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Bilateral relations with UAE reviewed



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Mohammed bin Nakhira al Dhaheri, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

Badr receives credentials copy from Lithuanian Ambassador-designate

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy Foreign Minister, received a copy of the credentials of Itavidis Pajarunas, Ambassador-Designate of the Republic of Lithuania to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Minister welcomed the Ambassador, wishing him success in performing his duties, and for the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries further progress and development.

The Omani-Lithuanian Business Forum held on Monday in Muscat, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with the aim of developing and strengthening trade and investment relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Lithuania, exchanging expertise and experiences between them, and working to expand the business base between the two sides.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas,



Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, explained that the forum comes to establish commercial relations between Omani business owners and their

counterparts from the Republic of Lithuania, and to introduce investment opportunities in the two friendly countries to increase the volume of trade exchange between them. — ONA

Oman, Palestine review ties in higher education, archaeology



MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation received here on Monday the Palestinian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Rula Maayah. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them in various

fields related to higher education, research, innovation, archaeology and tourism. It also touched on means of expanding cooperation in the fields of scholarships, exchanging expertise and mutual training.

The meeting was attended by Tayseer Farhat, Ambassador of Palestine to the Sultanate of Oman, heads of departments of archaeology and tourism at Sultan Qaboos University's College of Arts and Social Sciences and officials from the Ministry and the National Museum of Oman.

— ONA

LIBYAN AMBASSADOR BIDS GOODBYE



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in Muscat on Monday 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. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the ambassador and wished her success in her future endeavours. — ONA

Al Buraimi governor inspects projects in Mahdha



MAHDHA: Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, inspected a number of projects under implementation in the Wilayat of Mahdha, on Monday.

Among the projects inspected by the governor were road projects, a walking track and the site of a dam the implementation of which will commence shortly. The governor of Al Buraimi was briefed on the model quarter project that was completed in the Kohl area.

During the visit the governor reviewed the developments at the road and ferry maintenance project, a project that is expected to be implemented soon, inspected the proposed site for the implementation of the model park and examined the proposed site for the implementation of the sanitary drainage project in the Al Khatwa area, and the proposed sites for implementing the park and children's playground projects and the ferry maintenance station. In addition, the governor visited the areas of Humaydha and Al Ghadeer. — ONA

SQU celebrates 23rd Annual Day

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday celebrated its 23rd annual day amid scientific and research achievements.

The celebration ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. The event included an exhibition with 23 wings of various units at SQU.— ONA





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Disabilities forum focuses on integration, empowerment

MUSCAT: The tasks of the first Forum for Persons with Disabilities kicked off on Monday under the motto of 'Integration and Empowerment.'

The three-day forum, which is organised by the Ministry of Social Development at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, aims at enhancing the role of persons with disabilities in society, enable them to get comprehensive access to services and consolidate the role of the family in the early intervention system.

The forum seeks to review the products, systems and services rendered to the disabled, facilitate the exchange of information and ideas and enhance the innovation system for this segment of society. It also aims to raise social awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities.

Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, said that the forum also targets the development of partnerships among different sectors (the public sector, the private sector and civil society institutions) and encourages these sectors to cooperate with each other to upgrade the services rendered to the segment of society.

Dr Laila pointed out that the ministry has embarked on workshops to establish a national laboratory for the development of services for persons with disabilities.

Towards this end, the ministry is studying options to expand



Ministry plans to establish a national laboratory for the development of services for persons with disabilities

being conducted in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The overall objective is to empower persons with disabilities and harmonise laws pertaining to them.

The opening ceremony of the forum was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat. — ONA

channels and to open new tracks of specialisations with higher education institutions, the minister added. The forum also targets relevant technical institutions, schools, universities,

colleges and specialised institutes. As part of the forum, a preparatory programme titled 'Laboratory for the Development of Programmes and Services for Persons with Disabilities' is

MOU INKED TO BOOST TOURISM IN OMAN



DUBAI: Visit Oman, the national travel operator and a subsidiary of OMRAN Group, on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to cooperate and develop strategic initiatives with Cozmo Travel Company.

The move aims to boost the number of tourists visiting Oman and to organise marketing campaigns and initiatives which promote tourism destinations.

The MoU was signed on the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) event, which is held in Dubai.

Shabib bin Mohammed al

Maamari, General Manager of Visit Oman said that this partnership will enable Visit Oman from increasing the number of visits to Oman by providing travellers with a smooth registration progress. This includes providing several travel packages that meet the travellers' needs.

Al Maamari added that this partnership will develop tourism products which cater to the needs of different segments of tourists, including those seeking to go out on adventures, explore culture and those travelling for medical tourism. — ONA

Focus on digital transformation in higher education

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlBalushia

The two-day Future Universities Forum opened on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre saw participation of 31 institutions from the public and private sectors. The participants drawn from higher education institutions will present 19 working papers over two days.

The forum's objective is to raise the level of digital transformation projects through this platform. Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, launched the platform in the presence of Dr Said bin Hamad bin Said al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS).

The Forum, organised by the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, aims to promote digital solutions, teaching and learning technologies for higher education institutions, with over 25 specialised international companies sharing their experiences and digital solutions in various technical fields. The forum also aims to present specialised working papers related to policies, strategies, and laws related to digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman, presented by a group of specialists from various government agencies.

Dr Said bin Hamad bin Said al Rubaie reiterated Oman's commitment to the digital transformation programme, to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The event also saw another

forum on the sidelines on training and career guidance, which seeks to develop the readiness of graduates to work, equip them with future skills, enhance basic and advanced digital knowledge, and improve job-related skills.

Prof Nasser bin Mohammed al Hosani confirmed that the university's digital transformation strategy and plan is in line with the government's digital transformation programme, supervised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The university has been able to achieve the targeted indicators by adopting different work methodologies to implement projects and enhance the internal community's awareness of the importance of the project.

Dr Huda al Shuaili, Vice-President of the University for Electronic Systems and Student Services, pointed out that the training and career guidance forum seeks to develop the readiness of graduates to work, equip them with future skills, enhance basic and advanced digital knowledge, and improve job-related skills.

Samir bin Yaqout bin Salmeen al Mahrouqi, Head of the On-the-Job Training Department and member of the organising committee, said, "The forum aspires to empower students with practical experiences and achieve the set goals of the public and private sector institutions, as more than 7,000 students, including those graduated from various educational institutions, are likely to visit the forum."



Concerns over unhygienic living conditions in ancient harats

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Harat al Heera in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi is just one of the over 1,000 ancient districts, or Harats, in the Sultanate of Oman. These districts are part of the country's rich cultural and architectural heritage, but they have become a cause for concern due to unhygienic conditions in the area.

Some workers are said to have been living in some of the abandoned mud houses, which is dangerous, unsafe and making the areas unhygienic.

An academic study conducted by some Omani students in the 'Citizenship Education Project' framework showed that out of

Efforts to restore and preserve Oman's historical sites continue amidst concerns over unsafe living conditions as old houses of Harat al Heera in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi need urgent attention

the 60 existing houses in Harat al Heera, 19 are being used by some workers.

The study recommends the need to check the phenomenon and invest in the interest of tourism.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has given special attention

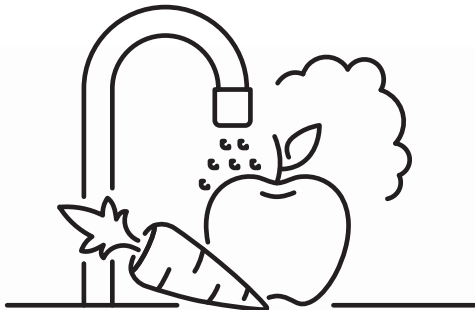
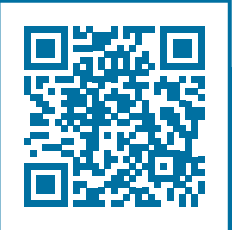


to these historical districts, with a strategy to document these locations and prepare detailed data, pictures, and drawings showing the types of buildings and engineering divisions for each lane separately.

The ministry has begun restoring some of these lanes to protect and document the places of national heritage and develop as tourist spots.

While officials have made efforts to address the issue, an Omani citizen has called for a careful study to recover the social, literary, religious, and economic values of these sites.

The sites store the cultural, architectural and heritage values of the Sultanate of Oman. "It is crucial to find a solution," he added.



WASH EXPOSED FOODS,
SUCH AS VEGETABLES
AND FRUITS



CONSUME WATER-RICH
FOODS SUCH AS CUCUMBERS
AND FRUITS LIKE APPLES,
WATERMELON



DRINK ATLEAST
3 TO 4 LITRES OF WATER
DAILY IF YOU ARE AN
ATHLETE TO REPLACE
THE FLUIDS LOST
DURING EXERCISE

STAY COOL AND HYDRATED

AHMED AL KAABI

SUMMER COMES with several health reminders from experts. The rise in temperatures causes loss of body fluid and energy. The season requires light yet nutritious food that provides our body with energy and keeps it hydrated to avoid fatigue, tiredness, and dehydration problems.

Nutritionist Dr Fatema al Zaabi stresses the importance of consuming food that provides the body with energy and hydration. She highlights the importance of tailoring diets to meet the changing needs of body during summer.

During the autumn season, the body's immunity weakens. Therefore, consuming foods rich in vitamins, particularly vitamin C, is essential to avoid falling ill. In the winter, energy-rich foods are recommended to keep the body warm. The spring season is known for colds and allergies. Consuming fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins is preferable.

In the summer, Dr Fatema emphasises the need to consume water-rich foods such as cucumbers and fruits like apples and watermelon to combat dehydration caused by high temperatures. Experts recommend a litre and a half of water daily during normal days.

However, due to sweat during summer, water intake should

double to avoid fatigue and dehydration.

Dr Fatema advises athletes to consume 3 to 4 litres of water daily to replace the fluids lost during exercise, distributing the intake over close and equal hours.

Drinking large quantities of stimulants like tea and coffee can lead to dehydration and headache during summer. Hence, Dr Fatema advises moderate consumption of these substances during the season.

People should avoid direct sunlight, wear a hat, and walk in the shade to avoid heat exhaustion or sunstroke. Exposure to the early morning sun provides the body with vitamin D. In contrast, exposure to the midday sun can increase the risk of heat exhaustion or sunstroke.

During the summer, the spread of bacteria and fungi increases, making food hygiene and storage more critical.

The nutritionist advises thorough washing of exposed foods, such as vegetables and fruits, covering food properly, and storing any leftovers in the refrigerator. Lastly, she recommends eating healthy foods rich in vitamin C to avoid influenza during summer. Vitamin C strengthens the immune system, making the body more disease-resistant.



AVOID DIRECT
SUNLIGHT, WEAR A HAT,
AND WALK IN THE SHADE TO
AVOID HEAT EXHAUSTION
OR SUNSTROKE



AVOID TEA,
COFFEE WHICH LEADS
TO DEHYDRATION,
HEADACHE



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5

NCC discusses Global Soft Power Index



MUSCAT: The National Competitiveness Committee (NCC) on Sunday held its first meeting for 2023 under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The meeting agenda discussed several issues and reviewed decisions made at the last meeting of the Committee,

followed by a review of the work of the National Competitiveness Office (NCO) for 2022, as well as an update on Oman's performance in international indices issued since the last meeting of NCC.

The meeting discussed at length the Global Soft Power Index, which is one of the indices that the NCO follows.

The committee also reviewed a proposal to organise a national workshop in cooperation with the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation to cover the Healthy Life Years (HLY), an international standard measure that looks after many international indicators including the Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum. — ONA

CAMPAIGN FOR ORGAN DONATION LAUNCHED



IZKI: The Directorate General of Health Services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, represented by Nizwa Hospital, on Monday launched the national campaign for organ donation in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Dr Nasser bin Abdullah al Shukaili, Director General of the Directorate General of Health Services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, delivered the speech during the symposium held at the Izki Cultural Center in the Wilayat of Izki.

Dr Ahmed bin Said al Busaidy, Director of the National Programme for Organ Transplantation, delivered a introductory lecture about the programme and the purpose of its launch, as well as the therapeutic, clinical and ethical evidence and protocols.

It was also highlighted that the patients are registered in a database of those willing to go for organ transplantation. — ONA

SERC to address energy challenges

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sustainable Energy Research Center (SERC), a vital institution at the SQU, aims to address Oman's energy challenges and help the country achieve its sustainable energy goals in a timely manner.

The SERC focuses on a wide range of research areas, such as energy policy and strategies, renewable energy, integrated electrical energy systems, energy efficiency and management, green hydrogen, and carbon capture, use and storage (CCUS) technologies. The centre aims to create strong cooperation with industry and government institutions to ensure its research contributes to society.

"As the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) gears up to celebrate its 23rd University Day in May, the most notable achievements of the University is the establishment of SERC, a institution of paramount importance aimed at addressing the challenges that the nation is facing in energy sources, production and distribution of the same and helping the country achieve its sustainable energy



Sustainable Energy Research Center
Sultan Qaboos University

goals in connection with the Oman Vision 2040 and is a path to economic diversification and a sustainable future," said Rashid al Abri, Director of Sustainable Energy Research Center & Associate Professor at Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at the SQU.

He further said that one of the most promising research areas at the SERC is green hydrogen, which is rapidly advancing due to increasing demand for cleaner energy and net-zero emission targets. Oman, blessed with high solar radiation and promising wind energy sites, has recognised the potential of large-scale green hydrogen production to diversify its economy and achieve its Oman Vision 2040.

"However, challenges still exist,

including cost-effective green hydrogen production and energy storage. To address these issues, Oman is actively encouraging research and raising awareness to promote a green hydrogen industry. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is taking steps to introduce a low-carbon economy, and the government has ambitious plans to generate over a million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030 and 8 million tonnes by 2050."

In line with its commitment to advancing green hydrogen research, SQU has joined the national hydrogen alliance, Hy-Fly as a member and this collaboration brings together experts from various fields to conduct research and development on green hydrogen technologies, such as the Sur Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster project.

"As Oman moves towards a sustainable and diversified future, the SERC at the SQU continues to play a crucial role in pioneering research and development in the field of green hydrogen, ultimately contributing to the country's long-term economic and environmental goals," Dr Al Abri said.

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for three months period ended 31 March 2023.

Company Financial Performance

During the three months ended 31 March 2023, the Company has planned major maintenance activities for some drilling rigs. This is required to be done for ongoing recertification of rig equipment. The majority of the scheduled major maintenance in 2023 is completed in Q1-2023.

- As a result of the above, your company:
1. Revenue has decreased compared to Q1 2022 by 3% from OMR 34.4 M to OMR 33.3 M.
 2. Profit after tax has decreased by 60% from OMR 6.4 M to OMR 2.6 M as the operating cost increased as a result of major planned maintenance activities and also finance cost had increased by 35% due to the higher benchmark rate of USD LIBOR rate in Q1-2023 compared to Q1 2022.

Segment Financial Performances – during Q1-2023 Vs Q1-2022:

1. **Drilling and Workover**
- This segment's revenue decreased by 6.5% during Q1-2023 compared to Q1 2022 from OMR 31.3 M to OMR 29.2 M, although there is no change in the number of rigs and hoists count in Q1 2023. This decreased mainly due to planned major maintenance activities in some rigs, as stated above.
- As a result of the above, Profit after tax for this segment has decreased by 61.8% in Q1-2023 compared to Q1-2022 from OMR 6.2 M to OMR 2.4 M.
2. **Well Services and Others**
- This segment's revenue increased by 30% in Q1-2023 compared to Q1 2022 from OMR 3.2 M to OMR 4.1 M. The increase in revenue is mainly from the fracturing business.
- As a result of the above, Profit after tax for this segment has increased marginally by 4.7 % in Q1-2023, i.e. from OMR 213 K to OMR 223 K.

HSE:

The company HSE performance in Q1 2023 was outstanding as there was no Loss Time Incident (LTI) or major incident in Q1 2023. All Units have achieved unit KPI target score in Q1 2023 as per the set criteria.

Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise leadership of the country's leader, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for maintaining the sustainable growth and prosperity of the Omani Economy. Abraj Board also appreciates the valuable support and guidance from the various stakeholders such as Government agencies, Shareholders, Clients, Management, Employees, Bankers and Suppliers.

Ayad Al Balushi
Chairman of the Board

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT

	31 March 2023 (Unaudited) RO'000	31 Dec 2022 (Audited) RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	193,914	196,106
Right-of-use assets	5,431	5,996
Intangible assets	194	191
Deferred tax assets	581	-
Deferred expenses – non-current	113	119
Advances	1,098	1,180
Total non-current assets	201,331	203,592
Current assets		
Trade and other receivables	35,742	33,974
Advances and prepayments	780	2,895
Deferred expenses – current	62	140
Inventories	20,061	18,605
Bank term deposits	-	18,449
Cash and cash equivalents	3,326	4,120
Total current assets	59,971	78,183
Total assets	261,302	281,775
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	9,323	9,062
Retained earnings	45,480	58,539
Total equity	131,823	144,621
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans – non-current portion	55,310	76,953
Deferred income	1,666	1,857
Deferred tax liabilities	4,502	3,775
Employees' end of services benefits	2,029	1,955
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	3,699	4,288
Total non-current liabilities	67,206	88,828
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	19,235	18,841
Lease liabilities - current	1,995	1,958
Trade payables	13,627	15,928
Other payables	23,121	7,489
Deferred income	874	1,027
Income tax payable	3,421	3,083
Total current liabilities	62,273	48,326
Total liabilities	129,479	137,154
Total equity and liabilities	261,302	281,775

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH (UNAUDITED)

	2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000
Revenue from contracts with customers	33,339	34,420
Cost of sales	(27,130)	(24,012)
Gross profit	6,209	10,408
General and administrative expenses	(1,419)	(1,377)
Other expenses	(98)	(237)
Other income	14	82
Expected credit loss reversal /(charge) on trade receivables	204	(28)
Operating profit	4,910	8,848
Finance costs	(1,864)	(1,379)
Finance income	44	112
Net Finance costs	(1,820)	(1,267)
Profit before tax	3,090	7,581
Taxation	(484)	(1,137)
Profit for the period	2,606	6,444
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,606	6,444
Earnings per share		
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza	3.4	8.4



اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG

Tender Announcement Sale of All Plant Equipment at AL-Rusail Power Plant Site

Al Rusail Power Company SAOC invites interested parties to purchase all or any power equipment located at the Al Rusail Power Plant site located in the Sultanate of Oman. All equipment will be sold on an "as is where is" basis to the highest bidder and the Company invites both local and international parties interested in purchasing all or specific item (s) of equipment. As shown in Figure 1, the power assets include eight (8) Gas Turbine Units.

Al Rusail Power Company SAOC, a closed joint stock company was incorporated under the Laws of Sultanate of Oman. The Company was established to build and operate a 665 MW power plant at PO Box 121, Postal Code 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman.

Bids must be submitted on or before close of business (05 pm GST) on **26th June 2023**. Tender documents which include further detailed information and data about Al Rusail Power Plant can be obtained by downloading the Tender Document from the Company's website at: <https://www.smnpower.com/tenders.php>

The bid price for the any Plant Equipment shall be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to:
Al Rusail Power Company SAOC
Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15,Way No.1013,
Al Qurum - Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



Figure 1 Al Rusail Power Plant



Arab foreign ministers of Saudi, Jordan and Syria attend a regional meeting in Amman. — AFP

Arab ministers hold landmark meeting with Syrian FM

AMMAN: A group of Arab foreign ministers met with their Syrian counterpart in Jordan on Monday to discuss how to normalise ties with Syria as part of a political settlement, officials said.

The talks are the first between Syria’s government and a group of Arab countries since a decision to suspend Syria’s membership of the Arab League in 2011.

Jordan has called on Syria to engage with Arab states jointly on a step-by-step roadmap to end the conflict, tackling the issues which affect its neighbours.

Before the ministers of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan sat down to talks in Amman, Syrian foreign minister Faisal Mekdad met bilaterally with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi, according to the Jordanian foreign ministry.

They discussed refugees, water issues and border security, including the fight against drug smuggling, the ministry said.

Amman has been fighting armed groups smuggling narcotics from Syria, including the highly-addictive amphetamine captagon.

Jordan is both a destination and a main transit route to the oil-rich Gulf countries for captagon.

The meeting comes two weeks after talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah between the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

Arab states and those most impacted by the conflict are trying to reach consensus on whether to invite Assad to the Arab League summit on May 19 in Riyadh, to discuss the pace of normalising ties with Syria.

Saudi Arabia long resisted normalising relations with Assad but said after its rapprochement with Iran.

Safadi on Sunday met with visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf, officials said.

— Reuters

Sudan conflict driving health sector towards ‘disaster’: UN

CAIRO: Sudan’s already troubled health sector faces the risk of “disaster” after more than two weeks of heavy fighting have rocked the poverty-stricken country, a UN World Health Organization official warns.

Even before the deadly conflict broke out on April 15, “the healthcare system in Sudan faced numerous crises... and was extremely fragile,” Ahmed al-Mandhari said, WHO regional director for the eastern Mediterranean.

Now — with hospitals bombed, medicines running low and many doctors fleeing the country — “it is a disaster in every sense of the word,” he said, warning of the growing threat of cholera, malaria and other diseases.

The battles raging in Sudan have pitted the Sudanese Armed Forces led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan against the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces of his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

More than 500 people have been killed and nearly 5,000 injured, according to official figures, but the real toll is feared to be much higher.

Only 16 per cent of Khartoum’s hospitals are now fully functional, al Mandhari said, and there is a “real shortage in medical staff... especially specialised medical staff, for example in surgery and in anaesthesia”.

The most vulnerable include about four million sick or



A man walks while smoke rises above buildings after aerial bombardment, during clashes in Khartoum North, Sudan. — Reuters

pregnant women and 50,000 children suffering from acute malnutrition who will no longer receive vital care, he added.

The humanitarian tragedy will likely worsen in a country where 16 million people are already in need of aid to stave of famine.

The UN had until Monday suspended its work in Sudan after five aid workers were killed in the fighting.

The violence also forced the aid group Doctors Without Borders to stop almost all its activities in West Darfur — a region still scarred by a war that erupted in 2003 and left at least 300,000 dead, according to UN figures.

Sudan’s healthcare system is in need of “hundreds of millions of dollars” to address a situation that both predated and resulted from the current crisis, he said.

Amid the continued fighting, he warned of doctors opting to flee the country alongside tens of thousands of other Sudanese seeking safer shores.

UK evacuation flights airlifted more than 2,000 citizens from Sudan, including about 20 doctors who wanted to leave the war-racked country. Regional powers have joined negotiations to help end the violence. — AFP

Israeli forces kill Palestinian teen in West Bank raid

JERICHO: Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian teenager during a morning arrest raid that led to clashes in a refugee camp outside the city of Jericho in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian health officials said.

The Palestinian health ministry said 17-year-old Jibril Kamal died after being shot in the head. Six other people were wounded during the raid, with three of them in serious condition, the ministry said.

Videos on social media showed a convoy of armoured military vehicles driving between houses as shots rang out in the distance. The military put up checkpoints controlling movement in and out of the area.

The Jericho raid came amid operations across the West Bank on Monday that ended in at least 17



Israeli troops aim their weapons as they clash with Palestinians during a raid in Jericho in the West Bank. — Reuters file photo

Videos on social media showed a convoy of armoured military vehicles driving between houses as shots rang out in the distance

arrests. Near the troubled northern West Bank city of Jenin, the Islamic Jihad movement said one of its officials Mahdi al-Sharqawi had been arrested. From the Jericho Hospital, director Naser Anani said: “The situation is very difficult. It exists in every city, in every refugee camp and it is the price we pay for resisting the occupation.”

Jericho Governor Jihad Abu al-Asal said the Israeli government must be held responsible. “We

tell the world, don’t leave this refugee camp prey to this occupation.”

In a separate incident, the Palestinian health ministry said Israeli soldiers critically wounded a 20-year-old Palestinian in Bethlehem around dawn on Monday. The military said it was not aware of any people wounded in the Bethlehem area, where security forces confiscated weapons.

Israeli-Palestinian violence has surged this year, with frequent military raids and violence by Israeli settlers amid a spate of Palestinian attacks.

More than 90 Palestinians have been killed since January.

Israel captured the West Bank, which Palestinians hope will form the core of a future independent state, in the 1967 Middle East war.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MALINDI

Autopsies start of ‘starvation cult’ deaths

Forensic experts on Monday began autopsies of more than a hundred corpses found in mass graves linked to a Kenyan pastor accused of inciting his followers to starve to death.

“Officially the process of post-mortem of the bodies starts immediately,” Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki told reporters outside a hospital morgue in the coastal town of Malindi.

“We are here to witness a very critical stage,” he said. “That process is expected to take



roughly a week, all going well.”

Mass graves in the nearby Shakahola forest have revealed scores of dead, most of them children. The death toll of 109 is still provisional. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Suspected IS chief killed in Syria

The suspected leader of the IS group has been killed in Syria in an operation carried out by Turkey’s MIT intelligence agency, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (pictured) said on Sunday. “The suspected leader of Daesh, codename Abu Hussein al-Qurashi, has been neutralised in an operation carried out by the MIT in Syria,” he announced on television.

The IS group announced the death of its previous leader, Abu Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi,



on November 30, replacing him with Abu Hussein al-Qurashi.

Suspected IS group fighters killed at least 41 people, 24 of them civilians, on April 16 in Syria. — AFP

TEHRAN

Activists report new poisoning cases

There have been new cases of poisoning at girls’ schools reported in Iran, according to activists of the Norwegian-based human rights organisation Hengaw on Monday.

Cases were reported in the capital Tehran and the Kurdistan region. There was initially no official information on the cases.

The incidents have been causing unrest in the country for around five months.

Throughout the country,



schoolgirls have been treated in hospitals, with doctors speaking of gas poisoning.

Thousands of suspected cases have been officially registered by the authorities. — dpa



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In brief

■ GENEVA



SWITZERLAND TAKES OVER UN SECURITY COUNCIL CHAIR

Switzerland took over the chairmanship of the United Nations Security Council for the first time on Monday.

In this role, the country wants to live up to its reputation as a mediator and bridge-builder, UN Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl told media.

However, the reputation of traditionally neutral Switzerland has suffered recently. Critical reporting on Switzerland has increased, Switzerland's Foreign Ministry said in response to a request. But there are no indications so far "of a significant deterioration in our overall perception that would have lasting negative consequences." — dpa

■ MOSCOW



FREIGHT TRAIN DERAILED BY 'EXPLOSIVE DEVICE'

A Russian freight train derailed on Monday in the western region of Bryansk bordering Ukraine after an "explosive device" detonated on the tracks but there were no casualties, the local governor said.

On the same day, officials said power lines had been blown up in northern Russia, which the FSB security service called an "act of sabotage."

The apparent attacks came a day after a Ukrainian strike killed four people in a Russian village in the Bryansk region.

There have been reports of sabotage on railroads in Russia and its ally Belarus throughout Moscow's more than year-long Ukraine offensive. — AFP

■ LONDON



FORMER US PRESIDENT TRUMP LANDS IN SCOTLAND

Former US president Donald Trump has arrived in Aberdeen ahead of a visit to his golf course.

Trump said on Truth Social that he is going to the Menie Estate near the city to open a "spectacular" second course.

Despite the visit, Trump, who is running for the White House again in 2024 and is seen by many as the presumptive Republican nominee, said his campaign is "on my mind", stressing that a victory for him would make America "greater than ever before".

The tycoon's trip to Scotland comes as he faces legal trouble in his native New York over his business practices. — dpa

HOMES SMASHED, 34 WOUNDED IN LATEST STRIKES ON UKRAINE

PAVLOHRAD: Russia unleashed a fresh volley of missiles on Ukraine overnight, causing huge blazes in a city in the east, damaging dozens of homes and wounding at least 34 people.

The attack on Pavlohrad came during the second wave of nationwide missile strikes in three days, with Moscow apparently reviving its winter tactic of long-range strikes ahead of a planned Ukrainian counteroffensive.

A huge crater had been blasted in the backyard of a house that was strewn with debris on Pavlohrad's outskirts.

Homes nearby were badly damaged. In the city centre, the windows of a dormitory that serves a chemical plant had been blown out.

"I ran outside and saw the garage was destroyed. Everything was on fire, glass shards were everywhere. Had we been outside, we would have been killed," said resident Olha Lytvynenko, 61.

Viktoriia Suprun, 41, said she had taken cover with her daughter in the hallway of the dormitory.

Mykola Lukashuk, head of the Dnipropetrovsk region council, said the attack had damaged 19 apartment blocks, 25 houses, three schools, three kindergartens and several shops.

The 34 wounded included five children, the region's governor said.

The city is located in southeastern Ukraine, behind the main eastern and southern front lines in the war.

Russia's defence ministry said its forces had struck using high-precision long-range air and sea-based missiles against "Ukraine's



Police are seen at the site of a residential area hit by a Russian military strike in the town of Pavlohrad. — Reuters

military-industrial facilities".

"The objectives of the strike were achieved," it said in a statement.

"The work of enterprises making ammunition, weapons and military equipment for Ukrainian troops has been disrupted." Damage appeared to be limited elsewhere in Ukraine,

Homes nearby were badly damaged. In the city centre, the windows of a dormitory that serves a chemical plant had been blown out

after air raid sirens sounded for hours through the night. Ukraine said it shot down 15 of 18 incoming cruise missiles. Officials in the capital Kyiv said there were no reports of civilian casualties or damage there.

The energy ministry said attacks had significantly damaged electricity distribution points in

the southern Kherson region and central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, leaving thousands of people without power. Repairs to the grid were set to take several days, it said in a statement.

Moscow says it does not target civilians and its attacks aim to reduce Kyiv's ability to fight. — Reuters

Paris police fire tear gas on march against pension reform

NANTES: Workers marched across France in anger at President Emmanuel Macron's increase in the retirement age on Monday, with police firing tear gas in Paris and the western city of Nantes, as protesters joined Labour Day rallies across Europe.

Macron's popularity has plunged to near record lows hit during the "Yellow Vest" crisis after he stared down trade unions and multi-sector strikes and lifted the retirement age by two years to 64.

The move crystallised discontent against a president perceived by many as indifferent to their daily hardships and Macron has been met by boos, pot banging and heckles as he confronts citizens on walkabouts.

Sophie Binet, leader of the hardleft CGT union, said the pension reform had left Macron isolated.

"The executive cannot govern without the support of its people," Binet said ahead of the Paris protest, adding her union had not yet decided on talks with the government on other work-related matters in the weeks ahead.

Laurent Berger, head of the reform-minded CFDT trade union, said Macron's government had been deaf to the demands of



French CRS riot police walk during the traditional May Day labour march in Paris. — Reuters

one of the most powerful social movements in decades.

He said his union was open to discussions with the government and dismissed suggestions that a rare alliance between the leading trade unions was being tested now that the pension bill had been signed into law.

"We must bring other proposals over salaries and working conditions to the table," he said.

Trade unions say the money can be found elsewhere.

In Paris, Extinction Rebellion

activists threw paint over the glass-fronted facade of the Louis Vuitton Foundation and paving stones outside the Ritz Hotel.

Macron says the French reform is needed to keep one of the industrialised world's most generous pension systems in the black.

French pension payments as a share of pre-retirement earnings are comfortably higher than elsewhere and a French man typically spends longer in retirement than those in other OECD nations. — Reuters

Armenian, Azerbaijani foreign ministers hold talks in US

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Washington on Monday as part of efforts to cool tensions between the South Caucasus rivals, the foreign ministries of Baku and Yerevan said in statements.

Tensions have flared anew Azerbaijan installed a road checkpoint at the start of the Lachin Corridor, the only route linking Armenia to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory. Karabakh is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, but home to mostly ethnic Armenians. Azerbaijan committed to keeping the route open.

The stand-off is seen as a test of Russia's resolve to mediate disputes in the region.

Armenia - formally an ally of Russia through a mutual self-defence pact - has repeatedly called on Moscow.

Azerbaijan said it had established the checkpoint in response to what it said were Armenian weapon supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh. Yerevan denies that charge.

The talks in Washington were not expected to yield a breakthrough.

Blinken was initially meeting



Antony Blinken

delegations from both countries separately before a three-way meeting was due to start later on Monday.

After its meeting with the United States' top diplomat, Armenia's foreign ministry said relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia had been "discussed" and they had "touched upon the humanitarian situation as a result of Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor".

Negotiations over a longer-term peace deal between the two sides after another military flare-up last year stalled as Armenia pushed for the European Union and France to have a bigger mediating role.

Washington has said it was "deeply concerned" by establishing the checkpoint.

— Reuters

The writer is an international adviser

Challenges require courage, skill, presence of mind, the ability

Life is full of challenges. They are

Most people are afraid to take them. I have learned one thing over time - Accepting challenges that life throws upon you, only makes you stronger in the end. Even if you

Be realistic when facing challenges. It really helps if you decide from the very beginning of a challenge that you are going to face the challenge and overcome it. No hiding from it or pretending it doesn't exist.

Try pursuing a challenge. The taste of victory is really sweet. You got to feel it to believe it. It will certainly lead you to live today better than yesterday.

JOSEPH SOTINEL

Both are privately owned. By contrast, Buckingham Palace in central London and Windsor Castle, west of the capital, belong to the state. Another historical symbol of the British monarchy, the Crown Jewels, are also the property of the nation and are therefore excluded from the evaluation of the royal fortune. — AFP

Lynsey Chutel
The writer is a
journalist based in
Johannesburg

In response to the worsening situation, the United Nations secretary-general's office said it was "immediately" sending Martin Griffiths, the Under-Secretary General for humanitarian affairs and emergency

relief coordinator, to Sudan.

"The scale and speed of what is unfolding is unprecedented in Sudan," Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the secretary-general, said.

Other nations have scrambled to evacuate their citizens by any means necessary, as the situation has deteriorated. Britain had airlifted more than 2,122 people by Saturday on 21 flights, with one more flight from Port Sudan in eastern Sudan planned for Monday, the British government announced on Sunday.

Americans have fled in long convoys of buses, trucks and cars heading to Egypt to the north or to Port Sudan, where they hope to board ships to Jiddah, Saudi Arabia.

The doctors union later said in a statement that the number of bodies scattered on the streets was growing, creating “an environmental catastrophe.” — **The New York Times**



An abandoned hospital in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, as deadly fighting continues in Sudan between rival generals' forces. – **AFP**

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Shall we all be signers?

Oman’s first forum for people with disability is happening this week.

While attending a press conference at National Autism Center, while the event was being announced, I realised it was the first press conference, where I experienced someone communicating in sign language. Throughout the event the interpreter was explaining in sign language. But now the person sitting next to me had actually started conversing with sign language and as I did not notice it, due to lack of sound, I had interrupted with my question only to realise there was a slight confusion. That is when the person with the gentle smile gestured it was okay and signalled me to continue. I apologised but realised I was using my hands too.

I was overwhelmed by the communication skill used by people with disability in speech. The interpreter said the individual wanted to say that we must have more and more events such as this forum that was being held by the Ministry of Social Development at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

As I walked towards the end of the hall there were two people conversing. They were a bit far away from each other. People were still speaking on microphone, but neither the voice on the speakers were interrupting them nor were they disturbing others, for they were speaking to each other in the sign language. Watching them one could experience silence no matter what was going around.

Without the sign language maybe silence could get louder. We talk about maintaining accessibility for everyone yet we do not take effort to step into the world of people for whom silence is a constant companion or for others who do not have means to get the voice out there to be heard. When others want to express all their emotions, thoughts and feelings in words, how are they going to yell it out. How do they express their frustrations when others raise their voice? Looking at the two colleagues having a lengthy uninterrupted conversation, one could



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

WOULD IT NOT BE LOVELY IF EVERYONE COULD AND WOULD LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE?

understand why it is important to face each other while conversing - to see the gestures and the signs clearly. They also maintained a certain distance. It was to face each other. So positioning seemed to be naturally an important element.

Would it not be lovely if everyone could and would learn sign language?

When we think of enhancing communication skills why would we miss out on this opportunity?

Sign languages also have grammar and lexicon. In Oman the Arabic sign language is taught. But when it comes to studying certain professions such as medicine then one has to learn sign language in English. We would have thought in English language there would have been just one sign language but the fact remains that there are three - American, British and Australian. Little bit more research revealed French and Spanish too. Actually this is how the history goes - a Benedictine monk first used sign language in 1500s to help him educate deaf Spanish students who were deaf and this lead to further development and in 1700s the first formal sign language was developed by Charles Michel de l’Eppe.

In sign language instead of the spoken words hand movements, gestures and body language are used and probably facial expressions are important. Why do we communicate?

To let others know what we are thinking or what we want.

Today we text and we have even brought words to mere alphabets.

But if we actually look at people talking, depending on culture, we can see the use of body language and hand gestures varying. The reserved people tend to use fewer hand movements. Some feel calm and confident people also tend to use their hands less.

Body language comes under nonverbal communication and it includes facial expressions, eye contact, body movement, nod, space, and the proximity, posture, touch and pitch of the voice. We make our initial judgement by the nonverbal communication even before words are spoken and that is when we listen to the pitch of the voice.

MAY DAY RALLY



A protester holds a placard during May Day demonstration in Hamburg, Germany, on Monday. – Reuters

Sudan risks long conflict as entrenched rivals struggle for control

AIDAN LEWIS AND TOM PERRY

Sudan’s warring factions are locked in a conflict that two weeks of fighting shows neither can easily win, raising the spectre of a drawn-out war between an agile paramilitary force and the better-equipped army that could destabilise a fragile region.

Even with hundreds of people killed and the capital Khartoum turned into a war zone, there has been little sign of compromise between army commander Abdul-Fattah al Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commonly known as Hemedti.

Foreign mediators have struggled to arrest the slide to war: a series of ceasefires brokered by the United States and others have been undermined by shelling and air strikes in Khartoum and conflict elsewhere, including the Darfur region in the west. Giving a faint flicker of a hope, UN Sudan special envoy Volker Perthes said on Saturday he saw signs of more openness to negotiations, but renewed fighting was heard in the capital.

Hemedti and Burhan have both excluded the idea of negotiating with

each other in public comments since the fighting began. An aide to Hemedti did not respond to questions about whether he was ready to negotiate or hold peace talks. Hemedti on April 20 said he would not sit with Burhan.

An aide to Burhan, asked the same questions, referred Reuters to Burhan’s remarks to US-based Al Hurra TV this week, where he said he cannot sit down with “the leader of the rebellion”, a reference to Hemedti.

The stakes couldn’t be higher both for Sudan and seven neighbouring states where stability may be jolted by conflict in a country with a history of civil strife, including the decades-long war that ended with southern secession in 2011.

Despite its air force and tanks, the army has so far been unable to dislodge RSF fighters spread out through Khartoum, which has been spared violence in Sudan’s past civil wars. It spells a drawn-out fight for the capital on the Nile, where the army said last Thursday RSF fighters were being defeated but a Western diplomat assessed the RSF to have the upper hand.

Many civilians have fled the

capital for safer areas. Residents have described a rapid breakdown as gangs and looters maraud in empty streets, neighbourhoods are rocked by air strikes and shelling, and food and fuel run low.

Even if the army can prevail in Khartoum, analysts worry the stage is being set for a return to the usual pattern of Sudan’s internal wars — pitting the nation’s military run by a powerful elite in the capital against those hailing from the regions angry at being marginalised, such as Darfur, the region where Hemedti and his

RSF first emerged as a fighting force. A senior regional diplomat described the situation as “terrifying”. “We will have a lot of fragmentation,” the diplomat said, expressing concern about renewed conflict between the centre in Khartoum and peripheral regions in the country of 46 million.

Tensions had been simmering for months between Hemedti and Burhan over how the RSF - estimated at 100,000 - should be integrated into the Sudanese army under an internationally-backed framework deal for civilian government, and over the chain of command in the lead up to

elections. A former Darfur militia leader, Hemedti had grown powerful as enforcer for Omar al Bashir, and rich thanks to the gold trade. He served as Burhan’s deputy on Sudan’s ruling council after Bashir’s overthrow.

Hemedti insisted the RSF’s integration should be stretched over 10 years, in line with details of a framework transition plan, sources familiar with the talks have said, while the army wanted a much shorter time frame.

Underlining the difficult outlook for peacemaking, mediators aimed at getting a ceasefire in place and to “stabilise the situation in that way, rather than going for some kind of big bang peace deal”, the Western diplomat said.

“What are they going to talk about that wasn’t on the table before the conflict started?” said the diplomat, adding that neither side could win a decisive military victory or control of all Sudan’s territory. Ahmed Soliman of Chatham House, a think-tank in London, said he foresaw “very bad scenarios either way with a limited likelihood of a short-term resolution that would halt the fighting permanently”. — Reuters



Sudanese refugees who crossed into Chad, in Koufroun, near Echbara. – AFP

UN SUDAN SPECIAL ENVOY VOLKER PERTHES SAID HE SAW SIGNS OF MORE OPENNESS TO NEGOTIATIONS, BUT RENEWED FIGHTING WAS HEARD IN THE CAPITAL

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OMANI-GERMAN PAIR FINISHES SECOND IN RACE 2 IN PORTUGAL

Al Faisal, Schiller take lead in GT Open

PORTIMAO, PORTUGAL: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller followed up a stunning win in race one with the runner-up spot in the shorter second race at round one of the 2023 International GT Open at the Autodromo Internacional Algarve, in Portimao, Portugal, on Sunday afternoon.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 crew had qualified in pole position and led for much of the second race before losing vital seconds during the driver change over.

With a little over 27 minutes to go, Al Zubair – who had taken over from

Schiller for the second part of the race – was trailing Team Motopark's Marcos Siebert by 4.408 seconds but the Omani closed to within 2.257 seconds at the finish, as Siebert and his Mexican team-mate Diego Menchaca claimed victory in the second race in their Mercedes AMG GT3. Eastalent Racing's Simon Reicher and Christopher Haase rounded off the podium places at the helm of their Audi R8 LMS GT3 Evo II.

Second place, to add to the win in race one, means that Al Zubair and Schiller now lead the International GT Open series by two points after the

2023 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN - POSITIONS AFTER ROUND ONE	
1. Al Faisal al Zubair/Fabian Schiller	27 pts
2. Marcos Siebert/Diego Manchaca	25 pts
3. Charlie Fagg/Samuel de Haan	20 pts
4. Christopher Haase/Simon Reicher	18 pts

opening round. Al Zubair said: "It has been a great weekend and I am feeling very comfortable with the team and the car. I am just increasing confidence. I couldn't really have asked for much more. P1 yesterday and second today with a 10-second handicap. This was an amazing result."

"To leave the first round of the International GT Open as the first round leaders is a strong indicator of the strength of the team we have built. I am excited for the next races and looking forward to it."

Picking up where they left off on

Saturday, Schiller put the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes take at the top of the standings by claiming pole position for the weekend's second race on Sunday morning. The German beat Optimum Motorsport's Charlie Fagg by 0.258 seconds to claim the perfect star position for the race.

He had last taken a pole in Barcelona in 2002 and said: "It's nice to take it where I left it. The car is very strong and Portimao is definitely in the top three of my favourite circuits. We'll see how it goes in the race and with the handicap, I will have to push hard from go!"



Title race heats up in OL with four rounds remaining

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The competition for the Omantel League title is reaching its climax, with only four rounds left in the season. Al Nahda Club are currently the front-runner and the closest to achieving the title, with only four points separating them from Al Suwaiq Club, who are in second place with 45 points.

Al Seeb Club follow in third place with 41 points, while Al Rustaq Club are in fourth place with 39 points.

The upcoming Round 23 will shed light on the standings, as the number of clubs vying for the title may reduce to three or two clubs, depending on the outcome of matches featuring Al Rustaq, Al Seeb and others.

Meanwhile, five clubs face the possibility of being relegated to the First Division League. Al Nasr Club appear to be the safest and need only one point from the next four rounds. Sur Club, on the other hand, are among the threatened clubs and must perform well to remain in the Omantel League while Al Ittihad, Al Bashayer and Al Orouba clubs face relegation nominations.

Dhofar, Oman Club, Bahla, Sohar and Al Musannah have secured their place in the league for next season and have lost hope of competing for the league title.



Their upcoming matches will serve to determine positions from second to eleventh place.

The 23rd round of the Omantel League will take place from May 1 to 3, with matches expected to witness changes in the standings table. On May 1, Al Ittihad will face off against Al Seeb at Al Seeb Stadium, while Al Bashayer will take on Al Nahda at the Nizwa

Complex and Al Musannah meet Sohar at Al Rustaq Complex.

On May 2, Sur will play Al Rustaq at the Al Rustaq Complex and Al Nasr will face Dhofar in a derby at Al Saada Complex.

The round will conclude on May 3 with Al Suwaiq taking on Oman Club at the Al Rustaq Stadium, while Al Orouba will meet Bahla at the Sur Complex.



Mumbai Indians' Tim David (L) and Tilak Varma celebrate their win at the end of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match between Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. – AFP

David fireworks claim Mumbai win in 1,000th IPL match

J AISWAL HIT CENTURY IN BIG RAJASTHAN TOTAL

MUMBAI: Tim David smashed an unbeaten 45 to trump Yashasvi Jaiswal's century as Mumbai Indians stunned Rajasthan Royals by six wickets in the Indian Premier League's 1,000th match on Sunday.

Chasing 213 for victory, Mumbai's Suryakumar Yadav hit 55 before David smashed a hat-trick of sixes in the last over from Jason Holder in his 14-ball blitz to steer the team home with three balls to spare.

David starred in an unbeaten 62-run stand with Tilak Varma, who hit 29, for a record chase at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium in the second match of the day that ended close to midnight.

Skipper Rohit Sharma praised David's hitting prowess after the Australian batsman was compared to former Mumbai big-hitter Kieron Pollard, who is now the team's batting coach.

"Big shoes to fill, Polly for so many years won us so many championships," Rohit, winner of five IPL trophies with Mumbai, said after the win. "But Tim has so much ability and power. In the back end, having that power keeps the bowler thinking."



Rajasthan Royals' Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a shot. – AFP

On a day of big chases, Zimbabwe batsman Sikandar Raza earlier helped Punjab Kings pull off a stunning last-ball win to edge out Chennai Super Kings by four wickets in the first match that also recorded over 400 runs.

But the fireworks were reserved for the second match of the day, which began with a ceremony to mark the 1,000-match landmark.

The left-handed Jaiswal turned on the heat with a six off Cameron Green and then Jofra Archer as he went on to score 124 off 62 balls — his maiden T20 ton.

The 21-year-old Jaiswal, who sold street food and lived in tents to pursue his cricket dream, steered the inaugural IPL champions to 212-7 after he reached his 100 off 53 balls.

The effort seemed a fitting knock for the special match until Suryakumar, a T20 sensation who has endured an ordinary tournament so far, came to life with his 50 off 24 balls.

The T20 sensation smashed eight fours and two sixes until a superb catch by Sandeep Sharma, who sprinted from short fine-leg to hang on to the ball, ended his innings.

But David and the left-handed Varma kept up the charge on a big-scoring day.

Jaiswal was still the man of the match choice and credited his hard work and hours in the gym for the on-field result. Mumbai lost Rohit for three on his 36th birthday, before Ishan Kishan (28) and Green (44) set up the chase in their partnership of 62. — AFP

Shotokan Karate Centre gears up for national championship

MUSCAT: The Shotokan Karate Centre has completed preparations for holding the National Shotokan Karate Center Championship under the umbrella of the Oman Karate Committee. The championship will be held at the Ahli Sidab Club Sports Hall in Darsait, Muscat on May 5 under the auspices of Shaikh Salem bin Hamad al Mahrouqi, Chairman of the Oman Karate Committee, member of the Majlis Ash'shura, representative of the Wilayat of Adam.

Regarding the tournament and the preparations, Shotokan Karate Centre Chairman Sensei Navaz Mukeri, said: "This national championship comes within the annual plans of the centre as 15 clubs, centres and academies practising karate have been registered and they are represented by 200 male and female players of different age groups and weights.

Sensei Hilal al Abdali, a member of the Shotokan Karate Centre, stated that what distinguishes this version of the tournament is the participation of 15 clubs, academies and private centres for karate namely Shotokan Karate Centre, Buraimi karate Academy, AIKI School of Martial Arts, Beats club, Bushi Do Kai Karate, Eagles Samayil Karate, Freedom Karate Team,

International Academy for Individual Games, International Shotokan Karate Federation, JKA Oman, Karate Stars, Muscat International Karate Academy, Professional Karate Club, Shito-Ryu Oman Karate Do Kai and Karate Champions Club. We expect great competition among the karatekas of the participating clubs, an exchange of experiences in the field of karate sport, and the discovery of top talents for the national teams."

Sensei Youssef al Siyabi, Head of the Shotokan Karate Centre Coaches and Vice-Chairman of the Referees Committee of the Omani Karate Committee, said this national championship will be managed by a group of referees who carry international and continental badges in addition to a group of national and resident referees.

Sensei Munther Bilal, a member of the Shotokan Karate Center, said the centre will hold a lecture for the coaches and another for the referees on May 4. "The lecture at the Ahli Sidab Club Sports Hall will focus on some points that the club coaches should follow with their players during the competitions as well as for the referees. The practical application of the amended International Arbitration Rules 2023 will also be discussed," he said.



Delhi take on Gujarat in 'David vs Goliath' encounter



We are just moving into the 43rd match of the IPL 2023 and there are already 24 occasions of 200+ scores by teams, which has astronomical number. To add on, there are multiple counts of 200+ scores being chased down as well.

The reason for this could be the quality of bats, or it could be the improved quality of batters, or it could be poor quality of bowling. Actually, in reality, the reason doesn't really matter, as the crowds and viewers have absolutely enjoyed this wonderful experience of batting domination and high-scoring encounters.

GT VS DC AT AHMEDABAD

● **PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER** – Gujarat and Delhi did clash in this year's IPL match number 7, where Gujarat walked easily past Delhi. Winning the toss, Gujarat opted to

chase in their away game, which is their comfort zone. On the back of some lusty strikes from Axar Patel and Abhishek Porel, Delhi managed to get to a below par 162/8. Chasing an average total, Gujarat were always in control and chased the total with 6 wickets and 11 balls to spare.

● **TEAM INFO** – Gujarat are currently the number one ranked team in the points table with six wins from eight games, while Delhi are placed last with six losses from eight games. Now we all know that GT is starting this as favourites so let's understand how can DC win this? GT are in an incredible form and chasing games down is their comfort zone.

So, to start off, can DC win the toss and put GT to bat first and then chase down the target. DC have been under-utilising Axar Patel and need to change immediately. Anything around 145-155 should give DC the optimum opportunity.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played — 2; Won by GT- 2; Won by DC — 0

● **GT possible 12** – D Warner, P Salt, M Marsh, M Pandey, P Garg, A Patel, R Patel, K Yadav, A Nortje, C Sakariya, M Kumar, S Khan



Delhi Capitals' David Warner fields the ball during the Indian Premier League Twenty20 match between Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. – AFP

● **DC possible 12** – W Saha, A Manohar, H Pandya, V Shankar, D Miller, R Tewatia, R Khan, N Ahmad, M Shami, M Sharma, J Little, S Gill

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The previous match at this venue saw a hard-fought contest between bat and ball. While the slower bowlers are expected to get a fair bit of assistance from the surface in Ahmedabad, the batters will also chance their arm with relatively shorter boundaries on offer at the venue. It will be a slightly warm evening in Ahmedabad with 1% chance of rain, which should not be a concern.

● **Match Prediction** – The likes

of Ricky Ponting and Sourav Ganguly have complicated the things very early on, to the point where the team has pressed the panic button and now only a few wins can make the equation better. Gujarat are an incredibly strong side and unless and until they don't mess this one, by making multiple changes, this is surely expected to go down as an easy win for them. So just like how all of you like it, it's going to be 'fafda, jalebi and dhokla' for dinner tonight at Ahmedabad.

FAN COMMENTS

● "This is definitely a scenario of David and Goliath. DC's

combinations might not have worked, but Gujarat Titans should definitely not make the mistake of taking Delhi Capitals lightly. GT need to have the presence of Hardik Pandya for all the games to manage the resources at its best. Also, the decision of resting Prithvi Shaw is a good one and Delhi should stick with it." – **Chaitanya Gulabsi, 59, Owner/ Al Turki Enterprises, Omani.**

● "Before the start of IPL, Delhi looked like an incredibly strong team on paper and with the management being in the hands of people like Ganguly, Ponting and Amre; it was believed that this is just going to be a piece of cake for them. But then, cricket is a complicated game and that's exactly what this year's IPL has shown us." – **Dr Faisal Hameed, 49, Neurologist, Indian.**

● "Cricket is a very good sport and loved by all Indians. Kachchhi wing was the first to do the Kachchhi Premier League (KPL) with artificial auctions many years ago. This year's IPL has been very good and if all stays on track, we should be able to be organise the KPL for our members this year as well." – **Hemlata Ben Jesrani, 73, Convenor, Kachchhi Wing,**

Indian.

● Seeing the craze of cricket growing in Oman and the interest that's developing in Omanis, I have opened a professional coaching centre for helping the youngsters and locals develop their skills in this wonderful sport. The academy is located in the heart of Maabela. I have specially called the best of coaches to promote this game after I saw so many locals commenting in this column. Great job Oman Daily Observer! – **Asif Abdulsamad al Balushi, 39, Chairman/ IBN Abdul Samad Engineering & Consultancy LLC, Omani.**

Send us your comment for next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 78795978' and the best comments will be included in our article. '30 words on the team that you support', full name, designation, age, nationality.

You could post your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, Twitter — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR Instagram — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use the #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

NEWCASTLE, MAN UTD PRESS TOP-FOUR CLAIMS



Manchester City's Erling Braut Haaland celebrates scoring their first goal against Fulham. – Reuters

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Bournemouth 4 (Lerma 20, 24, Solanke 63, Semenyo 90) Leeds 1 (Bamford 32)

Fulham 1 (Vinicius 15)
Manchester City 2 (Haaland 3-pen, Alvarez 36)

Liverpool 4 (Jones 3, Diaz 5, Salah 15-pen, Jota 90+4)
Tottenham 3 (Kane 40, Son 77, Richarlison 90+2)

Manchester United 1 (Fernandes 39) Aston Villa 0

Newcastle 3 (Wilson 54, 81, Walcott 79-og) Southampton 1 (Armstrong 41)

PLAYED ON SATURDAY

Brentford 2 (Toney 82, Dasilva 90+4) Nottingham Forest 1 (Danilo 45)

Brighton 6 (Undav 6, 66, Gross 13, 26, Welbeck 39, 48) Wolves 0

Crystal Palace 4 (Ayew 15, Zaha 20 Schlupp 30, Eze 66-pen)
West Ham 3 (Soucek 9, Antonio 36, Aguero 73)

Haaland strikes as Man City back on top

LONDON: Erling Haaland scored his 50th goal of the season on Sunday as Manchester City beat Fulham to return to the Premier League summit, with Newcastle and Manchester United winning to close in on a top-four finish.

Liverpool maintained their unlikely pursuit of a Champions League place by beating Tottenham 4-3 in a thriller but Southampton and Leeds are staring into the abyss.

City's 2-1 win at Craven Cottage left Pep Guardiola's men a point clear of long-time leaders Arsenal, with a game in hand.

The defending champions, chasing their fifth Premier League title in six seasons, were ahead in the third minute when Haaland scored from the penalty spot after Julian Alvarez was fouled.

Haaland's 34th Premier League goal of the season equals the competition record held by Andy Cole and Alan Shearer — set in the days of 42-game campaigns. The Norwegian is the first player to reach a half-century of goals across all competitions in a single English top-flight season since 1931.

"Before Winston Churchill was Prime Minister? Wow. Sounds a long time ago. Congratulations to Erling," said City boss Guardiola.

Fulham equalised in the 15th minute through Carlos Vinicius but Alvarez restored City's lead nine minutes before half-time.

Treble-chasing City, on top for the first time in 10 weeks, have won their past eight league games and are unbeaten in their past 18 matches in all competitions.

They are red-hot favourites to retain their title, taking full advantage of Arsenal's stumbles — the Gunners are winless in their past four matches.

Arsenal host struggling Chelsea on Tuesday, with City at home to West Ham the following day.

"It's important but on Tuesday Arsenal will play," said Guardiola. "Important is the West Ham game, it's a game in hand. After that we'll be top of the table and it will be more real."

WILSON DOUBLE
Callum Wilson came off the

Premier League		2022	2023
Standings			
	Points	played	
1 Man City	76	32	●●●●●●
2 Arsenal	75	33	●●●●●●
3 Newcastle	65	33	●●●●●●
4 Man Utd	63	32	●●●●●●
5 Liverpool	56	33	●●●●●●
6 Tottenham	54	34	●●●●●●
7 Aston Villa	54	34	●●●●●●
8 Brighton	52	31	●●●●●●
9 Brentford	50	34	●●●●●●
10 Fulham	45	33	●●●●●●
11 Crystal Palace	40	34	●●●●●●
12 Chelsea	39	32	●●●●●●
13 Bournemouth	39	34	●●●●●●
14 Wolves	37	34	●●●●●●
15 West Ham	34	33	●●●●●●
16 Leeds	30	34	●●●●●●
17 Nottingham F.	30	34	●●●●●●
18 Leicester	29	33	●●●●●●
19 Everton	28	33	●●●●●●
20 Southampton	24	34	●●●●●●
Last match			
● Won ● Drawn ● Lost			
● Champions League (C1)			
● Europa League			
● Relegation			

bench to score twice as third-placed Newcastle fought back to beat Southampton 3-1 and edge their opponents towards relegation.

The England forward was left out of Eddie Howe's starting line-up despite scoring twice at Everton in midweek but produced the perfect response.

He cancelled out Stuart Armstrong's first-half opener and then helped himself to a second after Theo Walcott's own goal had given the Magpies the lead.

The win keeps Newcastle two points ahead of Manchester United but Southampton are anchored at the foot of the table, six points from safety with just four games to play.

Erik ten Hag's Manchester United edged in-form Aston Villa 1-0, courtesy of a first-half goal from Bruno Fernandes. — AFP

Liverpool clinch last-gasp thriller over Spurs

ANDY JALIL
LIVERPOOL, MAY 1

In a nail-biting finish, Liverpool emerged winners with a 4-3 result to strengthen their position for European competition next season as Tottenham Hotspur too, despite the defeat, remain in place for the Europa League.

Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp, after his exuberant celebration at the winning goal (running to the fourth official and taunting, in the process he injured a hamstring!!) found himself in trouble with a yellow card and the FA are looking at his post-match comments about the referee, Paul Tierney.

Klopp said: "We have history with Mr Tierney, I really don't know what this man has against us. He always will say there's nothing

and it's not true. It cannot be."

He added: "I'm really not sure if it's me, how he looks at me. I don't understand it. I have pain for a few days, Mr Tierney not. In the next game I'll do what I always do and the celebrations – if we have something to celebrate I will be much calmer."

Tottenham found themselves 3-0 down in the first 15 minutes. They seemed to make a somewhat lethargic start. They conceded the first goal after three minutes when Curtis Jones volleyed home a cross from Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Two minutes later, an excellent passing movement between, Cody Gakpo, Mohammad Salah and Harvey Elliott ended with Gakpo crossing to Luis Diaz from the byline for Diaz to find the net. Just 10 minutes had been played after the second goal when Christian



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah in action with Tottenham Hotspur's Eric Dier. – Reuters

Romero brought down Gakpo in the box and Salah slotted the ball in from the resulting penalty.

Tottenham seemed to up their game with the shock of the three goals and managed to pull one back six minutes before half-time with Ivan Perisic crossing for Harry Kane to score his 25th league goal of the season.

Spurs were unlucky in the second half when Romero and Heung-Min Son hit the woodwork in a space of a minute. Liverpool were fortunate that Diogo Jota was not sent off when his dangerously raised foot caught Oliver Skipp on the head leaving him bleeding and needing stitches.

Spurs cut the deficit to just one goal in the 77th minute when Son ran well, advancing up-field, and scored from a long pass from Romero. Liverpool were suddenly

very nervy as Tottenham applied pressure for the equaliser. It came in the third minute of injury-time when Richarlison headed in from a free kick.

Just as Spurs thought they had managed to salvage a point they were stunned when 60 seconds later, Jota picked up a poor back-pass from Lucas Moura and scored to the utter disbelief of Tottenham.

A shocked Spurs interim-manager, Ryan Mason said about the foul of Jota on Skipp: "It's probably the clearest red card you will see. I have to be careful what I say but that's an impossible one to miss."

He added: "When you talk about endangering an opponent to draw blood from a stud when his head is five-and-a-half feet in the air baffles me. That type of decision is the difference between winning the game or not."

business

MUSCAT
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EXCHANGE
4,752.038



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$78.43
Brent Crude \$78.63
Light Crude \$75.04



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Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G.) First Quarter Results 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to share with you the results achieved by the Bank during the first quarter ended 31 March 2023. The Bank continued to maintain its leadership position in Oman's financial services sector with a strong performance across its different lines of business.

Financial Overview

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 51.30 million for the period compared to RO 48.26 million reported during the same period in 2022, an increase of 6.3 per cent.

Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 91.71 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2023 compared to RO 82.08 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 11.7 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 31.50 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2023 as compared to RO 31.83 million for the same period in 2022.

Operating expenses for the three months period ended 31 March 2023 was RO 48.70 million as compared to RO 45.76 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 6.4 per cent. Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the three months period ended 31 March 2023 was RO 13.69 million as against RO 12.0 million for the same period in 2022.

Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 8.4 per cent to RO 9,762 million as against RO 9,009 million as at 31 March 2022. Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 1.6 per cent to RO 8,992 million as against RO 8,853 million as at 31 March 2022.

Strategic Initiatives & Key Developments

Bank Muscat held the Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) of its shareholders on 22 March 2023. During the AGM, the Bank's shareholders approved the report of the Board of Directors of the Bank, the report on Corporate Governance and the report of the Shari'a Supervisory Board of Meethaq Islamic Banking for the financial year ended 31 December 2022. The appointment of statutory auditors for the Bank and external independent Sharia'a auditors for Meethaq Islamic banking were also approved at the AGM. The Bank's shareholders granted their approval to distribute a cash dividend of 15 bz per share for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.

As a result of the Bank's digital transformation efforts and financial inclusion strategy, the number of registered users on Mobile and Internet banking channels grew at a fast pace to over 1.6 million users. The Bank has the largest digital service network in Oman with over 810 active devices across the Sultanate. Instant debit card issuance has been launched at most branches across Oman. The quarter also witnessed a 30 per cent growth in the number of PoS and e-commerce transactions in comparison to the same quarter of the previous year.

Bank Muscat continued to spearhead the digital transformation of corporate, SME, and Government customers through its state-of-the-art and integrated Transaction Banking solutions. The volume of transactions processed on the Corporate Online platform increased significantly by 41 per cent over the corresponding quarter last year. The Bank has made significant enhancements to its direct debit collection solutions, enabling it to maintain a high level of compliance, while providing a seamless user experience.

Bank Muscat continued its market-leading position against the backdrop of heightened global volatility

and a demanding macroeconomic environment. The Bank is actively engaged with leading government-related entities and corporates on strategically important transactions, including the electricity and water sectors, hospitality and real-estate sectors, upcoming Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and provided advisory services for merger and acquisition transactions of companies in Oman.

In the first quarter of the year, the Bank's Assets under Management (AUM) grew to approximately USD 2.6 billion (over RO 1 billion). The Money Market Fund became the largest open-ended fund in Oman while the Oryx Fund distributed its highest-ever dividend (for FY 2022) during the first quarter of 2023. The enabling of purchases and redemptions for retail customers through Internet and Mobile banking is now reflecting in increasing interest in investment products.

In line with the strategies aimed at enhancing financial inclusion for different segments in the society, Meethaq Islamic Banking launched the Ikram package of Shariah-compliant financing products to benefit pensioners.

CSR & Sustainability

Bank Muscat launched the 2023 edition of its flagship Green Sports programme during the quarter. It also partnered with SMEs Development Authority this year to launch the annual Al Wathbah Academy entrepreneurial training for Omani SMEs based in Al Wusta. Building further on efforts to strengthen the communities it operates in, the Bank extended support to fishermen through its partnership with the Omani Fishermen's Association.

During the quarter, Bank Muscat continued to support a number of institutions and civil society organisations working for the welfare of people with disabilities. These initiatives included provision of white canes, special watches and braille-writing machines to Al Noor

Association for the Blind and support for persons with hearing disabilities at Al Amal School in Al Khuwair.

Awards and Accolades

Bank Muscat won several prestigious accolades including a Gold Award at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards testifying to its pioneering efforts in Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility. The Bank was also chosen as Oman's Most Trusted Local Bank, while Meethaq was similarly chosen as Oman's Most Trusted Brand in Islamic Banking. Bank Muscat won the Best Foreign Exchange Provider (Oman), Best Trade Finance Bank (Oman), the Best Private Bank in Oman awards from Global Finance and 4 prestigious awards from EMEA Finance including Best Bank in Oman, Best Local Investment Bank, Best Asset Manager and Best Private Bank in Oman. The Bank also won 2 international awards from JP Morgan for excellence in US Dollar-based international fund transfers.

In Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to thank our shareholders for the trust reposed in the Bank. The Board of Directors welcomes the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority to support the financial market in the Sultanate. We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik for his vision and guidance.

Khalid Bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2023			
	Unaudited 31-Mar-2023 RO' 000	Audited 31-Dec-2022 RO' 000	Unaudited 31-Mar-2022 RO' 000
Assets			
Cash and balances with Central Banks	746,238	883,060	835,209
Due from banks	689,591	641,480	839,017
Loans and advances	8,288,766	7,967,470	7,635,020
Islamic financing receivables	1,472,957	1,449,424	1,374,186
Investments securities	1,609,671	1,571,984	1,848,591
Investment in associates	8,606	8,795	8,579
Other assets	193,216	185,465	194,878
Property, equipment and software	67,277	68,304	70,458
Total assets	13,076,322	12,775,982	12,805,938
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Deposits from banks	1,193,859	1,004,106	931,013
Customers' deposits	7,780,036	7,409,967	7,657,160
Islamic customers' deposits	1,211,823	1,236,854	1,196,114
Sukuk	46,494	45,876	91,769
Euro medium term notes	192,853	390,376	385,747
Other liabilities	413,164	400,973	392,368
Taxation	65,254	55,706	61,240
Total liabilities	10,903,483	10,543,858	10,715,411
Equity			
Equity attributable to equity holders of parent:			
Share capital	750,640	750,640	375,320
Share premium	156,215	156,215	531,535
General reserve	410,258	410,258	410,258
Legal reserve	139,229	139,229	119,149
Revaluation reserve	4,904	4,904	4,904
Cumulative changes in fair value	1,153	(587)	1,915
Foreign currency translation reserve	(3,605)	(3,881)	(2,640)
Impairment reserve / restructured loan reserve	2,330	2,330	2,341
Retained earnings	206,395	267,696	517,745
Total equity attributable to the equity holders	1,667,519	1,726,804	1,960,527
Perpetual Tier I capital	505,320	505,320	130,000
Total equity	2,172,839	2,232,124	2,090,527
Total liabilities and equity	13,076,322	12,775,982	12,805,938
Net assets per share (in RO)	0.222	0.230	0.522
Contingent liabilities and commitments	1,691,577	1,630,064	1,747,115

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023		
	Unaudited for three months period ended 31-Mar-2023 RO' 000	Unaudited for three months period ended 31-Mar-2022 RO' 000
Interest income	133,786	109,488
Interest expense	(51,233)	(36,317)
Net interest income	82,553	73,171
Income from Islamic financing / investments	23,321	20,200
Distribution to depositors	(14,169)	(11,288)
Net income from Islamic financing	9,152	8,912
Net interest income and income from Islamic financing	91,705	82,083
Commission and fee income (net)	22,408	22,917
Other operating income	9,090	8,911
Operating income	123,203	113,911
Operating expenses		
Other operating expenses	(44,005)	(41,403)
Depreciation	(4,697)	(4,357)
	(48,702)	(45,760)
Share of results from associates	99	535
Net impairment losses on financial assets	(13,686)	(11,996)
	(62,289)	(57,221)
Profit before taxation	60,914	56,690
Tax expense	(9,619)	(8,427)
Profit for the period	51,295	48,263
Other comprehensive income / (expense)		
Net other comprehensive (expense) / income to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Translation of net investments in foreign operations	276	(142)
Change in fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI) debt investments	990	(2,123)
Share of other comprehensive income of associates	8	5
	1,274	(2,260)
Net other comprehensive (expense)/income not to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Change in fair value of FVOCI equity investments	742	914
	742	914
Other comprehensive income/(expense) for the period	2,016	(1,346)
Total comprehensive income for the period	53,311	46,917
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to		
Equity holders of Parent Company	53,311	46,917
Profit attributable to		
Equity holders of Parent Company	51,295	48,263
Earnings per share (in RO)		
- Basic and diluted	0.007	0.006

Invest Oman affirms country’s strong FDI appeal

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The Sultanate of Oman is ranked among the Top 10 countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that stand to benefit from strong investment inflows in 2023, buoyed by investment momentum garnered during the previous year.

According to Invest Oman, the official investment marketing initiative managed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and

Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), Oman is “making its presence felt in the investment world,” having been ranked fourth globally in the 2023 FDI Standouts Watchlist compiled by FDI Intelligence.

In a social media post on Sunday, Invest Oman referred to the Sultanate of Oman’s inclusion among MENA’s Top 10 countries to “carry the strongest investment momentum into 2023”; as affirmed by the FDI Intelligence report.

Oman, with a flourishing economy and a business-friendly



environment, is quickly gaining recognition as a prime investment destination in the MENA region,

FDI Intelligence had noted in its report. It highlights Oman’s growing influence in the world

of investment, underlining its sustained macroeconomic and foreign direct investment (FDI) trajectory.

Per FDI Intelligence, Oman’s strategic location, coupled with its impressive natural resources, has bolstered its economy and made it an attractive investment destination. The country has made significant progress in diversifying its economy, with a particular focus on non-oil sectors, such as manufacturing, mining, and logistics.

Oman’s unwavering commitment to promoting foreign investment has resulted in a surge in FDI projects, attracting significant investments from businesses across the globe.

In the FDI Intelligence, Oman achieved a score of 81.14 (out of 100) in Investment Momentum, an anticipated 4.1 per cent GDP growth in 2023 (based on IMF estimates), inflation limited to 1.9 per cent, and 27 per cent growth in FDI capex (CAGR 2019 – 2022), Invest Oman noted in its post

Forum seeks to boost Oman’s global competitiveness



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) launched a forum in Muscat yesterday to address the business environment in Oman. A first of its kind, the three day forum will aim to enhance the business climate in the country and boost its economic competitiveness, through various workshops and discussion sessions.

The first day of the forum targeted executive directors of companies in the country. Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, shared the following in his keynote speech: “The forum aims to review government efforts to improve the business environment, which will accelerate the development process of the Sultanate of Oman.

It also aims to identify the views of the private sector on improving the level of services provided in order to achieve global competitive levels based on the Global Competitiveness Report issued by the World Economic Forum.”

He added: “This will be achieved by involving representatives of the private sector in the decision-making process and the strategy formulation process to increase the effectiveness of government services.”

“The assessment of the Sultanate of Oman in international reports, will in return contribute to a catalytic business environment.”

Data Mining CEO Hamad al Musharifi defined the concept of competitiveness in his presentation.

“It is the country’s ability to make optimal use of its resources and institutions in order to raise the level of

THE REPORT IS A BENCHMARK FOR THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE MACRO AND MICRO ECONOMY. IT ALSO DEMONSTRATES THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS SATISFIED WITH GOVERNMENT SERVICES, AS WELL AS THE EXTENT OF THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE INCENTIVES AND FACILITIES PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

productivity and increase the efficiency of services provided to individuals and the business sector, thus contributing to achieving sustainable development and a resilient economy for the country, and placing it in an advanced competitive position.”

According to Al Musharifi, Oman ranked at 53rd in the Global Competitiveness Report issued by the World Economic Forum in 2019. “The report is a benchmark for the competitiveness of the macro and micro economy,” he said.

“It also demonstrates the degree to which the private sector is satisfied with government services, as well as the extent of the positive impact of the incentives and facilities provided by the government.”

“In addition, it evaluates the state’s ability to provide prosperity to its citizens, through its ability to make optimal use of its available resources and sets the stage for policy makers and other stakeholders to help craft and support economic strategies that drive growth.”

According to Al Mushraifi, the government seeks to raise its ranks in the index to be in the top 30 countries by 2030, and to be among the top 20 countries in 2040.

MSX rejigs listing of public joint-stock companies

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has issued a decision to transfer the listing of a number of public joint-stock companies from the parallel market to the main market and vice versa, as well as from the monitoring market to the parallel market and vice versa, effective on Sunday, May 7, 2023.

The decision stated the changes that occurred in the main market, where the listing of Oman Flour Mills, Oman Cables Industry, Oman Services and Financing Company, Ahli Bank, Taageer Finance, and Dhofar Power Company were transferred from the main market to the parallel market due to their failure to meet several listing standards in the



main market.

The decision also transferred Oman and Emirates Holding Company, HSBC Oman, United Finance, Bank Dhofar, SMN Power Holding, and Takaful Oman Insurance from the parallel market to the main market for meeting all the conditions and standards required for listing in the main market.

Meanwhile, the Holding Company for Investment of the City was transferred from the monitoring market to the parallel market for meeting the shareholder rights criterion, and the National Aluminium Products and Fisheries of Oman was transferred from the parallel market to the monitoring market for violating the shareholder rights standard.

Badr bin Hamoud al Hinai (pictured), Senior Director of the Market Operations Department at the Muscat Stock Exchange, explained that the Muscat Stock Exchange prepares an annual study on the transfer of listed public joint-stock companies according to the standards set forth in Article 39 of the Executive Regulations of the Capital Market

Law.

He pointed out that the results of the study help investors and interested parties clearly identify companies with good performance and excellent liquidity that are listed in the main market, while companies that have not met the basic standards for listing in the main market are listed in the parallel market, such as those with paid-up capital of less than RO 5 million and those that have not achieved net profits during the previous two years with a minimum of 5 per cent of paid-up capital.

On the other hand, companies experiencing exceptional circumstances such as merger decisions, acquisitions, and capital erosion are transferred to the monitoring market, he added.

Omani urea exported to 14 countries globally: Omifco

Omani-Indian JV affirms commitment to strengthening national food security goals

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 1

Urea exports from Oman-India Fertiliser Company (Omifco), limited until a few years ago to India under a long-term supply deal, now cover as many as 14 countries globally, a top official of the Sur-based joint venture project has revealed.

Ahmed bin Said al Marhoubi (pictured), CEO, said the uptake of Omani urea – a key nitrogen-based fertiliser used extensively as a crop nutrient in the agriculture sector – has also grown significantly in the Sultanate of Oman in trend with national efforts to boost the country’s food security.

“Since 2021, Omifco has exported urea to more than 14 countries across four continents, including the US, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, South Africa, Mozambique, Thailand, Nepal, and India. In addition, Omifco continues to meet the domestic urea requirements of the local Omani farmer community,” Al Marhoubi stated in an interview published in The Business Year, a UK-based global media group.

A subsidiary of wholly Omani state-owned OQ Group, Omifco operates a major facility at Sur



Industry City with a capacity to produce 1.65 metric tonnes/year of urea and 350,000 tonnes/year of ammonia. All of the urea output was shipped to India under a 15-year offtake agreement that expired in 2020.

OQ Trading (OQT), the commodity trading business of OQ Group, which oversees the marketing of Omifco’s ammonia and urea output, has since secured markets around the world for these commodities, some under

multi-year offtake arrangements.

In August 2020, Swiss-based international agri-business trader Ameropa said it had signed a 3-year deal with OQ Trading to lift part of Omifco’s urea output.

A similar agreement was also inked by India in February 2022 for the import of 1 million tonnes of urea from Omifco for a three-year period.

According to Al Marhoubi, the JV has also ramped up its support for local farmers in line with a broader commitment to strengthening the nation’s food security objectives “Omifco recognises its role as a critical stakeholder in addressing food security in the Sultanate of Oman and globally. We have always been at the forefront of making a meaningful

contribution to enhancing food security locally.

Some of our initiatives include providing urea at subsidised prices for local farmers, distributing farm equipment, providing refrigerated trucks for farmers, and mobile veterinary clinics.

Omifco is also setting up greenhouses in schools to get the attention of young Omanis and shape their minds on farming methodologies,” the CEO stated in The Business Year interview.

Further, in line with this vision, Omifco recently signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to fund the establishment of an indoor vertical farming project to support the cultivation of leafy greens, he added.

Opportunity Oman: Downstream petrochemicals



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
AL BALUSHI

The author is the founder and CEO of Smart Investment Gateway; email: yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com



The global petrochemical sector is witnessing great development by providing advanced solutions for trade and logistics, as global supply chains are experiencing severe disruptions today considering the uncertain expectations of oil prices, fluctuations in global production capacity, pricing policies, and uncertainty in the trade movement, which are factors that have accelerated the deflation of the economy.

The volatility of the markets has led to more pressures on all sectors, including the petrochemical sector, which is a mainstay of economies around the world, as petrochemicals are a vital part of our daily life, and an important component of the circular economy. Almost everything is made from petrochemicals, from automotive parts and electronics to the food, beverage, and medical industries.

The importance of petrochemicals is also reflected in the labour market, which is witnessing an improvement with the increase in demand for these industries, which will continue in the near future, to

certainly contribute to achieving development and progress in various fields.

The petrochemical sector is witnessing an unprecedented importance at the global and regional level, and the GCC market is a major centre for the production and export of chemicals, as it produces goods worth more than \$108 billion.

The sector has tremendous potential, and we hope to enhance our contribution to its multi-fold growth in the region.

The forecasts for the total demand for petrochemicals indicate that the overall outlook stays positive, despite the instability in the sector on many sides, as the petrochemical sector is expected to grow to \$1 trillion by 2030, which increases the new demand for oil and gas in the market.

The demand for petrochemical products will come mainly from the building and construction, pharmaceutical, automotive, and electronics sectors.

On the local level, the petrochemical industry in Oman is playing a key role in supporting the country's economic

diversification efforts and increasing exports by maximising the added value of oil and gas products.

The government recognises the importance of this industry in broadening the national economy's base and making more efficient use of the country's natural resources.

With the expansion of downstream facilities, such as Liwa Plastics, Duqm Refinery and Salalah OQ LPG, there are opportunities for the manufacturing of a wide range of petrochemical products that have applications in several industries such as construction, packaging, automotive, and pharmaceuticals.

In particular, the localisation of the plastics industry is a significant trend with support of Liwa Plastics, and the Duqm Refinery project, with its processing capacity of 230,000 barrels per day is expected to drive significant growth in the sector.

The project is the largest in the field of refineries and petrochemicals and will produce diesel and jet fuel, in addition to naphtha and liquefied petroleum gas.

The petrochemical downstream industry in Oman offers several opportunities for growth and expansion, making it a promising sector for investment in the manufacturing of various petrochemical products, including polyethylene, polypropylene, PVC, and specialty chemicals like solvents, detergents, and adhesives, which are utilised in different sectors such as construction, packaging, automotive, and pharmaceuticals.

With the potential to produce active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for medicine.

In conclusion, the petrochemical industry in Oman is one of the most supportive sectors for the expansion of manufacturing industries and economic diversification.

The country's downstream capacity is expanding with the construction of new facilities and there are opportunities for the manufacturing of various petrochemical products. Oman recognises the potential of this industry and is making efforts to utilise its natural resources more efficiently to broaden the base of the national economy.

Oman-Lithuania forum explores avenues for economic cooperation



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 1

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted on Monday the Omani-Lithuanian Business Forum, which was organised in partnership with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the United Kingdom.

In opening remarks, Faisal al Rawas, OCCI Chairman, welcomed a high-level Lithuanian delegation headed by Aušrinė Armonaitė, Minister of Economy and Innovation, and Zigmantas Dargevicius, Vice President of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of Lithuania and the President of Kaunas Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Crafts.

Al Rawas said the visit underlined bilateral efforts to strengthen commercial and investment relations between the two nations. He emphasised the importance of enhancing partnership and cooperation between Oman and Lithuania and establishing robust business relationships between the two nations.

Discussions during the forum identifies specific investments that serve the promising economic sectors of both countries, as well as enhancing commercial exchange, imports, and exports.

Al Rawas also expressed his hope that the deliberations would result in the exchange of information on exportable products and available business and investment opportunities in both nations.

OCCI remains committed to working with their Lithuanian counterparts to improve economic and business relations between the private sectors of Oman and Lithuania, the Chairman stated.

During a recent visit to Oman, a group of at least 30 Lithuanian companies from various industries expressed their excitement to establish partnerships in the Omani market.

The Lithuanian delegation includes manufacturers of furniture, real estate, tourism, and more. Lithuania is known as an export-driven country, and Oman presents an interesting market for Lithuanian businesses.

The delegation is interested in exploring all sectors of the Omani market and believes that cooperation between Lithuania and Oman could be strengthened in the IT sector.

With Lithuania being one of the most digitally advanced countries in the world and Oman investing heavily in technology, both countries could benefit from further collaboration.

ADVERTORIALS

Infitech participates in TrainEx



MUSCAT: In an effort to strengthen its position as a leading centre for training services and programmes in the oil and gas sector, Infitech Training Institute is participating in the Technical Education and Vocational Training Exhibition (TrainEx) as part of the 22nd edition of the Global Higher Education Exhibition (GHEDEX), which is held from April 30 to May 2, 2023, at the Oman International Exhibition and Conference Center.

Infitech's participation in this edition of TrainEx aims to highlight the institute's capabilities in providing high-quality training services and globally accredited professional programmes to develop the skills of the national workforce in the oil and gas sector.

Sohar International donates to transfer 500 MRI scans to private hospitals

MUSCAT: Sohar International has announced its contribution to the country's healthcare system through a donation to the Royal Hospital. The contribution aims to transfer 500 MRI scans to private hospitals to reduce waiting lists for examinations and provide better services to the community.

As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) umbrella, Sohar International is committed to making a positive impact on society, driving holistic well-being, and transforming lives.

Mohammed Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International, emphasised the bank's commitment to supporting pioneering initiatives that benefit every segment of society. Al Ardhi stated, "Our paramount objective has always been to promote comprehensive well-being within the community and effectuate transformational changes by supporting groundbreaking initiatives that cater to all segments of society."

We are thrilled to collaborate with the Royal Hospital to



address societal welfare. Sohar International's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy stems from the bank's conviction that the private sector has a duty to make a positive impact on society through sustainable business practices that benefit the community.

Through such contribution, Sohar international proactively endeavours to make a meaningful contribution to society." Sohar International has a track record of supporting initiatives that benefit society, and this

meeting is another step towards achieving that goal.

Recently, the bank provided financial aid to the Ihsan Association to purchase a fully equipped ambulance and supported the procurement of medical equipment for Hai Al Mina health centres in Muttrah.

The Royal Hospital conveyed its heartfelt appreciation to Sohar International, acknowledging the paramount significance of providing access to top-notch healthcare amenities for the overall welfare of the population.

Own a Lexus ES with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Now own a Lexus ES and get exclusive benefits. Service from 3 years / 30,000 kms up to 6 years / 60,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1 year free registration and scratch and win one out of 70 battery operated ride-on toy Lexus SUVs.

(Conditions apply. For details visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom).

The Lexus ES has an impressive design language that makes a lasting impression. From the headlights to the sleek profile, the ES is a head-turner from every angle.

The Lexus ES is available with two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque. While the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

For those looking to make the most of luxury and fuel-efficiency, the ES is also available



as an ES hybrid electric model. It has a hybrid battery that is available with 8 years/160,000 Kms warranty and is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The ES300h offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom.

Classifieds



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A close-up of a hand on a black steering wheel. In the background, a white car with red and black stripes is visible.

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An advertisement for property rental services. It features a 3D orange figure holding a blue and white megaphone. The text is arranged in a dynamic, overlapping layout. At the top, a grey box contains the text 'HAVE A PROPERTY'. Below this, a red banner with white and yellow text reads 'FOR RENT?'. To the right of the figure, the text 'Advertise with us.' is displayed. At the bottom, a red box contains the text 'Contact us on:' followed by the large yellow number '99639264'. The background is white with grey geometric shapes.

A graphic of a smartphone displaying the WhatsApp interface. At the top, a blue banner reads "Now get news on the go". Below it, a green WhatsApp logo is centered. The background of the screen is a light yellow pattern of various communication icons. Text on the screen says: "To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER, WhatsApp <your name> to 96473232".

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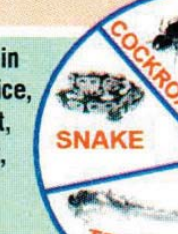
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Head Office Mohd Al Rashdi 99841230 m.alrahdhi86@yahoo.com	Ali Al Maashari 99639264 wadiameeh@yahoo.com	
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What it's like to explore the 6 km tunnel that connects three underground caves in Selma Plateau

Underneath the Selma Plateau is a tunnel that connects to a cave system that not a lot of people have seen or know about. This has always been on the bucket list of this writer, and after successfully crossing the said tunnel, he is sharing what the adventure was like... **P20**

Louis Vuitton dazzles luxury-seeking Seoul with first pre-fall show

LVMH'S TOP FASHION brand Louis Vuitton held its first-ever pre-fall fashion show on Saturday on a bridge in Seoul, the capital of a leading luxury market.

In one of the highest profile events since chairman and CEO Pietro Beccari started at Louis Vuitton earlier this year, the runway on the lower level of the double-decker Jamsil bridge that spans the Han River was bathed in blue shadows.

Models walked the 795 metre (2,608 feet) bridge, where traffic was stopped

for 24 hours, wearing fitted, sporty designs with geometric patterns designed by Nicolas Ghesquière, artistic director of women's collections at Louis Vuitton.

They strode out of a tunnel on chunky-heeled shoes in slick windbreakers, miniskirts that flared out and striped suits. Korean traditional music mingled with contemporary pieces to set the background.

In common with other European luxury houses, including Dior and Valentino, Vuitton has sought to tap into



the global popularity and youth appeal of K-pop stars, naming them as ambassadors who wear and promote their clothes.

On Saturday the creator and director of 2021's Netflix hit drama "Squid Game" Hwang Dong-hyuk participated in the show scenography.

South Koreans have become the world's biggest spenders per capita on personal luxury goods, splashing out an average of \$325 a year, analysts at Morgan Stanley say. — **Reuters**

READ

NIC BLAKE AND THE REMARKABLES

BY ANGIE THOMAS

Nic and two friends hunt for a powerful magic tool to save her father from imprisonment.



CULTURE

A person wearing Roman Centurion costume takes part in a historical parade to celebrate Rome's birthday in Rome. On April 21, 2023 Rome celebrated the 2776th anniversary of its foundation by the king Romulus in 753 BC. — **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

Customers visit the former Zara clothing brand flagship store, which reopened today under new branding Maag, in Moscow. Zara-owner - Spanish fashion retailer Inditex halted its operations in Russia and later sold its business to the United Arab Emirates-based Daher group following Moscow's military action in Ukraine. — **AFP**





Diane von Furstenberg: From Brussels to the big time in the States

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG is a US fashion icon. But she never forgot her Belgian roots — as evidenced by a return to Brussels, the city of her birth, to celebrate a half-century of her glamorous career.

"I really lived an American dream as a young European and it was fascinating," the 76-year-old said in an interview as the Belgian capital puts on an exhibition of her work.

The show, at Brussels' Fashion and Lace Museum, is the first exhibition in Europe dedicated to the Belgian-American designer, organisers said.

Naturally, pride of place goes to von Furstenberg's signature wrap dress, which made her famous as soon as it went on sale in 1973, three years after she made New York her home.

Sought after for its simplicity and practicality, the soft jersey wrap dress has been made in several dozen iterations in bright colours, making it an enduring feature in celebrity wardrobes.

"It makes a woman confident. And if you are confident, you are beautiful," von Furstenberg said with a wide smile.

"The jersey: very practical. Doesn't crinkle. You put in a print that moves and moves with your body. That all of a sudden makes beautiful curves in your body. The shape: very simple."

At age 25, von Furstenberg was making 25,000 dresses a week to keep up with demand.

Her star never dimmed, enabling her to go into philanthropy and support her view of herself as "a big feminist".

That's a theme informing the Brussels exhibition, which is titled "Woman Before Fashion".

"What is most important to me is to use my voice, my experience, my knowledge, my resources, my connections in order to help other women to be the women they want to be," she said.

A MIRACLE

With her second husband, US media billionaire Barry Diller, von Furstenberg runs a foundation that annually hands out awards to

personalities seen as inspiring other women.

For her own sources of inspiration, she cites first above all her mother, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps who incarnated, for her, combativeness and a desire for freedom.

Liliane Halfin, nee Nahmias, came from a Greek-Jewish family. She was deported to Auschwitz in Poland and then to the Ravensbrueck camp in Germany as a young bride in her 20s.

When she was freed in 1945 she weighed less than 25 kilogrammes (55 pounds) and was in such poor condition that doctors recommended she postpone having children.

"She was a skeleton amongst ashes. She went to concentration camps and she wasn't supposed to survive," von Furstenberg said, adding that her own birth 18 months later was "a miracle".

After the end of World War II her parents settled in Brussels, where the future designer, then named Diane Halfin, lived until age 14 before going to boarding school in Switzerland and England.

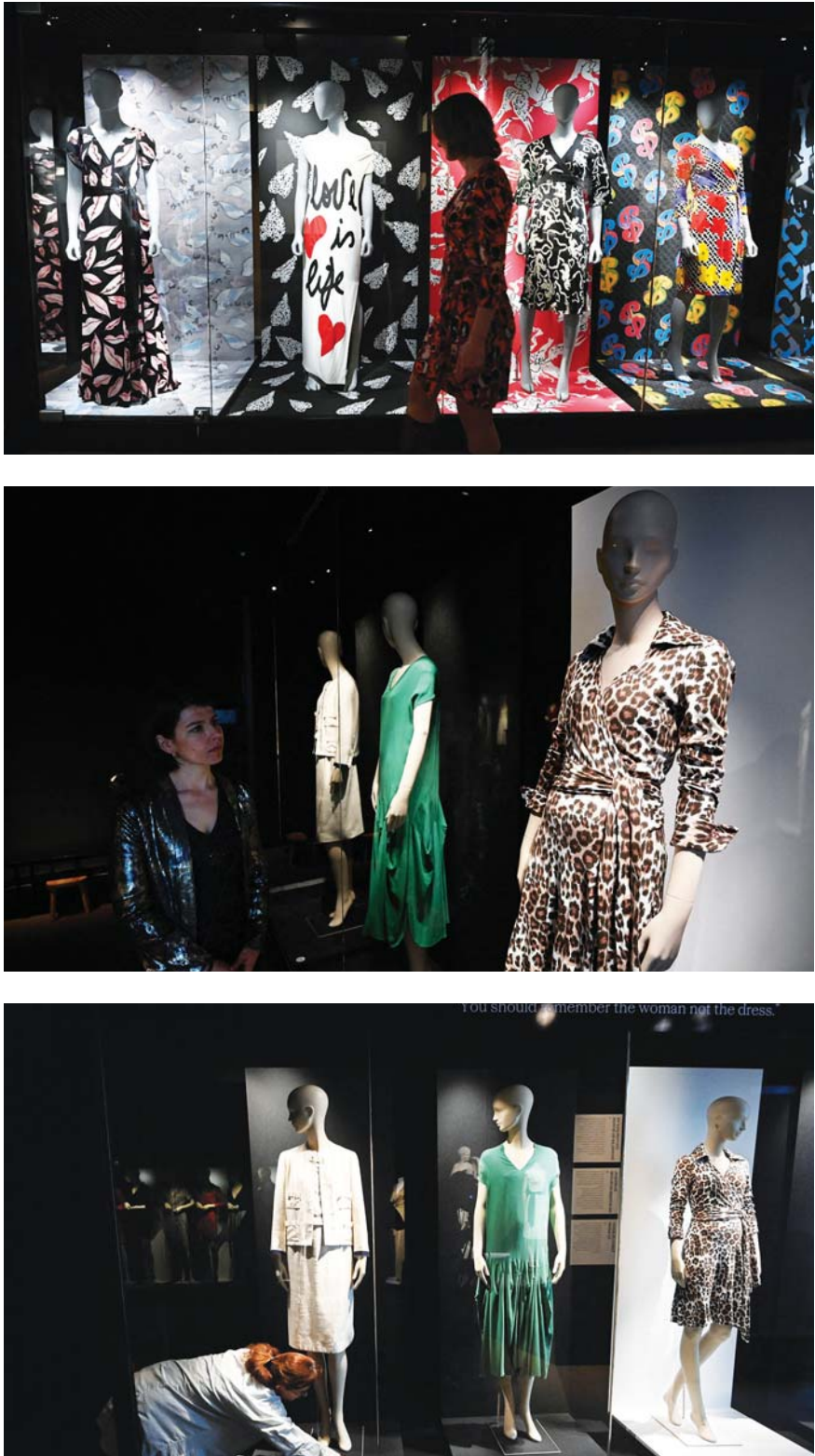
It was during her university studies that she met her first husband, a jet-setting European prince named Eduard Egon von Furstenberg, whose name she kept after their divorce. That name is now indelibly linked to the world of fashion.

For the curator of the Brussels exhibition, Nicolas Lor, one of the keys to the success of the Diane von Furstenberg label was the combination of a dress of typically European style with material that offered comfortable wear.

"She mixed the concept of the little dress that was thought up in the 1920s with the principles of sportswear and comfort that clearly defined apparel in the United States," explained Lor, a French fashion expert who has worked at Chanel and Christian Dior.

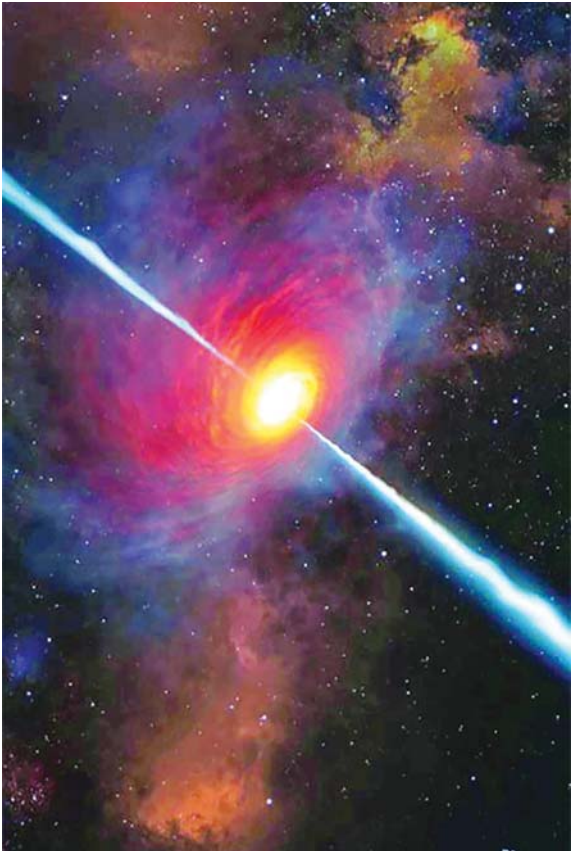
"For me, she was American," he smiled.

The exhibition runs to January next year. — AFP



SCIENCE

Milky Way's fate? Astronomers reveal what ignites quasars



ASTRONOMERS SAID last week that for the first time they have confirmed what ignites quasars, the brightest and most powerful objects in the universe, which put galaxies in their "death throes".

These celestial behemoths form when two galaxies smash into each other, the astronomers said, warning that this could be the Milky Way's fate in a few billion years.

Quasars are one of the most extreme objects in the universe, some shining with the brightness of a trillion stars despite being packed into the space of our Solar System.

They sit in the heart of galaxies, powered by supermassive black holes, requiring a huge amount of gas to be so staggeringly bright.

But exactly what creates quasars has been a matter of debate since their discovery in the 1950s.

In a new study, an international team of researchers said they have "clear evidence" that quasars are triggered by two galaxies colliding, which releases the vast amounts of energy needed.

Clive Tadhunter, an astrophysicist at the University of Sheffield in the UK and one of the study's authors, said that this could be the fate of the Milky Way one day.

The nearby Andromeda Galaxy is "coming directly towards us at about 200 kilometres (125 miles) a second," he said.

It will collide with the Milky War in roughly five billion years, and "we could get a quasar" as a result, he said.

Quasars push out all the gas from a galaxy, preventing any new stars from forming, he added.

BEACONS TO THE DISTANT UNIVERSE

The researchers compared observations of 48 galaxies with quasars at their centre to 100 without them.

Galaxies hosting quasars were three times as likely to have had collisions with other galaxies, the study said.

While the theory that such collisions ignited quasars has been around for decades, it was difficult to prove.

Tadhunter said this was because observations had often been carried out with telescopes that were optimised to look at objects in the centre of galaxies, but were less effective at spotting the distorted features at their edges that indicate past collisions.

For example, these diffuse structures "get washed out" when observed by the Hubble Space Telescope, he said.

So the team used land-based observatories, such as the Isaac Newton Telescope on the Spanish island of La Palma.

The new study, published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, also reviewed previous research to show how it may have missed the tell-tale signs of collisions.

Tadhunter said that quasars "act like beacons to the distant universe" because of their incredible brightness.

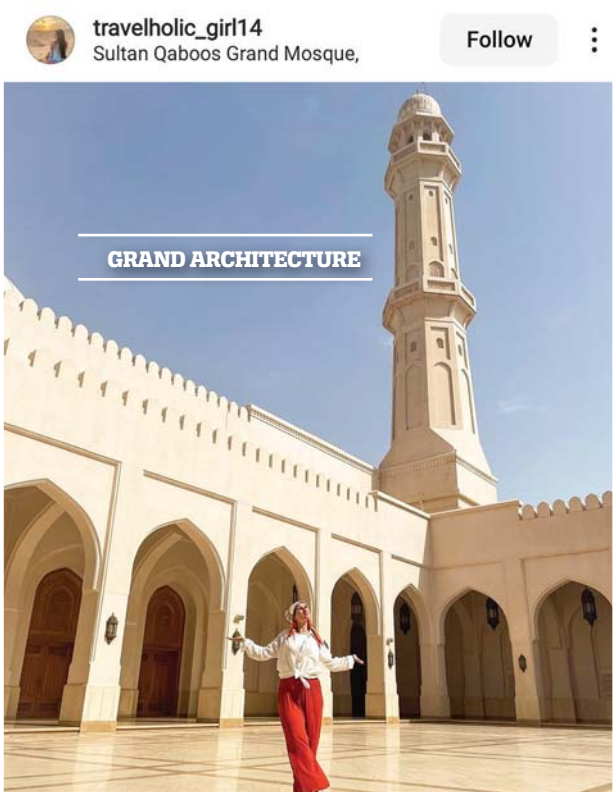
The James Webb Space Telescope, which has a much bigger aperture than Hubble, could help reveal more about quasars in this distant universe, when the universe was in its infancy, he said.

— AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Spare the bear: Sculpture of Spain's rifle-wielding ex-king puzzles onlookers



ONE OF MADRID'S main attractions acquired a completely new meaning for a few minutes this week when an artist placed a statue of former King Juan Carlos pointing a rifle at the landmark bronze figure of a bear shaking a tree.

The work of Chilean artist Nicolas Miranda called "Parasitic Strategies for Survival in a Cruel World" alluded to the 85-year-old Juan Carlos' passion for big-game hunting that landed him in scandal in 2012, not long before his abdication in 2014.

Juan Carlos is a controversial figure in Spain after a string of scandals, including his luxury elephant-hunting trip to Botswana in 2012 during a financial crisis at home. Once revered for his role in Spain's transition to democracy, he is now seen as a liability for his son, King Felipe.

After eight minutes standing next to the bronze bear figure, Miranda removed his unauthorised statue — 170 cm (67 inches) tall and made of polyurethane and modelling clay covered with metallic paint resembling patina on bronze.

While it puzzled some tourists and passers-by, some Spaniards took to Twitter to share their approval. "Is it the best metaphor for our parliamentary monarchy? I say yes," wrote one user.

The Bear and Strawberry Tree — the official symbols of Madrid — are photographed by thousands of tourists daily in the middle of the Puerta del Sol square.

Miranda will have an exhibition in Madrid next month which will include images of the performance in Puerta del Sol.

"My work as a contemporary artist is parasitic. I parasite something that already exists. For example, I connect the Madrid monument with the Spanish monarchy to make a parody of the symbol of the city," Miranda said in a press release. — Reuters

DINING

An Easy Spring Dinner That Shows Off Bulgogi's Versatility



JUST AS THERE IS no one right way to simmer up a marinara sauce, nor a single "correct" apple pie, there are myriad recipes for making bulgogi.

A classic Korean dish of beef marinated in some combination of soy sauce, sugar, garlic and ginger, the meat is then grilled until the sauce caramelises and condenses, turning salty and sweet, zingy and umami-rich. It's those heady flavours mixed with the char that give the dish its deep appeal, making it one of the most beloved preparations of Korean cuisine — and one of the most adaptable.

As my colleague Eric Kim put it a few years ago in a fascinating deep dive, versatility is one of bulgogi's virtues.

"If you grew up in a Korean household," he wrote, "then the dish wasn't just occasional barbecue; it was dinner on the regular, a quick pan-fry on the stovetop."

This weeknight recipe embodies that easygoing spirit. Its foundation is the marinade, which can be quickly whisked together with pantry staples. (If your pantry doesn't already include gochujang, the Korean fermented soybean and chile paste, you can rectify that by buying some at an Asian market, at a large supermarket or online.) Here, I've paired the marinade with thinly sliced pork (as you'd find in a traditional jeyuk bokkeum, but with less chile) and loads of vegetables. But think of this recipe as the kind of template that you can — and should — make your own.

Substitute other proteins, such as chicken, turkey, tofu or, more traditionally, beef, for the pork. Any quick-cooking vegetables — broccoli, asparagus, hakurei turnips, green beans, bell peppers and zucchini — will all work in place of the sugar snap peas and radishes, depending on the season. But if you like mushrooms, it's worth keeping them in the mix for their earthy, meaty character.

In grilled bulgogi recipes, the char is essential — in fact, the term bulgogi means "fire meat" — yet, in this stovetop version, the pork might not even brown. Instead, the

goal here is to sear the meat long enough to cook it through, while the sauce thickens and intensifies. Just take care not to overcook the pork, so it doesn't toughen, and the flavour remains deep and wonderful.

To serve, spoon the heady mixture over rice, or fold it into lettuce leaves — or do both. There are so many great options when it comes to bulgogi.

Pork Bulgogi With Spring Vegetables

By Melissa Clark

In this easy recipe, a deeply flavored Korean bulgogi marinade is paired with sliced pork, which is seared in a skillet with snow peas, radishes and mushrooms. You can use the basic recipe as a template, substituting other proteins like chicken, tofu or, most traditionally, beef for the pork, and whatever quick-cooking vegetables you like: cherry tomatoes, zucchini, broccoli florets are all great options. Don't worry about browning the pork here. The goal is to sear it long enough to just cook it through, while the sauce condenses and caramelises, coating the meat and vegetables.

Yield: 4 servings
Total time: 50 minutes

INGREDIENTS:
For the Marinade and Sauce:
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/4 cup gochujang
1/4 cup light brown sugar
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon white sesame seeds, plus more for serving
2 tablespoons neutral oil, such as grapeseed, avocado or sunflower
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
2 cloves garlic, finely grated or minced
1 (2-inch) piece ginger, finely grated

or minced
2 scallions, thinly sliced
For the Pork and Vegetables:
1 pound boneless pork chops, tenderloin or loin, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon neutral oil, such as grapeseed, avocado or sunflower
4 ounces shiitake mushrooms, sliced (about 1 1/2 cups)
1/2 cup thinly sliced radishes (about 5)
6 scallions, white and green parts thinly sliced
8 ounces snow peas, strings removed and halved crosswise (about 2 1/2 cups)
Cooked rice or lettuce leaves, for serving

PREPARATION:
1. Make the marinade: Add marinade ingredients to a medium bowl and whisk until combined. In a small bowl, reserve half the marinade at room temperature for serving.
2. Add pork to the marinade in the medium bowl and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 hours.
3. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add neutral oil. Once the oil is hot, add mushrooms. Let sear, stirring once or twice, until just tender and caramelised, 4 to 7 minutes.
4. Raise heat to high. Add pork along with its marinade, radishes, snow peas and all but 2 tablespoons of the scallions (reserve for garnish) to pan. Let cook, stirring often, until the pork is just cooked through, about 3 to 5 minutes. (Take care not to overcook it; it won't brown, and it may still look slightly pink inside).
5. Garnish with reserved scallions and sesame seeds, and serve hot over rice with reserved marinade for drizzling. — NYT

ANIMAL PLANET

Salamander Dads Are Turning Into Cannibals, Threatening Species Survival



THE HELLBENDER SALAMANDER has been called a lot of names: snot otter; mud devil; old lasagna sides. And now, perhaps: baby-eating cannibal, according to new research into the parental habits of these giant amphibians.

An eight-year study of hellbenders living in the rivers of southwestern Virginia has found that male salamanders are increasingly consuming their own young in areas near decimated forests.

Without nearby trees, pollutants flow into rivers, changing water chemistry in ways that seem to be altering paternal behaviour, the researchers said. Infanticide is becoming so widespread that eastern hellbenders — the largest salamander in North America at 2-feet long and weighing up to 5 pounds — may be on the cusp of eating future generations into extinction.

If you have rates of cannibalism this high, then that alone is enough to explain many of the population declines we've seen across the species range," said Bill Hopkins, an ecologist at Virginia Tech who led the research. The findings will appear in The American Naturalist.

Eastern hellbenders once thrived across 15 states. Their numbers have dwindled over the past 50 years, however, and researchers have struggled to explain why. Habitat loss, disease, poaching and climate change all probably contribute. But the driving factor might be baby-eating in response to deforestation.

Eating eggs with low chances of survival helps the salamanders conserve energy in lean times and boosts their chances of surviving long enough to make more and stronger babies in the future.

Hopkins' research suggests that cannibalism may be on the rise, with environmental damage — spurred by human activities such as cutting down forests — most likely to blame. He and his colleagues set up hundreds of underwater nest boxes in three rivers across southwestern Virginia. From 2013 to 2020, they monitored each box, tracking the fate of egg clusters they found.

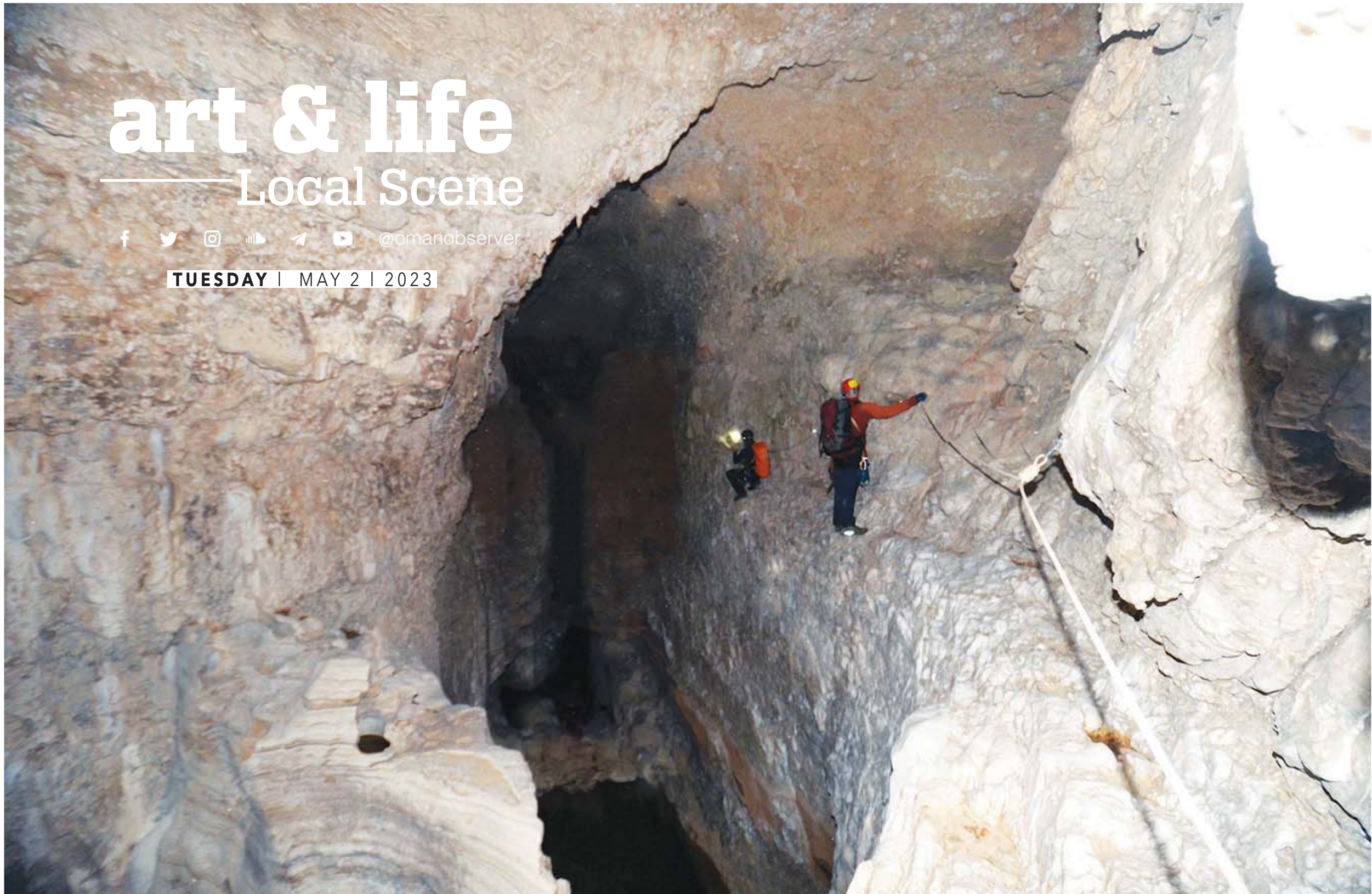
In areas with lush forest cover, males ate their entire spawn about 14 per cent of the time. But this happened more than three times as often wherever trees had been cut down. — NYT

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What it's like to explore the 6 km tunnel that connects three underground caves in Selma Plateau

By Dr Khaled Abdul Malek

My four friends and I had to wait for two years before we could finally manage to have a holiday at the same time in order to cross the tunnel joining the three-window cave to Al Tahiri Cave in Selma Plateau in Muscat Governorate.

Ahmed, Justin, Joel, Joe2 and myself embarked on this fantastic journey to Selma Plateau, which plunged us 270 m below ground for a walk that covered around 6 km. We reached the entrance of the three window cave sink hole around 2 pm and started fixing the rope for the first 30 m pitch.

Yusuf, a friend, accompanied us in order to drive the car and park at the spot, which we were to reach around 14 hours later, according to my estimation.

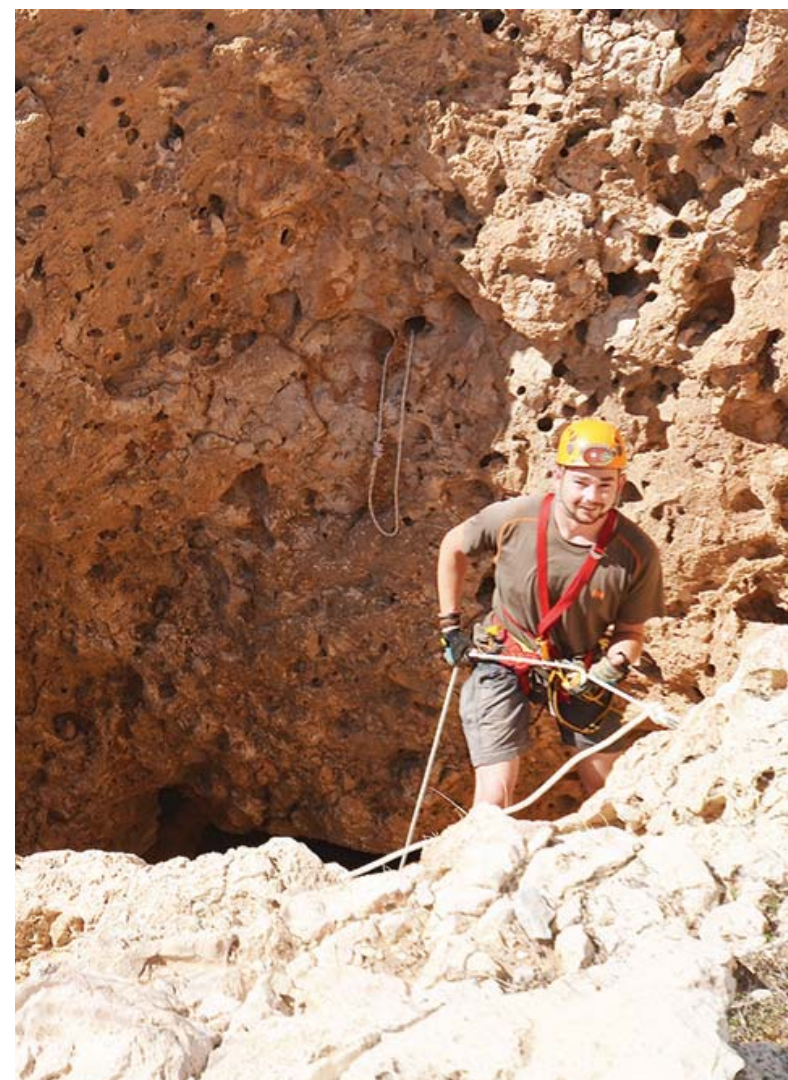
Joel was the first to go, disappearing in the hole at 2h 45. We all reached the bottom of the sink hole three hours later after having abseiled 10 drops in total, ranging from 4 to 34 m.

Then we started to progress in the flooded horizontal tunnel. In the beginning, we managed to avoid getting wet by doing traverses on the side walls using the ropes that some cavers had fixed earlier. This part of the tube was very hard as we were carrying heavy bags. Eventually we could no longer avoid getting into the cold and stinky water, as there was no other way to keep on advancing.

The water temperature was no more than 20 degrees, according to Joel!

Progress in this part of the tunnel was very slow. The passage was very narrow, and the roof was very low forcing us to progress on our knees for a long distance. This tube joins the gallery coming from the Seventh Hole (another sink hole in the same cave system) and continues underground through Al Tahiri Cave. I did the trip between the seventh hole and Al Tahiri Cave many times and knew it by heart.

To reach the junction with the other sinkhole, it took us around ten hours. We stopped for a short break to eat and put on dry clothes because



further down the gallery is supposed to be dry.

After a short while, we reached a pool full of water and realised that the gallery was flooded. We managed to avoid the first pool by doing a traverse, but soon after we were on the ledge of another one that we could not escape!

The next part of the crossing was very tough, as we had to swim several times and started to feel very cold.

The group reached the entrance of Al Tahiri Cave around 8h30 am.

From there we had around 1h30 of hiking to get to our car, which we drove back to the entrance of the three-window cave. Joel and Justin went down in the sinkhole again to retrieve the ropes.

We were all exhausted but very happy that we had achieved this extreme caving trip after almost two years of waiting.

