

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a session of political talks with Jean Asselborn, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, who is currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the march of bilateral relations. They also discussed means of enhancing cooperation, exchanging expertise and striking further agreements.



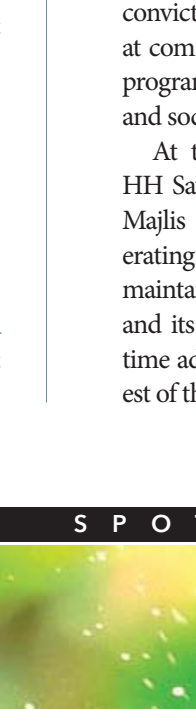
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DJOKOVIC SEES OFF NORRIE TO REACH QUARTERS



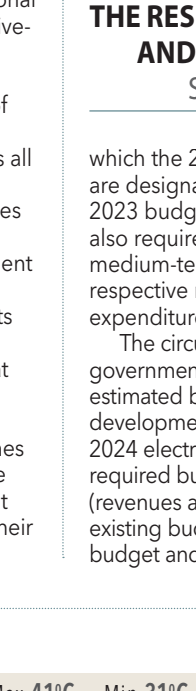
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OMINVEST HELMS CONSORTIUM BIDDING FOR AHLI BANK



P19

YOUNG OMANI INVENTORS INTRODUCE OMANEEM, A NATURAL INSECTICIDE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF NORWAY

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway, on 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 King Harald V. His Majesty also wished the people of Norway further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN AIR FLIGHT GROUNDED IN IRAN

The Sultanate of Oman's national carrier, Oman Air, said its flight WY2435 from Shiraz to Muscat was grounded on Monday after the aircraft was damaged due to debris on the runway at Iran's Shiraz International Airport. In a statement, Oman Air said on Tuesday that its engineering team is undertaking necessary measures to safely bring the aircraft back to Muscat. The statement from Oman Air says that due to the damage caused to the aircraft by debris on the runway while landing at Shiraz International Airport, flight WY2435 on May 15 has been grounded. Our Engineering team is undertaking necessary measures to safely bring the aircraft back to Muscat, however, due to paramount safety considerations, it is presently kept grounded and as a consequence, flight WY2436 returning to Muscat has been delayed.

Need to arrive at common visions

JOINT COOPERATION TO PROMOTE THE GOALS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and some members of the Council of Ministers on Tuesday received Khalid bin Hilal al Maa-wali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, and members of Majlis Ashshura's Office.

The meeting was held within the framework of joint coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman.

Then, the two sides held a joint meeting, as stipulated by in the Basic Law of the State and Council of Oman's Law. The meeting aimed to enhance the process of continuous coordination among all establishments of the state. It underlined a conviction on the need to arrive at common visions for supporting programmes to promote economic and social aspects.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd commended the Majlis Ashshura's stance in cooperating with the government for maintaining efforts to serve Oman and its citizens, while at the same time advancing the supreme interest of the country.



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, during the meeting.

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

HH Sayyid Fahd spoke about a number of points that enhance co-operation between the two councils within their strive to consolidate joint coordination.

During the joint meeting, emphasis was laid on government giving priority to initiatives that support the role of the Majlis Ashshura as a partner in the national action aimed at implementing the plans of comprehensive development.

In pursuance of this approach, service ministers will answer Majlis

- COMES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF JOINT COORDINATION
- ENHANCES COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNCILS
- EMPHASIS ON GOVERNMENT GIVING PRIORITY TO INITIATIVES
- PROMOTES GOALS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ashshura requests to present and discuss ministerial statements on ways to carry out projects that focus on providing the best services to citizens. This is in addition to dealing positively with the Majlis Ashshura's proposals about plans and programmes that are implemented at each stage.

The joint meeting reviewed the agenda, which included many topics, among them steps to activate the role of the joint ministerial co-ordination committee. **TURN TO P2**

S P O T L I G H T

WINGED GUESTS NEED SPECIAL CARE TOO

P4



MINISTRIES TOLD TO SUBMIT BUDGET ESTIMATES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy have issued Financial Circular No 1/2023 on rules for preparing 2024 budget estimates. The step comes in line with the implementation of national strategies and programmes of five-year development plans for achieving comprehensive development as per the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The financial circular requires all ministries and government departments to prepare estimates for their respective budgets (current budgets and development budgets).

The government departments are expected to submit their proposed annual plan drafts that include the following: general goals and indices for accomplishing them, programmes and initiatives that achieve those goals, the proposed budgets set for them and the time plan for their implementation and criteria on

THE DEPARTMENTS ARE ALSO REQUIRED TO PRESENT THEIR MEDIUM TERM PLANS IN LINE WITH THE RESPECTIVE REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE SCHEDULES

which the 2024 budget estimates are designated, compared to the 2023 budget. The departments are also required to present their medium-term plans in line with the respective revenue and expenditure schedules.

The circular stresses that all government units must submit the estimated budgets (current and development) for the fiscal year 2024 electronically, and enter the required budget estimates (revenues and expenditures) for existing budgets, the additional budget and the budget set for

operating new projects. The budget estimates are required to be sent before the end of July 2023.

The circular indicates that it is necessary to submit a list of disbursement (liquidity) estimates expected during the year 2024 and the expected disbursement for the remainder of the year 2023. These are required for each development project within the context of the ongoing implementation stages and based on the entity's records.

The expected date for completing project implementation have to be specified.

This is in addition to submitting a list of the progress made in strategic programmes cited within the "Strategic Programmes Folder" of the 10th Five-Year Plan until the date of the report. Also, the percentages of achievement of each programme have to be specified. The required statements are required to be dispatched via the 2024 Development Budget System. — ONA

‘Wild Oman: Wonder of Arabia’ to feature on foreign TV channel

KABER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman's serene beaches, mountains and clean environment will be featured on a foreign television channel, the premiere of which will be held in Muscat soon.

The film titled 'Wild Oman: Wonder of Arabia', made with the support of the Environment Society of Oman, will be screened exclusively at the Omantel Headquarters on May 22.

Oman Daily Observer and Oman (Arabic) are media sponsors of the film, which took more than a year to make with Omani and foreign crew of the film travelling the length and breadth of the country.

"We are featuring Oman's immaculate landscape rare animals, including Arabian leopard, turtles and Arabian Humpback, Ibex, and the like, which are truly Omani, and birds migrating to Oman. It is to safeguard all creatures and natural habitats and anything that only Oman exclusively has. Sometimes we tend to overlook," says Maisa al Hooti, whose



brainchild is this series of films, which began a year ago.

Maisa is a passionate underwater photographer and conservation advocate who runs 'Oman in Focus' for many years, to feature Oman's unique environmental assets on a global platform.

With the documentary film on Oman, from Musandam to Dhofar, Maisa and her team believe it's good to shed more

light on the fact that we need to protect nature and other creatures around us. It's also an attempt to tell the world that Oman is home to many of these unique animals and birds. Many people travel to other countries to see them.

"An international crew team does the whole shoot and post-production of the documentary along with the local craftsmen and experts who work hand in hand with them. **TURN TO P5**



Sayyid Fahd receives Majlis Ash'shura chairman, members of Majlis's office



FROM PAGE 1

The panel has a mandate to enhance joint cooperation between the two sides towards promoting the goals of sustainable development.

On its part, the Majlis Ash'shura would continue to spread social awareness about all that provides a realistic representation of the joint national action.

The Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura and members of Majlis Ash'shura's Office underscored the significance of the meeting. They touched on various visions for maintaining joint coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash'shura. They also expressed thanks to the government and its enlightened leadership for their keenness on consolidating pillars of constructive cooperation between the two councils. They expressed the confidence that the outcome of the meeting would enhance joint coordination aimed at maintaining Oman's accomplishments made as part of its march of progress and prosperity.

— ONA



PHOTOS BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI



Al Kawthar: Distribution of Interim Cash Dividends for 2023

The Management of Al Kawthar Sharia Complaint Fund approved the distribution of an interim cash dividend of 3%.

It was also decided to distribute cash dividends to the Fund Subscribers according to the unitholders register as of May 30, 2023. Based on this, the last day to subscribe is Thursday, May 25, 2023, to be eligible for the dividend distribution.

For more inquiries, please call: 22300400

+968 22300400

www.tanmia.om

PO Box 3028, Ruwi PC 112, Sultanate of Oman



Tathmeer: Distribution of Interim Cash Dividends for 2023

The Management of Tanmia GCC Diversified Fund approved the distribution of an interim cash dividend of 3%.

It was also decided to distribute cash dividends to the Fund Subscribers according to the unitholders register as of May 30, 2023. Based on this, the last day to subscribe is Thursday, May 25, 2023, to be eligible for the dividend distribution.

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CAF MIGRATORY BIRDS TO GET MORE PROTECTION

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The Central Asian Flyway of migratory birds covers about 30 countries, and 11 of them have come forward to take protection initiatives. The Sultanate of Oman is one of them.

Of the recorded 535 bird species in the Sultanate of Oman, 80 per cent are migratory birds, according to the Environment Authority.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, took part in the meeting held in early May 2023 in New Delhi, India.

The meeting aimed to discuss and agree on a foundational framework for Central Asian Flyway birds and draw conclusions from the report on the status analysis of bird paths in Central Asia launched in 2022.

The other ten countries are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, India, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The landscape of Central Asia consists of steppe, marshlands, desert and mountains, and it is home to a vast number of species.

The migratory species make the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) important, and it covers the continental area of Eurasia between the Arctic and Indian



Oceans as well as the associated island chains. The flyway comprises many migration routes for the water birds.

“The CAF covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory water bird species, including 29

globally threatened species, which breed, migrate and winter within the region,” stated the Convention on Migratory Species.

The challenges the migratory birds currently face are threats from the wetlands, grasslands and



other habitats. Plastic pollution in freshwater has also been a concern, and another factor is light pollution. The countries are making concrete efforts towards the protection of migratory birds.

In Oman, 70 sites have been identified as important areas for birds of migration. One of the favourite places for birdwatching is the Bar Al Hakman wetland reserve in Al Wusta as well as other sites in Dhofar and Al Sharqiyah.

The meeting of the range countries of the Central Asian Flyway in 2021 highlighted the accelerated habitat loss globally during the last decade. The increased weather variability and climate change have resulted in the loss of biodiversity for migratory birds.

Migratory birds use this flyway to complete their annual cycle of breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding. The countries have decided to formalise an action plan for the conservation of migratory birds.

Keep safe distance from fraudsters

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Royal Oman Police and other competent authorities have urged mobile phone users to be vigilant as fraudsters across the globe, including in the Sultanate of Oman, are constantly finding new ways to exploit people for financial gain, especially by scamming people out of their hard-earned money. Cybercrimes often cause enormous financial and material losses for the victims as well as the economy.

ROP has warned of a method in which fraudsters communicate with targeted people via text messages offering jobs with a specific daily salary.

The recipient of these messages is required to open bank accounts through which sums of money resulting from various fraud operations are transferred and then re-transferred to external bank accounts. ROP advised everyone not to respond to these fraudulent messages and the need to report immediately when exposed to such situations.

“I received a WhatsApp message saying that my number has been picked by Meta (Facebook owner) as an online assistant, whereby I can earn up to RO 200-300

per day,” said a Bangladeshi expatriate who managed to escape being a victim on advice from his boss.

According to experts, individuals can be victims of various types of fraud, including financial loss and leak of personal information, that is carried out by sending messages via e-mails or social media, including WhatsApp.

The main intention of fraudsters is to get individuals to reveal sensitive information such as bank account details, passwords, or other personal information that could be exploited for illegal purposes. Recently, the Directorate-General of Criminal Investigation at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) detected a new criminal method via the Imo app through an account bearing ROP’s logo and targeting citizens and residents.

The conman tells the victims that they were involved in violations that should be settled by providing their bank account information which the fraudster later used to withdraw cash from their accounts. ROP, which advises citizens and residents not to disclose their personal or bank account information on social media, has been working on an anti-fraud public awareness campaign to tackle instances of cyber fraud.

Oman hosts women affairs meet



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday hosted the 1st meeting of the GCC Standing Committee for Women Affairs.

The meeting discussed the status of women in GCC countries and the decision of

the Ministerial Council in its 154th session on joint GCC action in the field of women's affairs.

On the sidelines of the meeting, Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, met with Jassim



bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC.

During this meeting, the two sides reviewed means of enhancing the role of gulf women and their active participation in the joint GCC action. — ONA

OFFICE OF MAJLIS ASH’SHURA REVIEWS EMPLOYMENT OF MEDICINE GRADUATES

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash’shura reviewed the response of the minister of health to a report prepared by the Youth and Human Resources Committee regarding the Ministry of Labour’s plan to employ graduates of medical and assistant medical disciplines.

The office also reviewed a report prepared by the Youth and Human Resources Committee regarding the expressed desire on the implementation of the innovative employment project in the Sultanate of Oman. The report included an introduction and a summary of the expressed desire and its importance beside



the most important targets for implementing the project. It also included the opinion of the Ministry of Economy and the Development Bank on the proposal and the opinion of the committee.

Also discussed at the meeting was the report of the Youth and

Human Resources Committee regarding the expressed desire to declare the Omani Mixed Martial Arts Association. The meeting also reviewed the report of the Health and Environmental Committee regarding the expressed desire to implement a project to produce medical intravenous fluids from fresh date solution.

In addition, the Office of Majlis Ash’shura reviewed a number of follow-up applications including a request for briefing presented to the chairman of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) about the private food projects.

— ONA

Mobile emergency alerts trials on

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A number of residents and citizens across the capital received an emergency warning alert on their mobile phones as part of the trial runs conducted by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Omantel and Ooredoo.

Several local residents who confirmed to the Observer about receiving the trial ‘alert’ on their mobile phones around 10 am on Tuesday, were initially clueless about the purpose of having such alerts at a time when there have been no reports of cyclones and rains due to unstable weather.

“I was totally clueless about the campaign started by the government and had no idea about the trial runs. All mobile phones at my home received this alert,” said Sara Khan, who was among the first to enquire about the message with the Observer.

While most of them were surprised on



receiving this message, some complained of not getting them at all or even once.

The first-of-its-kind service in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the scheduled timeline has been carried out in the coastal wilayats of the Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta governorates.

It will be carried out in Dhofar Governorate on Wednesday.

The service provides several features including broadcasting instructions and a number of awareness messages to alert of catastrophes such as hurricanes, tsunamis, heavy rains, strong winds, and poor horizontal vision in four languages: Arabic, English, Hindi, and Urdu.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is

currently working on a complete revamp of the early warning system under a three-year plan which will be completed by 2025-26.

Under the new system, CAA will be able to provide accurate and localised advisories, which will save human lives and minimise damages to properties, Naif al Abri, Chairman, told the Observer.

While a new automatic meteorological station has been established in Barka, the new early warning project has been supported by the directives of His Majesty the Sultan with RO 8 million.

Upgrades to the early warning system will help in flood forecasting, including drawing the map of flowing wadis seven to eight hours in advance.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Khadouri, Director General, of Oman Meteorology, said the Muzn programme seeks to upgrade the early warning system, train the national human resources technically and scientifically, and raise the efficiency and quality of warnings, alerts, meteorological services, and early warning.

Most parts of Oman to get rains from Thursday

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 16

Oman Meteorology has warned of scattered rain over the coastal and mountainous areas of

Dhofar Governorate, starting from Thursday until Monday. The eastern and central Al Hajar Mountains (Al Dakhiliyah, and Muscat) are expected to get isolated rains, including occasional thunderstorms in parts of Al Sharqiyah North and South.

The governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Batinah South, Al Batinah North, and Al Buraimi will get rain starting from Thursday until Sunday.

Muscat (Al Seeb station) had a temperature of around 38°, which was relatively milder compared to the last three days.

Suhar recorded the highest temperature 47.4° on Tuesday followed by Qurayat (47.3°) and Liwa (46.9°) as the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman witnessed a noticeable rise in temperatures during the past 24 hours.

Nizwa (43°), Bidbid (44°), Al Rustaq (42°), and Salalah ((33°) while in the capital Al Seeb ((42°) and Al Amerat ((45°) were the hottest places on Tuesday.

Temperatures are likely to come down marginally to around 40° in some cities during the course of the week, the met official said.



WINGED GUESTS NEED SPECIAL CARE TOO

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WITH the temperature shooting up, experts are advising us to drink additional water, which works as a cooling agent to keep our body system coping with the weather. One segment of the ecosystem, however, needs our attention. This is the time when birds run short of water and need attention in all possible ways.

With mercury soaring to almost 50 degrees Celsius in some areas of the Sultanate of Oman and summer becoming harsher day by day, avian creatures and stray animals are finding it extremely difficult to cope with the weather. In some cases, they are surrendering to sunstroke and dehydration, leading to death.

Reports from ornithologists show that more birds die during the summer than in any other month. There is a certain point where the heat can be overbearing, and birds can suffer or even die, although they are able to regulate themselves to adapt to the heat.

Hence, birds lovers are calling upon people to spare some thoughts for these mute creatures, which can only suffer in silence for want of water to drink and cool down.

“Let’s not forget the birds around us and give them extra water to drink and bathe. It is the best way to help them stay cool and alive,” says Raghuram Pandit, a bird lover who dares the heat to keep some water and grains for the migratory birds in Al Ansab.

“What we need to do is to add multiple bird baths to the yard, and we can turn around for ground-level basins, pedestal baths, and hanging baths or waterers so that these birds can help themselves to survive the scorching heat,” he added.

One can keep a bowl of water on the windowsills or create a bird zone in the compounds where birds can frequent in the

hope of having some refreshments and thus help the nature preserve the beaked creatures.

“We are so happy to keep bowls of water and some green foliage to welcome our friends who visit regularly and during their ‘meal times’ that are already regulated by themselves,” said Susmitha, who hit the headlines for having the largest flock of avian friends visiting her courtyard regularly.

“It’s indeed a treat to watch the birds take a dip in the bowls and drink their heart fill. We make it a point to keep the grains and water for the parrots, crows and other birds from 5 am and as they flutter their wings in joy, it is a rare moment of rejoicing,” says Rajan, Susmitha’s husband.

Reports suggest that hundreds of thousands of birds die the world over each summer, and the onus of protecting them against extreme climatic conditions lies on every responsible individual.



“I make it a point to keep water in one earthen pot and some millet grains in the other as my children look forward to welcoming the birds to visit,” says Vijay, a resident who feeds them around the year.

It might not cost us anything except for a few minutes from our busy schedules. However, sparing a thought for these hapless creatures, which move around us in agony for water, is a sight one should not ignore.

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RAGHURAM
PANDIT





Right to live in the inclusive world

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 16

If we look at disability from a global perspective, the World Health Organization (WHO) data suggests 15 per cent of the world's population lives with some form of disability. Additionally, almost 240 million children are living with disabilities worldwide.

To have a sustainable life for all, including children with disabilities, is the objective of Oman Vision 2040. The National Centre for Statistics and Information data mentions 42,304 people with disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman, 10,880 among them are children.

With specialised services available for children, the government is putting in many efforts to bring positive changes in the lives of people with disability. However, raising awareness regarding empowering people with disabilities and removing negative stereotypes

and misconceptions in the community is not just the responsibility of the government and non-government entities but also the of the country's citizens.

In order to take a step towards fulfilling this responsibility, the students of Public Relations major from the Department of Mass Communication in UTAS Salalah launched a campaign titled 'We Were Born Unique' under the supervision of Dr Arafat al Jameel.

The team dedicated one whole week to various activities for children with disabilities.

During the campaign's inauguration, the students enlightened the audience regarding the uniqueness of people with disabilities. After that, many activities followed throughout the week, like visits to Al Saada School for Girls and Al Wafaa Centre for people with special needs.

In cooperation with Al Wafaa Centre in Salalah, the students organised an interactive event at



Salalah Grand Mall to spread the campaign's message to a broader societal audience and showcase the talents of people with disabilities.

Dr Raid Belkhair, Assistant Dean for Academic Support, Dr Nawal Salahaddin, Head of the Mass Communication Department, Dr Arafat al Jameel, Campaign Supervisor, Dr Jihad Bani Khalaf, Assistant Professor from UTAS Salalah, and social media celebrities attended the

event.

Mohammed bin Humaid al Kalbani, Director-General of Social Development in Dhofar, presided over the event's closing ceremony as the guest of honour.

Ghada Ali al Daas, one of the PR students, said, "This campaign is a beginning towards the non-ending support we can extend towards this section of the society. We will ensure our contributions in every small and big way."

People with disabilities have many experiences concerning their environment and surroundings. Their impairments lead to functional difficulties like communicating, making friends or taking care of themselves. For people with disabilities to live better and more fulfilling lives, society must eliminate communication and information, physical and attitudinal barriers and discrimination in any form. Every person with a disability has the right to be included in this beautiful world.

Workshop hones skills of teaching students with disabilities



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 16

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, in cooperation with the Embassy of the United States of America in Muscat, recently carried out a workshop on "Teaching Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities".

The workshop targeted 25 participants from teachers at special education schools, supervisors of the Department of Special Education, and senior supervisors from the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision in the ministry.

Shannouna al Habsi, Assistant Director-General of Special Education at MoE, said: "The workshop comes with the aim of providing the participants with the knowledge and skills of Universal Design for Learning, introducing them to the practical applications of strategies for teaching people with disabilities, exchanging experiences among them, and getting acquainted with the different international

models for teaching students with disabilities."

The American expert Sandra Story, a specialist in education for students with special needs and education for the disabled, and the presenter of this workshop, said: "We reviewed a number of concepts of learning difficulties, and we also worked to enrich these participants with strategies to support the educational process for learners with disabilities." She added that these learners with disabilities have human needs and are not necessarily special, as these strategies support the learning process for all learners of all abilities.

Cameron Tyrone, Deputy Chief of Public Affairs and Acting Director of the Embassy's Media and Cultural Affairs Department, said: "The US Embassy is proud to partner with the Ministry of Education on the special needs' workshops for educators. The joint efforts to bring a US Department of State specialist to teach this two-day programme is a sign of the strong partnership between the US and Oman."

'Wild Oman: Wonder of Arabia' to feature on foreign TV channel

FROM PAGE 1

They studied each creature carefully and prepared a time-lapse of animals, spent time with them, and learned how to capture them. And these experts helped us ease our work," Maisa adds.

The documentary is a two-part sequel, the first of which showcases the wildlife and

unique biodiversity of Oman. The second documentary features the various conservation efforts that are under way in Oman.

Oman has rich habitats in Musandam, Sur, Dimaniyat Island, Raz al Jinz, Ras al Hadd, Hasik, Masirah Island, Jabal Samhan, Bar al Hikman, Al Wusta, Nizwa, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and so on that are

aply filmed as part of the film. She attributes great success to the support and cooperation they received from the Environmental Authority (EA) and the Office of Conservation of the Environment at the Diwan Office. These agencies have been instrumental in sharing their knowledge and expertise with Oman in Focus Team.

"We are glad to have the support from the government and private companies, all of whom believe that this project will help the country welcome more FDI, receive more tourists and mark Oman's name on the global tourism map. All our sponsors are our strength in making such a project happen, and we owe it to them," Maisa adds.

Defence ministry secretary-general receives French Senate delegation

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday a delegation from the French Senate.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA





Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non- refundable)
125/2023	Providing general cleaning services for the buildings of Al-Wafa centers for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in both (Salalah - Taqa - Mirbat) and the building of the Autism Unit of the Directorate General of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of cleaning, washing and pest control services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first or second degree	Monday 5-6-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 25-6-2023 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Wednesday 17/5/2023.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om



Rohingya in Myanmar count the dead after Cyclone Mocha

SITTWE: Rohingya families in cyclone-hit Myanmar buried loved ones outside shattered villages and searched the seashore for the missing, expecting little help from a government that denies their identity.

Cyclone Mocha snapped bridges, downed power lines and ruptured close-lying huts in displacement camps and villages across Rakhine state, leaving tens of thousands even more on the edge.

On Tuesday, many were trying to pick through piles of debris that had once roofed their homes or clear fallen trees from village paths.

Others were looking for family members not seen since the cyclone made landfall. It was the most powerful storm to hit the region in over a decade.

Dozens were reported dead and more than one hundred were missing.

“We were trying to run but the water was very high and dragged us down,” Sar Hla Ma Kha, 40, said from Basara village.

Many walked the shore searching for family members

swept away by the raging waters.

Some found the bodies of their loved ones.

Aa Bul Hu Son, 66, on Tuesday buried his daughter, the latest member of his family to have been taken by the storm.

“I just found her dead body in the lake in the village and buried her right away. I can’t find any words to express my loss,” he said.

“Nine out of my 14 family members were killed,” he said next to the hastily dug grave within sight of the shore.

As the small group said Islamic prayers over Aa Bul Hu Son’s daughter and lowered her body into the soil, a plane took off from Rakhine state capital Sittwe’s airport a few kilometres behind the group.

Contact was slowly being re-established with Sittwe, a city of around 150,000 people, with roads being cleared and Internet connections re-established.

Images broadcast by state media showed troops unloading aid at the airport, and state media reported junta chief Min Aung Hlaing had visited to view the damage. — **AFP**



A girl looks outside a window from her destroyed house after Cyclone Mocha hit in Sittwe. — **AFP**



A screen grab shows black smoke and fire at Omdurman market in Omdurman, Sudan. – **Reuters**

Air strikes, artillery fire escalate as factions battle in Sudan capital

DUBAI: Air strikes and artillery fire intensified sharply across Sudan’s capital early on Tuesday, residents said, as the army sought to defend key bases from paramilitary rivals it has been fighting for more than a month.

The air strikes, explosions and clashes could be heard in the south of Khartoum, and there was heavy shelling across the River Nile in parts of the adjoining cities of Bahri and Omdurman, witnesses said. It has caused a humanitarian crisis that threatens to destabilise the region, displacing more than 700,000 people inside Sudan and forcing about 200,000 to flee into neighbouring countries.

Those who have remained in

the capital are struggling to survive as food supplies dwindle, health services collapse and lawlessness spreads.

Officials have recorded 676 deaths and more than 5,500 injuries, but the real toll is expected to be far higher with many reports of bodies left in the streets and people struggling to bury the dead.

Fighting has surged both in Khartoum and in Geneina, capital of West Darfur, since the two warring parties began talks in Jeddah brokered by Saudi Arabia and the United States more than a week ago.

The talks have produced a statement of principles about providing access for aid supplies

and protecting civilians, but mechanisms for setting up humanitarian corridors and agreeing to a ceasefire are still being discussed.

Both sides had previously announced several ceasefires, none of which stopped the fighting.

The army has relied largely on air strikes and shelling, only occasionally engaging in ground fighting, as it seeks to push back RSF forces that took up positions in neighbourhoods across Khartoum soon after the fighting erupted on April 15.

The RSF attacked major military bases in northern Omdurman and southern Khartoum on Tuesday in an apparent attempt to

prevent the army from deploying heavy weaponry and fighter jets, residents and witnesses said.

The RSF also said in a statement that it had captured hundreds of army troops in a counter attack in Bahri, releasing a video of rows of men in uniform sitting on the ground as RSF fighters celebrated around them. Reuters could not immediately verify the claim, which the army denied.

The army has been trying to cut off RSF supply lines from outside the capital and to secure strategic sites including the airport in central Khartoum and the major Al Jaili oil refinery in Bahri, where fighting flared again on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

Gazans amid the rubble of homes flattened by fighting

BEIT LAHIA: Dozens of homes were destroyed during five days of fighting, which erupted when the Israeli military launched deadly strikes on top militants from the Islamic Jihad militant group.

Nabhan family, has been trying to care for her children and grandchildren, many of whom have disabilities, since they were left homeless on Saturday.

“I borrow clothes from the neighbours for them. I didn’t take anything with me,” she said, in the Bir al Najeh neighbourhood of

northern Gaza.

The family said they were warned in a phone call from the Israeli military that a strike was imminent, but the army did not detail why it targeted the house when asked.

In total, 103 homes were completely destroyed and 140 severely damaged in the fighting, the United Nations said on Tuesday, citing officials in Gaza.

“People were screaming and we ran away... now 45 people are staying here, where will they go?



A residential building that housed the apartment of five disabled Palestinian siblings after it was bombed by Israel in Gaza. – **Reuters**

They need shelter,” Nabhan said.

Israel and Palestinians in Gaza have fought multiple wars in recent years.

The ruins of past conflicts are dotted across the densely populated Palestinian territory.

With Gaza’s poverty rate at 53 per cent, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, few people can afford to rebuild their homes.

In Deir al Balah in central Gaza, children clambered atop a huge mound of concrete and rebar

flattened by Israeli bombardment.

In the tightly-packed neighbourhood, Mohammed Zidan’s home escaped a direct hit but the blast was so powerful it blew out the walls.

“Because you want to strike one person, you don’t need to destroy a whole apartment complex,” said the 29-year-old.

“I’m a young man, living in my house, with my children in my home. I’m focusing on my work. What’s my fault, that you make me pay the price?” — **AFP**

TOKYO

Japan, China ministers call on defence hotline

Japan and China used a new military hotline for the first time on Tuesday, their defence ministries said, following years of negotiations to set up the communication channel.

Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada held a 20-minute call with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu, Tokyo’s ministry said in a statement.

Beijing confirmed the call, saying the air and maritime hotline would “contribute to further maintaining regional



peace and stability.”

The hotline had been mooted by both sides for over a decade as a way to avert unexpected clashes in the East China Sea.

Recently, Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently said he wants “constructive and stable” ties with China. — **AFP**

DUBAI

UAE invites Syria’s Assad to COP28 summit

The United Arab Emirates has invited Syrian President Bashar al Assad to the COP28 climate summit it is hosting at the end of the year.

The invitation was extended by UAE President Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Syrian state news agency SANA reported after the UAE Embassy in Damascus tweeted the same.

“COP28 is committed to an inclusive COP process that produces transformational



solutions,” a COP28 spokesperson said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters.

“This can only happen if we have everyone in the room.”

Thousands of world leaders, diplomats and dignitaries are expected to attend the summit in Dubai in December. — **Reuters**

TANTHIRIMALE

Farmers protest after elephants destroy crops

Angry villagers stormed a remote government office in Sri Lanka on Tuesday, officials said, a day after a herd of up to 50 elephants ravaged farmers’ fields near a wildlife reserve.

In what local farmers said was the biggest such incident involving the protected animals in recent memory, the elephants munched through nearly half their crops across seven villages in the island’s north.

Wildlife officials riding tractors and armed with rifles



drove the herd away from villages with fire crackers. Farmers and other officials rushed to a school fearing the elephants could harm students.

No one was hurt in the incident electrocuted or poisoned by farmers. — **AFP**



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In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



IMRAN BLAMES AGENCIES FOR VIOLENCE

Former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party accused intelligence agencies on Tuesday of being responsible for shootings and arson during violent protests that followed his arrest last week.

The former cricket superstar has waged a campaign of defiance against Pakistan's military, which controls the country's intelligence services, since being ousted from power last year.

Khan, 70, is Pakistan's most popular politician and his arrest on corruption charges last week, following months of political crisis, prompted his supporters to pour onto the streets of several cities.

■ TBILISI



GEORGIA TO RESUME RUSSIA FLIGHTS

Georgian Airways will resume direct flights to Russia from Saturday, the country's civil aviation authority said, drawing criticism from Ukraine and the European Union.

The move comes after Moscow lifted a flight ban last week in a significant warming of ties with Georgia, with which it has had no formal diplomatic relations since Russia defeated its southern neighbour in a short war in 2008. Georgia has in recent months tried to balance rapprochement with its giant neighbour and its aspirations to join the EU. "This latest decision by Georgia's authorities raises concerns in terms of Georgia's EU path," EU foreign affairs spokesman Peter Stano said.

■ KYIV



UKRAINE SC CHIEF DISMISSED

The head of Ukraine's Supreme Court was dismissed from his post on Tuesday after being detained in a bribery investigation which anti-corruption authorities cast as their biggest-ever case.

Kyiv has redoubled efforts to clamp down on corruption despite Russia's war, and doing so is vital to meet the conditions for joining the European Union.

Oleksandr Omelchenko, a prosecutor at the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), said the Supreme Court's top judge had been detained as part of a suspected bribery scheme and was awaiting a formal "notice of suspicion".

Election results show Erdogan dominating in quake-hit region

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party came out on top in Sunday's elections in 10 of the 11 provinces hit by February's earthquakes, with analysts saying his vow to rebuild devastated cities had reassured voters in what are mostly AKP strongholds.

The ruling party's strong showing, defying initial expectations in February that the quakes would hurt its support, was also driven by doubts about the opposition's ability to meet voters' expectations.

Nationwide, the AKP won a new parliamentary majority with its alliance partners, while Erdogan, 69, led comfortably in the presidential vote ahead of a runoff with his main rival on May 28.

The powerful earthquakes on February 6 killed more than 50,000 people and left millions homeless in Türkiye, causing destruction across 11 provinces from Adana near the Mediterranean coast to Diyarbakir in the mainly Kurdish southeast. Despite the huge toll of deaths and injuries and mass migration afterwards, voter turnout was still very high in the region, at between 85-89 per cent in most of the 11 provinces and above 80 per cent in the others. The nationwide average was 88.9 per cent. Many Turks who fled the region returned to vote.

Kurdish voters in the region came out strongly in support of Erdogan's main rival, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, in the presidential race, but the president was still ahead in voting in eight of the affected provinces.

Kilicdaroglu, 74, was clearly ahead in two provinces and in the



A vendor makes his way on a street, with election campaign posters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan in the background, in Istanbul. — Reuters

worst-hit province of Hatay, they each got 48 per cent support, with the opposition leader marginally ahead.

Critics and earthquake survivors had expressed anger over a slow initial quake response by government and lax enforcement of building rules — failures they said cost lives.

But dozens of people Reuters spoke to soon after the quake were thankful for the aid of the government and security forces, while also complaining that they had arrived late. Interviews since

then provided little evidence that the issue would change how people voted.

Ibrahim Kadir Demir, who lost his daughter and grandchildren in the earthquake, said he was happy with government services, adding: "I wish our president had won outright (in the first round)"

Erdogan's AKP has prioritised construction during its 20 years in power and this has helped to drive growth.

Pollster Mehmet Ali Kulat said the opposition alliance had failed to win over enough voters and

they had ultimately put their faith in the government to improve their plight.

"Earthquake survivors had seriously criticised the government response in polls and they said they would not vote for them. But these people were also looking for an answer to the question of who 'will rebuild my house, who will re-build my workplace?'" Kulat said.

"They see that it is Erdogan who can do this. This is one of the most important factors," he added.

— Reuters

Pilots seek Indian govt help to quit Go First

NEW DELHI: Pilots at India's Go First face delays getting paid due to the airline's bankruptcy process and want the government to allow them to take up new jobs without serving long notice periods, a group representing the pilots said in a letter seen by Reuters.

In the letter dated May 15, the Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) asks the aviation ministry to intervene, saying Go First is not issuing the necessary documents to pilots wanting to resign. Go First and the ministry did not immediately respond to questions.

Go First was granted bankruptcy protection last week, but many pilots have been looking for new jobs in light of the crisis and in early May flocked to a hotel for walk-in interviews organised by Air India.

But an Indian government rule from 2017 mandates pilots to serve a one-year notice period, and co-pilots six months, saying it is in the public interest to avoid sudden departures that can result in last minute flight cancellation and travel disruption. The FIP said notice periods globally were typically one month, and India should allow pilots at financially distressed airlines to resign immediately.

— Reuters



The block on Go First pilots risks sending "a negative signal that spreads an atmosphere of anxiety and stress amongst pilots," the FIP said in its letter.

The tussle with pilots is the latest headache for Go First, which is also facing a court battle with airline leasing companies over the bankruptcy proceedings, which prevent lessors from taking back their planes from the airline.

Go First blames a lack of engine supplies from Pratt & Whitney for its financial troubles, an allegation the US firm says is without merit. Go First won an arbitration order in its favour in March to require Pratt to supply spare engines, and is seeking to enforce it in a Delaware court.

On Tuesday, its court filing showed the airline faces the ongoing danger of failure if it doesn't get spare engines quickly. Pratt has argued the arbitration award is not enforceable.

UK promises 45,000 seasonal agricultural worker visas

LONDON: The UK government on Tuesday promised to award 45,000 visas for seasonal workers in the agricultural sector next year despite calls from within the ruling Conservative party to cut immigration.

After a drop during the pandemic, net migration has been steadily on the rise and is expected to hit a record high this year, British media have reported. Official figures are expected this month.

Hardline Home Secretary Suella Braverman said at a conference in London on Monday that there was "no good reason" Britain cannot train its own lorry drivers and fruit pickers to drive down immigration. But Downing Street defended the decision to grant the visas again.

The current rules "provide us the flexibility to flex the system depending on UK need," a spokesman said on Tuesday, adding that Britain has a "historically low" unemployment rate.

The announcement of the visas allocation comes alongside a new package of measures to support the farming industry. British farmers have grappled with soaring costs with the pandemic's



British Home Secretary Suella Braverman leaves Downing Street following the weekly cabinet meeting, in London, Britain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

disruption of supply chains and the war in Ukraine driving up the price of fertiliser, feed, fuel and energy.

Tougher immigration rules following Brexit, which ended free movement within EU member states, have made it harder to hire workers from the bloc, which British agriculture has traditionally relied upon.

The industry is also facing competition from imported products.

Ahead of a UK Farm to Fork Summit hosted by Downing Street on Tuesday, the government

UN blueprint to reduce plastic waste by 80%

WASHINGTON: Countries can reduce plastic pollution by 80 per cent by 2040 using existing technologies and by making major policy changes, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said in a new report.

The Kenya-based UN body released its analysis of policy options to tackle the plastic waste crisis two weeks before countries convene in Paris for a second round of negotiations to craft a global treaty aimed at eliminating plastic waste.

The report focuses on three main market shifts needed to create a "circular" economy that keeps produced items in circulation as long as possible: reuse, recycling and reorientation of packaging from plastic to alternative materials.

"If we follow this road-map, including in negotiations on the plastic pollution deal, we can deliver major economic, social and environmental wins," said Inger Andersen, UNEP executive director.

The treaty negotiations, known as INC2, will take place from May 29 to June 2 and are expected to result in key inputs for the first treaty draft, which needs to be done before the third round of negotiations in Kenya in November. UNEP estimates that government promotion of reuse options like refillable bottle systems or deposit return schemes could reduce 30 per cent of plastic waste by 2040.

It also says recycling could achieve an additional 20 per cent by that year if "it becomes a more stable and profitable venture" and fossil fuel subsidies are removed, and that the replacement of products like plastics wraps and sachets with compostable materials could yield an additional 17 per cent reduction. — Reuters

Impasse in the US on debt ceiling



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

As US President Joe Biden prepares to reengage in negotiations with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other influential Republicans on the critical issue of the debt ceiling to find common ground amidst a landscape riddled with challenges, constitutional experts warn of the potential ramifications should the they fail to forge an agreement on this matter.

The stakes are high. Inaction or an impasse in these deliberations would catapult the United States perilously close to defaulting on its debt obligations. Such a scenario, once unthinkable, would have far-reaching consequences, reverberating across financial markets worldwide and threatening to upend the delicate balance of the global economic order.

The intricate negotiations carry

profound implications for the US and the world. The outcome will determine whether the United States treads a path of fiscal responsibility or inches closer to the precipice of a potential default. President Biden's leadership and the engagement of Speaker McCarthy and other congressional leaders will be pivotal in charting a course forward that avoids the impending danger.

The eyes of the world are fixed on this crucial juncture, cognizant of the potential reverberations that could ensue from a failure to reach a consensus. Their ability to rise above political divides and find common ground will determine not only the economic fate of the United States but also its standing on the global stage. The world awaits the outcome with bated

IF THE US DEFAULTS ON ITS DEBT, IT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISH THE DOMINANCE OF THE DOLLAR IN THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE

breath, hopeful for a resolution that will avert financial calamity and reaffirm the strength and resilience of America's democratic institutions. If the US defaults on its debt, it will significantly diminish the dominance of the dollar in the global financial landscape and weaken the country's ability to shape international affairs.

Adding to Washington's woes, the unresolved banking crisis and the intensifying bipartisan struggle over the debt ceiling further exacerbate the situation, with small

and medium-sized banks facing a potential "death spiral" and a subsequent economic slowdown.

As the world's largest economy that leverages the strength of the dollar, the economic problems plaguing the United States could have negative ramifications for other countries. Could a US debt default unleash a "financial atomic bomb"?

In the United States, in the last few years, an atypical pattern has emerged, where the two major political parties engage in high-stakes brinkmanship when it comes to the debt ceiling. What was once a procedural formality has now evolved into a formidable challenge, as bipartisan agreement on this critical matter becomes increasingly elusive with each passing year.

The debt ceiling, once a routine legislative procedure, has now morphed into a battleground for partisan disputes and ideological clashes. Gone are the days when raising the debt ceiling was viewed as a "routine" step to ensure the continued functioning of the government and the fulfilment of its financial obligations.

President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress have been pushing for increase in the government's borrowing limit of \$31.4 trillion without any conditions since the start of the year. However, Republicans, who hold a slim majority in the House of Representatives, insist on establishing new spending limits for the future before approving further payments to cover previously authorised expenditures.

Greens lose appeal as voters fear cost of policies

SARAH MARSH

A slide in support for Germany's Greens, a junior partner in Olaf Scholz's coalition, could force the party to consider scaling back its climate ambitions as voters fret over their financial and social cost.

Support for the Greens slumped by a third to 12 per cent in the state of Bremen on Sunday compared with the last election in 2019, according to projected results. The vote reflected a drop in support at a federal level too, to around 15 per cent in opinion polls from a peak of 23-24 per cent last year.

With Russia's war on Ukraine and a subsequent energy crisis overshadowing Scholz's first year in office, the Greens won kudos for having long called for a more hawkish stance on authoritarian states and prioritising renewable energy. The party's relatively youthful leaders were also seen as more outspoken and relatable than Scholz, 64, helping them win new voters.

Their appeal has faded this year, however, as Germans focus more on domestic matters and consider how much the Greens' climate policies will cost and require in lifestyle adjustments. This has sent some voters back to Scholz's Social Democrats or the opposition conservatives.

In Bremen, support for the party dropped after its transport senator Maike Schaefer scrapped the so-called "bread-roll button" on parking ticket machines that gave locals a short spell of free parking to pop into their bakery or other stores. This was part of a broader Greens campaign to encourage public transport use that has angered many in a country particularly attached to its cars.

Another flashpoint at national level has been a proposed ban on new oil and gas heating systems from 2024, to force the use of green alternatives like heat pumps.

Greens co-chief Ricarda Lang said on Monday the party needed to keep its focus on carbon neutrality but get better at addressing the issue of affordability at the same time. The party will likely seek to scale back its proposals in future, said political scientist Stefan Marschall at the University of Duesseldorf. "We're going to see more compromises, less radicalism, which obviously wont suit climate activists," he said.

In Germany's last federal election campaign, the Greens were considered to have a real chance of winning the chancellery, and briefly led opinion polls in mid-2021. Last year, Greens Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, 42, and Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck, 53, were the country's most popular politicians. — Reuters



William A Haseltine

The writer is a scientist, biotech entrepreneur, and infectious disease expert, is Chair of the global health think tank ACCESS Health International

Remembering the pandemic...

President Joe Biden's administration has officially ended the national health emergency in the United States, allowing the remaining pandemic restrictions to expire on May 11. Other countries have already taken similar steps, and more are expected to follow suit. With the World Health Organization no longer considering Covid-19 a global health emergency, it seems that the virus and its massive death toll will soon fade from memory, along with N95 masks and PCR tests. But this collective forgetting jeopardises efforts to secure consistent funding for public health.

Our ability to forget something as catastrophic as a pandemic is partly a coping mechanism, reflecting the emotional immune system that enables us to move on with our daily lives. As devastating as the pandemic's social and economic impact has been, it has left an indelible mark on only a relatively small subset of the population, including survivors of lost loved ones, health professionals and other frontline workers, the immunocompromised, and those experiencing long Covid or other related health issues.

While tragic events often inspire us to pursue reform, our willingness to act is often short-lived, making it difficult to affect lasting change. This pattern is particularly evident in the news coverage and Google search trends that follow tragedies such as mass shootings, tsunamis, and earthquakes, which typically show an initial surge of interest that gradually fades over time.

To create and retain memories, the human brain undergoes a complex process that involves multiple interrelated stages, such as encoding, consolidation, and retrieval. When presented with new information, our brains process it by modifying neurons in the hippocampus, a critical centre for memory, along with other regions like theamygdala, which handles emotional memories. Together, these neurons form a physical representation of the memory called an engram.

A significant portion of the information we encounter can be lost unless it undergoes memory consolidation, which frequently occurs during sleep and helps to stabilise and retain memories in the long term. During this process, the hippocampus effectively "replays" the memory, which is then distributed to cortical



The virus and its massive death toll will soon fade from memory.

WITH PUBLIC-HEALTH EXPERTS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS NO LONGER CONSIDERING COVID-19 AN IMMEDIATE GLOBAL THREAT, THE PANDEMIC HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO SEEM LIKE A DISTANT MEMORY

neurons for extended storage. During the final stage, memory retrieval, the trace neurons within the hippocampus and cortex are reactivated.

Every day, we are bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information that our brains struggle to retain. Given that forgetting and remembering are inextricably linked, this "infodemic" further aggravates our tendency to forget. Moreover, the process by which our brains assess risk is deeply personal and influenced not just by data but also by our own biases and needs.

As Covid-19 fades from our collective consciousness, we are reminded why so many people were eager to forget the 1918 influenza pandemic and embrace the joys and risks of the Roaring Twenties. But collective amnesia threatens to leave us woefully unprepared for future airborne disease outbreaks, forcing us to re-learn fundamental lessons about the importance of masking, ventilation, and shifting activities outdoors to prevent transmission.

The 1918 pandemic infected a third of the world's population and claimed

more than 50 million lives, surpassing the combined military casualties of World Wars I and II. Yet, despite its enormous human toll, there are no permanent memorials or days of remembrance for its victims. Before 2020, if you asked people to name the deadliest event of the twentieth century, very few would have cited the virus. Only recently, historians such as Guy Beiner have begun to explore this pattern of forgetting. Without rituals of remembrance to commemorate the millions of lives lost to Covid-19, we risk perpetuating the cycle.

People often have a more positive view of the future than the past as a way of building psychological resilience. This future-oriented positivity bias arises because, unlike the unchangeable past, the future offers endless possibilities. But our tendency to look forward also impedes progress on issues like pandemic preparedness, as it leads us to believe we are better equipped than we are.

Numerous academic bodies, think tanks, public-health organisations, and governments have published detailed recommendations on how to improve pandemic preparedness, but there has been no coordinated and comprehensive effort to implement them. Three years after the start of the pandemic, we still lack clear explanations for why our public-health agencies are understaffed and underfunded, why supply chains failed, why Covid-19 misinformation was allowed to run rampant on social media platforms and cable news outlets, and why our public-health responses remain reactive rather than proactive.

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Nursing the world to health

Who on the earth has not benefited from nursing care at least once? Holding a child whose mother is seriously ill, comforting a woman at the bedside of her husband who is slowly dying, or cracking jokes with a young child while dressing his wounds — they are nurses, who provide compassionate care to us with enduring commitment.

Nurses are with people at the most vulnerable moments in life. People trust nurses with their hearts. They live to devote themselves to those most in need, no matter the risk!

Apart from their role as a health professionals, nurses also advocate and care for their patients. They also provide emotional support to the patient's family. Very often they play their role as a friend, sister or brother, neighbour, or someone who is always available to answer our questions or concerns.

They listen to the patients and assess their physical, emotional, cultural, mental and spiritual needs. In the current healthcare system, nurses are one of the most trusted healthcare professionals with a significant role to play in the treatment and medical care of the sick.

During the highly contagious period of Covid-19, nurses comprised the major part of the medical workforce. They played a vital role during the pandemic as front line workers of patient care in hospitals and were actively involved with the evaluation and monitoring of the community. They have shown great courage, flexibility and creativity on the front lines of this fight!

As I think back on this unbelievable period of the pandemic that took hold of our planet, I cannot believe how much healthcare professionals have given and endured to keep us all alive and healthy. The impact that they made is everlasting and immeasurable! I am a beneficiary of the



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist and author with nearly four decades of experience in broadsheet newspapers and magazines in India and the Gulf region

poignant care, dedication, abnegation and love of the nurses when I was bed-bound in a Muscat hospital after having been infected with the dreaded coronavirus. I touched death and I'm very lucky to be alive today thanks to the incredible care and dedication of the doctors, nurses and other hospital staff.

Nurses bring so much to our lives and the lives of the people whom we love. As nurses help bring new life into the world, we need to celebrate them not just for the long list of what they can do for us but for the hard work they put in to make it happen.

So it is apposite that we have a day that honours nurses and recognises all of their efforts! They are truly the unsung heroes who keep our healthcare systems running and most of all, who give us the care, love and human touch that we need in times of pain and suffering!

May 12 is marked as Nurses Day every year to pay honour and tribute to all of the nurses around the world for their endless contributions to society. The date is very important to nurses as well as it is the anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, who is widely considered the founder of modern nursing.

Nightingale, the well-educated daughter of wealthy British parents, defied social conventions and decided to become a nurse, she is remembered around the world as the "Lady with the Lamp." She took care of wounded soldiers of the British army and their allied forces during the Crimean War.

Not only did Florence Nightingale set standards of healthcare and nursing in the medical camps and hospitals during the war, but later also established a nursing school in 1860 to provide training to aspiring nurses and healthcare workers.

As wonderful as this icon is, it is important to realise that nurses are role models, representatives of a class of people who are unselfish in the extreme, always placing special caregivers!

SO IT IS
APPOSITE THAT
WE HAVE A DAY
THAT HONOURS
NURSES AND
RECOGNISES
ALL OF THEIR
EFFORTS!

TACKLING THE WILDFIRES



Firefighters return to retrieve more gear while tackling the Deep Creek Wildfire Complex near Entwistle, Alberta, Canada, on Monday. – Reuters

Bridging the AI regulation gap

On March 22, the Future of Life Institute published an open letter calling for a six-month moratorium on the development of generative artificial intelligence systems, citing the potential dangers to humanity. Since the publication of that letter, numerous high-profile figures have voiced similar concerns, including AI pioneer Geoffrey Hinton, who recently resigned from Google to raise the alarm about the "existential threat" posed by the technology he played so pivotal a role in developing.

The seriousness of these warnings should not be underestimated. Demands for government intervention rarely originate from tech companies, which in recent years have fiercely resisted efforts by American and European policymakers to regulate the industry.

But given the economic and strategic promise of generative AI, development cannot be expected to pause or slow down on its own.

Meanwhile, members of the European Parliament have voted in favour of a more stringent version of the AI Act, the landmark regulatory framework designed to address the challenges posed by "traditional" AI systems, trying to adapt it to tackle the so-called "foundation models"



Cédric O

The writer is a former French secretary of state for the digital economy

THE UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION ARE CURRENTLY PURSUING SEPARATE INITIATIVES TO REGULATE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

and advanced generative AI systems such as OpenAI's GPT-4. As one of the main negotiators of the European Union's groundbreaking Digital Markets Act (DMA) and Digital Services Act (DSA), I recognise the importance of creating a human-centred digital world and mitigating the potential negative impact of new technologies. But the speed at which the EU is developing restrictive measures raises several concerns.

First, large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4 could significantly increase the productivity of white-collar workers.

At a time when developed countries are desperately seeking ways to boost productivity, Europe cannot afford to miss out yet again on a technological breakthrough that could enhance its competitiveness. But the version of the AI Act as issued by the European Parliament acts as a de facto ban on LLM development on the continent.

Second, the EU's rapid response could result in yet another missed opportunity for the United States and Europe to agree on a common framework for regulating the tech industry.

So far, transatlantic regulatory discussions have been plagued by misunderstandings, and both sides have pursued their own initiatives without proper coordination.

In recent years, the EU has enacted several far-reaching bills to regulate the tech sector, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Governance Act, the DSA, and the DMA. But while Europe has embraced stricter digital regulation, sometimes at the cost of its own competitiveness, the US has been slow to adopt new rules, owing to partisan divisions and concerns about

potential infringements on freedom of speech. Unfortunately, although a common framework is necessary to ensure fair competition among businesses, there is little indication that the US and European approaches to overseeing the industry will converge anytime soon. To be sure, both sides are expected to seek regulatory frameworks that align with their own needs and priorities.

But our inability to find common ground on digital regulation has resulted in short-term inefficiencies and could lead to long-term decoupling, because a shared digital space becomes

increasingly difficult to maintain when rules and regulations diverge significantly. This also has political implications: when democracies cannot unite around shared values and goals, illiberal forces and regimes thrive.

The transformative power of LLMs, particularly their potential to cause widespread socioeconomic disruption by displacing millions of workers, raises the stakes for European and American policymakers to establish a shared regulatory framework. This would require concessions from both sides.

The EU, for its part, would need to pause its own AI-related legislation. The US, which has struggled to contain the collateral damage of new technologies despite leading the world in innovation, would have to find a way to achieve a bipartisan consensus in Congress.

While regulatory harmonisation would not be easy, it remains the most viable long-term solution. Europe must take advantage of the opportunity to gain a competitive edge, and the US must intervene to halt the race to the bottom that is currently playing out in the AI domain.

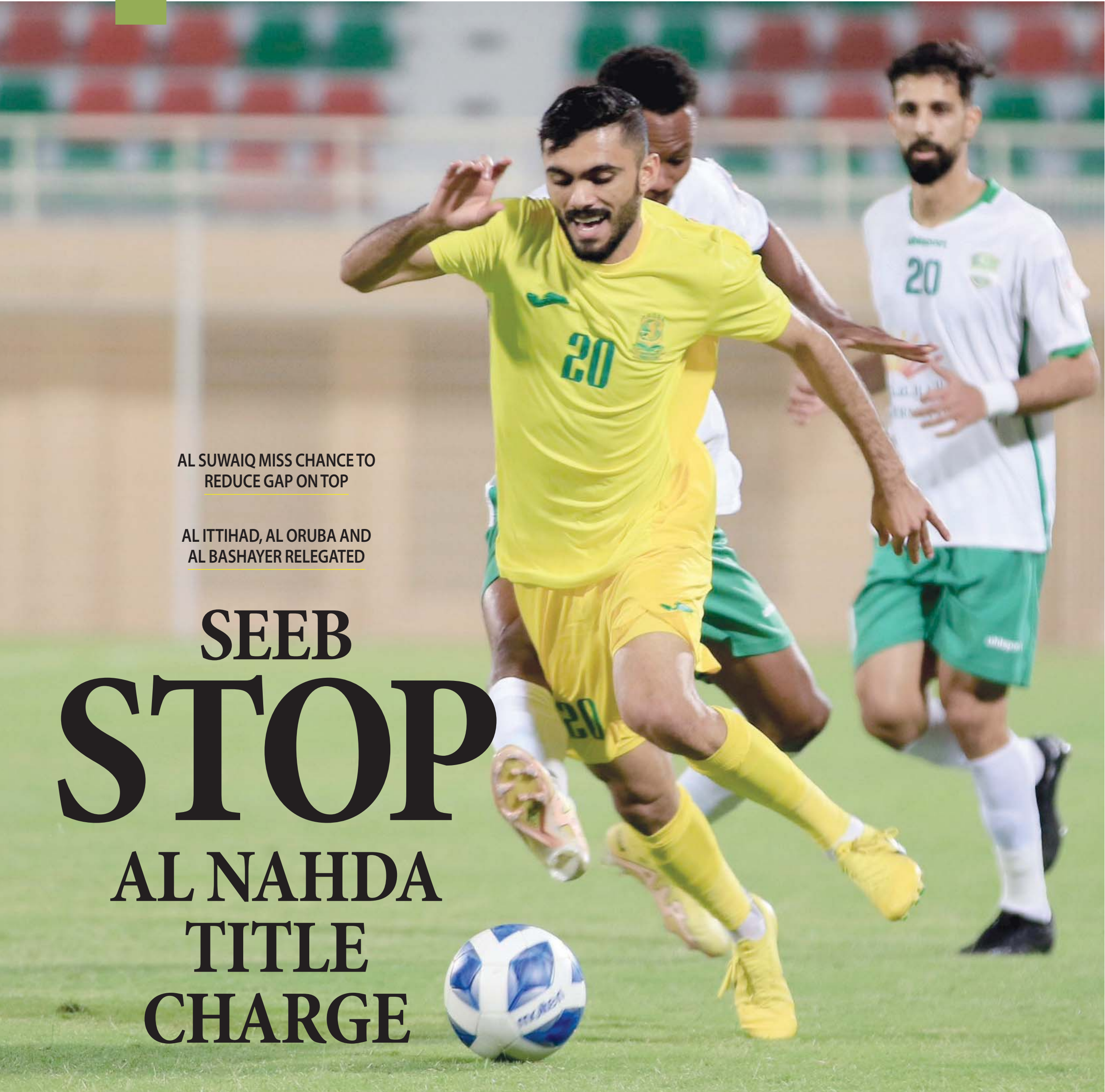
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Members of the European Parliament have voted in favour of a more stringent version of the AI Act.

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AL SUWAIQ MISS CHANCE TO
REDUCE GAP ON TOP

AL ITTIHAD, AL ORUBA AND
AL BASHAYER RELEGATED

SEEB STOP AL NAHDA TITLE CHARGE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 16

Seeb stunned leaders Al Nahda 2-1 to take the third spot while second-placed Al Suwaiq missed a golden opportunity to catch up with Al Nahda when they went down to Al Musannah in some pulsating action of the 24th round of the Omantel League on Monday night.

In a thrilling match held at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex on Monday, Al Seeb edged Al Nahda 2-1.

Jibula and Abdulaziz al Muqbali scored for Al Seeb in the 17th and 23rd minutes respectively, while Youssef al Saadi netted a goal for Al Nahda in the 86th minute.

Al Seeb's triumph elevated their tally to 45 points, creating a 5-point lead over fourth-placed Al Rustaq. This outcome served as a golden opportunity for second-placed Al Suwaiq, as they could narrow the point difference with Al Nahda to just one point.

However, Al Suwaiq suffered a 2-1 defeat against Al Musannah at Al Musannah Stadium. Consequently, Al Nahda maintained a 4-point lead over Al

Suwaiq, who are just two points ahead of Al Seeb with only two matches remaining in the league.

DHOFAR THRASH AL RUSTAQ

At Dhofar Stadium, hosts Dhofar dominated their match against Al Rustaq, achieving a resounding victory with a score of 4-1.

Abdullah al Mushrafi, Awad al Shehri, Joseph Lubaga, and Qassem Saeed each contributed a goal for Dhofar in the 49th, 61st, 90th and 92nd minutes respectively. Rustaq's Musab al Maamari salvaged some pride by scoring in the 95th minute.

Rustaq faced an uphill battle as they played most of the match with 10 players due to Omar al Yadi's red card in the seventh minute. With their tally stuck at 40 points, Al Rustaq's aspirations for third place were dashed as Al Seeb widened the gap to 5 points. Now, Al Rustaq's fourth place is in jeopardy, with Dhofar inching closer at 39 points, securing the fifth spot.

In an enthralling match in the 24th round, Al Nasr secured a 1-0 victory against Oman Club.

This triumph propelled Al Nasr to 30 points, but they remained in 10th position

OMANTEL LEAGUE POINTS TABLE										
TEAM, MATCHES, WON, DRAW, LOSS, GOAL DIFFERENCE, POINTS										
Al Nahda	24	15	7	2	23	52				
Al Suwaiq	24	15	3	6	11	48				
Al Seeb	24	12	9	3	32	45				
Al Rustaq	24	11	7	6	2	40				
Dhofar	24	11	6	7	10	39				
Sohar	24	11	3	10	4	36				
Bahla	24	10	6	8	3	36				
Oman Club	24	9	8	7	2	35				
Al Musannah	24	6	12	6	0	30				
Al Nasr	24	7	9	8	-1	30				
Sur	24	7	3	14	-9	24				
Al Ittihad	24	4	5	15	-18	17				
Al Oruba	24	3	7	14	-21	16				
Al Bashayer	24	3	3	18	-24	12				

after Al Musannah posted a surprise victory over Al Suwaiq, solidifying their position in ninth place.

Meanwhile, Oman Club are eighth with 35 points.

THREE TEAMS RELEGATED

Three teams were relegated to the first division after the 24th round.

In a decisive match held at Al Ittihad Stadium in Salalah, Al Ittihad Club were officially been relegated to the First Division League after suffering a 2-1 defeat against Bahla.

Bahla's San Hasumi made a significant impact by scoring two goals in the 43rd and 65th minutes. This loss put Al Ittihad's tally at 17 points, placing them in 12th position and trailing behind Sur by 7 points. With only two matches remaining until the end of the league, Al Ittihad's relegation has become inevitable.

On the other hand, Bahla has significantly improved their standings by raising their score to 35 points, securing the eighth place and enhancing their chances of competing with Sohar and Oman Club for the sixth and seventh positions.

At Sohar Stadium, hots Sohar thrashed Al Oruba 3-0 to put the opponents out of OL.

Sohar demonstrated an impressive performance with goals scored by Natalia Muvima, Abdullah al Shibli and Saud al Muqbali. With the win, Sohar snatched the sixth place from Oman Club with 36 points.

Al Oruba are 13th after the defeat with 16 points, 8 points behind Sur, and remain

relegated to the first division.

SUR SURVIVE

At Sur Stadium, Sur earned a crucial 1-0 win against Al Bashayer to guarantee their stay in the Omantel League.

The Sur win raised their tally to 24 points, putting them 7 points ahead of Al Ittihad and 8 points ahead of Al Oruba. With only two matches left, Sur's survival is now assured.

Meanwhile, Al Bashayer remained at bottom of the table with 12 points and officially confirming their relegation. The outcome was anticipated given Al Bashayer's poor technical performance throughout the season and their substantial distance from the survival competition, in which Sur ultimately emerged victorious.

This marks a significant turning point in the top-flight Omani League with the relegation of Al Ittihad, Al Oruba and Al Bashayer to the first division, while Bahla, Sohar and Sur continue to strive for better positions. The remaining matches promise intense competition and thrilling encounters as the league nears its conclusion.

Gill's ton fires Gujarat to play-offs, Hyderabad out



Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill plays a shot during the IPL match between Gujarat Titans and Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

AHMEDABAD, India: India opener Shubman Gill hit his maiden IPL century to help holders Gujarat Titans secure their play-off berth with a thumping 34-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday.

Gill, who smashed 101 off 58 balls, put on a 147-run stand with Sai Sudarshan, who made 47, to guide table-toppers Gujarat to 188-9 in Ahmedabad.

Mohammed Shami and Mohit Sharma both took four wickets to limit Hyderabad to 154-9 as Gujarat became the first team to secure one of the four play-off spots.

Gujarat, who had a fairytale debut season when they won the

title last year, are also assured of a top-two finish in the group phase.

"Very proud of the boys. Two in two. Last year was different, we knew there'd be a lot of challenges this year," skipper Hardik Pandya said.

"Boys have put their hands up in different situations. I think we've rightly earned the chance of making the play-offs."

Hyderabad, the 2016 champions, fell out of the play-off race, making it seven teams fighting for three remaining play-off places.

"Lots of pride still left in the upcoming games," said captain Aiden Markram.

"Maybe we'll give out a few

opportunities and guys can finish well but sadly we haven't been good."

Gujarat lost Wriddhiman Saha, for a duck, on the third ball of the match but Gill hit Fazalhaq Farooqi for four straight boundaries to set the pace.

Gill, who jumped to second in the batting charts with 576 runs behind Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis (631), smashed 13 fours and a six and Sudarshan was also punishing in his 36-ball stay.

The 23-year-old Gill, who has scored a ton each in all three international formats, was named man of the match.

Hyderabad hit back with wickets

and despite Gill's century in 56 balls, Gujarat managed just 34 runs in the last five overs and lost seven wickets.

The Sunrisers bowlers did well to check Gujarat's total, which looked like going over 200, as seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar returned figures of 5-30 but the efforts were vain.

Hyderabad were never in the chase after they fell to 12-3 with Shami taking two and further slipped to 59-7.

South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen then smashed 64 and put on 68 runs with Kumar, who made 27, but the stand only reduced their margin of defeat. — AFP

OC official selected for 2023 ICC Future Leaders Programme

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket official, Richa Sharma, is one of the 25 women leaders, who have been picked by the International Cricket Council (ICC) for the 2023 Future Leaders Programme.

Richa, who is the sponsorship and marketing manager at Oman Cricket (OC), is one of the only two women from the GCC region to be part of the future female leaders in cricket, announced by the world cricket governing body, based in Dubai, UAE.

The other woman selected is Kuwait national women's team captain Amna Tariq, who will have former South African captain Mignon du Preez as mentor.

Richa's mentor will be South African Kass Naidoo, International cricket commentator and founder of GSport4girls in South Africa.

In her remarks after her selection, Richa said: "I'm glad to share that I have been selected in the third batch of the 100 per cent Cricket Future Leaders Programme. I am confident that it will be a valuable and enriching experience for me, and certainly it will be an enormous opportunity for me to grow and enjoy this journey under Kass Naidoo."

She added: "I would like to thank the entire team of Oman Cricket, International Cricket Council and 100 per cent Cricket Future Leaders Programme for encouraging equal participation in sports for women and girls starting from grassroots level."

Kass Naidoo welcomed Richa on board the ICC programme and said: "I am looking forward to working



Richa Sharma

with Richa."

This is the second time that Oman Cricket will be represented in the ICC Future Leaders Programme.

Vaishali Jesrani, Oman women's team captain and advisor to Oman Cricket board, was selected in the inaugural programme that featured 40 women from across the world in 2021.

Vaishali was mentored by Anthony Everard, then Cricket Australia's executive general manager of fan engagement.

The 2023 programme is the third edition of the ICC 100 per cent Cricket Future Leaders Programme and begins on May 18. It comprises a record-breaking intake of 25 future women leaders in cricket.

The mentees, who have increased from 20 in 2022, will be paired with senior leaders from across global cricket to work on a one-on-one basis over a six-month period and will receive training and support in their areas of expertise in dealing with real-time and real-world issues and projects.

The programme will also include two full online group workshops and a debrief session with programme guide Belinda Clark.

Punjab primed for battle of pacers at Dharamsala



PBKS VS DC AT DHARAMSALA

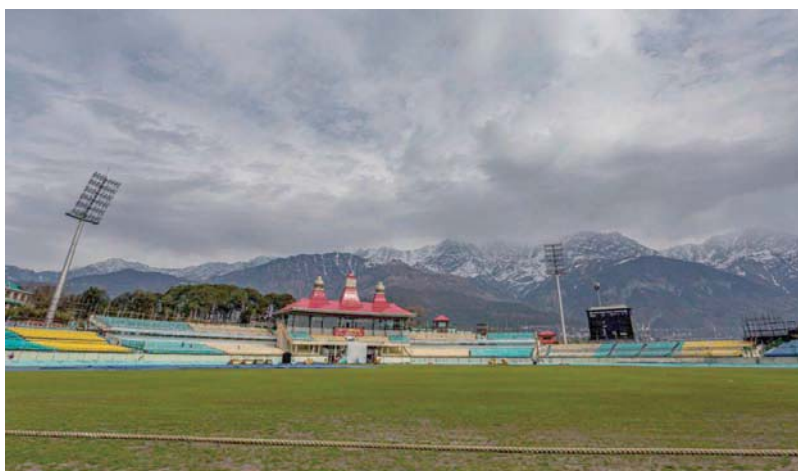
● **QUALIFICATION CRITERIA** – Delhi are out of the contention and they would love to be the party poopers for Punjab and Chennai. This way they can finish on a high at least. For Punjab, things are clear. They need to win both their remaining encounters against Delhi and Rajasthan, which will get them to 16 points. NRR is a factor for consideration, but I don't really think that they would be emphasising specially on it. The first focus for Punjab is to win and get to 16 points.

● **PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER** – Both these teams clashed just a few days ago at Delhi. Punjab were put into bat and on the back of a brilliant 103 from Prabhsimran Singh, Punjab somehow crawled

to 167/7 in 20 overs. A surface on which most batters of Punjab struggled against spin was always going to make it a difficult chase. Delhi got off to a flier with 65/0 in the powerplay, but immediately after that the spin of Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar ran through the entire top and middle order of Delhi and they could manage only 136/8. Punjab won this one by 31 runs.

● **TEAM INFO** – Punjab would have realised that Delhi are absolutely in no control of this game and they showcased it in the last game. On their home track, they didn't just choose the wrong side but also failed to capitalise on their home conditions as well. The question is, will Punjab go out of the way and go towards spin on the home conditions, which will neutralise the top order of DC. The most important part is to play horses for courses, which is something that DC hasn't been able to do. Although ideally, Dharamsala is known for being pace friendly.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played —



31; Won by DC – 15; Won by PBKS – 16

● **PBKS possible 12** – P Singh, S Dhawan, L Livingstone, J Sharma, S Curran, S Raza, Kagiso Rabada, S Khan, R Dhawan, R Chahar, A Singh, N Ellis

● **DC possible 12** – D Warner, P Salt, M Marsh, R Rossouw, A H Khan, A Patel, P Dubey, K Yadav, I Sharma, C Sakariya, M Kumar, M Pandey

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – On one of the most picturesque grounds of the world, where the pitch has not been in too much

favour of the batters. With heavy rains yesterday, the groundsmen wouldn't have had a lot to do, but its expected to be a pace friendly wicket. On a bright and shinny day, there are some expected showers in early evenings. With temperatures between 18 and 29 degrees, it should be a pleasant evening for cricket.

● **Match Prediction** – With toss being a big factor for win and lose, there should be a lot of advantage for the side chasing. Both Delhi and Punjab have an impressive pace attack and it will

not be easy. Although I feel that, for the benefit of keeping this IPL lively, Punjab would find a way to win this one. Thukpa is going to be the dish of the evening.

FAN COMMENTS

● "Don't everyone feel that the comments column has moved away from IPL and got a little to sentimental and emotional. Are Ganguly and Ponting helping Punjab to qualify by selecting the wrong combination? How can such experienced leaders, make a mistake of reading the home turf? Absolute disgrace." – **Sardar Jagandeep Singh, 33, Software Engineer, Indian.**

● "Considering how things have gone so far, I feel that there is still a twist left in the tail. Has anyone considered the fact that, Chennai Super Kings are yet to qualify and they are in a must win. I am hoping for Punjab and Bengaluru to win their remaining games for a spicy finish to the league stage. Somehow, I want to see one more match between LSG and RCB this season and no

matter the cost, I will travel for it." – **Riya Chaturvedi Sharma, 26, Newly Married Housewife, Indian.**

● "A few friends of mine told me about this write up being extremely accurate and hence I have followed it for the last 9 to 10 days. I am not sure about others, but I have been extremely successful in fantasy cricket since I have started to follow this page. Really request Oman Observer to make a fantasy team once." – **Hima Desai, 24, Architect, Indian.**

● "Sunil Gavaskar being such a big legend himself has caught a lot of attention by giving respect to a younger one. I feel that was the moment of the IPL. Can somehow RCB qualify and win this year's IPL. Probably I am asking for a lot, but 16 years of love is a lot of time and I feel that it's time. Lucknow in the eliminator, Chennai in the qualifier 2 and Mumbai in the finals. Wake up guys, it's just a dream :P" – **CA Mohammed Rajab Yousuf, 39, Financial Analyst, Indian.**



Djokovic sees off Norrie to reach quarters

ROME: Novak Djokovic eased into the Italian Open quarterfinals on Tuesday after breezing past Cameron Norrie 6-3, 6-4, although there was tension with the Briton after the top seed was hit by a smash. The Serb has reached the last eight in each of his previous 16 appearances in the Italian capital and he did again on Tuesday, getting past Norrie on centre court to set up a clash with Holger Rune. It will be a rematch of last year's Paris Masters final, when the young Dane won his first Masters 1000 title by beating Djokovic in a thrilling match. "Even though he's really young, I know his game quite well. He's been on the tour now for last few years playing some great tennis, particularly in the last I would say six to eight months," said Djokovic. "He's in very good form and I look forward to a challenge. I think it's going to be a very physical match."

SEVENTH TITLE
Djokovic is gunning for a seventh title on clay in Rome and his chances have been made a little bit easier by the shock elimination of Carlos Alcaraz on Monday. Alcaraz, who won two consecutive tournaments at Barcelona and Madrid, will take world number one spot from Djokovic on May 22 but it is the 22-time Grand Slam champion who could go into Roland Garros with yet another title under his belt. Djokovic won the first three games against Norrie and closed out the first set with little fuss, without needing to be at his best. The 35-year-old then took the second set to 2-1 with a break, but in the next game Norrie broke back while angering Djokovic with a smash which hit him on the back of his left leg.

Norrie had the whole court to put the ball away as Djokovic had given up on the point and was walking back to the service line.

BRINGING THE FIRE
Norrie raised his hand to apologise but at the changeover after the Briton moved to 3-2 Djokovic gave him another long beady-eyed stare as he passed him. And after Djokovic sealed victory with his second match point he gave Norrie a cursory handshake at the net, while avoiding eye contact and exchanging no words with his dispatched opponent. Djokovic later explained that he had been irritated by Norrie's on-court behaviour since the start of the match, doing "things that we players know in the locker room it's not fair play". "He's very nice guy off the court, so I don't understand this kind of attitude on the court, to be honest. But it is what it is. He brought the fire, and I responded to that," said Djokovic. "I'm not going to allow someone behaving like this just bending my head. I'm going to respond to that. "That's all it is. What happens on the court, we leave it on the court, and we move on." Fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) in a third-round match which was suspended on Monday due to the rain, and will take on another Italian in Lorenzo Musetti in the last 16 on Tuesday night. Iga Swiatek will bid to continue her blistering start to the tournament when she faces Donna Vekic. World number one Swiatek has won 13 straight matches in Rome and her bid for a third title in as many years has been boosted by seeds two to six all being eliminated. — AFP

Egypt beat Oman in Arab beach soccer

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 16

Oman beach soccer team suffered a 5-3 defeat against Egypt late on Monday in the second match of the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 which is underway at the Al Hamra Beach Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Despite the loss, coach Talib Hilal's men still have chances to advance into the quarterfinals of the tournament as the top two teams from each group will progress besides two more teams who are the best third placed in the three groups. Oman team had registered a strong start in the championship as they thrashed Palestine 7-1 in the opener on Saturday. In the match against Egypt, Khalid al Araiimi, Abdullah al Souti and Ahmed al Owaisi scored the goals for Oman whereas Abdulrahman al Shafi, Hassan Hussain, Mustafa Abdulmunim,

Ahmed Sulaiman and Haitham Mahsoob were the scorers for Egypt. With the conclusion of the second round matches, Egypt are topping Group B with six points while Oman are in second place with three points besides Palestine on third, who have the same credit. Kyrgyzstan are fourth with no point. Palestine defeated Kyrgyzstan 5-1 in the second round match while Egypt beat Kyrgyzstan 6-2 in their opening match.

CRUCIAL MATCH
Oman team will meet Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday in a crucial match at the Al Hamra Beach Stadium. The match will kick off at 18:30 (Oman time). In the same group, Egypt will meet Palestine in the following game which will start at 20:00 (Oman time). Oman team, coached by long-



serving national coach Talib Hilal, is fully aware that this tournament will act as thrilling stage for the team's preparation for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup UAE 2023 which will take place in UAE during November 16 to 26. Registering a positive result in the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 will definitely add a crucial step towards encouraging and enhancing the squad to perform much better in the world class assignment. In the other groups standing,

Morocco are leading Group A with five points while hosts Saudi Arabia are in second position with three points. Lebanon hold the same points in third place while Mauritania are fourth with zero points. In Group C, UAE head the group with six points while Libya are second with three points. Comoros are in third place with one point while Kuwait are in fourth place with no points. The quarterfinals will take place on Thursday while the semifinals are set for Friday and the final is scheduled on Saturday. The 12 teams taking part in the tournament have been distributed into three groups. Hosts Saudi Arabia led Group A alongside Mauritania, Morocco and Lebanon while Oman are grouped with Palestine, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt in Group B. The Group C features the UAE, Libya, Kuwait and Comoros.



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MAISARAH

Development of Duqm Industrial Fisheries Port enters key phase

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 16

The Duqm Industrial Fisheries Port has kick-started temporary operations, while actively developing a plan for the future, according to Nabil al Bimani, CEO of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), lead partner in the consortium overseeing the operation of the facility in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm.

“The full project will include a research and design centre, a training centre, a government [services] building, and a fish market,” he shared. “The fish market will include an auction system, in addition to a fishery village that will serve artisan fishermen,” he stated. The Duqm multipurpose port was built by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), and is going to be operated by a consortium of companies



including Fisheries Development Company (FDO), Oman Food Investment Company and the French port of Lorient.

Al Bimani also confirmed that the seafood canning plant by FDO’s subsidiary, International Seafood Company, is proceeding as planned. The plant, which has a capacity of 100 million cans per year, is expected to operate within

the first quarter of 2024. Concerning the remaining port facilities, Al Bimani said, “We are targeting to award the full development by early next year,” adding that the project will be completed within 18 to 24 months from the award.

Importantly, the fisheries port project will also focus on providing local SMEs with opportunities within the fishery industry, according to Al Bimani. Speaking to the Observer, Al Bimani shared that the company signed six agreements with local SMEs to provide port services worth over RO 8 million last week.

“Developing SMEs is one of the crucial things that we’re working on, and it’s one of the focus areas that we would like to continue [focusing on],” shared Al Bimani. Additionally, the company intends to encourage SMEs to participate in the port’s main operations. “The plan is that we

also engage undeveloped SMEs to take part of the core scope of the port’s operations. Whether it’s within the fishery side or the industrial side.”

It is worth noting that the Special Economic Zone mandates the allocation of 10 per cent of business and project tenders to local SMEs. “The consortium is committed to off-load this scope to the SMEs, plus also to take their hands and develop them to the acceptable level expected for this sector,” he added.

Oil steadies as IEA turns more bullish on oil demand

TOKYO: Oil futures steadied on Tuesday as support from a higher global demand forecast from the International Energy Agency (IEA) was countered by weaker than expected Chinese economic data.

Brent crude futures eased by 11 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$75.12 a barrel while US West Texas Intermediate crude was down 12 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$70.99. Both benchmarks rose more than 1 per cent on Monday, reversing a three-session losing

streak. The IEA raised its forecast for global oil demand this year by 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) to a record 102 million bpd. It said China’s recovery after the lifting of Covid-19 curbs had surpassed expectations, with demand reaching a record 16 million bpd in March.

In another bullish factor, the US Department of Energy, on Monday said it would buy 3 million barrels of crude oil for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for delivery in August. — Reuters

Ominvest helms consortium bidding for Ahli Bank

Strategic direction: Ultimate goal to enable merger of Ahli Bank with Ominvest subsidiary Oman Arab Bank

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 16

In a significant development, Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) has announced it will helm a consortium bidding to acquire Ahli Bank SAOG. Publicly traded Ominvest, a leading investment holding company, said in a regulatory filing that the consortium includes entities controlled by Arab Bank plc, with other investors expressing interest in joining the consortium.

The proposed acquisition is in accordance with the Takeover and Acquisition Regulation (E/2/2019) set by the Capital Market Authority.

“Ominvest and the consortium have substantial experience in the regional financial services sector and are committed to being anchor investors, supporting Ahli Bank’s growth and providing strategic direction,” it said in the filing. The consortium aims to make a cash offer of 185 baisas (base offer price) per share, providing an equitable opportunity for all Ahli Bank shareholders to participate in and benefit from the offer.

Importantly, no conditions are expected to be imposed regarding the acceptance percentage by Ahli Bank shareholders.

According to Ominvest, this base offer price represents a premium of approximately 28 per cent over Ahli Bank’s average one-year market price of 144 baisas, 20 per cent over its net book value as of March 31, 2023, 13 per cent over its average six-month market price of 164 baisas, and an 8 per cent premium compared to the closing stock exchange



price as of March 31, 2023.

TheshareholdersofAhliBankhavebeen categorised into three groups based on their shareholding as of May 15, 2023: strategic long-term investors (holding more than 25 per cent shareholding), significant financial investors (holding between 10 per cent to 25 per cent shareholding), and other investors (holding less than 10 per cent shareholding).

Under the proposed offer, Ahli Bank shareholders accepting the offer will be entitled to the following: Strategic long-term investors will receive the base offer price plus 15 baisas Significant financial investors will receive the base offer price plus 7 baisas Other investors will receive the base offer price.

“The consortium members already have a substantial stake in Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB), and the acquisition of Ahli Bank is viewed as a strategic opportunity to further strengthen Ahli Bank before a potential future merger between Ahli Bank and OAB, subject to regulatory and other approvals.

This merger would result in the creation of a robust and sizeable financial institution in Oman,” Ominvest noted.

The proposed offer will be funded by the consortium members from their own funding sources, leading to positive foreign direct investment in Oman. Consequently, there will be no constraints on Ahli Bank or OAB’s capital or lending capacity as a result of the offer.

AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN			
Group's Unaudited Financial Results for the nine months ended 31 March 2023			
Chairman's Report	Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Inc,ome		
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the company's report on activities and unaudited financial results for the third quarter ended March 31, 2023.			
1. Operating Results The Group's total revenue for the nine-month period ended 31 March 2023 was RO 7.938 million, compared to RO 13.384 the previous year. The Parent Company's net loss after taxation was RO 1.231 million, compared to a net profit of RO 0.522 million for the same period the previous fiscal year. For the nine months ended 31 March 2023, the Group recorded a consolidated loss after taxation of RO 4.298 million, compared to a net loss of RO 0.179 million in the same period the previous year.			
2. Operations The Group's revenue fell 41% from the previous year due to a lack of critical raw materials. The management was able to solve the problem with the purchase of raw materials by the end of the third quarter. This allowed the operations to resume at normal levels, but only through the second half of March 2023. Due to the limited supply of raw materials, the business is currently supporting important projects and clients who pay their invoices on time and have agreed to the price increase.			
Gypsum Quarry's production has resumed thanks to Awam Quarry. Awam Minerals has a contract in place guaranteeing full production for the following six months, and a number of other parties are awaiting Awam to reach a long-term supply agreement. The high demand and improved realization from the lowest level in 2021–2022 encourage maximizing production at the Quarry under the current market conditions.			
Due to the scarcity of explosives, the drilling and blasting industry in Fujeirah (UAE) is also experiencing a revenue decline, which will be resolved once the group company begins supplying explosives.			
Geodynamics Mideast restarted trading of explosives by importing explosives from Oman. The ANFO plant and raw materials warehouse construction is currently ongoing and is anticipated to be finished by September 2023. After the aforementioned is finished, we expect the volume to rise significantly. The Group's revenue and profitability will increase as a result, and its position in the UAE market will be strengthened.			
3. Health, Safety and the Environment Your company is run in a safe and efficient manner in strict accordance with the highest safety standards and the current Royal Oman Police Explosives Rules and Regulations.			
We had a tragic fatal incident in which one of the explosive transport vehicles was involved in an accident while transporting explosives to the blasting site. The driver of the vehicle lost his life in the accident. During the period ending March 31, 2023, no other accidents or environmental incidents were reported.			
During the nine months ending March 31, 2023, your company complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations.			
4. Future Outlook We are happy to inform our esteemed shareholders that the ANFO plant and raw materials storage facility's final construction work is ongoing and on schedule to be finished by September 2023. We anticipate that Geodynamic's facility will be able to start producing ANFO in the fourth quarter of 2023. Once finished, these will contribute to future volume growth. This, in our opinion, will increase the Group's overall profitability.			
Based on current and upcoming projects, we anticipate greater revenue growth in the drilling and blasting divisions in both the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, given the increased demand from COVID-19-affected export markets over the past two years, we are well-positioned to meet the increased demand from the mining industry, which was negatively impacted by the Covid-19.			
The Gypsum Quarry has already started operating, and management is working to increase production to 100,000 tons per month. As a result of the increased demand and better realization, Awam Minerals will undoubtedly see better results starting in the upcoming quarter.			
5. Acknowledgements The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.			
The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.			
Haythem Mahmood Abd Al-Nabi Macki Chairman			
Note The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.			

OBA holds CERMP certification course



MUSCAT: The Oman Banks Association (OBA) Academy organised a three-day Certified Enterprise Risk Management Practitioner certification course.

The programme was delivered by Global Risk Clinic, a leading Governance, Risk and Compliance Educators and Consultants based in Copenhagen, Denmark. The course was designed to deliver the fundamentals of Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) and an understanding of advanced ERM topics.

A number of bankers participated in this course that was held at the OBA office located in Muscat Hills, Muscat. OBA Academy is part of the

Oman Banks Association that focuses on educating the Omani banking community on global trends, recent developments, and best practices by working closely with international and reputable resources to share their knowledge and expertise with senior banking executives and decision makers.

Over the last couple of years, OBA Academy delivered a number of programs such as Environment Social Governance, commercial law, data protection, consumer protection, cybersecurity, customer service, Value Added Tax, Risk Management, as well as hosting a number of financial and economic experts in the ‘Meet The Expert’ series.

Renaissance funds drive to put reflective collars on camels

MUSCAT: Reiterating its commitment to create a positive local impact through its CSR initiatives, Renaissance has lent its full support to a project aimed at preventing road traffic accidents caused by stray camels and protecting motorists and this valued livestock from death and injury.

Renaissance has funded over 10,000 reflective collars for camels in North Batinah in recognition of the challenge faced by authorities to make camels visible in the dark.

The project will be implemented in the wilayats of Shinas, Liwa, Suhar, Saham, Khabourah and Suwaiq. Besides reflective collars, the funds will be used to raise awareness among camel breeders and owners about the importance of this initiative.

Renaissance formalised this commitment with Eng Abdullah al Hadabi, Director General for Al Batinah North in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources at an event held on May 15, in the presence Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, the Governor of Al Batinah North.

Khamis al Balushi, Director General, Government Relations,



Renaissance said, “At Renaissance, CSR is all about making a meaningful contribution to communities. We are proud and honoured to be part of this campaign which will contribute towards bringing down fatalities and injury to people and to camels.”

Road traffic accidents caused by stray camels have remained a growing concern. National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data for 2021 puts the number of accidents involving

camels on the roads at 502. The same year, 11 people lost their lives and 45 were injured in related incidents, according to NCSI.

Renaissance is the leading accommodation, services solutions and IFM company in Oman, listed on Muscat Stock Exchange.

The company has invested over \$520 million in Oman employing over 2,600+ Omani nationals contributing to local growth, building potential and creating opportunities.

Renaissance is committed to safety, efficiency, green awareness, and sustaining in-country value.

The company has built a strong local supply chain with 61% per cent of procurement within Oman and is passionate about building a sustainable future by investing in substantial CSR programmes every year. Renaissance owns and operates Renaissance Village Duqm, Oman's largest workforce accommodation facility, in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Sohar International’s CEO delivers insightful presentation at AFCM conference

MUSCAT: Aligned with Sohar International's commitment to supporting Oman's Vision 2040 and contributing to the national economy, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, delivered a thought-provoking presentation in the Arab Federation of Capital Markets (AFCM) annual conference.

This prestigious event is the largest gathering of stock exchanges and capital markets in the Arab world and is being hosted by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The presentation titled “The Future of Business: Oman Investment Destination” offered valuable insights into the numerous advantages that Oman offers to businesses and investors, making it an ideal destination for those looking to capitalize on the country's unique opportunities



and potential for growth.

Ahmed al Musalmi emphasised Oman's distinct investment-friendly landscape, highlighting the country's compelling strengths and benefits that make it an attractive prospect for investors seeking portfolio diversification.

Al Musalmi said, “While Oman offers numerous investment avenues, such as the clean energy sector, there are still underexplored areas that present

substantial potential for investors.

Particularly in light of the global push towards sustainable energy practices, it is crucial to recognize the significance of exploring this sector and the investment opportunities it offers.

Given Oman's readiness to embrace and explore new investment opportunities, investors should consider the country as a destination for their investments. By doing so, they can

not only benefit from potential returns but also contribute to the country's economic growth and development, especially considering the changing global landscape and challenges faced by the world.”

During his insightful presentation Ahmed al Musalmi shed light on the various factors that contribute to Oman's uniqueness and attractiveness as a prime destination for business and investment.

One of the key points he emphasised was Oman's geo-strategic location, which encompasses robust logistical network and multi-faceted infrastructural — physical and digital — capability that uniquely serves as a gateway for connecting with regional and global markets and offers tremendous potential for businesses looking to expand their reach.

ahlibank wins Best Private Bank in Oman award

MUSCAT: As part of its journey towards excellence and innovation in the banking sector, ahlibank, one of the fastest growing banks in the Sultanate of Oman, has been conferred the Best Private Bank in Oman award at the MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2023.

The award attests to ahlibank's status as a leading player in the Sultanate of Oman, worthy of recognition for its continuous efforts to be a thriving centre for banking. The prestigious award was received by Najla al Lawati, AGM- Head of Private Banking & Wealth Management at ahlibank, at a ceremony held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on May 10, 2023.

Organised by MEED in partnership with Retail Banker International and Private Banker International, the awards were given in recognition of the



Middle East and North Africa region's fast growing markets in the banking and financial service sectors, and for the notable changes in the vast financial landscape.

Commenting on the award, Najla al Lawati said, “At ahlibank, we continuously strive to achieve greater heights in the fast-growing and competitive market. The banking industry as a whole has had massive growth in the last few years. Moreover, with perseverance and agility, we have been able to evolve to cater to this change, displaying a consistent positive trajectory.”

BankDhofar banking partner of OER Business Summit

MUSCAT: As one of the leading financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, BankDhofar was the banking partner of OER Business Summit 2023. The high-profile summit was recently held under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani.

The summit brought together business leaders and experts from various business sectors to share knowledge and insights. This year's edition of the summit focused on ways of augmenting revenues from alternative sources and by way of diversification in areas of strength to achieve the economic growth objective.

The discussion panel titled

“Business resilience in a fragile global economy” shed light on business areas related to building business resilience, attracting Foreign Direct Investment, technology usage and digitalisation, Growth Enablers, Sustainability and Governance, among other areas of concern. Vikesh Mirani, Chief Financial Officer at BankDhofar participated in the panel discussion and shared his thoughts and experience in this area.

Commenting on that, Vikesh Mirani, Chief Financial Officer at BankDhofar said: “On a global scale, the banking sector is one



of the important business sectors that help to fund economic operations, create employment opportunities, and maintain

financial stability.

BankDhofar has been playing a crucial role and has contributed effectively in driving the growth

of the national economy, as we have set our strategy to be in line with Oman Vision 2040. The OER Business Summit 2023 was a good platform to share thoughts and insights with practitioners about this important topic.”

BankDhofar has set a clear banking strategy that is in line with Oman Vision 2040, and has effectively contributed to driving the growth of the national economy.

Since its inception in 1990, BankDhofar has established itself as one of the leading financial institutions in the Sultanate, with a strong presence in Corporate Banking, Retail Banking,

Treasury and Project Finance. The Bank has been catering to customers' needs and requirements, and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman through innovative products and creative solutions.

Following best international banking practices, the provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, has placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.



Oman LNG to capitalise on renewables drive, Sur Hydrogen Cluster



Decarbonisation: Hydrogen output from proposed Sur Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster estimated at 480 tonnes/day

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 16

A proposed Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster, currently the subject of a feasibility study for eventual implementation at Sur Industrial City, has the potential to produce around 480 tonnes/day of hydrogen, according to Oman LNG – a key stakeholder in the initiative.

The study, backed by the Sustainable Energy Research Centre (SERC) of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) as well as the National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly), will not only contribute to the decarbonisation of industries in Sur, but also free up natural gas volumes for potential liquefaction into LNG prior to their export.

Significantly, majority state-owned Oman LNG sees itself as well-placed to benefit from the sizable volumes of gas saved as the nation's power sector invests in renewables as part of a transition to cleaner energy resources.

"I think that the national target of 30 per cent of electricity generation coming from renewables by 2030 is realistically achievable," commented Oman LNG Chief Executive Officer Dr Hamed al Numani.

"Additionally, the

liberalisation of the power sector with the creation of a spot market represents a great opportunity not only for the country, but for Oman LNG as an LNG producer too," he stated in a recent interview featured in Renewables Now, a UK based news portal.

Furthermore, the potential availability of hydrogen from the Sur Hydrogen Cluster will also help optimise Oman LNG's operations. "

(Hydrogen) will become available to a number of industries that today are using gas, allowing us to produce more LNG. Hydrogen is a fuel that, as an LNG producer, we can consume too," he said.

With this goal in mind, Oman LNG is extending its keen backing to the Sur Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster initiative. Envisaged to include renewable energy components, the hub will potentially produce 480 tonnes of hydrogen per day.

"This would allow us to reduce our own gas consumption to power our plants, and dedicate the excess gas for LNG. We will shift from gas turbines to gas engines that can be enabled to run on green hydrogen," said the CEO.

"In short, hydrogen will help us decarbonise our own production and enable a much richer energy mix. That is why Oman LNG has been pioneering the Sur hub concept – because we should not look at hydrogen in isolation, but should see it in combination with the other energy means to capitalise on it the most," he further added.

Ministry of Transport unveils carbon reduction measures

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology launched a special programme for cutting down carbon emissions. The programme comprises a number of projects and initiatives to be applied in various sectors, including the transport sector or the communications and information technology sector, which account for nearly 20% of the total carbon emissions in Oman.

The ministry divided its carbon neutrality plan into three phases: Cutting down 3% of carbon emissions by 2030; 34% of carbon emissions by 2040; and 100% carbon emissions by 2050.

In the first phase of its plan, the ministry seeks to reach 7,000 electric cars — which account for 35% of the new light vehicles — and cut down 40% of carbon emissions from heavy equipment by using dual combustion technology. The technology was fully developed in Oman.

The ministry also plans to use biofuel in public transport vehicles and transform some port equipment into environment-friendly devices that use electricity. In the second phase, the ministry targets reaching 22,000 new electric cars by 2040, which comprise 65% of the new



THE MINISTRY SEEKS TO REACH 7,000 ELECTRIC CARS – WHICH ACCOUNT FOR 35% OF THE NEW LIGHT VEHICLES – AND CUT DOWN 40% OF CARBON EMISSIONS FROM HEAVY EQUIPMENT BY USING DUAL COMBUSTION TECHNOLOGY.

vehicles in Oman.

The ministry is also working on a plan to limit the operating age of public transport vehicles in a manner that boosts the reduction of carbon emissions.

This is in addition to establishing a regional centre for refuelling ships with green fuel.

The step will constitute a major development in the region.

The second phase also envisages upgrading bus stations and buildings, namely by installing solar panels that contribute to the reduction of emissions. In the third phase, the ministry plans to fully use hydrogen technologies or electricity technologies for trucks and heavy equipment as a measure to cut down carbon emissions by 100%, and thereby meet full carbon neutrality for Oman by the year 2050.

The ministry has engaged heavily with private sector

partners to strengthen the infrastructure in Oman and prepare it for the electric cars on most roads.

Towards this end, the ministry set a short-term plan to install more than 140 electric vehicle chargers by the end of 2023, and more than 350 chargers by 2026.

The ministry made it a condition that an electric vehicle charger on public roads should have a minimum power capacity of 120 kilowatt-hour (kWh). Fast chargers have already been installed at border posts, with a capacity of 120 kWh, according to the ministry. — **ONA**

European Union states approve world's first comprehensive cryptocurrency rules

BRUSSELS: European Union states on Tuesday gave the final nod to the world's first comprehensive set of rules to regulate cryptoassets on Tuesday, piling pressure on countries such as Britain and the United States to play catch up. An EU finance minister meeting in

Brussels approved rules that were thrashed out with the European Parliament, which gave its approval in April. The rules are expected to be rolled out from 2024. Regulating crypto has become



more urgent for regulators after the collapse of crypto exchange FTX.

"Recent events have confirmed the urgent need for imposing rules which will better protect

Europeans who have invested in these assets, and prevent the misuse of crypto industry for the purposes of money laundering and financing of terrorism," said Elisabeth Svantesson, finance minister for Sweden, which holds the EU presidency.

The rules require firms that want to issue, trade and safeguard cryptoassets, tokenised assets and stablecoins in the 27 country bloc to obtain a licence.

Ministers took steps to combat tax evasion and the use of cryptoasset transfers for

money laundering by making transactions easier to trace.

They agreed on a requirement that from January 2026 service providers obtain the name of senders and beneficiaries in cryptoassets, regardless of the amount being transferred.

There was also agreement on amending rules on how member countries cooperate with each other in taxation to cover transactions in crypto-assets, and on exchanging information on advance tax rulings for the wealthiest individuals. — **Reuters**

Oman's jewellery imports and exports increase

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 16

In recent years, the jewellery industry in Oman has experienced a significant boost in both imports and exports. According to the preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman's jewellery imports grew by 146% in 2021, reaching a total value of RO 303.1 million, up from RO 123.2 million in 2020.

Additionally, Oman's jewellery exports have increased by 334.6% in 2020, reaching a total value of RO 99.3 million, of which RO 37.3 million are for re-exports compared to RO 22.8 million in 2019 of which RO 8.25 million are for re-exports.

The significant increase in jewellery imports and exports can be attributed to several factors.

First is the increase in the amount of jewellery imports and exports. In 2021, Oman imported 500 kilogrammes of jewellery compared to 300 kilogrammes in 2020.

Meanwhile, the amount of exports increased to 1,135 kilogrammes in 2020 compared to 512 kilogrammes in 2019.

These jewellery include natural and artificial pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, precious metals, ordinary metals clad with precious metals, articles of these materials, traditional ornaments, imitation jewellery and coins.

Oman's jewellery industry has been able to benefit from the country's strategic geographic location and its proximity to key markets in the Middle East and Asia.

This has enabled Oman to serve as a hub for the jewellery trade in the region, with many



THESE JEWELLERY INCLUDE NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL PEARLS, PRECIOUS AND SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES, PRECIOUS METALS, ORDINARY METALS CLAD WITH PRECIOUS METALS, ARTICLES OF THESE MATERIALS, TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS, IMITATION JEWELLERY AND COINS.

international buyers and sellers choosing to conduct business in the country.

Furthermore, Oman's government has implemented

several initiatives to support the growth of the jewellery industry. For example, the government has provided financial incentives to companies in the sector, such

as tax exemptions and reduced customs duties. This has helped to attract foreign investment and encourage local entrepreneurs to establish their own jewellery businesses.

Another factor contributing to the growth of Oman's jewellery industry is the rising demand for luxury goods in the region.

With a growing middle class in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, there has been an increase in demand for high-end jewellery and other luxury goods.

As a result, Oman's jewellery industry has been able to capitalise on this trend by offering a range of high-quality products to meet the demand.

With this, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre hosts Muscat Jewellery exhibition showcasing a wide range of authentic gemstones, attractive

gold and fabulous diamond from Oman and overseas.

The increase of jewellery imports and exports also indicates the recovery of the jewellery sector from the Covid-19 pandemic, as imports are close to the pre-pandemic rates, as it reached 600 kilogrammes in 2019 valued at RO 191.2 million while the pre-pandemic exports in 2019 reached 190 kilogrammes valued at RO 87.99 million.

The increase in jewellery imports and exports in Oman is a clear indication of the country's growing importance as a hub for the jewellery trade in the region.

With the government's support and the rising demand for luxury goods in the Middle East, Oman's jewellery industry is set to continue its upward trajectory and contribute to the country's economic growth and diversification efforts.

Company bosses exit with economy struggling



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

There has been a record rise in the turnover of CEOs, according to a study of FTSE 350 firms. The number of bosses departures among the UK's top companies more than doubled over the last year, as boards attempted to insulate their firms from rising prices and interest rate hikes with a change in leadership. Some 38 chief executives of Britain's largest companies left their roles in 2022, double of the 18 that exited in 2021, according to advisory firm Russell Reynolds Associates. The uptick in CEO turnover has been engineered by a "greater level of change and instability" in the UK economy, Luke Meynell, managing director of Russell Reynolds Associate, said. Departures from the FTSE

350 companies contributed to just over one in five of every exit last year, while 13 FTSE 100 companies changed leadership. FTSE 250 companies CEO exits climbed to 25 from 10. Notable exits last year include Jonathan Akeroyd taking the helm at FTSE 100-listed luxury fashion retailer Burberry from Marco Gobetti, and Pete Redfern being replaced by Jennie Daly at housebuilder Taylor Wimpey. Nick Read also departed as Vodafone's CEO last year. "UK companies have experienced a turbulent few years, with the economy recovering more slowly from the pandemic than others in the G7 – and the nation having faced additional challenges for long periods from supply chain issues created by Brexit," Meynell said. "The challenges which CEOs

must now address have multiplied considerably. Accordingly, boards worldwide will be considering carefully whether they have the right person in place at the top," he added. UK firms have been hit by a slowdown in consumer spending and hamstrung by swelling costs. Inflation surprisingly hit 10.1 per cent in March, down slightly from February's 10.4 per cent, but remains much higher than in the rest of the rich world. Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey and co had increased borrowing costs 11 times in a row to 4.25 per cent and last week there was a further increase taking it to 4.50 per cent. These factors have squeezed companies, with a separate report from EY-Pantheon revealing profit warnings among UK listed firms have hit their highest

level since the early days of the Covid-19 crisis. As a result, chief executives may have been at greater risk of losing their job as boards bid to help steady the ship amid the economic turbulence. Many top forecasters have since restricted their recession warnings for the British economy this year, but growth is still tipped to be sluggish. Meanwhile, many firms are shrugging off economy fears to focus on growth. Small businesses are turning their attention away from worrying about whether the country will slip into a recession to concentrate on growth, a new survey out last week showed. Confidence among the country's small firms — which drive output — rose sharply from its depths at the end of last year, according to the Federation of

Small Businesses (FSB). While still in negative territory at minus 2.8 points, the FSB's confidence index shot up from minus 45.8 points in the final three months of last year. The findings are the latest set of data to indicate the UK will probably dodge a recession this year. Martin McTague, national chair at the FSB, said the "data shows that small firms may be about to turn the corner and rebound after the pandemic and the energy crisis, with confidence recovering alongside improved optimism for the second quarter." Separate research from consultancy BDO found worker shortages are slowing business growth. "More than two fifths (44 per cent) of these businesses say their number one workforce issue is the cost of hiring," the firm said.

To bet on China's shoppers, ditch its companies

ROBYN MAK

Investing in China need not be too stressful, provided you avoid investing in Chinese companies. As consumer bellwethers Alibaba and Tencent struggle with the country's uneven retail recovery, foreign firms selling popular items like luxury goods and chip equipment to the People's Republic are rallying. It could be a sign of things to come. A spending pop in the transport, food and beverage and hospitality sectors helped lift first-quarter GDP to 4.5 per cent. But that data was flattered by comparison to a grim 2022, and April data on imports, inflation and bank loans all disappointed. Household time deposits climbed sharply to 92 trillion yuan (\$13.3 trillion) last month, implying weak consumer confidence. Quarterly results from China's Internet giants paint a gloomy picture. E-commerce company Alibaba and social media and entertainment group Tencent are forecast to report just single-digit per cent revenue growth in the three months to March later this week, in no small part because discretionary spending even on relatively affordable categories like apparel, electronics and video games has yet to fully bounce back. Executives at online retailer JD.com recently cautioned that "organic forces driving consumption demand are not yet sufficient." The \$57 billion company's New York stock is down a whopping 33 per cent this year; Alibaba and Tencent are trading well below their five-year forward price-to-earnings multiples, per Refinitiv. While Beijing's crackdowns on domestic technology companies and property developers have eased, other risks are rising. The White House is readying an executive order that could ban certain investments into China, while earlier this month the US accounting watchdog said the audits of the New York-listed Chinese companies it reviewed had "unacceptable" deficiencies. That will raise investor concerns over the accuracy of financial statements at some 200 firms and at the same time Beijing is restricting foreign access to local corporate data and raiding due-diligence firms. If the compromise that allowed mainland firms to avoid being forcibly delisted from American exchanges falls apart, Alibaba and peers will probably fall further. This stands in stark contrast to this year's roughly 30 per cent rallies at European luxury brands LVMH, Hermes and Richemont, which have cashed in on a rebound in Chinese luxury shopping and travel. Nor are the rallies limited to bling peddlers. Chip-equipment maker Tokyo Electron and Uniqlo-owner Fast Retailing have both enjoyed China bounces. The US-listed parents of casino operators in Macau, like MGM Resorts International and Wynn Resorts, have outperformed their Hong Kong-listed entities too. That's a smarter way to trade the economic recovery. — Reuters

Rich world has three ways to win over global South



HUGO DIXON

The writer is Commentator-at-Large for Reuters. He was the founding chair and editor-in-chief of Breakingviews.

The Group of Seven rich countries needs a stronger pitch to non-aligned nations. A strategy based on peace, prosperity and protecting the planet could work. It would certainly be more effective than delivering lectures on democracy. Leaders of the world's rich democracies, who gather later this week in Hiroshima, already have a lot on their plate dealing with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, higher inflation, and the rising challenge from China. Nevertheless Japan, which is hosting the summit, has made "outreach to the global South" one of the gathering's two priorities along with "upholding the international order based on the rule of law". This makes sense, partly because the topics are linked. Many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have largely stayed on the sidelines during the Ukraine war, even if they initially condemned Russia's invasion. They are unlikely to impose sanctions on China following an invasion of Taiwan, let alone join any military action to defend the island. But if more developing countries spoke up to condemn violations of international law, the People's Republic might be more reluctant to contemplate aggression against Taipei. Another reason to care about developing countries is that their actions will help determine whether the planet fries. If nations like India switch to a greener model of growth, climate change may not reach catastrophic levels. If not, the whole world will



The G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting opening session starts at International Conference Room of Toki Messe in Niigata, northern Japan. — Reuters

GIVEN THE CONTINUED FAILURE OF RICH COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY THE UNITED STATES, TO DELIVER AN OLD PROMISE TO MOBILISE \$100 BILLION A YEAR FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, NATIONS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH ARE UNDERSTANDABLY SCEPTICAL.

suffer. Even rich democracies in temperate regions will feel the consequences, mainly in the form of mass migration unlike anything they have yet experienced. Non-aligned nations are also important economically. Many have grown rapidly and still have huge potential to develop. Countries like Brazil are sources of vital raw materials that will be needed to sustain a global green industrial revolution. Others, such as Nigeria, are still needed to produce hydrocarbons. Meanwhile the likes of Vietnam can help the developed world diversify its supply chains to reduce its dependence on China, which currently dominates key products such as batteries and solar panels. THREE P'S The rich democracies' goal should not be to pull the global South into their camp in advance of a possible clash with China. Rather it should be to ensure that non-aligned countries remain genuinely neutral, instead of aligning themselves with Beijing. There are three areas where the developed world could have something to offer. Call them the "three P's": peace, prosperity, and the planet.

Start with peace. When it comes to opposing military aggression, the United States has limited credibility because of its calamitous invasion of Iraq. The United Kingdom is also compromised, both because of its involvement in Iraq and its intervention in Libya, for which France shares responsibility. Even so, rich countries could do more to confront aggression via the United Nations. This is sometimes hard given that both Russia and China can veto critical resolutions at the Security Council. But the United States and its allies could do more to empower the UN General Assembly, where all countries have a vote – and none has a veto. When it comes to promoting prosperity, rich democracies are similarly vulnerable to accusations of double standards. The United States is the main culprit. Both President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump took measures to protect US jobs at the expense of foreign trade, most recently via the climate-focused Inflation Reduction Act. If the G7 nations want good relations with developing countries, the most important thing they can

do is promote trade. This should include following through on promises to locate production in friendlier nations such as India to avoid overdependence on China. Promoting imports risks a backlash from voters at home. That's why rich countries also need ambitious policies to help those who lose out from globalisation. Finally, there's protecting the planet. Rich democracies already have a range of initiatives to help developing nations go green fast. They have signed so-called Just Energy Transition Partnerships with countries such as Indonesia; promised a \$600 billion infrastructure splurge to rival China's \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative; and advocated further reform of multilateral development banks so that they do more to tackle issues such as climate change. The snag is that the G7 hasn't articulated a joined-up vision of what it is seeking to achieve on climate change. Nor has it provided much hard cash. Given the continued failure of rich countries, especially the United States, to deliver an old promise to mobilise \$100 billion a year for climate change in developing countries, nations in the global South are understandably sceptical. Wealthier countries now need to find creative ways of providing finance, even as domestic budgets are squeezed. — Reuters

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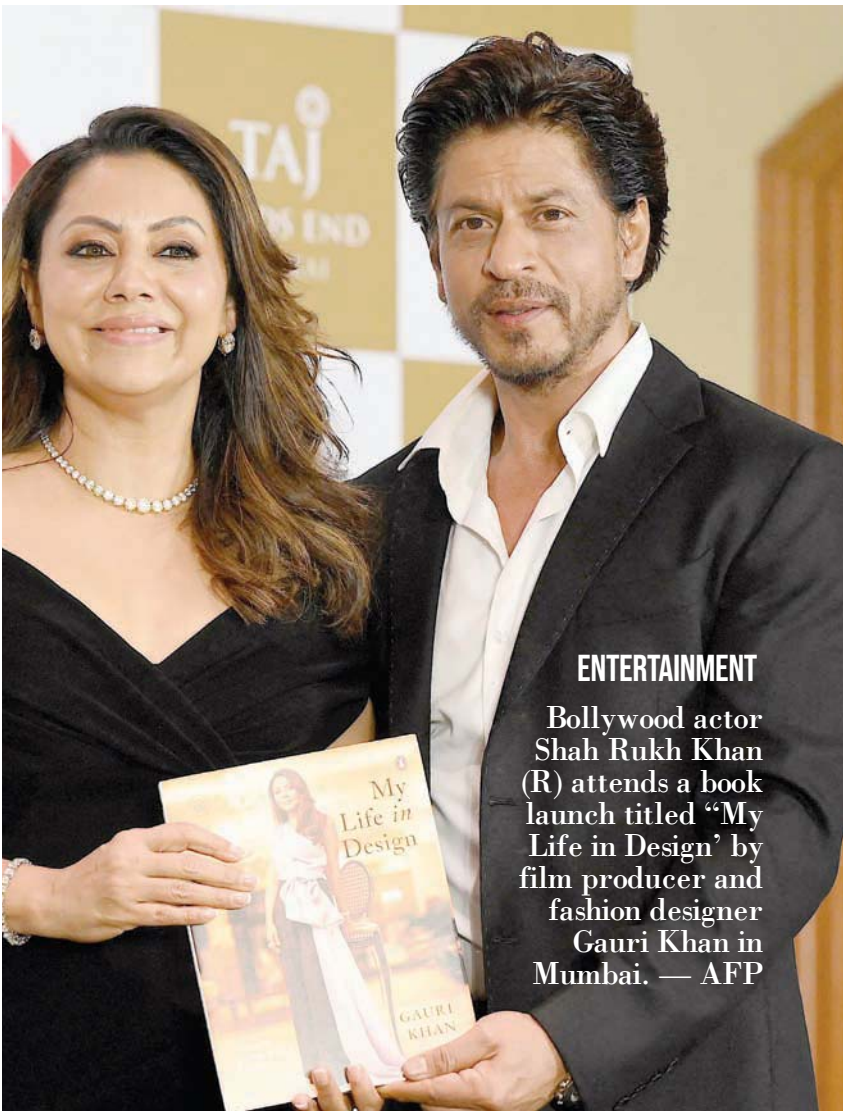
DINING

A street hawker sells roast duck in the street of Phnom Penh. Roast duck holds a special place in Cambodia's gastronomic landscape, offering a delightful blend of flavours and a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Wonder. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A Chopard representative displays the Palme d'Or, the highest prize awarded to competing films, during an interview on the day of the opening ceremony of the festival. — Reuters



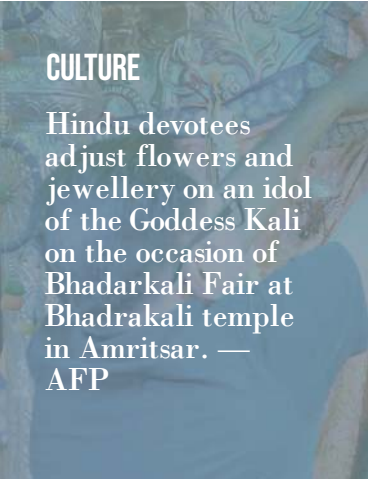
ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan (R) attends a book launch titled "My Life in Design" by film producer and fashion designer Gauri Khan in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

Canadian artist The Weeknd who is behind the smash "Blinding Lights" had updated his screen name on Twitter and Instagram, although the handle on both remained @theweeknd. — AFP



CULTURE

Hindu devotees adjust flowers and jewellery on an idol of the Goddess Kali on the occasion of Bhadarkali Fair at Bhadrakali temple in Amritsar. — AFP



art & life

WEDNESDAY | MAY 17, 2023 | SHAWWAL 26, 1444 AH

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Young Omani inventors introduce Omaneem, a natural insecticide

In Oman, a team of young Omanis succeeded in creating a natural insecticide out of the seeds of the neem tree. A portmanteau of "Oman" and "neem", Omaneem is generated from the neem seeds and then mixed with other essential oils and other plant extracts to create the insecticide

LIFESTYLE

\$200 million raised by controversial sale of jewels with Nazi links



JEWELS BELONGING to an Austrian billionaire whose German husband made his fortune under the Nazis raked in more than \$200 million, auctioneers Christie's said on Monday. The \$202 million raised far exceeds the previous record, set during the 2011 auction of the jewellery collection of one of Hollywood's greatest stars, Elizabeth Taylor. At that time, the auction brought in almost \$116 million. Christie's offered up scores of sparkling pieces at the controversial in-person sale which began in Geneva last Wednesday. The extraordinary collection belonged to Heidi Horten who died last

year aged 81, with a fortune of \$2.9 billion, according to Forbes. A report published in January 2022 by historians commissioned by the Horten Foundation said Heidi Horten's husband Helmut Horten, who died in Switzerland in 1987, had been a member of the Nazi party before being expelled. In 1936, three years after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, Horten took over textile company Alsberg, based in the western city of Duisburg, after its Jewish owners fled. He later took over several other shops that had belonged to Jewish owners before the war.

More than 700 pieces of jewellery are part of this Horten collection, and is being dispersed in tranches to avoid exhausting buyers. The last lots are scheduled to be sold in November. As it has done countless times in recent weeks in an attempt to respond to critics, Christie's auction house stressed that in accordance with Heidi Horten's wishes, all proceeds from the sale will be donated to philanthropic causes, "including medical research, children's welfare and access to the arts. The jewellery auction went ahead despite demands by Jewish groups to call the sale off. — AFP

LOCAL SCENE

Al Bustan Palace welcomes new GM



AL BUSTAN PALACE, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel has announced the appointment of Erkan Karatas as General Manager. With 25 years of progressive experience in luxury hospitality, Erkan will spearhead the team at this iconic resort, nestled between the Al Hajar mountain range and the Sea of Oman. "I am truly delighted to join this esteemed property and embark on a remarkable journey with the exceptional team of our Ladies and Gentlemen. With great enthusiasm, I am committed to introducing a series of innovative initiatives that will elevate our guest experience to unprecedented heights," says Erkan. "Our shared goal is to redefine luxury and set a new benchmark that will inspire and captivate our

discerning guests. I eagerly look forward to the incredible opportunities that lie ahead as we transform The Palace into an unrivalled haven of opulence and excellence." Erkan joined The Ritz-Carlton in

2001 and has held different leadership positions in several luxury hotels across the portfolio of Marriott International such as The Ritz-Carlton Istanbul, The Ritz-Carlton Moscow, The Istanbul EDITION, The Ritz-Carlton Herzliya, The Ritz-Carlton Astana and JW Marriott Hotel Ankara. He has a solid track record in leading and mentoring numerous hotel openings including The Ritz-Carlton Guangzhou, The Ritz-Carlton Vienna, The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi Grand Canal, Bulgari Hotel London, and Bulgari Hotel and Residences Dubai. Erkan has returned to Türkiye in 2018 and most recently served as General Manager of the The St. Regis Istanbul, where he spent four years, from 2019 to 2023. Being an advisory board member with Marriott International for EMEA General Managers and EMEA Food and Beverage he was listed as one of the 100 Power GMs in The Middle East. He is an experienced leader with a high commitment to service and quality and strong passion for Food and Beverage. He's a member of Chaîne des Rôtisseurs - Association Mondiale de la Gastronomie and he carries WSET International Advanced Diploma from London. During his leisure time, he enjoys spending time with his family, cooking and playing table tennis.

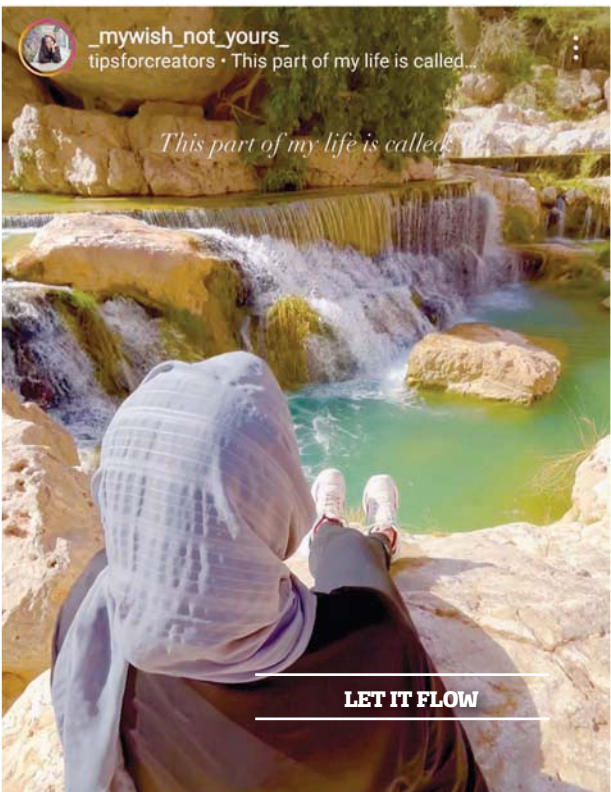


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By Baraah Al-Mujaini

The neem tree has proven to be a botanical marvel revered for centuries for its extensive significance, not just for medicine but for a diverse range of human uses. In the annals of Indian folklore, it is known as the "village pharmacy" and the "cure-all" tree.

Boasting an impressive pharmacopoeia, its leaves, seeds, bark, and oil contain a myriad of active compounds that traditional practitioners have harnessed for treating ailments ranging from skin infections to digestive disorders.

In Oman, a team of young Omanis succeeded in creating a natural insecticide out of the seeds of the neem tree.

A portmanteau of "Oman" and "neem", Omaneem is generated from the neem seeds and then mixed with other essential oils and other plant extracts to create the insecticide. This insecticide expels and kills all types of mosquitoes efficiently and quickly.

The idea came after the rapid spread of different types of mosquitoes, and most importantly the Aedes aegypti mosquito, which causes yellow fever, Zika disease, dengue fever, and other health diseases.

The team shared that Omaneem is best used during the mosquito season and would help well the visitors going to Dhofar for the Khareef season, when mosquitoes are reportedly causing issues for campers and visitors.

According to the team, the product has been developed to get rid of mosquitoes in natural and safe ways for humans and the environment.

They shared that before Omaneem, many people resorted to using harmful pesticides and chemicals to get rid of mosquitoes. The team noted that it is not friendly to humans, and usually causes chest pain and allergies.

After conducting research in laboratories, the research team, led by Ali al Busaidy, concluded that the ingredients and active substances in the neem tree can be used to expel and kill mosquitoes. The extract is more efficient if it is from the neem seeds.

"We found that this pesticide has a strong effect on mosquitoes and does not carry any harm either to humans or the environment", Ali al Busaidy said.



The main objective of creating this natural insecticide is to solve the health, environmental, and economic problems caused by mosquitoes in Omani society.

"As young people in Oman, we have a responsibility to contribute to the overall wellness of society. By coming up with this environmentally and human-friendly product, we are able

to contribute in our own little way," Al Busaidy said.

"What's even better is that we extracted it from something that's already growing in Oman, and with a focus on local production, we are able to do more," he added.

The team said that they hope to address some issues, like specialised equipment, in order to mass produce the product.

"We double-checked the efficiency of this product by testing it many times in the laboratories, and we experience its efficiency as well in practice in different areas here in Oman", Al Busaidy added.

Internationally, scientists have discovered neem's potential to combat malaria, reduce inflammation, boost the immune system, and even exhibit anti-cancer properties. These findings have sparked interest worldwide, leading to ongoing investigations into the tree's potential as a source of novel therapeutic agents.

Farmers, in some parts of the world, also already employ neem-based formulations to protect crops, safeguarding both the environment and human health. As the world grapples with concerns surrounding the impact of synthetic chemicals, the neem tree's biopesticidal properties offer an eco-friendly and sustainable solution.

Currently, the team is working hard to find ways to mass produce the product and sell it in the market.

DISCOVERY

Australian researchers find shipwreck lost for 50 years

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS have located the shipwreck of the MV Blythe Star nearly 50 years after it suddenly sank off the Tasmanian coast.

Australia's national science agency CSIRO on Monday said that the location of the 44-metre motor vessel, which suddenly capsized and sank off the south-west coast of Tasmania in October 1973, was confirmed in April during a 38-day research mission to study a submarine landslide off the west coast of the island state.

The voyage, led by the University of Tasmania, included a side mission to investigate an unidentified shipwreck which had previously



been spotted by fishing vessels. "The seafloor mapping... showed the unidentified shipwreck was lying in approximately 150 metres of water," CSIRO said. "The bathymetry showed that the shipwreck matched the dimensions and profile of the MV Blythe Star."

The agency said that the shipwreck is intact and sitting upright on the seafloor, with its bow point-

ing towards the north-west. Using underwater cameras, researchers were able to identify part of the vessel name - 'STAR' - on the ship's bow.

The data collected was provided to state and national maritime heritage agencies. The hope is that the mapping and video footage may help answer questions about what caused the ship to sink. — dpa

MUSIC

The Weeknd starts scrapping stage name on social media

THE WEEKND APPEARS to be making good on his recently expressed desire to transition back to his given name, Abel Tesfaye, after soaring to stardom under his globally known stage moniker.

On Monday the Canadian artist behind the smash "Blinding Lights" had updated his screen name on Twitter and Instagram, although the handle on both remained @theweeknd.

The shakeup follows comments in W Magazine in which Tesfaye said he wants "to kill The Weeknd."

"I'm going through a cathartic path right now," he said. "It's getting to a place and a time where I'm getting ready to close the Weeknd chapter," he added.

"I'll still make music, maybe as



Abel, maybe as The Weeknd. But I still want to kill The Weeknd. And I will. Eventually. I'm definitely trying to shed that skin and be reborn."

He also told the publication the album he's working on now "is probably my last hurrah as The Weeknd."

"This is something that I have to do. As The Weeknd, I've said everything I can say."

Tesfaye, 33, is set to star along-

side Lily-Rose Depp in the forthcoming HBO series "The Idol," set to premiere next month.

The Canadian artist born to Ethiopian parents rose to fame on a brand of dark R&B after gaining a strong following on YouTube more than a decade ago.

He went on to become the first artist to gain more than 100 million monthly listeners on Spotify. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

Greek island villages say they are being left to die

THEY MAY LIVE in a tourist paradise, but many villagers on Greek islands despair of a central government they say does little for them.

"We are second-class citizens," said retired sailor Manolis Melaisis, sitting outside a cafe in Diafani on the island of Karpathos.

"No doctor stays here for more than a year. There is no pharmacy and soon there will be no school either," he said.

Although it is the second-largest island in the Dodecanese group after Rhodes, Karpathos has only two ferries a week to Athens.

In the hillside village of Olymbos, the leaflets for Sunday's national election lie on the counter of Sofia Chatzipapa's cafe.

"MPs, the prime minister and the president have all passed through here admiring our beautiful village," scoffed the woman in her 70s, who wears the island's traditional embroidered black dress and headscarf.

"They take pictures. Then once they're back in Athens, they forget about us and our problems," she said.

As well as no pharmacy, Diafani — which has about 200 permanent residents but draws thousands of tourists in summer — also lacks a bank, post office or petrol station.

The only road to the island capital of Pigadia is winding and strewn with stones.

BREATH OF LIFE

At the Diafani cafe, a photograph shows the old sailor Melaisis with the rest of his school class.

In 1961, there were about 60 pupils. Now there are just two and the school may not reopen after the summer.

A bus drops off Diafani's last remaining schoolchildren — Vassilis, 11, and Marinos, 8, who live in Olymbos.

Their teacher, Theodora Koukourikou, carries their backpacks so they can climb the steep path to the school, which is perched on a rise facing the sea.

"These schools on isolated islands are a breath of life for small communities," said the 27-year-old teacher, who was

appointed to Diafani last September.

"Once closed, there will be nothing left of Diafani or Olymbos... It will just be a destination for tourists."

At the start of the next school year, Vassilis will go to secondary school in Olymbos, joining his elder sister and seven other pupils.

Marinos may also have to go there despite being way too young.

Olymbos — known for its windmills,

said.

"We have a beautiful country but not the administrators that it deserves."

Both Diafani and Olymbos rely for basic supplies on the island capital, which is an hour and a half away by car on windy roads.

"The state must encourage families to come to these remote regions with grants or a reduction in taxation," said Ilias Papailias, a restaurant owner and



pastel-coloured houses and chapels — has so far managed to keep its local crafts, dialect and music alive.

But this heritage is now under threat, as is the future of the villages themselves.

"The abandonment of our villages is an open wound that no government has succeeded in resolving," said Yannis Hatzivassilis, a sculptor who has carried on the trade of his father.

- 'Asking for basic services' -

"In the 1960s people left to work abroad and few returned.

Farmers now devote themselves to tourism and the younger generations aspire to a more comfortable life," Hatzivassilis

head of the local Diafani-Olymbos council.

Yannis Prearis is the last cobbler who makes the leather boots traditionally worn by the women of Olymbos.

His son is not yet two years old but Prearis already knows that if the school closes, he will be forced to leave Olymbos.

"We are asking for a doctor, a school, safe roads, public transport — basic services that any state should provide to all citizens," he said.

But he would like to stay in Olymbos.

"My grandfather and my father did this job and if I leave, it's a whole craft that will disappear."

— AFP



LIFE AT THE ACADEME



DR ZAINAB AL AJMI

Teachers' Emotions and Productive Career

In teaching, knowledge and emotion are bound together. Teachers impart knowledge and act as role models and mentors for their students. A growing body of research has examined the essential role of teachers' positive emotions in classroom effectiveness, as enthusiasm and joy, can lead to a more engaging and supportive classroom environment, while negative emotions, such as frustration and anxiety, can lead to increased tense and unproductive ones.

Additionally, research has revealed that teachers who can effectively regulate their own emotions can better support their student's emotional development and create a positive learning environment. However, researchers observed that there is no training framework for either investigating teachers' emotions or addressing them.

Therefore, it is crucial for teacher training programmes and professional development opportunities to address the role of emotions in teaching and provide support and resources for teachers to manage their emotions in the classroom effectively. Doing so can create learning environments that promote positive emotional experiences for both teachers and students, leading to enhanced academic performance and productive professional life.

Besides the results shown by the research above, Mandip et al., (2012) stated that "emotional intelligence and job satisfaction are two concepts of high interest in the modern work environment.

They serve as a competitive edge in personal and organisational life. The education system or the teaching profession is one of those within which, individuals could reap great advantages from the knowledge of emotional intelligence owing to recurrent human communication that exists among them. It has been found that a lack of job satisfaction leads to lower productivity, higher absenteeism, poor judgment, defensive behaviour, hostility, reduction in creativity, and job turnover".

According to Allen & Meyer (1990), "There are three indicators that indicate an affective commitment in a person, namely: 1. Emotional attachment. It is a feeling of attachment to the organisation. He feels that he is part of the family which is shown by a high sense of belonging to his organisation. 2. Identification. A person could be able to believe that he and the organisation have the same goals and values, hence he feels that the organisation will be able to support his performance and gives him a sense of pride for being part of that organisation. 3. Participation. Trying to give the best results with their abilities and improve performance to achieve organisational goals. (In Bayu et al., 2023). Hence teachers are not only responsible for providing academic knowledge, but a good teacher must also have a deep understanding of the emotional and psychological needs of their students a teacher's frustration, anger, or disappointment can negatively impact students' learning and performance.

In conclusion, teachers who are emotionally committed will perceive a student's emotions as a part of their responsibilities as well as a work environment challenge that must be resolved. Therefore, teachers require not only teaching skills but also emotional intelligence. Teachers who possess empathy, patience, and a positive attitude toward their students can create a supportive learning environment where students can thrive academically and emotionally. The emotions and feelings of a teacher play a crucial role in shaping job satisfaction and a productive career. Therefore, improving teacher training programmes could be beneficial to teachers if designed that consider teachers' emotions and feelings.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT ZEINBF@MOE.OM