

GCC sports ministers meet

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will host on Wednesday the 36th meeting of GCC ministers of youth and sports. The meeting will discuss a spectrum of topics on its agenda, including the decision of the Supreme Council to study means of enhancing joint action in digital transformation and technologies, among other topics. **DETAILS ON P12**



P12

SABALENKA SURVIVES SHERIF SCARE TO REACH SEMIS



P13

DUQM SET TO BECOME REGIONAL HUB FOR DIRECT-REDUCED IRON PRODUCTION



P20

THE MESSAGE BEHIND THE "STARLIGHTS" MADE OUT OF FISHBONE



MUSCAT

HM CONGRATULATES PARAGUAY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Santiago Peña, President-elect of the Republic of Paraguay. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success in leading the people of Paraguay towards achieving further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the cooperation relations between the two countries further development and growth. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO POLAND PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Andrzej Duda of the Republic of Poland, 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 President Dr Andrzej Duda. His Majesty also wished the people of Poland further progress and prosperity. — ONA

7 FIRMS BOOKED FOR NOT PAYING WAGES

The Ministry of Labour has referred seven companies to the Public Prosecution for violating Article (51) of the Labour Law related to their failure to pay wages on the legally specified date. Article (51) of the Labour Law requires employees to be paid their wages on a working day and in the case of monthly paid employees, once every month at least, or in the case of weekly or fortnightly paid employees, once every week or fortnight. **DETAILS ON P3**

INSIDE



ARTILLERY FIRES MARK MAY DAY IN UKRAINE

P7



MANY PALESTINIANS STILL LONG FOR RETURN

P8

Royal Decree amends provisions on Oman Botanic Garden

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 25/2023 on amending the provisions of Royal Decree No 6/2006 on Oman Botanic Garden reading as follows: Article (1) states that

the texts of Articles 1 and 3 of Royal Decree No 6/2006 shall be replaced by the following two texts: Article 1: The zone whose dimensions are demarcated in the chart attached to this Decree shall be a nature reserve under the

name "Oman Botanic Garden". It shall be affiliated to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Article (3): Within the context of Oman Botanic Garden, the Minister of Heritage and Tourism shall exercise all powers stated in

the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation.

REGULATIONS/BYLAWS The minister shall issue the regulations/bylaws and decisions necessary for the implementation

of this Decree through coordination with the authorities concerned.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA



PALESTINE LEADERSHIP HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Rula Maay'ah, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the State of Palestine. At the outset of the meeting, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of the Palestinian leadership to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani people. She underscored the Palestinian people's appreciation of Oman's continuous support for their cause. **DETAILS ON P2**

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

Sudan warring parties agree to 7-day truce from Thursday

KHARTOUM: Warring generals in Sudan have agreed "in principle" to a seven-day truce, the government of neighbouring South Sudan said on Tuesday, after regional envoys denounced repeated violations of previous ceasefires.

The announcement came as diplomatic efforts intensified to end more than two weeks of war in Africa's third-largest country.

Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his deputy turned rival, Mohamed



A relative hugs a man, part of a group of Indonesian university students evacuated from Sudan, after his arrival at Sultan Iskandar Muda International Airport in Blang Bintang, Aceh province. — AFP

Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, "have agreed in principle for a seven-day truce from May 4 to 11," the South Sudanese foreign ministry in Juba said in a statement.

Multiple truces agreed since fighting began on April 15 have been repeatedly violated, including one previously announced by South Sudan early in the fighting, which saw renewed air strikes on Tuesday. **SEE ALSO P6**

STAFF REPORTER

SALALAH, MAY 2

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has completed implementation of 3 tourism projects in the Governorate of Dhofar in partnership with the Dhofar Municipality and Omran Company, with a total investment cost exceeding RO 3 million.

The projects include development of Al Mughsail Beach waterfront, Hamrir View, Wadi Darbat, and Ain Jerziz, to strengthen the infrastructure in the governorate to be a sustainable tourism destination throughout the year.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar, said: "The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is exerting efforts to utilise and develop the natural sites in the Governorate of Dhofar to create a tourism and economic tributary during various tourism seasons, including khareef and surab seasons."

He pointed out that, Al Mughsail Beach waterfront project is built on an area of 174.6 square metres at a cost of RO 874,6000.

He added that Al Mughsail Beach waterfront project includes a family outlet, cars

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is exerting efforts to utilise and develop the natural sites in the Governorate of Dhofar to create a tourism and economic tributary during various tourism seasons, including khareef and surab seasons

KHALID BIN ABDULLAH AL ABRI
DG, Heritage and Tourism, Governorate of Dhofar

parking, an arena for events and activities, food and beverage kiosks, a number of restaurants, an extended walkway on the beach, seating umbrellas, picnic sites, green spaces, practicing marine sports facilities, and a special park for adventures and children's games.

He added that work on the project includes the handover of furniture and kiosks, replacement of agricultural soil, directional signs, water supply, the paving of roads and municipal parking spaces. **TURN TO P2**

Temperature crosses 40°C in many parts of Oman

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

After several days of respite, heat has build up in most parts of the Sultanate of Oman. The weather remained comparatively cool during the whole of April due to rains in some places, but suddenly the temperatures have changed from Monday. On Tuesday, the mercury crossed 40°C in several parts of the country.

Places like Fahud and Qarn Alam recorded the highest temperature of 42°C in the last 24 hours. The highest temperatures in Zamaim, Al Sinaina and Hamrat ad Daru ranged between 41.1°C and 41.2°C. Maqshan, Marmul and Haima witnessed temperatures ranged between 40.6°C and 40.9°C.

Temperatures in Al Seeb, Nizwa, Adam, Mahout and Thamrait recorded 41 degrees Celsius, and Duqm saw the highest at 43 degrees Celsius.

Overall, skies remained clear over most of the governorates, with a chance of dust rising due to fresh winds over the desert and open areas. Met Office indicated low horizontal visibility in the desert and open areas due to active northwesterly winds during the next three days.

Most of the governorates are experiencing westerly to northwesterly light to moderate occasionally fresh air, which might rise the dust. Westerly

winds generally carry dust. This wind originates from the Arabian Gulf and moves towards the Sultanate of Oman. Reports say the westerly wind usually makes the atmosphere hot and dry, and maybe it is time for the cotton fabric to make the appearance. Along the Sea of Oman coast, winds will be northeasterly light to moderate, while over the rest of the governorates, winds will be northwesterly light to moderate occasionally fresh over parts of desert and open areas.

National Museum, Palestinian ministry sign pacts

MUSCAT: The National Museum on Tuesday signed two agreements with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The first agreement provides for organising an exhibition and activities for 'Oman Day' in the State of Palestine. The exhibition will be mobile and it will take place in accordance with schedules and venues to be agreed about later.

The second agreement provides for the establishment of a special corner for the State of Palestine in the National Museum. The venue will spotlight the history, civilisation and Palestinian cause. It will also document bilateral relations between Oman and Palestine over various historical epochs and in the present time.

The two agreements were signed by Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum and Rula Maay'ah, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the State of Palestine.

Al Musawi said that the museum seeks to underline the historical and moral significance of exhibitions it holds in reviving the centuries-old relations between the two countries.

The museum is a step forward in cementing ties of cooperation, underscores Oman's heritage and its active participation in regional and international events, he added.

Al Musawi pointed out that

Sayyid Fahd receives Palestinian minister

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers received on Tuesday Dr Rula Maay'ah, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the State of Palestine.

At the outset of the meeting, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of the Palestinian leadership to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani people. She underscored the Palestinian people's appreciation of Oman's continuous support for their cause.

HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's

continued support for the Palestinian cause and all efforts aimed at restoring the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.

The meeting dealt with the bilateral relations between the two countries and means of promoting them particularly in the areas of heritage, tourism and museums. It also touched on the latest developments at the regional and international arenas.

The meeting was attended by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum. — ONA

the establishment of a corner for the State of Palestine in the National Museum will introduce the visitors to the cultural heritage of Palestine throughout the ages and affirms the museum's policies aimed at enhancing expertise and expanding cooperation between the two sides.

On her turn, Rola Maay'ah said the two agreements would enhance cooperation between the State of Palestine and the Sultanate of Oman in the fields of tourism and cultural heritage.

She stressed that the strength of bilateral relations and valued Oman's support for the State of



Palestinian and its people.

The National Museum also launched exhibits about the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. The exhibits include a model of the Dome of the Rock, given as a present by the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1989, as well as a round painting of the Dome of the Rock, given as a present by the Palestinian President to Sultan Qaboos in 2001. — ONA



Public Announcement for Nissan and Infiniti customers in Oman

Nissan Motor Co., Ltd. ("Nissan") would like to announce the end of its distribution arrangements (commercial agency) with Suhail Bahwan Automobiles LLC ("SBA").

Effective from 1 April 2023, SBA will no longer be Nissan's authorised distributor for the supply of Infiniti vehicles and parts and provision of related services, while effective from 7 April 2023, SBA will no longer be Nissan's authorised distributor for the supply of Nissan vehicles and parts and provision of related services.

Pending the appointment of a new distributor for Nissan and Infiniti products in Oman, Nissan has appointed OPAL Marketing & Industry LLC to provide repairs and maintenance of Nissan and Infiniti vehicles covered by the Nissan and Infiniti warranty booklets in Precision Tune Auto Care centres located in Oman.

For any repairs and maintenance requirements covered by the Nissan and Infiniti warranty booklets, customers are kindly requested to book their appointments by contacting:

Toll free numbers: 80001234 or 80004455
nissan@precisiontunegcc.com



RO 3 million projects in Dhofar to boost tourism



FROM PAGE1

As for the Hamrir View project, it extends on a space area of 50,000 square metres, as its investment cost reached RO 505,000. The project includes a playground, parking spaces, food and beverage kiosks, restrooms and seating areas.

There is also the Wadi Darbat project, which is being developed on an area of 105,000 square metres, at an investment cost of RO 561,5000. The project provides a unique hospitality and entertainment experience in the bosom of greenery, orchards and waterfalls flowing in the valley, in terms of housing, food, drinks, attractive picnic areas, cable cars and a waterfall viewing platform.

The Ain Jerziz development project, which extends on an area of 40,000 square metres, aims at raising the level of public service facilities, while the project includes parking spaces, toilets and picnic areas.

The ministry is also implementing a number of projects in partnership with the Dhofar Municipality, including Hashir Oasis and Sadah Oasis, which provide all services to

visitors, residents and travellers at a number of stations in the governorate, where lands have been offered for investment and the implementation of the plans developed by the ministry for these oases has kicked off.

It also offers a number of heritage and historical sites for investment, including the waterfront cafes of Al Baled Archaeological Park, Kut Hamran, Burj Al Askar, the old market in the Wilayat of Mirbat, the Fort of Mirbat, the customs building and the surrounding area, in addition to the Rakhout Fort, while the ministry is currently working on to exploit these tourism sites to enhance their attracting capabilities for the visitors.

Eng Ammar bin Marhoon al Marhoon, Chairman of the Development Committee of the Municipal Council in Salalah, said that the Governorate of Dhofar enjoys its natural ingredients, which contribute in attracting tourists, while it has a diversified geographical composition including mountains, desert sands, valleys and picturesque beaches, in addition to its cultural and historical treasures emanating from an authentic civilisation of

thousands of years.

He added that the governorate is distinguished by a number of tourism icons that, if they are optimally exploited, will contribute to promoting this sector and compete at the regional and international levels.

Further to its contribution to the GDP of the country and in the revitalisation of other promising sectors as well as the tourism and heritage sectors, the concept of tourism and its planning goes beyond being a goal of pleasure and entertainment to a pivotal tool for achieving the comprehensive development objectives, which are included in the Oman Vision 2040 as well as the Tenth Five-Year Plan, which the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working on, implementing its visions and embodying them in cooperation with its partners in the sector through the national strategy for tourism.

These efforts are being reflected in many projects in the wilayats, encouraging the private sector and facilitating the process of accelerated growth by diversifying and developing the elements of the tourist attractions and raising their efficiency and revitalisation.



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GEN AL NUMANI RECEIVES YEMENI, LIBYAN AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Tuesday Dr Khaled Saleh Shoteif, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed several areas of joint cooperation and means of enhancing them.

The Yemeni ambassador lauded Oman's efforts, its

endeavours to resolve the Yemeni crisis and its support for establishing peace through coordination with all related international parties.

Gen Al Numani also received



Sania Abu Al Qasim Ghoma, Ambassador of the State of Libya to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

The Libyan ambassador

expressed her appreciation for the cooperation extended to her by all officials in the Sultanate of Oman. She also lauded the firm bilateral relations between Oman and Libya.

On his turn, Gen Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in boosting bilateral relations during her tour of duty, wishing her success.

— ONA

City folk seek water parks

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

As summer days approach and high-temperature lock people, especially children, in their homes, one activity that would have given an occasional reprieve is the water theme park.

Even the famed beaches are a no-go during summer.

Apart from two such parks in Nizwa and Salalah, children of the Sultanate of Oman are deprived of such activities, forcing them to look for avenues in neighbouring countries or elsewhere.

According to industry analysts and the World Waterpark Association, water parks in North America, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America generate over \$10 billion in revenues from millions of visitors.

"Water park is the only good outdoor option during summer, and we just do not have it here in the Sultanate of Oman. Now, we have two snow parks, but they are expensive and cannot be visited regularly. Some water parks, even small, in and around the city, would have been useful," said Mustafa al Balushi, who takes his children to water parks abroad every year.

Several countries, including less developed countries, have water parks attracting many visitors and



revenues every year.

"I come from Dhaka; we do have a couple of good water parks in the city to take our kids during summer vacation. It is a long time since we have it here in the Sultanate of Oman, which everyone has missed," said Mustaq Hassan, an expatriate from Bangladesh.

Park operators do have their

challenges, like uninterrupted water supply, water treatment, and round-the-clock maintenance. Now all eyes are on the development of Hayy al Sharq, a world-class multi-cluster 1.5 million sqm entertainment and leisure theme park, which will be built in Barka.

Apart from an integrated theme park and other entertainment

options, it will also have water parks.

Hawana Aqua Park in Salalah is the first entertainment venue of its kind in Oman. It has been hugely popular since opening its doors, while Wadina Waterpark in Nizwa is around an hour and a half away from Muscat. However small, it is the only one available nearest to the capital.

Seven firms booked for not paying wages

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 2

The Ministry of Labour has referred seven companies to the Public Prosecution for violating Article (51) of the Labour Law related to their failure to pay wages on the legally specified date. Article (51) of the Labour Law requires employees to be paid their wages on a working day and in the case of monthly paid employees, once every month at least, or in the case of weekly or fortnightly paid employees, once every week or fortnight.

The timing of payment for employees employed on piecework depends on when the piecework is completed but generally, must be weekly for the value of any work in progress already completed and the balance within one week of final completion. In all cases, an employer may not delay payment for more than seven days from the due date.

Meanwhile, the ministry took action against 18 workers violating the provisions of the Labour Law, including nine workers who left the employer.

The ministry has warned



companies that do not comply with the transfer of employees' salaries via the Wages Protection System (WPS). The warning holds significance as a number of private sector companies continue to defer payment of employee salaries by several months despite the overall economic situation in the country getting better over the past year.

In a statement, the ministry said that as per Article (53) of Chapter One, part four of the Omani Labour Law issued by Royal Decree No (35/2003), the employer will not be cleared of the employee's salary unless the amount is deposited in the employee's account at one of the locally approved banks.

Passengers scramble for refunds as Go First cancels services

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 2

India's leading budget airline, Go First, has cancelled all its flights for three days (May 3-5) due to operational reasons. The airline operates services to Kannur and Mumbai in India from Muscat and all these flights have been cancelled.

"We regret to inform due to operational reasons, Go First flights scheduled for May 3-5 have been cancelled. We apologise for the inconvenience caused by the flight cancellations. A full refund will be issued to the original mode of payment shortly. We acknowledge the flight cancellations might have disrupted your travel plans and we



are committed to providing all the assistance we can," the airline said in a statement.

Passengers have been complaining about the lack of response from the airline with its refund and cancellations page not opening for transactions. "You choose to cancel the flight due to operational concerns and besides requesting a refund and

using a different airline. I need to rearrange my travel on the same day (urgent situation). Customer service, numbers are busy," said one passenger seeking a refund.

Apart from cancellations, passengers have been also complaining about last-minute cancellations by the airline. "The helpline numbers are not functional," said another

passenger, while travel agents confirmed they have been getting calls for cancellations for flights even beyond May 5.

The Wadia-owned Go First suspended flights due to pending dues of oil marketing companies. Reports suggest that the airline's cash flow has been seriously hit as it has grounded more than half of its fleet due to recurrent issues.

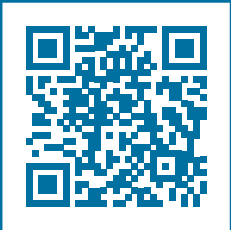
However, the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Tuesday said that Go First Airlines informed them that all flights will remain cancelled on May 3 and 4.

The non-supply of engines from Pratt & Whitney which powers its Airbus A320 neo aircraft has also led to the grounding of flights.

ASIAN WORKER KILLED IN BIDIYAH LANDSLIDE



An Asian worker died and another one was rescued by a search and rescue team from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority after a landslide occurred while the workers were digging a well at a farm in Al Mintrib area in the Wilayat of Bidiyah.



British Embassy to host King Charles’ coronation



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 2

The coronation of King Charles and Queen Consort Camilla will take place at Westminster Abbey, London, on May 6. People from across the world are expected to visit the capital city to experience this unique and historic occasion, with millions more watching from home, across the UK and around the globe.

Big lunches, street parties and a day dedicated

to good causes will bring communities together throughout the UK over the special coronation bank holiday weekend.

On Sunday (May 7), a spectacular Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle will showcase the country’s diverse cultural heritage in music, theatre and dance. One of the highlights of the concert will be ‘Lighting up the Nation’, in which iconic locations across the UK will be lit up with projections, lasers, drone displays and illuminations. The British Embassy in Muscat will also be lit up to mark the occasion.

The activities on Sunday will culminate in a fantastic evening of song and dance at the Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle, staged and broadcast by the BBC in front of an audience of several thousand members of the public, selected for free tickets via a public ballot.

The weekend of celebrations will end with ‘The big help out’. Created by Britain’s best-loved charities and organised by The Together Coalition, it will highlight the positive impact volunteering has on communities across the nation.

In tribute to the King’s lifetime of public service, ‘The big help out’ will encourage people to come out and support the causes that matter to them. The British Embassy Muscat staff members will also be volunteering their time to support their local communities in Muscat.

“The British Embassy is hosting a screening of the King’s coronation at the Al Bustan on May 6 for invited guests, with thanks to our platinum sponsors, BAE Systems and Standard Chartered; and our gold sponsors, Addleshaw-Goddard, Trowers & Hamlin, Royal Grammar School of Guildford Muscat, and Howden Insurance Brokers Oman,” an embassy press release said.

Fine arts exhibition opens at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah



MANAH: A modern art exhibition codenamed ‘Bareeq’ was inaugurated on Tuesday at Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University for International Cooperation. The exhibition was organised by Sheikha Nadira Al Riyami School and in partnership with Omani Women’s Association in the Wilayat of Manah.

The exhibition included innovative works of art that expressed identity, traditions and heritage, with special emphasis on the role of Omani women in several artistic fields. — **ONA**

GCC standardisation organisation’s technical board meets

MUSCAT: The Technical Board of Heads of GCC Standardisation Authorities held its 55th meeting in Muscat on Tuesday. The meeting was chaired by Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for Commerce and Industry.

The two-day meeting reviewed a number of topics, including the approval of draft Gulf standards and technical regulations, as well as the GCC Standardization Organization’s plan for the period (2021-2025).

The meeting discussed projects of joint cooperation aimed at enhancing ‘conformity assessment services’ with member states. It also looked into a mechanism set for the participation of parties concerned in the meetings of the Technical Board.

The meeting touched on the use of the ‘Gulf Conformity Mark’ system, being considered as substitute for the ‘Gulf quality Mark’.

The meeting also reviewed a unified progress report drafted by GCC technical committees tasked with specifications, the issue of specifications’ technical work guides and the assessment of the performance of GCC technical committees for the year 2020.

The meeting was attended by Saud Nasser al Khusaibi, Chairman of the GCC Standardization Organization, and other officials from member states. — **ONA**

ANNOUNCEMENT



RECALL CAMPAIGN 2020-2022 (JL) JEEP WRANGLER

Starting Date of Campaign: **3 May 2023**
Recall Segment: **Body Frame**
Recall Type: **Safety Recall**
Recall Code: **28A**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE		NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
	From	To	
2020-2022 (JL) JEEP WRANGLER	1C4HJXAG3LW258096	1C4HJXCG0MW539089	34

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicles.

Description of Recall:

Approximately 5,120 of the vehicles mentioned above may have been built with an unnecessary frame stud. This stud may come into contact with the fuel tank in the event of a crash, which, in certain circumstances, may cause a fuel leak. In the presence of an ignition source, this leak may result in a fire, increasing the risk of occupant injury and injury to persons outside the vehicle.

Rectification Procedure:

Inspect the frame and, if necessary, remove the frame stud, then apply black paint to the cleared stud area.

Parts Number	Description
04443609GB or equivalent black paint	Paint, Touch Up Spray Black (142g / 5oz)

Service Procedure:

If you have a 2020-2022 (JL) Jeep Wrangler, please get in touch with our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive on 24 500 530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be inspected and repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 24 500 530

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com

ANNOUNCEMENT



RECALL CAMPAIGN 2021-2023 (WD) DODGE DURANGO

Starting Date of Campaign: **3 May 2023**
Recall Segment: **Rear Spoiler**
Recall Type: **Safety Recall**
Recall Code: **20A**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE		NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
	From	To	
2021-2023 (WD) DODGE DURANGO	1C4SDJCT7NC136754	1C4RDJAG5MC606539	23

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicles.

Description of Recall:

Approximately 3,400 of the vehicles mentioned above may have a rear spoiler that is over-flush with the roof, which can cause contact when cycling the liftgate. This may result in vehicle occupants hearing the spoiler hitting the body when opening or closing the liftgate or a rattle from the spoiler being loose while driving. An over-flush rear spoiler may become damaged when cycling the liftgate, which can cause it to become partially detached from the vehicle. If the rear spoiler becomes partially detached, it may separate from the vehicle while driving and create a road hazard to other drivers, potentially causing them to crash.

Rectification Procedure:

The rear spoiler will be inspected for looseness and gaps that may indicate improper installation. If necessary, the upper spoiler section will be ordered and replaced, and the spoiler will be reattached to the vehicle.

NOTE: Only a small number of vehicles are expected to require replacement of their spoilers.

Parts Number	Description
CSANY731AA or CSANY732AA	Rear Spoiler

Service Procedure:

If you have a 2021-2023 (WD) Dodge Durango, please get in touch with our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive on 24 500 530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be inspected and repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 24 500 530

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com



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5

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CARDS

Implementation of regulations starts

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

@Afrahalbalushia

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has started the implementation of regulations regarding the registration of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and the issuance of Entrepreneurship cards. The regulation grants the MSMEs owners 90 days from the implementation date in an effort to reconcile their situation.

The Entrepreneurship Card is a document that enables its holder to obtain a package of facilities in various sectors from relevant authorities. The most important objective of the card is to support small and medium enterprises through the provision of a set of privileges and incentives by government and private agencies in coordination with the SMEDA. The card is granted to the enterprise according to conditions set by the regulations.

Ahmed al Asmi, Director of the Customer Services Department at SMEDA, said: "The regulation came to keep pace with the rapid changes in the world of entrepreneurship and provides wider opportunities

for small and medium enterprises to enable them to sustain their growth, as it will increase the pace of packages of facilities, incentives and exemptions from government and private institutions." Entrepreneurship will raise the contribution of these institutions to the gross domestic product and their role in employment.

The conditions for registering the enterprises include the status of the enterprise as small or medium, according to the classification stipulated in this regulation. It depends on the number of enterprise workers and the revenue volume in Omani rial.

A major firm or its branch should not own the institution, and the headquarters of the institution should be within the geographical borders of the Sultanate of Oman. The application for registration of the institution should be submitted on the form prepared for this purpose.

The regulations also specified the aspects of selling, waiving, or disposing of the enterprise that obtained the Entrepreneurship Card in any way by settling all obligations related to aspects of support and incentives,



provided that the new owner of the enterprise obtains a new Entrepreneurship Card within thirty days from the date of sale, assignment, or disposal. In addition, the entrepreneurship card is considered cancelled if a new card is not issued within the period referred to, and all aspects of support and incentives obtained by the organisation are cancelled.

The regulations also stated that

that all obligations related to support and incentives are settled.

When the entrepreneurship card is cancelled for any reason, the support and incentives associated with it will be cancelled, and it is not permissible to apply for a new card for any establishment belonging to the previous owners or one of them or an establishment in which they are partners, except after the lapse of at least one year from the date of cancellation.

It is worth noting that SMEDA followed the regulation by a decision specifying the categories eligible for the entrepreneurship card, and the regulation witnessed an expansion in the categories to include five categories in line with the changes and in an effort to maximise the impact of the sector on the national economy and raise its contribution to the gross domestic product and to meet

the rapid changes in the business world and economic changes.

Obtaining the card requires that the owner of the enterprise be insured in one of the retirement or social insurance systems of the competent authorities, with the exception of retirees or those over the age of sixty years. The entrepreneurship card is issued for a period of one year, renewable for similar periods, provided that an application is submitted for renewal before sixty days from its expiry date, and the card is considered cancelled in the event of non-renewal within the aforementioned period, provided that he has no obligations that impede the cancellation of the card.

The new regulations for registering MSMEs and issuing the Entrepreneurship Card aim to provide wider opportunities for small and medium enterprises.

البنك الوطني العماني
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund



National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report For the 3M- 2023 ending 31st of March 2023

The first quarter of 2023 was challenging and volatile with biggest bank failures since the financial crises. However, the Global markets were more resilient in the first quarter as a near visible end to rate hikes, further declines in inflation and quick actions by government officials in response to the bank failures helped shore up confidence. The GCC markets ended 1Q on a mixed note. Despite some positive cues from developed markets the GCC corporate numbers did not have much to cheer about. The investor interest in the regional markets post dividends was not encouraging, leading to declines in most markets. Brent Oil saw a surprise upside trigger from OPEC+ announcement of a production cut.

The NBO GCC FUND gained 4.90% in 1Q23 and outperformed the Benchmark S&P GCC Composite Index by 6.71%. Overall, our stock selection as well as allocation contributed to the returns. Our position in US markets also aided the overall performance of the fund. The active risk of reducing banking sector exposure also helped positively.

Saudi Tadawul turned positive in 1Q after 3 consecutive quarters of decline. S&P raised KSA's sovereign rating from A- to A while Moody's upgraded the outlook to positive from stable. ADX saw profit taking during the quarter after a strong run up in the year 2022. On the other hand, DFM saw some interest in buying and ended 1Q with 2.1% gains. Both Qatar and Kuwait market ended the quarter with losses. MSX had a successful IPO and ended the quarter marginally higher. On the economic front, the S&P revised Oman's sovereign rating from Stable to Positive on the back of the country's fiscal and economic reforms. Bahrain ended with a marginal decline of 0.5%. All 3 major US indices ended the quarter in the green, led by Nasdaq with 16.77% gain.

Going forward, we expect the interest rate cycle to turn lower and in favor of equities. The corporate performance in GCC could be an important driver of equities. Besides IPOs giving new opportunities to diversify, we also believe that certain sectors like consumption and the new generation Information Technology stocks offer further scope for appreciation. Overall, we believe that our portfolio is well positioned to benefit from the mutating environment and is likely to deliver positive results to the unit holders in the medium to long term.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	31 March 2023 RO	31 March 2022 RO	31 December 2022 RO
ASSETS			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	10,361,613	13,351,217	10,064,468
Cash and cash equivalents	362,590	409,316	466,929
Dividends receivable	62,664	69,649	65
Total assets	10,786,867	13,830,182	10,531,462
LIABILITIES			
Current liabilities			
Accruals and other payables	40,140	124,329	100,649
Total liabilities	40,140	124,329	100,649
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	10,746,727	13,705,853	10,430,813
Net asset value per unit	0.927	1.070	0.883

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	31 March 2023 RO (3 months)	31 March 2022 RO (3 months)	31 December 2022 RO (12 months)
INCOME			
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	483,727	1,581,611	(415,099)
Net realised (loss) / gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	(54,634)	118,374	(56,445)
Dividend income	141,807	197,977	345,514
Interest income	508	500	1,349
Foreign exchange gain	2,547	--	--
Other income	--	576	674
	573,955	1,899,038	(124,007)
Expenses			
Management fees	29,896	36,281	138,344
Fund Management Body fees	14,384	14,000	35,000
Brokerage expenses	13,482	9,574	46,886
Foreign exchange loss	--	8,935	42,581
General and administration	3,139	5,468	20,180
Administrator fees	4,077	4,947	18,865
Custodian fees	2,367	2,400	10,525
	67,345	81,605	312,383
Net profit / (loss) and total comprehensive income for the period / year	506,610	1,817,433	(436,390)
Net profit / (loss) per unit	0.043	0.142	(0.036)

Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Rawl, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO
Since 1973



Recall Campaign



Date of Campaign : 03.05.2023
Campaign Type : Recall Campaign
Product Description : 2nd Row Seat SAB Wire Harness Inspection / Repair

Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle production range	VIN Range	No. of affected Vehicles
KIA	Telluride (ON)	1stSep'2022 - 23rd Jan '2023	5XXP281C3PG335889 - 5XXP581C1PG354836	18

Description of defect:

On some Telluride (ON) produced within specific production date range mentioned above, the side Airbag (SAB) wire harness contained in the 2nd row seat cushion assembly was manufactured by the supplier with the incorrect length. As a result, the wire harness can become damaged if it contacts the seat frame when the seat is folded or adjusted. If the wire harness is damaged, the Airbag MIL shall illuminate in cluster & the 2nd row seat side Airbag (S) may not deploy in a crash, thereby increasing the risk of injury.

Procedure:

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, 2nd Row seat SAB wire Harness inspection / repair, if necessary replace the wiring harness. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

For more information:

Customers, who own Telluride models as per the above VIN range, may please contact M/s. Reliable International Automotive LLC for details & booking appointment from 03/05/2023 onwards for inspection & installations.

Contact Details:

Contact Details: Toll free No. 80073222 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 08.30 to 17.30hrs.

C/R 170783



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-116/2023	Construction of Ibra Health Center in North Sharqiyah Governorate	18/May/2023	14/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent	R.O 110.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-117/2023	Construction of Al Mudhaybi Health Center in North Sharqiyah Governorate				

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om.



Red Sea evacuations put Saudi centre in Sudan crisis

PORT SUDAN: The HMS Al Diriyah, a 102-metre-long Saudi warship, is typically used to escort oil tankers through the Red Sea and in training exercises with Western naval powers.

But this week the vessel carried out a different kind of mission: transporting shell-shocked civilians from conflict-hit Sudan to safety on Saudi soil.

It was part of a broader evacuation effort that has given Saudi Arabia a central role in Sudan's crisis, putting the Gulf kingdom's regional clout on display for a global audience.

As of Monday, Saudi Arabia had welcomed more than 5,400 civilian evacuees, the vast majority of them foreigners representing 102 countries on six continents.

"I've been terribly impressed with all of their work to help evacuate people, to put their navy at the disposal of people fleeing," said Cameron Hudson of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The fighting — which has killed hundreds and wounded thousands so far — partly resulted from "gentle hand-holding" of army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and paramilitary leader Mohamed Hamdan Daglo when the world should have insisted on real reform, said Kholood Khair,



Evacuees from Sudan disembark from a ship upon their arrival in Jeddah. — AFP

founder of the Khartoum-based think tank Confluence Advisory. "This is a momentary reprieve for the international community

to focus on evacuations as the main story, rather than how we got here," Khair said. State-run channels are filming

new arrivals disembarking in the port city of Jeddah and interview diplomats stressing the Saudi navy's speedy mobilisation.

Khair, of Confluence Advisory, last week found herself in Port Sudan along with thousands of others desperate for a way out.

Saudi Arabia had welcomed more than 5,400 civilian evacuees, the vast majority of them foreigners representing 102 countries on six continents

She has credited the Saudis with being "the only ones on the surface who are taking any kind of responsibility by providing this safe route out, even if it is marred by politics".

Defence ministry spokesman Colonel Turki al Maliki said military assets would continue to be allocated to evacuations "as long as the Saudi Embassy is receiving requests from the other embassies".

Saudi officials are meanwhile positioning the kingdom as a mediator, keeping ties to both generals.

An envoy of Burhan's met on Sunday with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, and Saudi officials have requested an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. — AFP

Kenyan pastor to face terror charges over cult

MALINDI: A Kenyan cult leader accused of inciting his followers to starve themselves to death will face terrorism charges over the deaths of more than 100 people found buried in mass graves, prosecutors said after a court hearing on Tuesday.

The deeply religious Christian-majority country has been stunned by the discovery of mass graves last month near the Indian Ocean coastal town of Malindi in what has been dubbed the "Shakahola forest massacre".

Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, who set up the Good News International Church in 2003 and is accused of inciting followers to starve to death "to meet God," appeared in the dock in Malindi.

The small courtroom was packed with relatives of victims as Mackenzie, dressed in a pink and black jacket and brown trousers, was brought in by about half a dozen police officers along with eight other defendants.

After a brief hearing, the case was moved to the high court in

Kenya's second-largest city of Mombasa, where the suspects will face terrorism charges, prosecutor Vivian Kambaga said.

"There is a court (in Mombasa) that is gazetted to handle cases under the prevention of terrorism act," Kambaga told a magistrate during the hearing in Malindi, asking for the case to be moved to the high court.

Ezekiel Odero, a wealthy and high-profile televangelist, also appeared at the high court in Mombasa following his arrest in Malindi on Thursday in connection with the same case.

A total of 109 people have so far been confirmed dead, most of them children.

The first autopsies from Shakahola forest were carried out Monday on nine children and one woman.

Prosecutors have linked Odero and Mackenzie, saying in court documents that they share a "history of business investments" including a television station used to pass "radicalised messages" to followers. — AFP

Rockets fired from Gaza after hunger striker dies in Israeli custody

JERUSALEM: Palestinian groups fired salvoes of rockets from Gaza into southern Israel on Tuesday after a leader died in custody following an 87-day hunger strike, the first such death in more than three decades.

Khader Adnan, who was awaiting trial, was found unconscious in his cell and taken to a hospital, where he was declared dead after efforts to revive him, Israel's Prisons Service said.

Hundreds of people took to the streets in Gaza to rally in support of Adnan and mourn his death, and two separate rocket barrages were launched against Israel, claimed by an umbrella group including Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The Israeli military said at least three rockets were fired from Gaza in the hours after Adnan's death and a further 22 were launched later in the afternoon. Four were intercepted by Israeli air defence systems and the rest fell in open

ground. Since 2011, Adnan had conducted at least three hunger strikes in protest at detentions without charges by Israel. The tactic has been used by other Palestinian prisoners, sometimes en masse, but none had died since 1992.

Disputing the Prisons Service account, Adnan's lawyer Jamil al Khatib and a doctor with a human rights group who recently met him accused Israeli authorities of withholding medical care.

"We demanded he be moved into a civilian hospital where he could be properly followed up (on). Unfortunately, such a demand was met by intransigence and rejection," Al Khatib said.

Adnan, 45, was from Jenin in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Islamic Jihad sources said he was one of its political leaders.

Lina Qasem Hassan of Physicians for Human Rights in Israel said she saw Adnan on April 23, at which point he had lost 40 kg and was having trouble



A Palestinian kicks a burning object in clashes following the death of Khader Adnan during a hunger strike in an Israeli jail. — Reuters

breathing but was conscious.

"His death could have been avoided," Lina said, saying several Israeli hospitals had refused to admit Adnan after he made brief visits to their emergency rooms.

The barrages came almost a month after cross-border exchanges of fire between Israel and Gaza, which followed an Israeli police raid in the Al Aqsa mosque complex during the holy month of Ramadan. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Strikes kill seven, knock out airport

Israeli strikes on north Syria's Aleppo province overnight killed seven putting the area's international airport out of service.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Israeli missiles targeted "the Aleppo international airport area and the Nayrab military airfield area" nearby, reporting explosions



at both facilities and "severe damage".

The Observatory and state media said the strikes knocked out the Aleppo airport. — AFP

KAMPALA

State minister shot dead by bodyguard

Uganda's minister of state for labour and industrial relations, Charles Okello Engola, was shot dead by his bodyguard on Tuesday, according to police. The motive for the killing was so far not clear, police said.

The bodyguard allegedly fired several shots at Engola at close range as he was leaving his house to the north of the capital Kampala, police spokesman Fred Enanga said. The minister was killed instantly, he said. The bodyguard fled the scene and



later shot himself in a hair salon. Assassinations of members of government and other high-ranking figures are rare in Uganda. Engola was deputy to Labour Minister Betty Amongi. — dpa

TOKYO

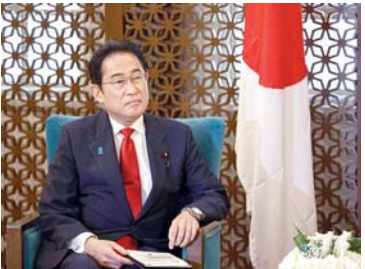
Kishida to visit South Korea, meet Yoon

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will visit South Korea on May 7-8 for talks with President Yoon Suk Yeol, the governments of the two nations said on Tuesday.

Kishida will meet Yoon in Seoul on Sunday, Japan's foreign ministry said.

Kishida's wife, Yuko, will also make the trip, according to South Korea's presidential office.

Earlier, Kishida told reporters that the visit to Seoul would be an opportunity for a "frank



exchange on the acceleration of ties" between the two countries.

The visit would come ahead of the Group of Seven (G7) leaders summit in Hiroshima.

— Reuters



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In brief

ROME



CIVILIAN RESCUE SHIP TAKES 300 MIGRANTS

A vessel operated by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has rescued over 300 migrants in distress in the Mediterranean, the organisation said on Tuesday.

In a first operation, the crew of the Geo Barents took on board some 300 people travelling on an overcrowded wooden boat. Shortly afterwards, a further 36 migrants were rescued from another vessel, MSF said. Among those rescued are three pregnant women and 80 minors, including two newborns, according to the organisation. The migrants had been located within Malta's search and rescue region, RSF said. — dpa

KATHMANDU



US CLIMBER DIES ON MOUNT EVEREST

A US climber has died on Mount Everest, his expedition organiser said on Tuesday, the first foreign death on the highest mountain in the world this season.

The 69-year-old mountaineer was on an acclimatisation rotation at around 6,400 metres when he died.

"He was feeling unwell and passed away at Camp 2. Efforts are underway to bring (back) his body," Pasang Tshering Sherpa of Beyul Adventure said.

Sherpa said bad weather was hampering the recovery efforts. Beyul Adventure is a local partner of US-based expedition organiser International Mountain Guides. — AFP

MINNEAPOLIS



POLICEMAN CONVICTED IN GEORGE FLOYD MURDER

The last of four former Minneapolis police officers charged in the death of George Floyd has been found guilty of manslaughter.

Tou Thao, who held back onlookers as three other officers pinned the 46-year-old Black man to the ground, was convicted by Hennepin County District Court Judge Peter Cahill after a bench trial in the northern US city.

Thao opted to be tried by a judge rather than by a jury. Cahill convicted him on Monday and the decision was released on Tuesday. Derek Chauvin was captured in a video that went viral. — AFP

Artillery exchanges and missile attacks mark May Day in Ukraine

KYIV: Several people were killed in Russian missile attacks and artillery exchanges in Ukraine.

According to the General Staff in Kyiv, the Russian military used cruise missiles and combat aircraft. Several civilians were killed or injured in attacks in the east of the country and in central Ukraine. Numerous residential buildings and infrastructure objects were also damaged or destroyed.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for a strengthening of his country's air defence.

"We are working with our partners as actively as possible to make the protection of our skies even more reliable," Zelensky said on his nightly video address.

"Last night alone, from midnight to seven in the morning, we managed to shoot down 15 Russian missiles," Zelensky said. "But unfortunately not all of them."

In the Zaporizhzhya region in central Ukraine, Russian and Ukrainian military forces engaged in intense artillery exchanges during the day.

At least two civilians were killed and 14 others wounded in Mikhaylovka, which is occupied



Ukrainian servicemen take part in a military exercise in the Kharkiv region. — AFP

by Russian troops. The warring parties' statements could not immediately be independently verified.

New explosions over the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea caused unrest among its population. According to Russian media, a Ukrainian drone was shot down by air defence in the west of the

peninsula. At the weekend, a fuel depot in the port city of Sevastopol was set on fire by a drone attack.

The number of people injured in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region following overnight Russian missile strikes rose to 34, according to the latest figures on Monday.

"There are already 34 injured

from the missile strike on Pavlohrad district," the region's governor, Serhiy Lysak, said on Telegram, after earlier saying 25 had been hurt.

Most of the victims have suffered fractures, bruises, wounds from splinters and smoke inhalation from fires that broke out after the rocket attacks. — dpa



General view of the Europol building in The Hague, Netherlands. — Reuters

INTERNATIONAL POLICE ARREST 288 IN DARK WEB BUST

THE HAGUE: A multi-continental crackdown has halted a major "dark web" marketplace, with international police arresting 288 suspects and recovering more than 50 million euros in cash and virtual currency, Europol said on Tuesday.

The joint operation called SpecTor by US, British, Brazilian and European law enforcement also netted almost a tonne of drugs and 117 firearms, Europe's policing agency said.

"In an operation coordinated by Europol and involving nine countries, law enforcement have seized the illegal dark web marketplace 'Monopoly Market' and arrested 288 suspects involved in buying or selling drugs on the dark web," the Hague-based Europol said in a statement. "A number of these suspects were considered high-value targets," Europol said.

The sting followed in the wake of a successful 2021 operation by German police in which it seized the Monopoly Market's criminal infrastructure. "Europol has been compiling intelligence packages based on troves of evidence provided by the German authorities," Europol said. "These target packages, created by cross-matching and analysing the collected data and evidence served as the basis for hundreds of national investigations," it said.

"As a result, 288 vendors and buyers who engaged in tens-of-thousands of sales of licit goods were arrested across Europe, Britain, the United States and Brazil," Europol said. — AFP

UN chief urges 'quantum leap in climate action'

BERLIN: United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for the world to make "a quantum leap in climate action," addressing a lead-up conference to the COP28 climate meeting hosted by the German Foreign Office on Tuesday.

"We know that the 1.5 degree pathway is possible," Guterres told participants of the 14th edition of the Petersburg Climate Dialogue in Berlin in a video message.

Referring to one of the goals in the Paris Climate Agreement - preventing global warming from exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius - Guterres said this requires developed countries and international financial institutions to deliver "on long-overdue finance," and "breaking our fossil fuel addiction," among



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (C) welcomes participants of the Petersburg Climate Dialogue, in the United Arab Emirates. — AFP

other things. Representatives from some 40 countries are among the attendees of the two-day conference held in Germany annually since 2010, this time to prepare the United

Nation's COP28 climate change conference set to take place in Dubai in November.

In her opening remarks on Tuesday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock

presented a more optimistic picture, saying she believes industrialised nations will keep their long-standing promise to financially support poorer states.

"The good news is that as things stand now, we are on a path to finally reach the \$100 billion figure this year," she said, referring to an annual amount that richer nations originally pledged.

Germany has already pledged to increase its own contribution to at least \$6.6 billion, said Baerbock. However, trillions of dollars are needed for climate protection and adaptation to increasing global warming, she added.

"Public funds alone will not be able to cover this need.

That is why it is important to mobilise massive private funds as well." — dpa

French unions plan protests against pension law

PARIS: French trade unions announced on Tuesday a new nationwide day of protests on June 6 against President Emmanuel Macron's decision to increase the retirement age by two years to 64.

The reform, which Macron signed into law last month despite weeks of protests and strikes, has crystallised discontent against a president perceived by many in France as being aloof and indifferent to their daily hardships.

With lawmakers poised to discuss on June 8 a draft bill proposed by the opposition Liot party to cancel the retirement age reform, the unions said in a joint statement that the day of industrial action on June 6 was meant to "allow all workers to make themselves heard by the MPs."

Aware that the government

is closely monitoring whether they can maintain a rare unified stance, the unions headlined their statement: "Still united, numerous and determined to get the (pension law's) withdrawal and social progress."

The unions said they would use the upcoming talks to reaffirm their opposition to the pension reform and would work on joint proposals to improve workers' conditions.

But some could possibly still decide not to go to the meetings with Borne, a source who took part in the morning's union discussions said, adding that the phrasing of the lines referring to these meetings was bitterly discussed.

Opinion polls show a substantial majority of French people oppose the higher retirement age. Police clashed on



Police officers stand guard, as union workers participate in a protest during a May Day rally in San Juan. — Reuters

Monday with hundreds of black-clad anarchists in Paris and other cities during May Day union-led protests against the pension

reform. On Wednesday France's Constitutional Council will review a new bid by the opposition to organise a citizens' referendum

on the pension reform. It rejected a previous request last month, clearing the way for approval of the bill. — Reuters

Travelling during Eid...



Saif al Shaibany
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The writer is a banker by day and a storyteller by night

Sometimes rules are meant to be bent if not broken. A break from the norm is usually refreshing and can make a big difference. Even if it means breaking a tradition once in a while.

Sobreakingtherulesisconsidered a no-no, especially a tradition which involves marking the first three days of the month of Shawwal. Those three days are usually celebrated by visiting families and friends and gathering under one roof.

Such tradition is upon us we are now in the month of Shawwal marking the end of the holy month of Ramadhan.

We look forward to the festive celebrations of Eid al Fitr a treat of all the hard work which been put in during the holy month.

Depending which part of the world you're from the first three days of Shawwal are given as a holiday to celebrate the Eid. Where many Muslim look forward to wear new clothes, visit their families, eat and the children look forward to dress in their new clothes and receive their eidya.

In many parts of the world including Oman the first three days are always special, but no more important than the first day of Eid. As many mothers and grandmothers would always say “I want to see all of you on the first day” what they actually mean is don't have any idea on travelling. Then comes those who say this Eid let's take a break from the routine and travel anyway. What travel you

TRAVELLING IN EID IS NOT NEW, USUALLY MANY TRAVEL DURING EID AL ADHA, BUT VERY LESS DURING EID AL FITR

say, yes travel on the day which is seen by many as no you shouldn't travel on Eid especially on the first day.

Travelling in Eid is not new, usually many travel during Eid al Adha, but very less during Eid al Fitr.

So is this a trend now? The answer could be yes. The small break from the usual starting... something new

or even starting a new tradition and of course a balance has to be made as we can't travel on every Eid.

And this trend is now seen among many families in the Middle East who have started travelling during Eid taking advantage of the long Eid holidays a chance to refresh.

Travelling to hot spots like Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Far Eastern countries or Western European countries. As the weather conditions of those countries are ideal for many of the Eid escapers.

But as we are all aware everything has its drawbacks when travelling during those festive days.

Eid does provide its sense of magic - the feel of joy, the whole country joins together in festivities, visiting families and to have them

all gathered under one roof, and let's not forget the shuwa. All this usually happens only once or twice every year.

Okay and yes - the opposite also can be said on the opportunities, taking from different perspective to refresh, a change, creating new memories and a new family tradition.

That tradition is a balance of old and new creating a modern culture not staying far away from the old neither trying to change it, but to enhance its experience.

As travel is something new and Eid is something old. The balance between them is what will make it work. The ones who are willing to take the chance might enjoy the fruits of the experience.

Why does your life flash before your eyes near death?

ISSAM AHMED

Survivors of close calls with death often recall extraordinary experiences: seeing light at the end of a tunnel, floating outside their own bodies, encountering deceased loved ones or recapping major life events in an instant.

The fact that these stories share so many elements in common and come from people from diverse cultural backgrounds points to a possible biological mechanism — one that has yet to be de-mystified by scientists.

In a new paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS), researchers at the University of Michigan found evidence of surges in brain activity associated with consciousness in two dying patients.

While not the first study of its kind, what sets the new research apart is that it's detailed in a way “that's never been done before,” senior author Jimo Borjigin, whose lab is devoted to understanding the neurological basis of consciousness, said.

The team looked back at the records of four patients who died from cardiac arrest while on electroencephalogram (EEG) monitoring. All four fell into comas and were removed from life support after it was determined they were beyond medical help.

When taken off their ventilators, two of the four patients — a 24-year-old woman and a 77-year-old woman — saw increases in their heart rates as well as surges of brain waves in the gamma frequency — the fastest such brain activity, which is associated with consciousness.

Earlier studies — including a prominent paper published in 2022 about an 87-year-old man who died from a fall — have also found spikes in gamma waves in some people near the point of death. The University of Michigan paper went further by examining in greater depth which parts of the brain lit up, with the activity detected in the “posterior cortical hot zone” — comprised of the temporal, parietal and occipital lobes, which are associated with changes in consciousness.

“If this part of the brain lights up, that means the patient is seeing something, can hear something, and they might feel sensations out of the body,” said Borjigin, adding that the region was “on fire.”

Brain and heart activity were monitored, second by second, for the last few hours of the patients' life, contributing to the strength of the analysis, she added. It's not clear why two of the patients experienced these potential signs of “covert consciousness” while two did not, though Borjigin speculated their history of seizures might have primed their brains in some way.

Owing to the small sample size, the authors cautioned against making wide-ranging inferences. — AFP

75 years after the Nakba, many Palestinians still long for return



Adel Zaoun
The writer works for AFP

From her modest home in the blockaded Gaza Strip, Amina al Dabai remembers the very different world in which she grew up more than seven decades ago. Born in 1934, Dabai was still only a child when Israel was created on May 14, 1948.

Now she is one of 5.9 million Palestinian refugees living in the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria according to the United Nations.

They are descendants of more than 760,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes 75 years ago.

The event is known by Palestinians as the Nakba, or “catastrophe”, during which more than 600 communities were destroyed or depopulated by Jewish forces, according to the Israeli organisation Zochrot.

The memory of the Nakba, which is commemorated on May 15, has become a rallying point for the Palestinian quest for statehood. It falls a day after Israel declared statehood in 1948, prompting an invasion by five Arab armies which the young nation defeated.

Ahead of the anniversary, AFP spoke to some Palestinians in their 80s and 90s who were exiled during the Nakba to the Gaza Strip.

Dabai recalled the day “Jewish soldiers in disguise” arrived in her hometown of Lydda, now known as Lod in central Israel. Because the fighters' faces were covered in keffiyehs, a scarf that has come to symbolise the Palestinian struggle, locals thought they were reinforcements sent from Jordan.

People were so delighted they “rushed for the fountain” in the town centre to celebrate.

But realising the soldiers were Jews, they “fled into the mosque and their homes”.

“They (soldiers) stormed the mosque and killed everyone inside,” she added. “I was young and saw it with my own eyes.”

Planned deportation, expulsion or voluntary exile? A massacre of hundreds of civilians and unarmed fighters in a conflict where both sides were guilty of atrocities?



Amina al Dibai recounts her story during an interview at the Rafah camp in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

THE MEMORY OF THE NAKBA, WHICH IS COMMEMORATED ON MAY 15, HAS BECOME A RALLYING POINT FOR THE PALESTINIAN QUEST FOR STATEHOOD

The events of July 12 to 13, 1948, during the capture of Lod by Israeli forces, remain the subject of debate and intense controversy even to this day.

One thing seems certain: the town was emptied of almost all of its 30,000 Arab residents practically overnight.

Following the war, the West Bank fell under Jordanian rule while Gaza was controlled by Egypt.

“We lived comfortably” until that point, recalled Dabai, as she reminisced about children playing on swings, the central market, and the trickling of water from a large fountain surrounded by shops.

But she is bitter about what she lost:

“We were a weak country and we did not have powerful weapons.”

The day after the disguised soldiers arrived, she said, they returned with orders — leave Lod, or be killed.

“We said we don't want to leave. They said they would kill us. So all the poor people left, and we were among them,” said Dabai.

The family fled on foot, walking for several days until they reached the Christian town of Bir Zeit, near Ramallah in the West Bank, then moving on towards Egypt. But the journey was too expensive and so the family settled in Gaza instead. Like many, they were sure they would be back soon.

Only after the Oslo Accords established the Palestinian Authority in the 1990s did Dabai manage to obtain a permit to visit her old neighbourhood in Lod.

“I put my hand on the wall of our house and said: ‘my love, my grandfather's house, is destroyed, and our neighbours' homes are inhabited by Jews”, she said.

She said she would not accept any compensation for the home, and no longer expected to return, but insisted that “future generations will liberate the country and return”.

“No one was filming the massacres and what was happening, in the way we do today,” she added, her voice breaking. — AFP

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

For a peaceful and prosperous world

What is fundamental for a peaceful and prosperous world is quality education. Unfortunately, what we are witnessing currently is that education is in a crisis as it is not aiding to shape a world that ensures social, economic and environmental justice.

By education, I do not mean the mindless pursuit of achieving top grades and marks. It should be based on more knowledge and awareness. Because without education, or where education is low, and not within the reach of the citizens, there will not be established order.

Chaos and anarchy thrive where education does not!

So education is fundamental to development and growth — from health advances and agricultural innovations to efficient public administration and private sector growth. As people play the most important role in shaping the status of the country, education is responsible for shaping a person.

As global bodies like International Labour Organisation suggest a transformation with systemic changes in the prevailing educational model is required.

By transforming education means empowering learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be resilient, adaptable and prepared for the uncertain future.

Today, most countries in the world are in the midst of a list of a number of pressing challenges including global warming, loss of biodiversity, growing gender inequalities and discrimination, and devastating pandemics like Covid-19.

It is estimated that of the world's 787 million children of primary school age, 8 per cent do not go to school. The new figures show that 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide were still missing out on school in 2021.

These children are the future and will be responsible for the development of the nation. Knowledge



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

UNDER OMAN VISION 2040, THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN MAKING GREAT EFFORTS TO TRAIN AND UPGRADE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF OMANI CITIZENS

is power and education empowers. Nelson Mandela has quoted, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

The government of each country should ensure that education reaches everyone. Laws must be promulgated for mandatory education till a certain age which could make every individual aware of the basic living in society.

In this context is the fourth goal of the United Nations 2030 agenda that ensures quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Everyone has a role to play in improving the quality of education. Governments, teachers and schools have a vanguard role to play, along with parents and students themselves.

And when it comes to the Sultanate of Oman, the country is on the right track in achieving the goal of providing quality education, reflecting the pivotal importance of the sustainable development file within the national agenda.

Under the Oman Vision 2040, the government has been making great efforts to train and upgrade the qualifications of Omani citizens to enable them to contribute to the development of society and humanity at large.

The government's attention to education and training has been reflected in setting legislation, developing policies and upgrading programmes and institutions. The Basic Law of the country states, “Education is a right for every citizen, its aim is to build the Omani personality, preserve the national identity, and consolidate the scientific method.”

Now back to the educational transformation again — without it no human being will be able to achieve the knowledge and skills they need to stay fit in this globalised complex world. Nor will they be able to live harmoniously!

In the long term, education reaps greater benefits, educated kids today will develop a very civilised and moral society tomorrow!

MURAL OF KHADER ADNAN



A Palestinian rides his bike past a mural depicting Khader Adnan, a Palestinian hunger striker and top figure in the Islamic Jihad in the occupied West Bank, in Gaza City, on Tuesday. Khader Adnan began a hunger strike on February 5, died on Tuesday, the prison service said in a statement. – AFP

Making ESG ratings count

MSCI, one of the most influential gatekeepers of environmental, social and governance ratings, is about to downgrade the ESG ratings of 31,000 investment funds in one fell swoop.

The dramatic move comes after MSCI decided to update its methodology and require funds to meet higher standards for AA or AAA ratings

One would expect a move with such a potentially far-reaching impact on financial markets to be scrutinised in advance by regulators. Alas, ESG ratings providers (ERPs) have so far flown under the regulatory radar.

ESG ratings are instrumental to guiding investment decisions. But, as the MSCI downgrades indicate, they are currently highly subjective and, often, inflated.

In fact, as many as half of the companies included in a 2021 Bloomberg Businessweek analysis had been upgraded by MSCI as a result of methodological changes. Just two years later, a fresh round of changes is bringing mass downgrades — and even more uncertainty about what to expect.

This problem is hardly exclusive to MSCI. According to a 2022 report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), how ERPs approach the measurement risk or impact is highly inconsistent.



Hazel Ilango

The writer is an energy-finance analyst covering debt markets at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis

THE LACK OF SHARED STANDARDS AND TRANSPARENT METHODOLOGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE RATINGS LEADS TO THE MISPRICING OF STOCKS AND BONDS

The lack of shared standards and transparent methodologies leads to the mispricing of stocks and bonds — and, as in the MSCI case, the funds that hold them — and undermines effective decision-making by investment managers.

Regulatory intervention is urgently needed to establish a stable and credible ESG ratings system that is both accurate and predictable.

The first step is to ensure that the methodologies used by all ERPs are transparent, and independently verified from the outset.

Regulators should require ERPs to provide concrete and structured evidence to support the ratings assigned and the validity of their criteria.

Moreover, any changes to an ERP's methodology or internal guidelines should be independently assessed and confirmed.

And if a change in criteria or methodology is set to bring sweeping ratings adjustments, regulators must step in to evaluate and approve it, just as they would if faced with the prospect of large-scale credit-rating downgrades.

MSCI's ESG Fund Ratings are based on unregulated assessments that examine a company's financial risk

according to ESG factors, an approach known as single materiality, rather than its influence on the environment or society.

While some ERPs say that their ratings do account for broader effects, these claims are difficult to verify using their disclosed methodologies.

The single-materiality approach is notably inadequate for funds with exposure to fossil-fuel assets.

The IEEFA's examination found that MSCI has granted top ESG ratings to funds with more than 85 per cent exposure to fossil-fuel investments.



ESG ratings providers (ERPs) have so far flown under the regulatory radar.

These ratings are highly misleading, because they both underestimate the risks that such firms' activities generate and exaggerate their positive impact.

Reliance on fossil fuels exposes investors to climate risk, which, if not properly accounted for, could result in substantial losses through value destruction and high opportunity costs.

Ultimately, high ESG ratings can make firms appear greener than they are, leading investors to tilt portfolios towards firms with poor sustainability performance.

ERPs should consider adopting a “double materiality”

approach, which reflects the impact of a firm's activities on society and the planet. Only such an approach — as well as stringent regulatory oversight — can ensure that ESG ratings help avoid greenwashing and promote truly sustainable investments.

The scale of the problem should not be underestimated. ESG ratings influence the allocation of trillions of dollars in capital markets.

Ratings that are inflated and misleading — based on arbitrary rules, opaque methodologies, and entrenched bias from input-based disclosures — could well lead to disaster, much as the flawed ratings of mortgage-backed securities enabled the 2008 global financial crisis.

Better regulation of the ESG-ratings industry is vital not only to prevent the next financial crisis, but also to deliver genuine progress toward sustainability.

The good news is that the United Kingdom's Financial Conduct Authority, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the European Commission, and Japan's Financial Services Agency are already exploring ways to tighten standards on ESG ratings. In the best interest of investors — and the planet — other market regulators should follow suit.

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AL NAHDA THRASH AL BASHAYER TO CLOSE IN ON OL TITLE

OMANTEL LEAGUE POINTS TABLE						
TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAW	LOST	GD	POINTS
Al Nahda	23	15	7	1	24	52
Al Suwaiqi	22	14	3	5	11	45
Al Seeb	23	11	9	3	17	42
Al Rustaq	22	11	6	5	5	39
Oman Club	22	9	8	5	4	35
Dhofar	22	9	6	7	6	33
Bahla	22	9	6	7	3	33
Sohar	23	10	3	10	1	33
Al Musannah	23	5	12	6	-1	27
Al Nasr	22	6	9	7	-1	27
Sur	22	6	2	14	-10	20
Al Ittihad	23	4	5	14	-17	17
Al Orouba	22	2	7	13	-19	13
Al Bashayer	23	3	3	17	-23	12

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 2

Al Nahda continued their march towards the Omantel League title with a resounding 3-0 victory over Al Bashayer in the 23rd round. The game was played at Nizwa Complex on Monday.

Al Nahda scored their first goal of the match in the 35th minute by Mohammad Khasib. In the second half, Abdulaziz al Shamousi scored the second goal in the 56th minute. Ali al Rashidi increased Al Nahda's lead with the third goal in the last minute.

With this win, Al Nahda now have 52 points, consolidating their lead in the league and keeping the second-placed Al Suwaiq at bay with a seven-point difference.

Al Suwaiq will meet Oman Club in the same round on Wednesday. With this loss, Al Bashayer remained in last place with 12 points facing a high possibility of relegation to the First Division League.

There are only three rounds left in the Omantel League and Al Nahda need just



five points to secure the league title and achieve the double this season, following their victory in the HM's Cup.

DRAMATIC TIE

Al Seeb and Al Ittihad fought hard but ultimately ended in a draw 1-1 during the 23rd round of the OL match at the Al Seeb Sports Stadium.

The game was a thrilling one, with the tie continuing until the end of regular time. In the 90+6 minute, Mohamed Ramadan of Al Seeb scored the goal that would have given his team the lead of third place. However, Al Ittihad managed to equalise with a goal scored by Mohammad Ayyad three minutes later in virtually the last action of the match.

Despite playing with only 10 players after Khaled Yazid was expelled in the 22nd minute, Al Ittihad did not lose the match, ending it with a draw.

The result was unfavourable for Al Seeb, as their struggle with Al Rustaq for third place in the league may be threatened if Al Rustaq beat Sur on Tuesday. While Al Ittihad, currently in 12th place with 17 points, struggle to avoid relegation.

SOHAR WIN

Sohar emerged victorious over Al Musannah 1-0 in another match at Al Rustaq Stadium. Junior Anthony scored the only goal of the match in the 87th minute, securing Sohar's close win. Sohar now have 33 points, temporarily equalling Bahla, who are playing the 23rd round match with Al Orouba.

Additionally, Sohar's win puts pressure on Oman Club, who are currently in fifth place with only two points ahead of Sohar. The result also marks a significant setback for Al Musannah, who are now in a precarious position in ninth place with only 27 points, and their chances of avoiding relegation could be dependent on the outcome of the next round.

The top-flight Oman football league has only three rounds remaining, and the competition for the top spots is still fierce. Sohar's victory has brought them in contention for a fifth spot, while Al Nahda's win has given them a strong advantage in the race for the title. Meanwhile, Al Seeb's tie with Al Ittihad has made their bid for third place more challenging. The other matches of the round is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Bangalore defend 126 against Lucknow

LUCKNOW, India: Royal Challengers Bangalore's bowlers starred to secure an 18-run victory against Lucknow Super Giants in a low-scoring Indian Premier League match on Monday.

Skipper Faf du Plessis top-scored with 44 to guide Bangalore to 126-9, a total their bowlers defended by bowling out Lucknow for 108 on a tough batting pitch.

Bangalore pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj dismissed Kyle Mayers for a duck from the second ball of the chase and Lucknow soon slipped to 38-5 with Virat Kohli taking two good catches.

Lucknow's batsmen seemed to be in a hurry to get the runs as Nicholas Pooran, on nine, and Marcus Stoinis, on 13, fell to Karn Sharma's leg-spin and the innings witnessed two run outs.

Lucknow suffered an early blow when skipper KL Rahul seemed to hurt his thigh while fielding before limping off and then came into bat last.

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood returned figures of 2-15 from his three overs in his first IPL appearance this season.

Bangalore, still searching for

their first IPL title, moved up a place to fifth in the 10-team table with five wins in nine matches. Lucknow dropped to third.

Du Plessis, who returned to captain the side after he played as a batsman in the previous few matches led by Kohli, set up victory for Bangalore with a knock that stood out in an otherwise disappointing show by the star-studded line-up.

Du Plessis and Kohli put on 62 runs for the first wicket despite a shaky start but none of the other batsmen could survive the test of Lucknow bowlers.

Spinners Ravi Bishnoi and Amit Mishra took two wickets each and Afghanistan fast bowler Naveen-ul-Haq returned figures of 3-30.

Bishnoi took down Kohli, stumped for 31, and Glenn Maxwell, lbw for four, with his leg-spin and soon Mishra and Naveen joined forces in an innings which was interrupted by a brief spell of rain.

Du Plessis, who reclaimed the top spot in the batting charts with 466 runs after overtaking Yashasvi Jaiswal (428) of Rajasthan Royals, attempted to hold the innings but fell to Mishra. — AFP



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Faf du Plessis plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against Lucknow Super Giants in Lucknow. — AFP

KOHLI, GAMBHIR DOCKED FULL MATCH FEES OVER ALTERCATION

NEW DELHI: Former India team mates Virat Kohli and Gautam Gambhir were docked their full match fees following their altercation in Monday's Indian Premier League (IPL) match in Lucknow, organisers said.

Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore had been beaten at home last month by Lucknow Super Giants, who have former Test opener Gambhir as their 'Global Mentor'.

Bangalore successfully defended 126-9 in a low-scoring contest to exact revenge, and Kohli, well known for his combative nature, looked animated throughout the match, screaming, punching the air and gesturing to the Lucknow crowd with every dismissal.

When the players were shaking hands Kohli appeared to have a blunt exchange with Lucknow bowler Naveen-ul-Haq and was then confronted by Gambhir.

Kohli, 34, initially looked like he was trying to reason with Gambhir but the conversation became heated and the pair, who previously clashed in a 2013 IPL match, had to be separated by team mates.

Gambhir, 41, was fined 100 per cent of his match fee for breaching the tournament's code of conduct, organisers said in a statement,



Lucknow Super Giants' team mentor Gautam Gambhir (C) shakes hands with Royal Challengers Bangalore's Virat Kohli (L) and Glenn Maxwell (R) at the end of the match. — AFP

with Kohli handed a similar fine. Both players admitted to their offence, they added.

Naveen was fined 50 per cent of his match fee for his role in the altercation.

Bangalore and Lucknow are among five teams level on 10 points after nine matches, two points behind leaders and defending champions Gujarat Titans.

Lucknow skipper KL Rahul hurt his hip while fielding and could not open the innings. He came out to bat at number 11 and could not score off the three deliveries he faced in the penultimate over of the match.

"He pulled his hip flexor I guess," Lucknow stand-in skipper Krunal Pandya said. "I do not know how bad it is. The medical team will assess it." — Reuters

Omani coaching couple to take part in world karate event in Türkiye

MUSCAT: The World Karate Championship will be held in Antalya, Türkiye, from June 4 to 7 in which more than 25 countries will participate which includes Arab, European and Spanish teams.

Oman's participation will be under the leadership of coach Iqbal bin Youssef al Balushi along with his wife and coach Shaima bint Salem al Rahbiyeh. The arbitration will be on the Russian Karate and Jiu-Jitsu Federation system under the JKA system — the Japanese karate system which is close to the basic traditional karate.

The main supporter in Sultanate of Oman for foreign participation in this world event is Shaikh Adel bin Saeed al Shanfari — CEO of Al Shanfari Group of Companies, and he is also the Consul of the State of Luxembourg. Shaikh Adel is the head of the International Mixed Martial Games Organisation based in Iran. Russia and more than 60 countries are members of this organisation which is called World Oriental Sport (WOF).

Oman's representative coach Iqbal al Balushi has a long history in martial arts, especially karate and



Iqbal bin Youssef al Balushi and Shaikh Adil al Shanfari.

kickboxing. He holds a sixth degree black belt from the Russian Karate Federation. He has worked as a karate instructor at Sultan Qaboos University, Dhofar Club and Al Musannah Club.

He has also worked as a karate instructor in Canada and founded many sports clubs in Oman and is the CEO of Al Azaiba Karate and Kickboxing Team.

India overtake Australia at top of ICC Test rankings

NEW DELHI: India overtook Australia on Tuesday to go number one in new Test rankings issued by the International Cricket Council, while also retaining the top position in T20s.

England remained number three in Tests but reduced the gap behind the top two teams significantly, the rankings published by the ICC showed.

England have won 10 out of 12 Tests since captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum joined forces last year following a woeful run of one win in 17 matches.



The new annual rankings reflect all series completed since May 2020 and drop results from the 2019-20 season, the ICC said.

The table remained otherwise unchanged, with South Africa fourth and New Zealand fifth ahead of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

India remained number one in the T20 rankings, increasing their lead over second-placed England, while New Zealand overtook Pakistan and South Africa to be third. Australia are sixth ahead of West Indies, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The new rankings for ODIs will be released on May 10. — AFP

Kohli-Gambhir spat adds spice to IPL festival



That fight between Gautam Gambhir and Virat Kohli, was exactly something that we needed as an entertainment.

This is something that has been going on for the last 15 years and it has never been resolved. When IPL started in 2008, Delhi couldn't pick Virat Kohli, as they already had a strong batting line-up with Gautam Gambhir, Virender Sehwag, Shikhar Dhawan, Ab de Villiers, Shoaib Malik and so on. Hence, they decided to invest on pacer Pradeep Sangwan.

With years, Virat Kohli became the star of Indian cricket, and it is believed that it was Virat Kohli, who was behind Gambhir's exclusion from the Indian team. These assumptions could never be clarified and the differences between both just raised with time.

Cut short to this season, where Gambhir made an extravagant celebration in his team's (Lucknow Super Giants) win against Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore. This was the home game for Bangalore and multiple gestures which LSG players made were remembered by Kohli and on different occasions in the

game, he made it a point to reply to those gestures.

Things got ugly when, Afghani Naveen passed a few remarks to Kohli and things got heated. Gambhir was never to keep quite and got involved in the things, which made it bad to worst. Although the players were able to separate both the parties without any harm and then later were seen smiling and enjoying at the ground.

Although the social media handles of both the franchises continued to go after each other even late in the night and suggested that the scores weren't settled. As viewers, we would more than wish to see these teams clashing once again in the play-offs, and I tell you that it won't be anything less than an action-packed drama.

LSG VS CSK AT LUCKNOW

● **PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER** – Both these teams clashed in the sixth match of this year's IPL, where Chennai got the better of Lucknow in a 422 run-fest at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. Chennai played a free-flowing game to get to 217 runs in 20 overs. In reply, LSG fought hard to finish at 205/7, although poor starts from KL Rahul, Hooda and Krunal Pandya, costed Lucknow the game.

● **TEAM INFO** – Lucknow are sitting well on third, while Chennai are fourth. Both have 10 points and NRR is what



separates them. Lucknow are coming from a heated defeat against RCB. Chennai have lost two back-to-back matches and these both would desperately like to get back on the winning track.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played – 2; Won by CSK- 1; Won by LSG – 1

● **LSG possible 12** – M Vohra, K Mayers, D Hooda, M Stoinis, K Pandya, N Pooran, K Gowtham, R Bishnoi, N Haq, A Mishra, Y Thakur, A Badoni

● **CSK possible 12** – R Gaikwad, D Conway, A Rahane, M Ali, A Rayudu, S

Dube, R Jadeja, M S Dhoni, M Pathirana, T Deshpande, M Theekshana, A Singh/P Solanki

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch at the Ekana Cricket Stadium is a bit slow in nature. The ball tends to hold a bit on the surface and the batters will have to be on their toes. The spinners will play a major role. The temperature in Lucknow is expected to range between 21 and 28 degrees Celsius. Expect rain to play a spoil sport.

● **Match Prediction** – With 70 per cent chance of rain, doubt that this game is going to be a full game. In case of a reduced game, both these power-packed sides can be extremely dangerous and it can be anyone's game. Although I am favouring CSK to win this one, for better quality in their spin bowling department comparatively.

PBKS VS MI AT MOHALI

● **PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER** – Both these clashed against each other in the 31st game, where Punjab came out victorious in a 415-run thriller at the Wankhede (Mumbai). Arshdeep's 4-for was the stand out performance.

● **TEAM INFO** – Mumbai are seventh with 8 points, while Punjab are sixth with 10 points. Mumbai have finally got back to winning ways after two defeats and they would want to continue their momentum. Punjab are coming after an important

win against Chennai. All of last 3 games of Punjab have been 200+ games and they have won two out of them, so expect this one also to be a high-scoring encounter.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played – 30; Won by MI – 15; Won by PBKS – 15

● **PBKS possible 12** – A Taide, S Dhawan, L Livingstone, S Raza, S Curran, J Sharma, S Khan, H Brar, K Rabada, R Chahar, A Singh, P Singh

● **MI possible 12** – R Sharma, I Kishan, C Green, S Yadav, T Varma, T David, J Archer, P Chawla, K Kartikeya, R Meridith, A Khan, N Wadhwa

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch at the Punjab Cricket Association IS Bindra Stadium is a wonderful track to bat on. The ball comes nicely onto the bat, so batters enjoy their time in the middle. Spinners may get some assistance from the surface, but it's a good surface to bat on. The temperature is expected to range between 22 and 35 degrees Celsius.

● **Match Prediction** – Punjab and Mumbai have had a long history between them and their head-to-head situation indicates the same.

Considering this year's form, although Mumbai are just starting to look like a settled side, but it is Punjab who have been the talk with their unpredictable performances. Punjab are likely to be favourites due to their free-flowing attacking game play and lack of quality bowling in Mumbai. Sadda Punjab!



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates winning her quarterfinal against Egypt's Mayar Sherif in Madrid Open. – Reuters

Sabalenka survives Sherif scare to reach semifinals

SWIATEK EDGES ALEXANDROVA TO REACH MADRID QUARTERS

MADRID: World number two Aryna Sabalenka was forced to sweat by Mayar Sherif but eventually came through 2-6, 6-2, 6-1 to reach the Madrid Open semifinals on Tuesday.

Australian Open champion Sabalenka struggled badly at first but turned the two-hour match around convincingly to reach the semifinals.

“I was just trying to keep fighting to keep playing my game and find my rhythm,” said Sabalenka.

“She’s a clay court specialist and I’m very happy with this win. It was a very tough one.”

Sherif, the first Egyptian to reach a WTA 1000 quarterfinal, capitalised on Sabalenka’s erratic start to break in the first game.

The 26-year-old became the first player to take a set off Sabalenka in Madrid, breaking again for 4-1 and missing set point at 5-1 before clinching it on serve. However the Belarusian, 24, bounced back strongly, converting all four of her break points in the second set and hitting 10 winners to Sherif’s one to force a third.

The 2021 Madrid winner was a break down at 2-1 in the second but won 11 of the next 12 games.

Sabalenka showed her power as she battered Sherif back to break in the third set before consolidating for 3-0.

Sherif, who beat world number five Caroline Garcia in straight sets in the third round, was eventually overrun by the big-hitter, who secured another break and then served out.

On Monday, Sabalenka made light work of 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva with a 6-3, 6-1 win to reach the quarterfinals.

Iga Swiatek, top of the world

rankings, followed her into the last eight with a hard-fought three set win over Ekaterina Alexandrova, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

Russian youngster Andreeva, a wildcard, became only the third 15-year-old to win a WTA 1000 main draw match when she beat 2021 US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez last week.

She went on to beat two top 20 players in Beatriz Haddad Maia and, on her 16th birthday, Magda Linette, but overcoming 2021 Madrid winner Sabalenka was a bridge too far.

Two-time French Open winner Swiatek recovered from an early break by world number 17 Alexandrova to take the first set in what proved a trickier clash than it seemed on paper.

The Pole surrendered a 5-2 lead in the second and failed to convert a match point on the way to a tie-break, in which Alexandrova hit three aces to force a third set.

Swiatek broke for 2-1 and held on to that advantage before breaking to love to clinch victory in two hours and 27 minutes, finishing at past 1 am on Tuesday morning.

“(Playing so late) wasn’t easy for sure,” said Swiatek.

“It’s tough, you have to sleep in the middle of the day to be fresh in the evening.”

Swiatek will face Croatian Petra Martic, who upset Czech player Barbora Krejickova 6-3, 7-6 (7/1).

Third seed Jessica Pegula beat Italy’s Martina Trevisan 6-3, 2-6, 6-3 and will face Veronika Kudermetova, who beat Daria Kasatkina in a tight all-Russian battle 7-5, 1-6, 7-2 (7/2).

Maria Sakkari beat home favourite Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-4

to set up a quarterfinal clash with Romanian Irina-Camelia Begu.

MEDVEDEV, RUBLEV OUT

On Tuesday, world number three Daniil Medvedev crashed out in the fourth round against Russian compatriot Aslan Karatsev, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4.

The second seed in the Spanish capital has admitted he struggles on clay and fell to another defeat against Karatsev on the dirt, as he did in Rome two seasons ago.

After going nearly three hours on Monday in a three-set win over another Russian, Alexander Shevchenko, Medvedev secured an early break but Karatsev immediately struck back for 2-2.

They stayed on serve and Karatsev triumphed comfortably in the tie-break, his ball striking immaculate throughout the clash.

Medvedev complained fruitlessly about the shadows in the Arantxa Sanchez stadium, the second court in Madrid.

Ranked 121st in the world, qualifier Karatsev broke the 2021 US Open winner for 3-2 in the second set and only dropped two points on his serve after that to triumph.

“Feeling great, playing well, I just have to focus every match. I’ll be preparing for the next round,” said Karatsev.

“You just concentrate more (against the best players), you have to be 100 per cent because they don’t give you any free points, you have to concentrate, be mentally tough.”

Earlier, Karen Khachanov knocked out Andrey Rublev 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 in another all-Russian battle, and will face home favourite Carlos Alcaraz or Alexander Zverev in the quarterfinals. — **AFP**

Open Water Swim in Qurum on May 5

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 2

The Oman Aquatics Federation (OAF), the newly approved name of former Oman Swimming Association, is all set to organise the 15th edition of Oman Open Water Swimming Championship in Qurum Beach on Friday. The federation announced recently changing the location of the event to take place in Muscat instead of Duqm. The previous year’s championship was held in Dibba.

More than 60 swimmers representing 13 clubs confirmed their presence in this year’s championship. The participating teams and swimmers will compete for the cash prizes of more than RO 2,500 besides the gold medals and trophies for the top winners. The championship will feature different categories including senior category for above of 18 years old and youth category for between 14 to 17 years old. Both categories will swim for a distance of 3 kilometres.

The competition will be for three rounds and each round for 1 km. The youth category competitions



will begin at 8:30 am while for senior it will start at 8:45 am. The registration and numbering of all the swimmers will start at 7 am. Another category is dedicated for masters with 500 metres distance.

The medal ceremony of the championship will take place after the conclusion of all the competitions as the chief guest Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Vice-Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, will distribute the awards and medals to the top winners in presence of top dignitaries and officials.

Salalah club were the title holders of the last year while Jaalan Club ended the event as runners-up and Majees Club finished in third place. The last championship had registered participation of more than 65 swimmers representing 15 clubs.

GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Malallah al Busaidy, Secretary-General of OAF, said that Oman Open Water Swimming Championship is one of the top domestic event.

“The championship is a great opportunity for the club

swimmers and the national team swimmers to gain the maximum technical outcomes. The national team swimmers will take part in the event as a training purpose without competing in different categories of the championship except the swimmers who are representing their clubs,” he added.

Al Busaidy, who will act as championship director, affirmed that all the logistics and technical arrangements are almost completed.

“The registration will begin early in the morning at 7 am and we hope all the clubs to corporate with the organising committee towards the success of the event. The final and medals ceremony will be held in a closed hall in a hotel in Muscat after the competitions end. During the podium ceremony, the top swimmers will be feted besides the sponsors from government and private sectors,” he concluded.

The championship will be headed by the secretary-general of OAF while international referee Said Khairallah will be the main umpire of the tournament and Abdulmoneim al Alawi, Fina open water referee, will be the technical director of the event.

GCC YOUTH, SPORTS MINISTERS MEETING FROM TODAY

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 2

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will host the 36th meeting of GCC ministers of youth and sports from May 2-4 at Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat.

During the meeting, they will discuss topics including the decision of the Supreme Council to study means of enhancing joint action in digital transformation and technologies.

The ministers will discuss the ways to develop joint Gulf action in the youth field, in addition to the youth volunteer work, among the strategic plan for the committee duties of Ministers of Youth and Sports in the GCC.

The meeting also will review the Gulf Youth Forum, as Oman participated in the previous forum in Saudi Arabia, in addition to the joint activities and programmes whose budgets are approved by the Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee.

They will review the strategic cooperation with regional and international organisations in the youth sector and the recommendations made by the technical committees.

In addition, talks will be held about the honourees and creative youth in the GCC, and the implementation of the Gulf Youth Day, as well as determining the place and date of the next meeting, which will be headed by



Qatar for the year 2024. The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, hosted the meeting of the Technical Committee, which was held last January.

In the technical meeting, they raised the year’s activities including the Tomorrow’s Skills Programme in Bahrain, the Social and Cultural Forum for Girls, the Holy Quran Competition, the Youth Science Forum, the Youth Theater Festival, and the Youth Ideas Forum for Sustainability.

The General Secretariat had approved the honourees names in the youth field for the year 2023 in the GCC countries, Wafa al Ali and Rashid al Shamsi from the UAE. The Hope Ventures from Bahrain, Dr Abdullah al Fawzan, and Dr Luay al Tayyar from Saudi Arabia, Tilal Development Company and Occidental Oman, Khalifa al Shahwani and Hareb al Jabri from Qatar, Dr Hashem al Tabtabaei and Dr Fawaz al Ajmi from Kuwait.

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Oman’s Duqm set to become regional hub for direct-reduced iron production

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 2

Duqm, a coastal town in Al Wusta Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman, is becoming a global hub for direct-reduced iron (DRI) production, attracting investments from steel industry players around the world.

The development of DRI plants within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) is set to transform Oman into a major steel exporter, providing a significant boost to the country’s economy.

DRI is a high-quality iron ore product that is used to make steel. It is produced by reducing iron ore with natural gas in a process called direct reduction. DRI is a cleaner and more efficient alternative to traditional blast furnace

steelmaking, as it emits fewer greenhouse gases and consumes less energy.

The Sultanate of Oman, with its abundant natural gas reserves and strategic location, is an ideal location for DRI production.

Duqm, in particular, is attractive to investors due to its deep-water port, which allows for easy export of the finished product to markets around the world. It also has access to a reliable supply of natural gas, which is a key raw material for DRI production.

Several major players in the steel industry have already announced plans to invest in DRI production in Duqm.

Just recently, Mitsui & Co, Ltd and Kobe Steel, Ltd announced the formation of a joint venture to build and operate a 5 MTPA DRI



plant in Duqm through MIDREX process. The production plant will be powered by natural gas and is scheduled to commence production in late 2027.

The Mitsui-Kobe Steel joint venture is well-suited to compete in the global DRI market due to its expertise in steel production and its extensive network of customers.

The joint venture will be able to leverage the strengths of both companies to produce high-quality DRI at a competitive cost.

On the other hand, Oman-based Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL) intends to set up a 4.5 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) capacity integrated steel mill for the production of a range of green steel products at a capex of around \$2.4 billion.

Anchored by a 6 MTPA pelletising plant, the mega project will be integrated with a 2.25 MTPA direct reduced iron (DRI) plant and 2.5 MTPA Electric Arc Furnace steel melt shop in the first phase (with similar expansions envisioned in the next phase).

Meanwhile, Australia’s Fortescue Metals Group plans to study the feasibility of building a

green hydrogen-based DRI plant in Duqm.

The plant, which would produce 250,000 tonnes of DRI per year, would be powered by renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power.

The development of DRI production in Duqm is part of Oman’s broader strategy to diversify its economy and create new opportunities for growth.

The Omani government has identified manufacturing sector as a key area for development and DRI production in Duqm is expected to play a significant role in achieving this goal.

Overall, the DRI production in Duqm is a significant development that has the potential to transform Oman into a major player in the global steel industry.



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Directors' Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are pleased to present to you the financial results of the Company for the three-month period ended March 31, 2023.

Over the last year, while we have witnessed gradual recovery from the effects of the pandemic, we have also seen the negative impact of the threat of a worldwide recession and higher interest rates resulting in slower growth and restrained business sentiments across the globe. In Oman, we have seen healthier growth rates and inflation is much better controlled than we have witnessed in certain other geographies. We continue to improve our technological capabilities to be aligned with the digital transformation happening across the world, in order to provide solutions that deliver best in class customer experience.

With a well-diversified geographical presence across Oman (21 branches), coupled with a broad product profile, your company is well positioned to provide innovative and financial solutions for both Retail and SME. Your Company was awarded the ‘Leadership in SME Financing’ at Muntada Almara event at Sohar. This serves as a testament of our continuous efforts in supporting the growth of the SME sector in Oman and our leadership position in the industry. Your Company also successfully launched the new brand identity both internally and externally across all platforms.

Your Company continues to adopt a prudent approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. Within this policy, our approach has been to target customers who satisfy our credit risk appetite. We anticipate a reasonable growth to our asset base in the medium term.

Our total regulatory capital of Omani Rials 97.58 million post the redemption of the Perpetual Bond issue on the first call date is the highest among Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs) which gives us a strong base on which to build our business. Your company remains the largest finance and leasing Company in the Sultanate in terms of asset size, branch network, revenues and profit.

The operating profit (profit before provision and tax) was at RO 3.53 million (RO 4.17 million in March 2022) while Net Investment in Lease was at RO 426.94 million (RO 425.45 million in December 2022). Profit after tax was RO 2.20 million as compared to RO 2.51million in March 2022.

Your Company is fully compliant with the provisioning norms prescribed by the Central Bank of Oman and the International Financial Reporting Standards. We have added to our credit reserves through additional overlay over the IFRS9 requirement in order to be prepared for future challenges given the incremental risk in the

portfolio due to the Covid-19 pandemic and recessionary trends.

Your Company remains committed to Omanisation and as of March 31, 2023, the number of Omani employees was 297 out of the total workforce of 325. The Omanisation percentage works out to 91.38% which is higher than the given target of 85%. Your Company continues to remain committed to providing career growth and development of Omani nationals through ongoing training programs in line with their job requirement. We will continue to maintain momentum on employee engagement initiatives, development of future skills, managerial and leadership capabilities for their professional development.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, our bankers, depositors, customers and shareholders for the support extended towards the growth of the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we also thank the management and staff which has enabled us to establish ourselves as the most trusted company in the sector.

Hani Muhammad Al Zubair
Chairman

Unaudited Condensed Interim Statement Of Profit Or Loss And Other Comprehensive Income For The

	Three months ended 31 March 2023 RO '000	Three months ended 31 March 2022 RO '000
Income		
Income from financing activities	10,824	10,479
Finance costs	(5,047)	(4,188)
Net finance income	5,777	6,291
Other operating income	682	852
	6,459	7,143
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(2,707)	(2,755)
Depreciation	(135)	(137)
Amortization	(88)	(81)
Net impairment loss on finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	(928)	(1,225)
Bad debts written back	(9)	9
Total expenses	(3,867)	(4,189)
Profit before tax	2,592	2,954
Income tax expense	(389)	(443)
Profit after tax	2,203	2,511
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss		
Movement in revaluation reserve – net of tax	2	2
Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	(4)	(89)
Other comprehensive income	(2)	(87)
Total comprehensive income	2,201	2,424
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.004	0.004

Unaudited Condensed Interim Statement Of Financial Position As At

	31 March 2023 RO '000	31 March 2022 RO '000	31 December 2022 RO '000
ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	5,998	3,987	5,876
Net investment in finance leases	352,719	354,610	355,763
Working capital and factoring receivables	74,223	60,697	69,689
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	4,966	3,398	4,907
Asset held for sale	1,500	1,500	1,500
Goodwill	5,950	5,950	5,950
Intangible assets	657	833	637
Property and equipment	6,487	6,615	6,572
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	452,760	437,840	451,144
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors and accruals	13,029	15,418	9,018
Tax liabilities	2,753	2,710	2,364
Bank borrowings	306,004	276,297	287,780
Fixed deposits	32,114	32,603	32,091
Deferred tax liabilities	697	533	697
End of service benefits	587	605	565
Total liabilities	355,184	328,166	332,515
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	57,370	54,123	54,123
Share premium	5,786	5,786	5,786
Revaluation reserve	1,021	1,029	1,023
Foreign currency reserve	5,319	4,321	5,319
Voluntary reserve	3,000	3,000	3,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	1,269	(662)	1,273
Legal reserve	10,376	9,363	10,376
Retained earnings	13,435	14,645	19,529
Total shareholders' equity attributable to the equity holders of the company	97,576	91,605	100,429
Perpetual bonds	-	18,069	18,200
Total equity	97,576	109,674	118,629
Total liabilities and equity	452,760	437,840	451,144
Net assets per share (RO)	0.170	0.169	0.186

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English with 7 days of receipt of the request. The full set of financials are available in the website of Muscat Stock Exchange.

New certification recognises OAB’s steps to protecting customers’ sensitive data

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has been awarded the prestigious Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) certification.

The certification confirms OAB’s security measures meet the highest standards of protecting its customers’ payment card data and underlines how the bank is mitigating the risk of data breaches, fraud and other security incidents. The PCI-DSS certification is an internationally recognised security standard awarded to organisations

that meet and exceed the rigorous security standards set forth by the PCI Security Standards Council. It ensures organisations handling sensitive information, such as credit card data, maintain a secure environment.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO at OAB, said, “This is a testament to our industry-leading commitment to protecting our customers’ payment card data and maintaining the highest standards of security. By investing in the very best cybersecurity solutions



and adopting state-of-the-art technology, our customers can be assured that they can trust us to keep their payment card data safe

and secure.”

He went on to explain that OAB is an extension of a 93-year-old global legacy under Arab Bank, and part of the Ominvest Group which further adds to the bank’s stringent data protection and cybersecurity processes and procedures.

As the longest bank publicly listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, OAB regularly assesses and enhances its practices to meet the highest global industry standards.

The PCI-DSS certification was developed by the PCI Security Standards Council, a global organisation that brings together leading payment card brands, including Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover.

Organisations must meet 12 requirements to ensure the security of payment card data, such as maintaining secure networks, protecting cardholder data, and regularly monitoring and testing security systems.

Bank Muscat showcases its services at first forum for persons with disabilities

MUSCAT: The first Forum for Persons with Disabilities organised by the Ministry of Social Development has been witnessing a large turnout of visitors from government and private institutions, non-governmental associations, persons with disabilities and their families, school students and services centres working for the welfare of persons with different types of disabilities.

The attendees also visited the Bank Muscat stall in large numbers to learn more about the banking services and facilities provided to this important segment of society.

During the event, which is taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on May 1-3, 2023, bank employees introduced visitors to many services tailored specifically for the benefit of the disabled as well as job opportunities at the bank for disabled persons.

They also took the time to explain more about how the bank is utilising modern technology to provide better services. The bank’s participation highlights its pioneering role and its keenness



to support Oman’s Renaissance by integrating different segments of society in playing their role in strengthening the national economy.

On this occasion, Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager – Credit, Bank Muscat, said “Bank Muscat participation in this forum highlights its leading role in enabling the disabled to play their part in society and underscores the initiatives implemented by the bank.

The bank will continue to develop and offer new services and products for the welfare of

the disabled at all its branches across the Sultanate of Oman. It may be noted that Bank Muscat has a number of achievements to its credit in this regard including the launching of the first ATM in Oman for persons with visual disabilities, on the premises of the Al Noor Association for the Blind.

It has also been taking great effort to ensure that its staff are trained in Arabic Sign Language and available at different branches to better serve customers with hearing and speech impairments. The bank also continues to partner with

associations serving the disabled by providing assistive devices to those in need.”

As part of its keenness to provide banking services and facilities to different segments of society, the bank organised sign-language training for more than 200 of its employees in cooperation with the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired. Bank Muscat continues to be keen to strengthen its pioneering corporate social responsibility in this area.

The bank has also previously provided wheelchairs and

electrically-operated beds to the disabled and Braille Sense devices and special laptops to students with visual disabilities at Sohar University.

It has also supported the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre and the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities. These efforts are a part of the bank’s initiatives in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility in helping persons with disabilities to integrate into society and contribute to the development of the country.

As part of its continued efforts to provide enhanced banking services to persons with disabilities, the bank is comprehensively upgrading 11 conventional banking branches and 9 Meethaq Islamic branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

Also, its m-Banking app has been updated to allow screen reading in Android and iOS, which can assist persons with visual disabilities. Bank Muscat is also implementing best practices on social media, promotional campaigns and e-mailers including describing images and videos with alternative text.

New India Assurance holds blood donation drive



MUSCAT: As part of the national and social responsibility, a blood donation drive in association with the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) of the Ministry of Health was organised by The New India Assurance Co Ltd at its head office premises in Muscat on April 26, 2023.

V V Raghavan, COO of New India Assurance Co Ltd, lead the blood donation drive by being the first donor and followed by the staff and their family members. It was a successful drive, unique for the event was the active participation and voluntary blood donation by the female staff members.

New India would like to thank all the volunteers who donated blood and specially the medical team of the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) of the Ministry of Health.

New India has committed to make it as an annual event and add it as a part of the calendar of events.

Bank Nizwa partners with Buna to offer seamless cross-border payments

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank and most trusted in Oman, has announced a partnership with Buna, a cross-border payment system fully owned by the Arab Monetary Fund.

This collaboration will enable Bank Nizwa to provide its customers with seamless payments in both Arab and international currencies, within a safe, risk-controlled and transparent environment. Buna currently facilitates payments in four Arab currencies; the UAE Dirham, Saudi Riyal, Jordanian Dinar and Egyptian Pound, as well as two international currencies, the US Dollar and the Euro.

“Our partnership with Buna demonstrates Bank Nizwa’s unwavering commitment to driving innovation and digitalisation in the financial industry. By leveraging Buna’s state-of-the-art digital platform, we can provide our customers with a seamless cross-border



payment experience, whilst also unlocking new avenues for growth and strengthening investment ties with our global trading partners.

The collaboration aligns with our digitalisation strategy, which focuses on harnessing the latest advancements in payment technology to deliver innovative financial solutions. At Bank Nizwa, we are dedicated to providing innovative and efficient financial services that cater to the unique needs and preferences of the people,” said Khalid al Kayid, the Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa.

Own a Kia Sportage and get a chance to scratch and win cars and more

MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning a Sportage can get a chance to win a Kia Pegas or Kia Niro thru scratch & win offer. Also, Scratch & Win up to 20 per cent off on new Kia vehicles and periodic service up to 100,000 kms. Additionally, get 1 year insurance and cash gift. (Conditions apply. For details please visit any Kia showroom.) The campaign will end on May 11, 2023.

The Kia Sportage with its stylish design underlines a brand new era in design, which is attractive and stunning. The fifth-generation Sportage moves to the next level in design, while paying homage to its rich heritage.

The Sportage has Kia’s modern signature Tiger Nose grille – that acts as the visual focal point of the car – LED DRLs (daytime running lamps), which in turn create solid boundary lines for the striking LED head lamps.

At the rear, the all-new Sportage maintains strong road presence



with a muscular swooping fastback design that flows into the rear lamps, allowing the SUV to personify strength and stability.

Depending on spec and model, the 2023 Sportage rides on 17-inch, 19-inch choice of different alloy designs, colours and finishes. In terms of interior space and comfort, the Sportage offers a unique high-tech environment that is visually impressive, as well as spacious and intuitive.

Throughout the cabin, the highest quality materials that are

powerful, responsive and efficient powertrains. A 2.0 RVC 4WD with Nu 2.0 MPI churning 157 hp at 19.5 kg.m torque. This is paired to a 6-speed AT. The Sportage is also available as 1.6T 2WD SRE, 1.6T 2WD SPL and 1.6T 4WD SPL with Gamma 1.6T GDI with 176 HP and 27 kg.m. torque. These are paired to a 7-speed DCT.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the ‘Good Partnership award,’ ‘Family Like Care’ Service award,’ and ‘Kia ‘Distributor of Distinction’ award.



Omani mining firm secures \$15m in new financing for copper-gold project

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAY 2

Oman-based copper mining firm Al Hadeetha Resources LLC says it has obtained around \$15 million in additional finance from its existing project finance lender Sohar International Bank – funds that will be utilised to support the completion and commissioning of its Al Washi-hi Majaza Copper-Gold project in Al Mudhaibi Wilayat.

Construction of the project's 1 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) copper concentration plant is now well progressed, with approximately three quarters of all civil work completed by end



of April 2023, according to the company.

Around \$8 million of the additional financing facility will be used to acquire spare parts, reagents,

lubricants and other consumables needed to commission the plant. The remaining \$7 million will be used for general working capital, including the payment of

utility bills and mining and camp running costs etc, ahead of mine output revenue generation, the company said.

A host of major project

milestones have been achieved to date, including: Primary crusher retaining wall steel erection and concreting; Stockpile tunnel; Reagent storage building foundation and block work; Power substation; Grinding and flotation electrical room foundation, slabs and roof; Concentrate and tailing thickener tank area; SAG and ball mill foundations; Conveyor foundations (for ROM handling); and Tailing filter building.

Australian-based mining firm Alara Resources has a 51 per cent stake in Al Hadeetha Resources Company.

Atmavireswar Sthapak, Managing Director, Alara, said: "We are thrilled to have put the additional finance facility

in place, with our existing lender Sohar International Bank.

This results in a simpler finance structure than the alternative of obtaining this amount from a future off-take partner. It ensures AHRL, the JV company developing the Al Washi-hi Majaza Copper-Gold Project, has the finance required to prepare to operate this exciting asset ahead of mine output revenues starting to flow.

With a raft of construction tasks already complete, copper product from the Al Washi-hi Majaza Copper-Gold Project will soon be making its way to clients."

The copper-gold project is slated for commissioning in September 2023.

Rise in business activity gives hope for recovery



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

However, a quarter point rise to 4.5 per cent in May followed by a further rise to 4.75 per cent in June is seen by the financial markets as highly likely.

The latest rise in the flash PMI index was driven by the dominant services sector. Its index of activity jumped from 52.9 to 54.9, a year high.

Chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, Chris Williamson, said: "For now the key takeaway is that the economy as a whole is not only showing encouraging resilience but has gained growth momentum heading into the second quarter.

The latest PMI reading is broadly indicative of GDP rising at a robust quarterly rate of 0.4 per cent.

The April data also pointed to the slowest increase in input costs for companies for more than two years as fuel and energy prices ease from the crippling highs seen a year ago in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, survey respondents reported that there has been no let-up in wage inflation, particularly in the services sector.

New order growth for services companies reached a 13-month high buoyed by a post-pandemic surge in spending on travel, leisure and entertainment.

UK economist at forecaster Capital Economist, Ashley Webb, said: "Overall, April's flash composite PMI suggests that the recent resilience in activity continued into Q2 and inflationary pressures may be easing more slowly."

He added: "We think the Bank (BoE) will need to raise rates further and keep them high for all of this year to reduce inflation all the way to the 2 per cent target."

The current gloomy retail figures contrasted with a strong bounce in consumer confidence in analyst GfK's latest index.

It reported a six-point rise in the index to minus 30 in April.

Joe Staton at GfK, the largest German market research company, said: "As food and energy prices continue to rise and inflation eats into wages the cost of living crisis is painful day-to-day reality for many. But are all consumers buckling under the pressure? On the evidence of April's figures the answer is no."

Hopes that the UK economy can live through surging inflation and a downturn in the retail sector, were given a boost by a survey showing business activity at its highest level for a year.

The closely watched S&P Global/CIPS Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) index rose from 52.2 in March to 53.9 in April, the third consecutive month of recovery. A reading above 50 points to an increase in output and suggests GDP grew during the month.

S&P Global upgraded the UK's credit outlook to 'stable' from 'negative', reversing the rating it gave following September's mini-Budget from then Prime minister Liz Truss and her chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng which had sent markets into a frenzy.

The rating agency also reaffirmed its AA rating on UK debt, while predicting economic output to shrink by 0.5 per cent this year, before growing by an average of 1.6 per cent a year between 2024 and 2026.

"The government's decision to abandon most of the unfunded budgetary measures proposed in September 2022 has bolstered the fiscal outlook," S&P said.

The index came out on the same day as disappointing official retail sales showing a 0.9 per cent fall in March, a dramatic turnaround from growth of 1.1 per cent in February.

Economists blamed cold and wet March weather and shortages of fruit and vegetables in supermarkets for the worse than expected data.

The mixed statistical messages will make it even harder for the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to make its decision on interest rates in coming months.

Oman gearing up to tap offshore oil and gas opportunities

CONRAD PRABHU

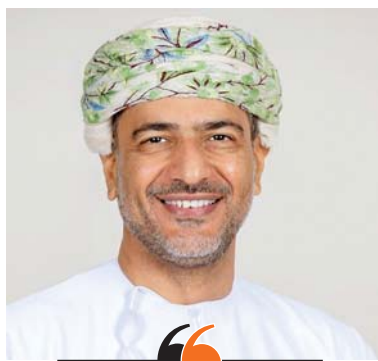
MUSCAT, MAY 2

Seeking to sustain hydrocarbon production as it transitions to a green energy future, the Sultanate of Oman plans to intensify its focus on opportunities in its vast, largely untapped offshore sector.

According to Mohsin al Hadhrami (pictured), Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, new acreage will need to be opened up for investment and development if current production levels are to be maintained over the long term. Going forward, this focus will increasingly encompass offshore opportunities, he noted.

"... we are dedicating more attention to offshore opportunities," the Under-Secretary said. "This area is still under development, but we are working on it and we see offshore exploration activities coming soon," he stated in an interview featured in The Energy Year (formerly The Oil & Gas Year), a leading UK-based news portal focused on the global energy sector.

Earlier, Al Hadhrami underlined the Oil & Gas sector's pivotal role in funding Oman's eventual transition to a low-carbon, green hydrogen-centric



The oil and gas sector is our starting point for building a future based on a greener economy because it has been the main driver to create significant in-country value (ICV), boosting job opportunities and encouraging local businesses.

MOHSIN AL HADHRAMI

Under-Secretary

economy.

"The oil and gas sector is our starting point for building a future based on a greener economy because it has been the main driver to create significant in-country value (ICV), boosting job

opportunities and encouraging local businesses," he pointed out.

In the interim, however, Oil & Gas activities will continue to underpin the economy during the changeover – a goal that needs to be secured by attracting new investment in the upstream sector to help sustain output, he explained.

According to the official, oil production averaged above 1 million barrels of oil per day (bopd) during the first 11 months of 2022, which was about 10 per cent higher than the output of 968,000 bopd (approximately) recorded during the corresponding period of 2021.

"Our objective for 2023 is to maintain production, in line with the goals set by Opec+," the Under-Secretary stressed in the interview. Significantly, a combination of new investment inflows into the upstream sector, as well as technology, is key to unlocking hydrocarbon opportunities – both onshore and offshore, according to the official.

"The Sultanate of Oman's reservoirs continue to decline, but exploration is always surprising us with good results where technology plays a major part, like advances in seismic acquisition and processing, fracking techniques and what have you.

In addition, in order for us to keep production levels up, we will need to attract investments in the sector, which is healthy, and part of our strategy is to open up new blocks," the Under-Secretary said.

To this end, a new bid round featuring three onshore concessions was launched by the Ministry, said Al Hadhrami, noting that investor interest in the upstream sector continues to be promising.

"We are optimistic about our oil and gas future, as we are receiving good feedback on our initiatives. International companies are showing rising interest in Oman, driven by our stable business environment and robust knowledge in the industry, and supported by more than 50 years of data acquisition and know-how development," the official said, adding: "In a nutshell, Oman presents a very positive landscape for oil and gas activities to grow, with local talent, stable regulations and a friendly business environment."

Presently, only three offshore concessions – Block 8 (off Musandam), Block 50 off the east coast, and Block 52 in the south, are the subject of exploration, development and production activities in Oman's offshore sector.

Mining sector HSE roadmap targets zero harm

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, MAY 2

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals yesterday held a health and safety forum to address safety concerns within the mining sector. The event was held in collaboration with Oman Energy Association (OPAL).

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, shared the following, "HSE in any sector is very critical for the health of any sector. The measure of the success of any sector depends heavily on the HSE environment that we set.

That was proven in the oil and gas sector, and that is why it is very important for us to take lessons from the oil and gas sector into the mining sector, and to prepare the leadership of the mining sector to be prepared for the challenges and opportunities in the mining



sector in regards to improving the HSE sector." Humaid al Bulushi, General Manager of HSE and Standardisation at OPAL, stated: "The event today is a very critical event; it is a start of a new journey on safe leadership in mining.

The first mining leaders' forum is mainly to focus on the transformation of safety leadership and the HSE management systems applied within the mining sector.

All the leaders in the room will be key partners to move up the standardisation of HSE practices

within the mining sector." The forum will also witness the development of a health and safety roadmap to achieve zero harm by 2030.

"The mining sector overall is very critical to the country, especially its economy and the leaders here today are the main people who can drive the change.

Their presence and participation today are very important to setting up the roadmap for the 2030 mining HSE plan. So, we are going to develop a 2030 plan today, as an

[initial] draft."

Furthermore, al Bulushi believes that effective health and safety procedures within the industry can boost economy. "It has been demonstrated that businesses with strong HSE management systems are very good at managing costs, performance, and productivity.

So, if you have a strong and robust HSE management system with strong safety leadership across [establishments], that will ease up everything ... the waste will be removed, the cost will be reduced, the productivity will go up and that overall will have a very positive impact on the economy" he shared.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed the first mining agreement with a foreign investor to extract nickel and its derivatives, with initial investments estimated at \$25 — \$30 million.

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The message behind the “Starlights” made out of fishbones

At the Matti Sirvio Art Gallery in Jawharat Al Shati in Al Qurum, 62 artworks crafted by 45 artists around the theme Black is White, Black and White, Black or White are currently on display. One of the artists showcasing his work used fishbones for his entry... **P20**

Hollywood writers strike over pay in streaming TV ‘gig economy’

THOUSANDS OF FILM and television writers were headed to picket lines on Tuesday after union negotiators called a strike, sending Hollywood into turmoil and disrupting TV production as the industry wrestles with the shift to streaming.

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) said its leadership unanimously supported its first work stoppage in 15 years after failing to reach an agreement for higher pay from studios such as Walt Disney Co and Netflix Inc.

“The companies’ behaviour has

created a gig economy inside a union workforce,” said the WGA, which represents roughly 11,500 writers.

The strike hits Hollywood studios at a difficult time. Conglomerates are under pressure from Wall Street to make their streaming services profitable after pumping billions of dollars into programming to attract subscribers.

The rise of streaming has led to declining television ad revenue, as traditional TV audiences shrink and advertisers go elsewhere. The threat of a recession in the world’s biggest



economy also looms.

The last WGA strike in 2007 and 2008 lasted 100 days. The action cost the California economy an estimated \$2.1 billion as productions shut down and out-of-work writers, actors and producers cut back spending.

The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), which represents studios, said it had proposed “generous increases in compensation,”

and was willing to increase its offer.

But it said it objected to WGA demands that “would require a company to staff a show with a certain number of writers for a specified period of time, whether needed or not.”

Writers say they have suffered in the streaming TV boom with shorter seasons and smaller residual payments.

“Wow. This is scary,” Emmy-winning

writer Ashley Nicole Black wrote on Twitter after the strike was called. “But a future where we accept what the companies are trying to do — low paid, freelancer writing gigs with no job security — is much scarier.”

For TV viewers, the strike’s first impact will be seen on late-night talk shows such as “Jimmy Kimmel Live” that count on teams of writers to pen topical jokes for programs recorded on the day they are broadcast.

Those shows are expected to immediately start airing re-runs.

“The Late Show” host Stephen Colbert, in an episode taped just hours before the strike was called, showed pictures of his writing staff on screen in a gesture of support.

“They’re so important to our show,” said Colbert, who also is a WGA member. “I think that the writers’ demands are not unreasonable.” Other TV programming may be disrupted depending on how long the strike lasts.

Writers said they were willing to walk off the job because changes from streaming have made it difficult for many to earn a living in expensive cities such as New York and Los Angeles.

— Reuters

READ

SILVER IN THE BONE

BY ALEXANDRA BRACKEN

Tamsin Lark is on a quest to retrieve a magic ring that may break a curse on her brother, Cabell.



TRAVEL TALES

The medieval walls that surround the entire city of Avila, with the cathedral in background, in the Castilla and Leon region. Avila’s Cathedral is considered the first Gothic cathedral in Spain. Avila is one of the 13 Spanish cities classified as World Heritage by Unesco. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Visitors eat their meal in the Russian version of a former KFC’s restaurant, now Rostic’s during the opening ceremony in Moscow. The Russian incarnation of KFC opened its first restaurant in Moscow on April 25 after the American fast food chain exited the country over the Kremlin’s offensives in Ukraine. — AFP





Taylor Swift and the Sparkling Trap of Constant Reinvention

OSCAR DE LA RENTA. Versace. Alberta Ferretti. Roberto Cavalli. Elie Saab. Christian Louboutin. Zuhair Murad. Ashish. The list of the designers who have made looks for Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, which began in Arizona in March and ends in California in August before heading overseas, is like a mini-tour of fashion weeks, replete with sparkles, chiffon and a message tee.

The resulting dress-up extravaganza has been greeted, not surprisingly, with heart-thumping enthusiasm. So many clothes! So much glitter! So fun! There are pages of stories online breathlessly documenting "Every Outfit Taylor Swift Has Worn on Her Eras World Tour" (as Elle Australia put it). And new styles keep emerging, enabling new coverage. As if sheer wardrobe abundance is an achievement unto itself.

It's possible it is. The logistics alone are daunting: How do you change that much, and that fast, while in the middle of a performance?

Certainly it has raised the bar for the artists who are touring next, as we enter the Summer of the Diva: Madonna, who is embarking on a retrospective tour (just imagine the looks that one could involve), and Beyoncé, who set the bar sky-high in August when she dropped a teaser of sorts via the "I'm That Girl" trailer, which involved at least seven looks compressed into a few minutes, from cyborg goddess to cowboy dominatrix to killer Audrey Hepburn.

But it's also possible to see in all these Swiftian clothes, all the wardrobe switcheroos, something else. It's possible that they are actually not just a tour down memory lane but a more pointed piece of meta-commentary on the expectation that female pop stars unveil new versions of themselves for our viewing pleasure, one-upping their old image with new wardrobes ad infinitum. And a message that Swift is, perhaps, calling time on the whole thing.

The promise of reinvention is a core American value: the belief that everyone has the right to a fresh start, that you are limited only by your imagination and abilities. It's intrinsically linked to the promise of fashion, which likewise dangles the lure of a new you; of allowing you to try on different selves until you settle into one that feels right.

Yet it is also its own kind of prison, as Swift, who has made a habit of embedding meaning into her wardrobe choices, said in her 2020 documentary, "Miss Americana."

"The female artists that I know of have reinvented themselves 20 times more than the male artists," she says in a voice-over toward the end of the film, as various versions of her public personas flash by: teenage Taylor, with her gold ringlets, sparkly blue eye shadow and princess dresses; "1989" Taylor, with her ironed bob and glittery bodysuits; "Reputation" angry Taylor, with snakes crawling up her limbs.

This is necessary, Swift

continues, because otherwise "you're out of a job."

At the time she was talking about her newfound political voice as well as her new album, "Lover" (now three albums and at least two Taylors ago: the earth nymph Taylor of "Folklore" and "Evermore," and the dreamer Taylor of "Midnights"). But in many ways, what she meant is laid bare (so to speak) in her Eras Tour.

Each musical era revisited in the show had — and has — its own look, all 10 or so of them. To watch her go through them in succession is to see not just fabulous clothes worn with purpose but also the hamster wheel of constant reinvention that has been the model for contemporary female pop stars since Madonna set the tone in the 1980s.

It's particularly stark in comparison with another musical act now touring to similar response and acclaim: Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen is 73, and his style hasn't changed much in 50 years. He's still in beat-up jeans and a denim shirt, bracelets around his wrist, boots on his feet.

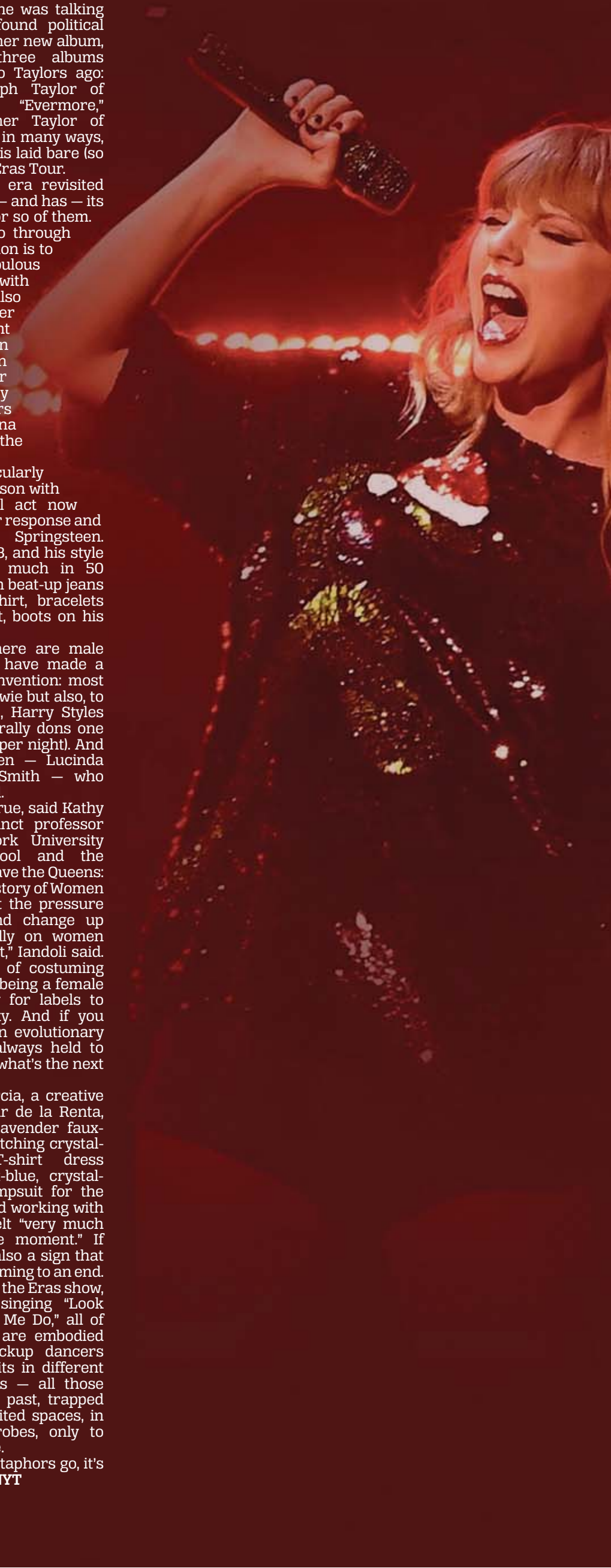
To be fair, there are male rock stars who have made a game out of reinvention: most notably David Bowie but also, to a certain extent, Harry Styles (though he generally dons one statement outfit per night). And there are women — Lucinda Williams, Patti Smith — who bucked the trend.

But it is also true, said Kathy Iandoli, an adjunct professor at the New York University Steinhardt School and the author of "God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop," that the pressure to dress up and change up falls exponentially on women — "1,000 per cent," Iandoli said. "There's a level of costuming that comes with being a female pop star, a way for labels to market creativity. And if you are known as an evolutionary artist you are always held to the standard of 'what's the next version of you?'"

Fernando Garcia, a creative director of Oscar de la Renta, which made a lavender faux-fur coat with matching crystal-embroidered T-shirt dress and a midnight-blue, crystal-embroidered jumpsuit for the current tour, said working with Swift on Eras felt "very much like a full-circle moment." If so, perhaps it's also a sign that another era is coming to an end.

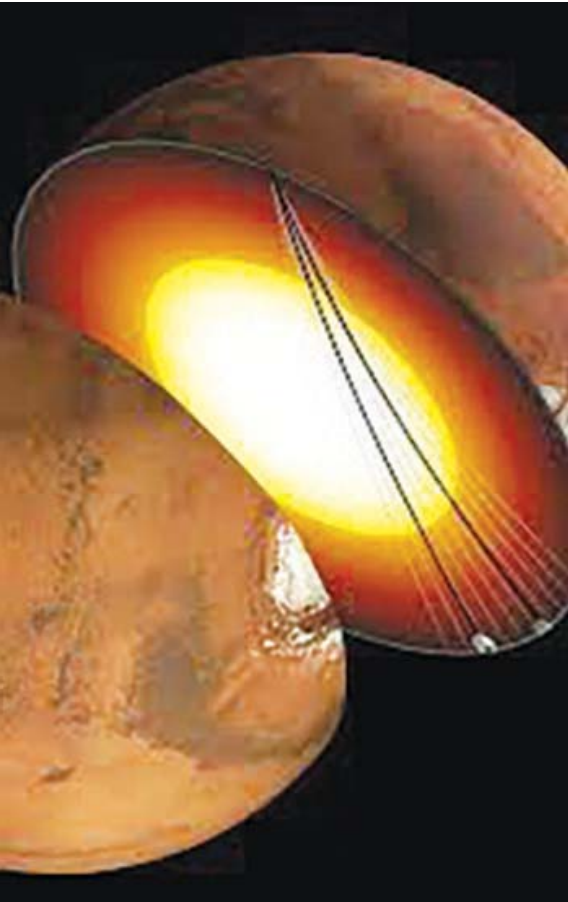
At one point in the Eras show, when Swift is singing "Look What You Made Me Do," all of the old Taylors are embodied by different backup dancers in different outfits in different little glass boxes — all those mini-mes of the past, trapped in their own limited spaces, in their old wardrobes, only to finally break free.

As fashion metaphors go, it's hard to miss. — NYT



SCIENCE

Study details differences between deep interiors of Mars and Earth



MARS IS EARTH'S next-door neighbour in the solar system - two rocky worlds with differences down to their very core, literally.

A new study based on seismic data obtained by NASA's robotic InSight lander is offering a fuller understanding of the Martian deep interior and fresh details about dissimilarities between Earth, the third planet from the sun, and Mars, the fourth.

The research, informed by the first detection of seismic waves travelling through the core of a planet other than Earth, showed that the innermost layer of Mars is slightly smaller and denser than previously known. It also provided the best assessment to date of the composition of the Martian core.

Both planets possess cores comprised primarily of liquid iron. But about 20 per cent of the Martian core is made up of elements lighter than iron — mostly sulphur, but also oxygen, carbon and a dash of hydrogen, the study found. That is about double the percentage of such elements in Earth's core, meaning the Martian core is considerably less dense than our planet's core — though more dense than a 2021 estimate based on a different type of data from the



now-retired InSight.

"The deepest regions of Earth and Mars have different compositions - likely a product both of the conditions and processes at work when the planets formed and of the material they are made from," said seismologist Jessica Irving of the University of Bristol in England, lead author of the study published this week in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The study also refined the size of the Martian core, finding it has a diameter of about 2,212-2,249 miles (3,560-3,620 km), approximately 12-31 miles (20-50 km) smaller than previously estimated. The Martian core makes up a slightly smaller percentage of the planet's diameter than does Earth's core.

The nature of the core can play a role in governing whether a rocky planet or moon could harbour life. The core, for instance, is instrumental in generating Earth's magnetic field that shields the planet from harmful solar and cosmic particle radiation.

"On planets and moons like Earth, there are silicate - rocky - outer layers and an iron-dominated metallic core. One of the most important ways a core can impact habitability is to generate a planetary dynamo," Irving said.

"Earth's core does this but Mars' core does not - though it used to, billions of years ago. Mars' core likely no longer has the energetic, turbulent motion which is needed to generate such a field," Irving added.

Mars has a diameter of about 4,212 miles (6,779 km), compared to Earth's diameter of about 7,918 miles (12,742 km), and Earth is almost seven times larger in total volume.

The behaviour of seismic waves travelling through a planet can reveal details about its interior structure. The new findings stem from two seismic events that occurred on the opposite side of Mars from where the InSight lander - and specifically its seismometer device - sat on the planet's surface.

The first was an August 2021 marsquake centred close to Valles Marineris, the solar system's largest canyon. The second was a September 2021 meteorite impact that left a crater of about 425 feet (130 meters).

The US space agency formally retired InSight in December after four years of operations, with an accumulation of dust preventing its solar-powered batteries from recharging.

"The InSight mission has been fantastically successful in helping us decipher the structure and conditions of the planet's interior," University of Maryland geophysicist and study co-author Vedran Lekic said. "Deploying a network of seismometers on Mars would lead to even more discoveries and help us understand the planet as a system, which we cannot do by just looking at its surface from orbit."

— Reuters



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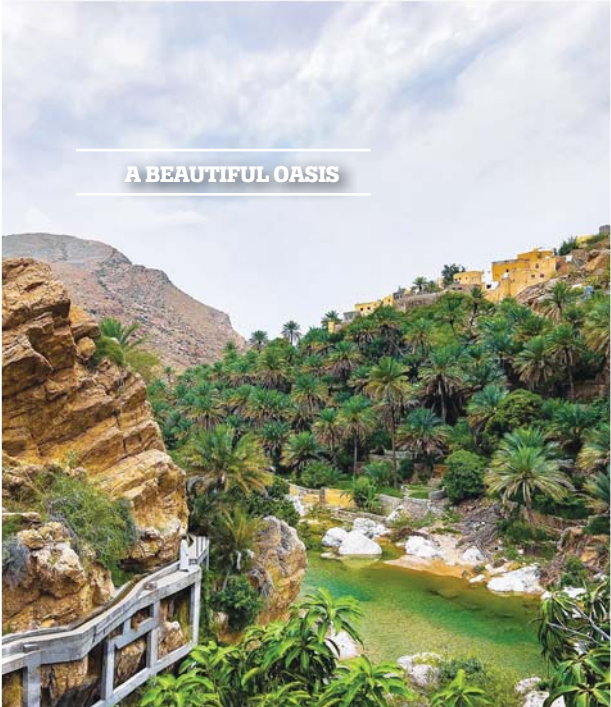


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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Fake 'Hitler diaries', one of world's biggest hoaxes, head for German archive



THE FORGED DIARIES of Adolf Hitler, whose publication in the 1980s was one of the world's greatest hoaxes, are to be handed over to Germany's national archive, Bertelsmann media group said on Monday.

The diaries, first published by *Stern* magazine for 9.3 million Deutsche marks, are to be handed over to the archive this year following an inventory, Bertelsmann said.

Stern, whose publisher Gruner + Jahr belongs to Bertelsmann, published excerpts of the counterfeit series in 1983, even as doubts mounted over their authenticity. It sold serialisation rights to newspapers including Britain's *Sunday Times*.

The diaries were found to be fake following inspection of their content and the paper and ink used, prompting an embarrassing climb-down one week after *Stern's* bombastic announcement of their discovery.

"The forged Hitler diaries are in good hands in the Federal Archives as peculiar testimonies to contemporary German history," said Michael Hollmann, president of the archives, which first revealed the diaries to be fake 40 years ago.

"They show a brazen attempt to give the brutal crimes of National Socialism a human veneer," Hollmann added.

Konrad Kujau was jailed for forging the diaries. His handwriting had a strong resemblance to Hitler's but historical inaccuracies were among the clues that gave him away.

Bertelsmann has commissioned a review into *Stern* magazine under founder Henri Nannen from 1948 until his departure in 1983 by the Institute of Contemporary History.

It has extended the researchers' mandate to include the Hitler diaries fiasco, in order to investigate "how and why it was possible for the fakes to be published", the statement said.

— Reuters

CHANGING WORLD

Acclaimed director Milo Rau brings 'Antigone' to Amazon



HE HAS BEEN CALLED "the most controversial director in theatre," so it's no surprise Milo Rau's latest project is graphic and visceral: an updated version of 'Antigone' transposing the Greek tragedy to the Amazon rainforest and reenacting a bloody massacre.

The Swiss director, who heads the NTGent theatre in the Belgian city of Ghent, has made his name as a provocateur, whether travelling to Moscow to stage the trial of Russian protest punk band Pussy Riot, using children to play out the story of notorious Belgian pedophile Marc Dutroux, as actors.

Now the acclaimed director has landed in the small town of Eldorado dos Carajás, in northern Brazil, to recreate a 1996 massacre in which police opened fire on impoverished farmers who were protesting for land, killing 19 people in cold blood.

A short film of the reenacted massacre will play during 'Antigone in the Amazon,' a theatrical alarm bell warning of the dangers of humankind's destruction of the rainforest, which will premiere on May 13 at Rau's theatre.

The play, which stars an Indigenous activist, Kay Sara, as Antigone — the tortured heroine who defies a brutal government and pays with her life — will also play at France's prestigious Avignon festival in July.

Rau, 46, spent nearly a month in Brazil producing the reenactment.

That included tracking down survivors of the 27-year-old massacre to join as actors in the performance, in which police in riot gear descended on the defenceless protesters with harrowing realism, beating them, dragging them through the street and gunning them down.

Directing the survivors as actors in the grisly scene was a delicate exercise, Rau admits.

"In the nucleus, in the centre, there is this super dark history. So today we restaged it with the survivors, (who were) at this very spot in the very moment," he said in an interview.

"You go through the trauma again to remember it, but also to go a step further."

POTENT POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

The massacre occurred the afternoon of April 17, 1996.

Thousands of members of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) — a radical group known for fighting Brazil's deep-rooted inequalities by seizing land for impoverished small-scale farmers — had invaded a local ranch.

When they got word of plans to evict them, they protested by blocking the highway through town, a crucial artery for loggers, miners, cattle ranchers and others profiting from the plunder of the rainforest.

State police, who reportedly had orders to clear the highway by any means necessary, opened fire on the protesters.

Rau, who sported a red MST hat and black T-shirt, openly admires the controversial movement, which was founded in the 1980s and also fights to protect the environment through sustainable agriculture.

"MST is more than a social movement. For me, it's an example for a post-capitalist society, a new agriculture," he said.

He added he sees potent points of convergence between Sophocles' ancient classic and modern-day Brazil, where the Amazon suffered a surge in destruction under the government



of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022).

"Antigone basically is a fight of the people against dictatorship," he said.

MST, he said, is about "Indigenous people, landless people, rural people" fighting against "the state and big landowners, who are personified in 'Antigone' by Creon."

LAST FRONTIER

Rau, who calls the Amazon the "last frontier" outside modern society's reach, signed an open letter during the 2018 campaign that brought Bolsonaro to power, warning that electing him would be a "catastrophe."

The director said he saw a sliver of hope in the election last year of veteran leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010 and made a presidential comeback in January after defeating Bolsonaro at the polls.

But he found troubling symbolism in the ribbon of asphalt — site of the massacre — that serves as his set.

"It's really the middle of the Amazon, it's the street where you have all these trucks going up and down to exploit the Amazon. It's a symbol of capitalism," he said.

"You have all these layers, and that's what made it for me." — AFP

LIFESTYLE

At a ballet in Lima shantytown, dancers - and self-esteem - soar



ON A BARREN SHANTYTOWN hill in Lima, a group of girls in white leggings gamely tiptoe around a rocky, dusty path. "And onnnne, twoooo, threee, fourrrr," hums the ballet instructor whose day job is selling trash.

It's not likely any of her students will make it as a professional dancer, says Maria del Carmen Silva, or La Miss, as her students call her — slang for teacher here.

Today, the teacher on the hill is more interested in healing than in the talent of her little "fairies."

Silva started classical dance at the age of 12, danced until she was 33 and today, at 58, she is leading an initiative to improve the lives of poor girls and teens through ballet — long associated with a demanding (thin and white) aesthetic.

We had to be "thin, with long limbs, a small head and extremely flexible," recalls the former dancer with the national ballets of Peru and of neighbouring Chile.

Silva, who is fair haired and has light eyes and a comfortable life, began volunteering in 2010 at a public



school in the very poor coastal district of Chorrillos.

There she met the girls of San Genaro II, a settlement 300 meters above the level of the Pacific where in the last four decades some 500 families have settled in wooden houses with corrugated metal or zinc roofs.

— Rehearsing on the hill — An endless number of stairs zigzag up the hills above Chorrillos, where the poor live.

Up here, there is no drinking water, and locals are supplied by tanker trucks or public wells.

Most people in the neighbourhood eke out a living in the informal sector which in all of Peru reaches 75 per cent of the working population, the highest rate after Bolivia, according to the International Labor Organization. Silva confesses, half ashamed, that she came to school looking for a typical dancer, but she found girls with "short legs, flat feet or without much instep." Sadly, above all, so many could barely muster a smile, when their everyday concerns were so pressing.

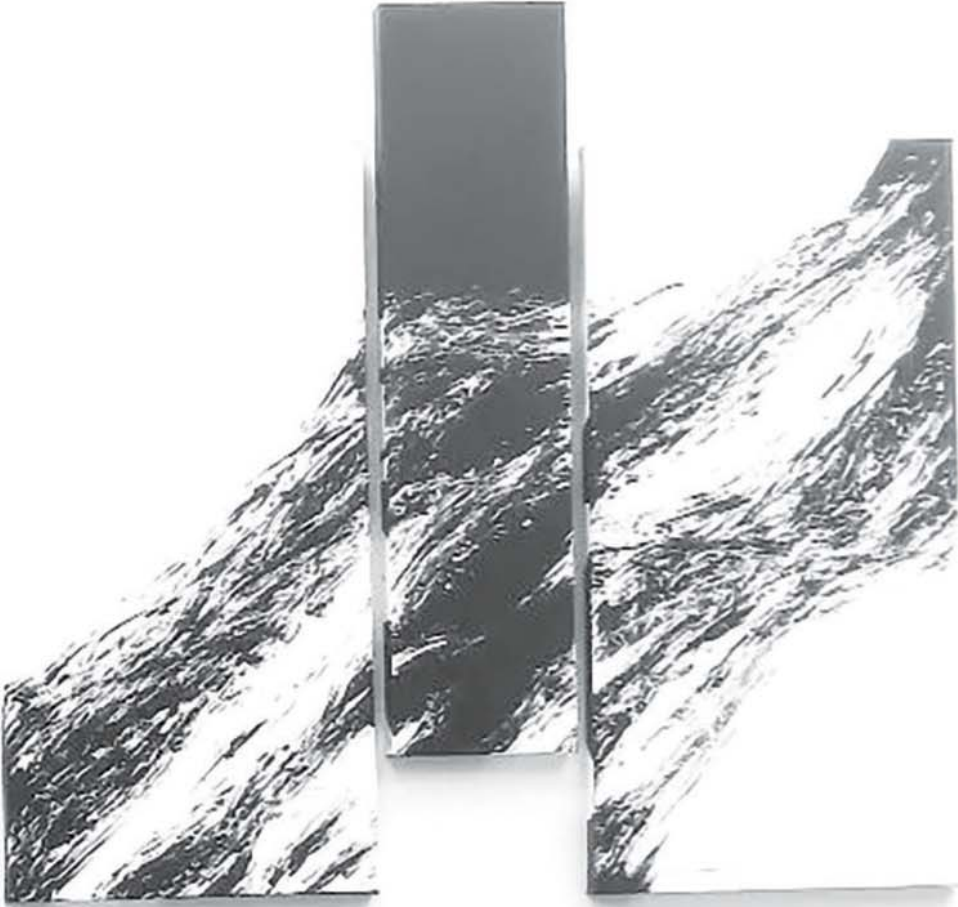
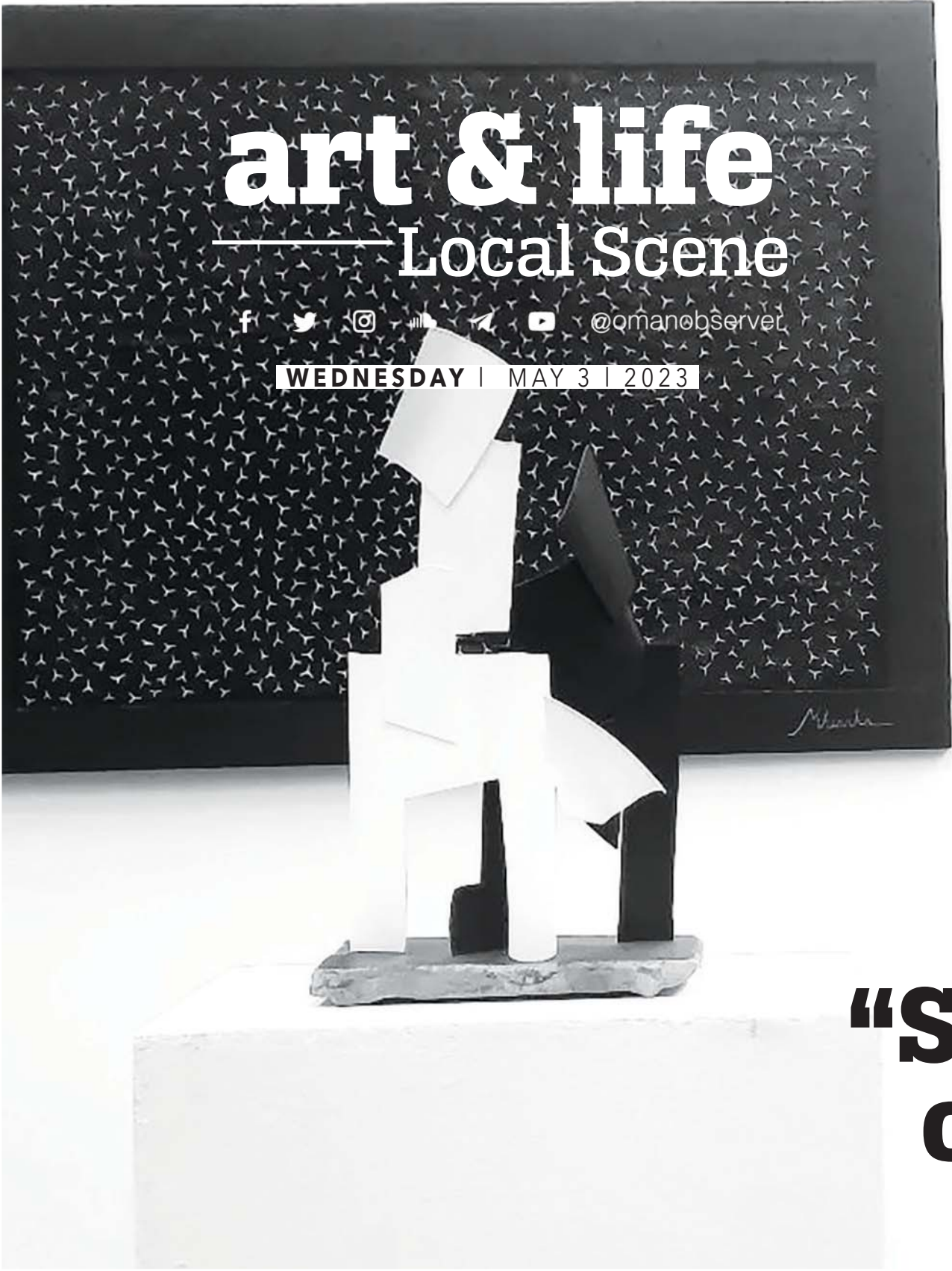
"Some of the girls have their dads in jail; others have been raped or mistreated by their parents; and some have told me: my dad beats my mom," she notes sadly.

"I am from a different economic class, so I didn't even realise that they were leaving because they couldn't afford the clothes; because they don't even have water and sometimes not even anything to eat," she says.

That's when she said she had a mental breakthrough.

"I told myself: forget about that perfect dancer, that perfect prototype, and reach out to the human being."

Now she organises some rehearsals on the hill, despite the fact that her knees already suffer from the bustle between San Genaro II, the school, and the small school that she runs in a religious complex in Miraflores, one of Lima's more affluent districts. — AFP



The message behind the “Starlights” made out of fishbone

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_here

At the Matti Sirvio Art Gallery in Jawharat Al Shati in Al Qurum, 62 artworks crafted by 45 artists around the theme Black is White, Black and White, Black or White are currently on display, inaugurated by Rasma Noor Mohammed al Zadjali of RASMA last Saturday.

The collection is a beautiful display of what Oman-based artists can do, providing them with a great challenge and allowing each artist to shine in their own way.

Of the dozens of artists showcasing their artworks, Emerson Sumaang, or 'Mhearts' was getting several accolades, primarily because of his sustainable approach to art using materials found in nature, most especially at the beach, and secondly, because of his unique approach and techniques in creating his artwork.

"Each art piece I create is unique and different. Stones, plastics, metals, and bones were used for my art, and the tools and materials to fix them are sometimes difficult to find locally. It is sometimes necessary to order them from outside the country to complete the pieces. I still struggle when creating new art, but it is

part of the creative process. It forces me to be more creative and teaches me to be more resourceful," Mhearts shared in an e-mail interview.

For this exhibition, Mhearts chose fish bones for his art and while that may paint a gross picture in your head, the result of Mhearts' art is actually mesmerising.

In his personal collection, he used these fish bones to create the outlines and art of other sea animals like sea turtles or starfish.

For the exhibition, he has a giant canvas made of wood, and on it is a swirling array of fish bones that remind you of the night sky.

"For this art exhibition, I chose fish bones in my art. I'm staying near the beach, and every time I walk there, I always find dead puffer fish," he explained.

He added, "The fish are trapped in fishermen's nets, but since they are poisonous, they are often discarded and thrown on the beach. I came up with an idea on how to use them and give these bones new life in the form of art. I separated the fishbone from the fish flesh. It is a long process, but it's really worth it. The fishbone has unique and beautiful shapes that perfectly fit my canvas," he explained.

Talking about the exhibit, Mhearts shared that out of the 60+ artworks on display, both by local and ex-pat artists based in Oman, he decided on "Starlights" to be his entry.

"The canvas that was used is recycled plywood, which I found in the trash. I burned it to make it naturally dark, and against the whiteness of the fishbone, you create a great contrast," he shared.

Beyond sustainability and care for nature, which are at the core of

his art, Mhearts said that there is also meaning to his piece.

"As with the bright light where you see nothing, this fishbone represents nothingness and emptiness. It also signifies pain. We all experience struggles and pains in life, and that is part of what makes us human. And sometimes we find ourselves in a dark place, but if we just learn how to see those small lights in the dark, life changes, and you will realise there are more lights we can see, just like the starlight in the night," he said.

Mhearts had been creating art ever since he was a child but only started showing his works in 2021, having gained the courage to be proud of his work.

"From 2021 on, I had the opportunity to showcase my pieces in some art exhibitions, but especially during beach clean-ups, where my core message is locked in," he shared.

"My art is always inspired by found objects and trash on the beach. I believe recycling and reusing things are very significant in our time now. A lot of trash and unwanted things are thrown away on our beaches and in nature, and this is harmful to our environment. My art is not just a creative expression for me but also a way to inspire others to protect our nature, to keep it healthy and clean," he explained.

Mhearts is just one of the inspiring stories in the "Black is White, Black and White, Black or White" exhibition. It is an abstract art exhibition and is open to any type of art and medium.

If you want to meet Mhearts and the other participating artists, including gallery owner and art curator Matti Sirvio, the exhibition will be on until May 31.

