchard reminds us in an important new book, what matters is the difference between the real interest rate and the growth rate of the economy.

If the real interest rate is lower than the growth rate of inflation-adjusted GDP, then the debt ratio can fall even when the government runs budget deficits.

The CBO’s forecast for growth over the next ten years is 1.7% – higher than the real interest rate. This is not a licence to engage in unlimited spending.

But it implies that, given a debt-to-GDP ratio of 100%, the federal government can run deficits of 0.5% of GDP (the difference between 1.7% and 1.2%) over and above its interest payments without causing the debt ratio to rise. It is conceivable that the CBO is overestimating the US economy’s growth potential.

Productivity growth has been trending downward, and that downward trend could persist.

Equally, however, the CBO could be underestimating

potential growth, given that firms are only beginning to exploit the new technologies springing up all around us.

A prudent way to proceed is to adopt the CBO’s estimate while acknowledging the considerable uncertainty surrounding it. Inflation will come down, given the Fed’s commitment to reducing it.

So, too, will nominal interest rates, given investors’ awareness of the Fed’s commitment.

Which comes down faster – what happens to the real interest rate, in other words – will depend on the balance of saving and investment.

Think of it this way: the more savings are available to fund productive investment projects, the lower will be real rates of return.

On the savings side, the past is a good guide to the future, because the factors determining the savings available to the US economy evolve slowly over time. Principal among them are the average age and longevity of the population.

Insofar as longevity dominates, and people anticipating more years in retirement save more, the supply of savings and demand for US Treasury bonds are both likely to rise.

Working in the other direction is the supply of saving from China and other emerging markets, what former Fed Chair Ben Bernanke called the “global savings glut.”

With growth in China slowing, this source of saving will decline.

Moreover, the willingness of China and other emerging markets to invest specifically in US Treasury bonds will diminish, given the rise of US-China tensions and the US government’s demonstrable willingness to impose financial sanctions on governments whose policies it doesn’t like.

A good guess is that these different changes in savings supply, working in opposite directions, will be more or less offsetting.

The important action, then, will be on the investment side. There will be political pressure and considerable economic incentive for additional investment in infrastructure, climate-change abatement, health-care delivery, and new digital technologies.

Competition for a limited supply of savings by those undertaking these additional investments will put upward pressure on interest rates, making debt sustainability more tenuous.

But those same investments, if carried out intelligently, will boost economic growth, making debt sustainability less of a problem.

Those who imagine an imminent debt crisis are making much ado about nothing. It would be better if US policymakers saved their energy – and political capital – for fighting real rather than imaginary battles.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before the Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Hammad bin Ahmed al-Haili, Chairman of the Supreme Court, and Sayid Khalifa bin Saad bin Khalifa al-Rasaidi, Chairman of Administrative Judicature Court, Saad bin Khalifa al-Rasaidi took the oath of office at Al-Barkah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world. "He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability." — OMA

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL BUTTS

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing, on dust cases. A drive around the downtown area and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental stress, we should discipline ourselves. PEOPLE ARE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al-Mubali, who stopped his car to scare away a group of people at a sidewalk in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that they have the best way to slow the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

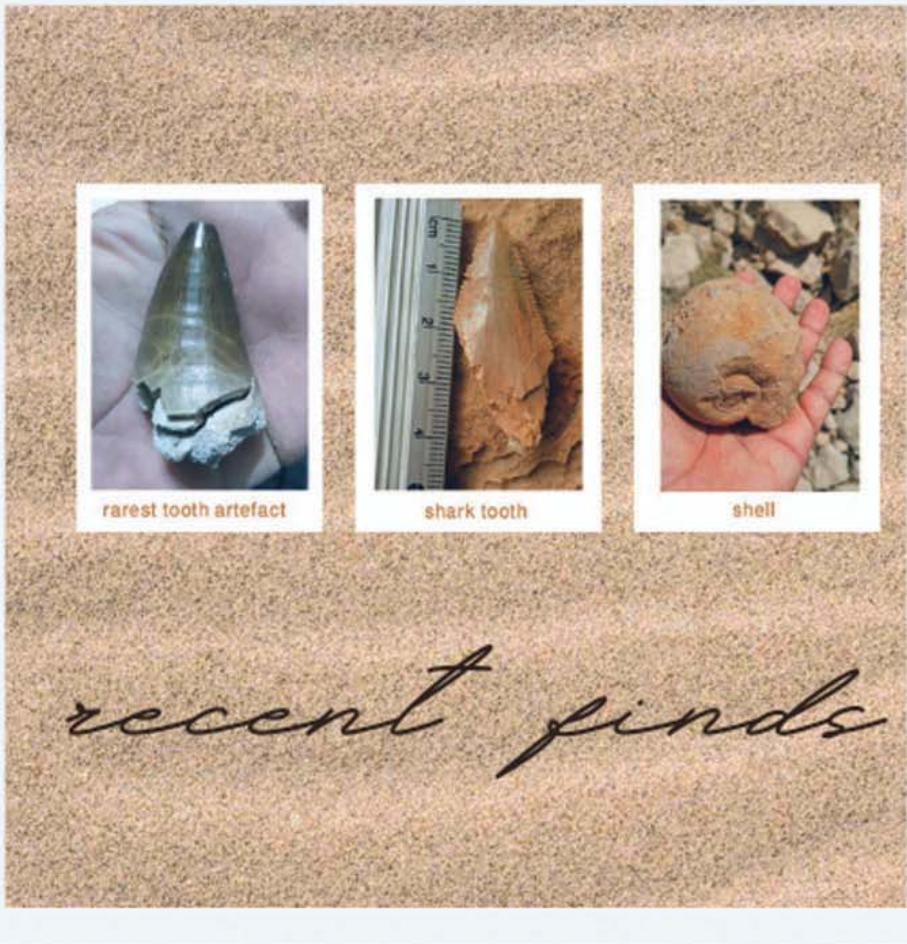
MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Oman Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknotes, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4



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An Omani educator's comprehensive fossil collection is ready for the public



The Sultanate of Oman is a paradise for geologists," says a die-hard fossil collector and a Geography teacher from Suhar. "The presence of volcanic ophiolites in Oman, famous for its ability to absorb Carbon dioxide from the atmosphere makes it unique," says Majid bin Khalfan bin Saeed al Muqbali, who plans to launch his fossil museum from his Suhar home soon... **P20**

The Dar Al Atta'a Let's Read Children's Writing Competition

THE LET'S READ TEAM is delighted to announce the launch of its 17th Children's Writing Competition. This year, the participants are requested to write an original story set in Oman or to re-write a traditional Omani tale in their own words. Each story must be accompanied by a colourful illustration depicting the Omani landscape and characters from the story. Participants can write their story in either English or Arabic. Jane Jaffer, chairperson of the Let's Read

Programme, said "We hope that children, aged eight to eighteen, from schools across the country, will participate in the writing competition. We would like to thank our sponsors: Renaissance Services, The London Speaker Bureau, and KPMG, for their support and sponsorship of this year's competition." Stephen R Thomas, CEO, Renaissance Services said, "Renaissance is very happy to be part of this initiative, which will give



children skills that cannot be taken away and will only grow over time while expanding their horizons." Tom Kenyon-Slaney, Chairman of the London Speaker Bureau, added, "The process of participating in a

writing competition is one of the most comprehensive and helpful super-curricular activities for a prospective school or university applicant." Maythaa al Manthri, CEO of the Let's Read Team and a judge of the Arabic

entries said, "We are looking forward to receiving some exciting stories from the students this year." The entries should be a maximum of 500 words long and can be submitted by hand to the Let's Read Charity Bookshop on 3rd floor of Oman Avenues Mall (from 10 am to 8 pm) or sent by email to: letsreadoman@gmail.com for the English entries. The Arabic entries can be sent to: maythaa.1988@gmail.com To be considered for assessment and the opportunity to win great prizes, each entry must include the name, age, and contact details of the student and the name and contact details of their school. The closing date for submissions is Saturday 8th April 2023. Entries to the competition will be divided for assessment into three different age groups. Entries will be read by at least three judges and graded according to specific criteria: descriptive setting, vivid characters, an exciting story, and colourful illustrations. With sufficient sponsorship, we hope to publish the winning stories in a book entitled, Stories from Oman.

READ

MAAME
BY JESSICA GEORGE

Maddie, the daughter of an overbearing mother recently returned from Ghana and a father suffering from Parkinson's, begins to build a life for herself in London.

DISCOVERY

A restorer points to a detail of the section 'Inferno' (Hell) of the mosaic ceiling of the Baptistery of San Giovanni, one of the most ancient churches in Florence, Tuscany, during the presentation of the start of a six-year restoration of its mosaic ceiling. The mosaic ceiling of the Florence Baptistery, a set of mosaics covering the internal dome and apses, is one of the most important cycles of medieval Italian mosaics, created between 1,225 and around 1,330 using designs by major Florentine painters. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

French artist Jacques Auberger aka Jacques performs on stage during the 38th Victoires de la Musique, the annual French music awards ceremony, at the Seine Musicale concert hall in Boulogne-Billancourt, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP



Cuba's Harley-Davidsons a labour of love for island's super-fans

CUBAN CARLOS PUPO Sablon spared no effort to join up with his fellow Harley-Davidson enthusiasts.

He got up at 4:00 am to drive his electric blue Harley 660 kilometres (410 miles) over 13 hours — despite fuel shortages — to be there.

Cuba's Harley-Davidsons are not as well known as the island nation's collection of vintage American cars, but they also contribute to a palpable feeling of stepping back in time.

There are only around 200 on the island — compared to 60,000 classic cars — but their owners tenderly care for and repair them to keep the hum of their engines audible on the island.

For the past 12 years, Harley enthusiasts have met up annually in Varadero — the seaside resort 145-kilometres (90 miles) east of Havana to "share the passion" over a long weekend, explained Raul Brito, 60.

He is one of the event's founders and the proud owner of a 1960s Harley, "the last model to enter the island" after the 1959 communist revolution.

Until then, there were several thousands of the iconic motorcycles in Cuba, with even police riding them.

But they lost popularity following the communist revolution that created a stigma against anything associated with the capitalist United States.

Antonio Ramirez, 60, is a former taxi driver who has reinvented himself as a bike mechanic.

He owns four Harleys, including a custom-made orange tricycle.

His first bike previously belonged to his grandfather and then his father "who used it to go to work."

Now, restoring Harleys has become a business for Ramirez.

"I buy them in parts and then restore them," he said.

But that has only really become possible over the last decade with the loosening of trade restrictions with the US, and helped by the development of Cuba's tourism industry.

Ramirez has been able to source original parts thanks to "family, friends and foreigners" travelling in Cuba.

"It was more difficult before, you had to improvise to create everything. Now it's easier to



import parts, but we still make a lot by hand," said Sergio Sanchez, a mechanic from Pinar del Rio, 300 kilometres (186 miles) away.

Consequently, "there are few original Harleys, almost none, due to the lack of parts."

As a teenager, Sanchez used to borrow his father's Harley, but "it is impossible to find a 1947 piston nowadays."

MORE DIFFICULT MORE EXPENSIVE' -

As is the case with many products in a country that suffers severe shortages due to 60 years of US sanctions, word of mouth and WhatsApp groups are the keys to finding a good deal.

This year, Sanchez turned up to the bikers' weekend with a white 1947 Harley that used to belong to the police.

Thanks to the 2014 restoration of diplomatic ties between Washington and Havana that sparked an explosion in tourism, it was possible once more to source parts that used to be out of reach, said Sandy Leon, 46, who helped restore the white Harley in 2019.

But the good times did not last as Donald Trump succeeded Barack Obama in 2017 and gradually ramped up sanctions



that hit tourism.

In the first four months of 2019, 250,000 Americans visited Cuba, almost double the corresponding period in 2018.

But Trump barred US cruise ships from landing in Cuba and the flow of American tourists dried up. "Now it's more difficult and more expensive" to source parts, said Leon.

Cuba's economic crisis that has seen the peso depreciate has also complicated matters.

Pupo Sablon was recognised for his efforts, winning the prize for having travelled the furthest distance to attend the event.

He managed to buy his striking blue Harley after making a deal with a Canadian enthusiast who produced the \$15,000 needed in return for the right to ride the Harley when visiting the island of 11 million people.

Before then, the Harley had "remained in the same family since it left the factory in 1951."

Pupo Sablon restored it with "parts from that era" in order to maintain its "original aesthetic."

Just like its colourful vintage cars, Cuba's motorbikes made before 1960 cannot be exported because they are considered part of its "national heritage." — AFP

FILM FESTIVAL

Berlin film fest promises starry nights, meaty fare



THE BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year, opens on Thursday with a focus on the fight for freedom in Ukraine and Iran and the starriest line-up since the pandemic.

The 73rd Berlinale, traditionally the most politically minded of the big three European festivals, will coincide with the first anniversary of the start of the Russian invasion.

The event will screen nine new movies, primarily documentaries, about Ukrainian life in wartime, including Sean Penn's "Superpower", shot by the two-time Oscar winner in Kyiv last February.

Iran's embattled independent filmmakers will also take centre stage with a series of premieres and panel discussions looking at the country, which has been rocked by rights protests since September.

Artistic director Carlo Chatrian said the 11-day festival was "standing shoulder to shoulder with those who fight to express their ideas".

He promised films that "tell the story of the world with all its wounds as well as its heartbreaking beauty".



SPIELBERG, MIRREN, KRIEPS

French-Iranian actor Golshifteh Farahani ("Paterson") will serve on the jury for the Golden and Silver Bear top prizes headed by Hollywood star Kristen Stewart, at 32 the youngest president in the festival's history.

Nineteen films from around the world will vie for the main awards, including "Manodrome" starring Jesse Eisenberg and Adrien Brody, billed as a thriller about masculinity in crisis.

The European bureau chief of The Hollywood Reporter, Scott Roxborough, said that after several editions marred by the coronavirus outbreak, the Berlinale was back with "big star power" and "gala red carpet bonanzas".

Three-time Academy Award winner Steven Spielberg is due in the German capital to collect an honorary Golden Bear for his life's work, spotlighted in a retrospective.

British actor Helen Mirren will premiere the keenly awaited "Golda" in which she stars as Israel's only female prime minister, Golda Meir.

And Vicky Krieps, the acclaimed Luxembourg-born actor who made her breakthrough opposite Daniel Day-Lewis in "Phantom Thread", will unveil her turn as renowned Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann in a biopic by veteran German director Margarethe von Trotta.

Von Trotta "will be adding to her list of phenomenal feminist figures of the last two centuries", after acclaimed dramas about icons such as philosopher Hannah Arendt and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, Roxborough said.

EXPLOSION OF MANGA

The Berlinale has a stronger track record than Cannes or Venice for including female directors, who make up about 40 per cent of participants at this year's Berlinale.

The opening night film will be Rebecca Miller's "She Came to Me", a romantic comedy about a composer fighting writer's block, starring Peter Dinklage of "Game of Thrones", Anne Hathaway and Marisa Tomei.

John Malkovich will present "Seneca — On the Creation of Earthquakes", a surreal take on the mentor of the tyrant Nero in Ancient Rome.

And "Boom! Boom! The World vs. Boris Becker" — a look at the travails of the German tennis champion by award-winning US documentarian Alex Gibney — will make its debut.

Roxborough noted that the Berlinale has a reputation for "finding new voices" and launching up-and-coming talents.

Berlin "is the place for discoveries because the selection committees are quite good at finding stuff overlooked by other festivals", he said.

Roxborough said he was looking forward to new movies by Brandon Cronenberg — son of horror king David — and Korean-Canadian director Celine Song, who caused a sensation at last month's Sundance film festival with her semi-autobiographical drama "Past Lives".

And he predicted that animated fantasy feature "Suzume" by Makoto Shinkai — already a blockbuster in Japan — could be "the biggest film to come out of Berlin this year" amid a global boom in Japanese anime. — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

World's oldest dog Bobi, 30, is also one of the luckiest



BOBI, A 30-YEAR-OLD guard dog who cheated death in his first days, is living out the end of his life as a celebrity in central Portugal after being declared the world's oldest dog ever.

When he was recognised by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest dog on February 1, he broke a nearly century-old record previously held by Bluey, an Australian cattle dog who died in 1939 at the age of 29 years and five months.

A purebreed Rafeiro, a Portuguese livestock guard dog whose normal life expectancy is between 12 and 14, Bobi was not supposed to live at all, never mind make it this long.

He was born on May 11, 1992, along with three other pups in a wood storage shed owned by the Costa family in the small village of Conqueiros in central Portugal.

Because the family owned so many animals, the father decided they couldn't keep the newborn puppies and the parents took them from the shed the next day, while the mother dog Gira was out, said Leonel Costa, who was eight years old at the time.

But they didn't realise they had left one puppy behind — his colouring made him blend in with the surrounding wood.



- SECRET EXISTENCE -

Leonel and his sister were heartbroken that the puppies were being killed.

But then they noticed that Gira kept returning to the shed, had a look and discovered the surviving puppy. They decided to keep his existence a secret until he could open his eyes.

"We knew they wouldn't do anything to him then and that Bobi would remain with us. So we kept the secret," Leonel said.

"Afterwards, we were punished, but it was worth it," he said.

Today Bobi is living out his twilight years oblivious that he is a world record holder, except for the media visits following the Guinness classification.

"We didn't expect this reaction," Leonel said. Leonel attributes Bobi's longevity to the tranquility of country living and his human diet, which includes lots of meat and fish.

"He has always eaten what we eat," he said. He has never been chained up or put on a leash and used to roam the woods around the village.

Today walking has become difficult, so he spends most of the time hanging out in the yard with cats or napping after meals. Many of the Costa dogs have lived a long life. Bobi's mother Gira lived to 18 years and another dog lived to 22.

"We see situations like this as a normal result of the life they have, but Bobi is one of a kind," Leonel told Guinness. — AFP

ART

Van Gogh family role hailed in museum's 50th birthday show



HE'S ONE OF THE most famous artists in history. But Vincent van Gogh could have faded into obscurity were it not for his family — and the vision of one woman.

The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam launched its 50th anniversary celebrations on Wednesday with a new exhibit hailing their often under-appreciated role.

"Choosing Vincent" which opens on Friday until April 10, not only features several of the Dutch master's famous paintings, but also rarely-seen objects including his birth certificate and the only-known photograph of him in existence.

It pays homage to the tireless work of Vincent's beloved brother Theo and, in particular, Theo's widow Jo Van Gogh-Bonger, who dedicated her life to making sure the world saw the genius of Vincent's works.

"Jo contributed greatly to the fame of Vincent," curator Lisa Smit said.

Van Gogh sold only a handful of paintings during his lifetime, and at the time of his death in 1890 after a self-inflicted gunshot wound was often wracked with self-doubt about his talent.

Theo died six months after Vincent, in 1891, leaving Jo Van Gogh-Bonger with a large collection of paintings by a virtually unknown artist.

- 'ALL-IMPORTANT LIFE DECISION' -

"At this point in time, Jo is a young woman of 28 and she has a little boy who hasn't even turned one yet," said Smit.

"So what is she going to do with

this collection? Is she going to keep it, is she going to sell it? She really has to make that all-important life decision."

The answer to that question created the Van Gogh we know now — whose paintings including "Sunflowers" and "Irises" are among the most expensive ever sold.

"A few months after Theo's death, she writes in her diary that she wants to make it her mission to follow Theo's dream to find recognition for her brother in law, which she does for the rest of her

life," said Smit.

She not only preserved the paintings, but also looked after the correspondence between her husband and her brother in law, which would later be published as "Dear Theo."

Theo and Jo's son, named Vincent after his artist uncle, continued keeping the collection intact and was instrumental in handing it over in its entirety to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation in 1962.

Part of the deal was the building of a museum to house Van Gogh's works including other famous paintings like "Wheatfield with Crows" and self-portraits.

- 'TELLS A STORY' -

"Choosing Vincent" prominently features the iconic work "Almond Blossom" — which Vincent painted as a gift to his namesake nephew in 1890 a few months before his death.

The Japanese-influenced work



was one of the hundreds of Van Gogh's paintings handed over to the Foundation in 1962.

In 1973, the museum opened its doors to the public as the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh.

The museum changed its name to the Van Gogh Museum in 1994 and today houses more than 200 paintings, 500 drawings and around 800 letters in the largest collection globally by the painter.

"This is an exhibition that tells a story," said Van Gogh Museum Director Emilie Gordenker.

"A story about Vincent, but also his family and how close they were and what they meant to each other." — AFP

ANIMAL PLANET

France's lynx at high risk of extinction: Study



THE ELUSIVE EURASIAN lynx is at risk of vanishing completely from France, according to a study on Monday that called for urgent measures to boost the population of isolated wild cats.

There are at most 150 adult lynx hidden in the mountains of northeastern France, cut off from healthier wild cat populations in Germany and Switzerland, according to the scientists behind the genetic study published in the journal Frontiers in Conservation Science.

"Given the rapid loss of genetic diversity, we estimate that this population will go extinct in less than 30 years," said co-author Nathan Huvier of the Centre Athenas, a wildlife refuge in eastern France.

"This population urgently needs new genetic material to become sustainable."

The lynx, which disappeared in France in the early 20th century, was reintroduced in the 1970s, spreading through the Jura mountains along the French-Swiss border, where the majority of the population remains.



Huvier said poaching may be occurring but that the main threat to the lynxes is cars because their territory is "highly fragmented" by roads.

Last year, conservationists in the area recorded 22 collisions with vehicles. Only one lynx survived.

To study the population in the Jura, the researchers collected genetic samples between 2008 and 2020 from lynxes that were treated for injuries, orphaned cubs or those that were found dead.

They compared 78 of the samples to reference data from the parent population in central Europe's Carpathian Mountains in central Europe.

The researchers found that while the total French population is estimated to be between 120 and 150 individuals, there are only an estimated 38 lynxes thought to have sufficient genetic diversity for healthy breeding.

The authors warned that without a breeding programme to introduce new genetic material into the population, it will likely collapse.

"The lynx is an apex predator and thus a keystone of its ecosystem," Huvier said.

"The fact that it is back in France is excellent news and that's why it is so important to protect this population (as well as all the other populations) and help it to develop further."

French authorities last year expressed concern at the decline of the lynx population and launched a national plan to restore the species.

But calls to boost the population by introducing more lynxes have met with resistance from hunters and farmers, who prefer that the animal's population is left to increase naturally. — AFP

art & life

Local Scene

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WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 15 | 2023

An Omani educator's comprehensive fossil collection is ready for the public

By Liju Cherian
@lijucherianoman

In 2016, a young Geography teacher from Suhar chanced upon a rare tooth of a marine reptile of the time of Mosasaurs, the large extinct marine reptiles.

This ancient discovery is claimed to be the only one discovered in the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Gulf so far.

Meet fossil collector and paleontologist Majid bin Khalfan bin Saeed al Mughali from Suhar.

His love for the 'study of the earth' was born at an early age as he began to learn the geological diversity that Oman abounds with.

He set his passion since his early school days, when his father, presented him a precious quartz stone that he found from one of the mountains of Oman.

From then there has been no looking back. Today, he has an amazing collection of over 3,000 geological pieces, one of which dates back to over 600 million years ago.

"The Sultanate of Oman has rocks and fossils, some of them, which are over 850 million years old (granite rocks in Hasik), and traces of glaciers and pine trees dating back to over 270 million years," says Majid.

His Suhar home looks like a miniature museum with its vast collection which he has been able to collect over the years many of which are some rare geological gems with valuable data.

Oysters, shells, pine wood fossils, rare tooth artefact, shark teeth, Trilobite footprints, coral reefs and many others form part of his stunning collection.

So far, he has been able to collect over 3,000 fossils of various sizes and types, which he has been able to collect from geological exploration tours crossing mountains and deserts in all governorates of Oman.

Majid has collected and classified fossils according to historical sequences from the oldest to the most recent ones. He has displayed ample information which makes it easier for any visitor to read and study the details about the time period it belongs.

Majid says the geological pieces belong to three different ages from ancient to modern and all of them have been collected from the Sultanate of Oman.

The oldest pieces about a fossil of microorganisms known as Stromatolite dates back to 600 million years ago, which is a primitive bacterial colony, and the rarest geological piece he possesses is from a dinosaur age called Mosasaurus.

A geologist specialist who visited him confirmed after matching its components with scientific research studies.

A member of the Geological Society of Oman (GSO), Majid teaches at the Naeem Bin Masoud School in Suhar and was able to collect several unique geological pieces that add up to his collection.

Majoring in Geography, he graduated from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), College of Education, which really gave a boost to his interests.

He later went on to participate in a number of geological exploration missions from the university and also the GSO as well as other foreign missions in Oman.

Says Majid: "I did not keep these findings for myself, but rather I strived to introduce fossils to the public through my participation in various public exhibitions implemented by government institutions in North Al Batinah, including the General Directorate of Education and the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in North Al Batinah and the Department of Culture and Youth and the municipality of Suhar."

Fossils give us a useful insight into the history of life on Earth. Based on the response from visitors to the mini museum, Majid decided to set up a permanent museum at his residence.

Majid (Instagram @Maajidkhalfan) has registered his geological findings with the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in North Al Batinah and also presented proposals to place his treasures in the museum.

