

HM THE SULTAN GREETES PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Republic of the Philippines on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Marcos Jr. and the friendly people of his country. — **ONA**



HM GREETES PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on the occasion of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Russia. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Putin, and further progress and prosperity to the friendly Russian people. — **ONA**



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BILATERAL RELATIONS

Sayyid Fahd meets Egyptian Minister of Awqaf



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers on Sunday received Dr. Mohammed Mokhtar Goma, Minister of Awqaf of Egypt.

At the beginning of the meeting, the guest conveyed greetings of the Egyptian leadership and best wishes to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman, wishing the Omani people further progress and prosperity. He also asserted the attention accorded by the Arab Republic of Egypt to its distinguished relations with the Sultanate of Oman in several spheres. **>A2**

BY 2030

Oman set to become one of largest exporters of hydrogen

PARIS: The Sultanate of Oman is on its way to become one of the largest exporters of hydrogen in the world by 2030, according to a recent report.

The report, issued jointly by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the International Energy Agency (IEA), demonstrated Oman's competitive potential as a hub for renewable energy and hydrogen.

The report was reviewed during a visit made by an Omani delegation to the International Energy Agency's headquarters in Paris. **>A5**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES



OMAN

Fees exemption for healthcare expanded

1 The Ministry of Health's commitment to serving the citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman by providing world-class healthcare has been lauded across the region. **>A6**

WORLD

Donald Trump calls his indictment 'ridiculous'

2 Former US President Donald Trump has described his federal indictment as "ridiculous" and "baseless". He made the remarks in Georgia. **>A7**

SPORTS

Australian team lifts maiden WTC title

3 After dominating India over the course of five days, Australia secured their maiden World Test Championship 2023 title on Sunday at the Oval, London. **>A8**

The **Invest Oman lounge** is a unified window to provide all services to investors. It is also a window for displaying investment opportunities that exceed OMR1 million with opportunities available to Omani, Gulf and foreign investors.

MINISTRY EASES NORMS TO FACILITATE INVESTMENT

Some space at the Investment Services Centre can also be given to private sector

Times News Service

MUSCAT: To create a competitive and attractive business environment, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion MoCIIP, issued a decision for simplifying investment procedures for investors.

The ministerial decision no. (361/2023) stipulates that the Investment Services Centre at the Ministry of Commerce, Indus-

try and Investment Promotion, through the Invest Oman Lounge, affiliated with the Investment Services Centre, will undertake the processes of completing all investor procedures smoothly to issue necessary approvals, permits and licences for investment projects, and provide necessary data and information for that.

The Investment Services Centre aims at facilitating and simplifying procedures for investors

to reach the highest levels of competitiveness, increase strategic and local investments, and attract foreign investment to the national economy.

The Invest Oman lounge is a unified window to provide integrated services to investors. It is also a window for displaying investment opportunities that exceed OMR1 million to Omani, Gulf and foreign investors.

The decision defines the rules and system of work at the centre, provided that it includes measures to simplify and facilitate the procedures for registering companies, establishments, and investment projects, and issuing necessary approvals, permits and licences to economic activities. **>A3**

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Oman, Egypt to boost ties in religious affairs

The two sides discussed ways of exchanging expertise related to legislations, laws and systems in the fields of awqaf and religious affairs



MEETING: The Omani side was chaired by Dr. Mohammed Said Al Ma'amari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, while Mohamed Mokhtar Goma, Minister of Awqaf chaired the Egyptian side. - ONA

The Omani side was chaired by Dr. Mohammed Said Al Ma'amari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, whereas Mohamed Mokhtar Goma, Minister of Awqaf chaired the Egyptian side. During the session, the two sides discussed ways of exchanging expertise and information related to legislations, laws and systems in the fields of awqaf and religious affairs.

They also stressed the importance of coordinating efforts and stances to demonstrate tolerance as a pillar of Islam. They further discussed the potential of exchanging scholars, preachers, researchers, training experiences, publications and research issued by both sides. During the session, a visual presentation was given on the systems and programmes of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. - ONA

OHRC Chairman meets Emirati counterpart



DISCUSSION: Sheikh Abdullah Shuwain Al Hosni, Chairman of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) with Maqsoud Kruse, Chairman of the National Human Rights Institute of the UAE. - ONA

MUSCAT: Sheikh Abdullah Shuwain Al Hosni, Chairman of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) met on Sunday with Maqsoud Kruse, Chairman of the National Human Rights Institute of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on a set of topics that enhance the joint work.

They also discussed means of exchanging expertise to benefit from the experiences of the two institutions in a manner that serves human rights. Meanwhile, the visiting delegation was briefed on the role played by the OHRC since its inception and its work mechanisms, objectives and terms of reference, as well as its efforts locally, regionally and internationally in the field of human rights. - ONA

FROM A1 Ties with Egypt reviewed

After welcoming the guest, HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed the course of the advanced relations binding the two countries, thanks to the firm ties binding the two leaderships and their brotherly peoples. Conversation during the meeting reviewed the relations of bilateral cooperation between the two countries and the joint interest in issues of concern to the Islamic world and stability of its countries,

as well as the benign efforts exerted in various fields. The meeting also highlighted the real image of Islam at all levels. The Egyptian Minister of Awqaf commended the wise, balanced policy pursued by the Sultanate of Oman, as well as its positive role in backing efforts of understanding and constructive dialogue among countries to support security and stability. He also underscored the

importance of the talks he conducted with the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs in Oman, as well as their positive reflections on the existing cooperation between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Dr. Mohammed bin Said Al Ma'amari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs and Khalid Mohammed Abdulhalim Radhi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman. - ONA

MEETING Discussion held on social work

MUSCAT: Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development met on Sunday with Dr. Mohammad Mukhtar Goma, Egyptian Minister of Awqaf and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting Oman. The meeting discussed a set of topics, particularly in the areas of social work. It was attended by a number of officials at the Ministry of Social Development. - ONA



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INNOVATIVE RESEARCH Research project examines global citizenship education

MUSCAT: 'Promoting Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in the Sultanate of Oman: An Analysis of National Policies' by principal investigator Dr. Khalaf Marhoun Al Abri, Associate Professor of Education Systems and Policies at the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University, is one of the innovative research projects funded by the Block Funding Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. For this research project, Dr. Khalaf Al Abri and his team aimed to explore the extent of the adoption of global citizenship concepts and principles in Omani education by analysing the reality of including global citizenship concepts in national policies in Oman. More specifically, through this paper, Dr. Khalaf analysed school education policies and plans in Oman in light of the requirements and objectives of the global citizenship education, studied the reality of the application of education for global citizenship in primary schools in Oman, and monitored the challenges facing the application of education for global citizenship in primary schools in Oman. The research team also developed proposals that would enhance education for global citizenship in Omani schools, monitoring the knowledge, behavior



and attitudes of both teachers and students in Omani primary schools towards education for global citizenship, and implemented a training program for Omani primary schools to promote education for global citizenship based on the analysis of educational policies and plans as well as its practical application. Dr. Khalaf mentioned that the results of the study indicated the emergence of the principles of global citizenship in the visions and missions of the Omani schools, however the study confirmed that these visions and messages must be reformulated in a new way, as there is a weakness in their formulation, as well as their inclusion of these principles. The results also showed the Sultanate of Oman's interest in

education for global citizenship through the inclusion in policy documents of the principles and elements of global citizenship, and its focus on building a global citizen. According to Dr. Khalaf, based on the results of the study, the research team developed a training program for teachers, which was applied to a group of teachers in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science. The research team was able to promote this training programme at the regional level, as it was adopted by the UNESCO office in Doha, and the programme was implemented in April 2023 for a group of teachers at UNESCO affiliated schools in Kuwait. - ONA

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COMMENTARY

Why don't kids play outside anymore?



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

The great outdoor activity is now almost non-existent. Fresh air is a rarity and I am not talking about pollution. Businessmen, with the help of engineers, are building mausoleum-like structures that entertain people under a concrete roof where the sun rays never penetrate. The places kids now love to spend their summers with the blessing of their parents.

When I was growing up, we kept close contact with the earth and the feel of the sands under our feet made up part of our childhood experience. There were acres and acres of space to explore and endless hideaways when you feel you want to be alone. It was all open under the blue sky and no one was complaining that the sun was a major cause of skin cancer.

The same businessmen, to make a quick buck, are selling creams to protect us from the sunlight and drinks to replenish our energy. In summers like this, you used to see children staging their own Olympics on the streets. The commotion they caused was part of life in the neighbourhood. You now wonder where all the children have gone? Aren't they supposed to be frolicking out there like we used to? The answer is that most families lock up their



children at home fearing that they might pick up bad habits. They also have them staying indoors, not to learn anything useful but watch television or play mobile phone games.

One parent defended it by saying "why should I let my kids out there kick a stupid ball or run in circles when they can do something for their future by learning something new from the Internet?"

I am not a man who argues when the other person has made up his mind about his convictions. Of course he was wrong. To him, ten months of school in a year is not enough. A kid must strengthen his mind about other educational pursuits in the other two months just to satisfy over zealous parents. What he didn't know that he was actually creating robots to comply with his carefully written programs. But the surprising thing is that this man was actually kicking a "stupid ball" with me in our neighbourhood when we were kids.

He broke every window within the two hundred meters radius with his

experimental shots. He was also climbing every tree on his path and rode a bike in a breathtaking speed around corners. I would say we had fun with our childhood without being malicious. And we turned out to be alright. I could not help feeling that he is depriving his kids the same privilege his father allowed him when he was growing up.

Parents like him would say that the world has now changed from the one we knew. It is true but our parents said the same thing. But you cannot lock up your children just because their "minds would be polluted by other kids." It is also an insult to other parents who don't feel the same way. In my opinion and I would stick to it, kids must be taught to be street-wise. And that does not mean they should get into drugs or involved in a fight. If they are happy and get a solid upbringing at home, they would know how to handle the streets. It is where kids learn the basic elements how to handle problems in their future lives.

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MINISTERIAL DECISION

Investment services

< FROM A1 The Investment Services Centre must also submit quarterly reports to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on its work, including a detailed statement on the volume of transactions that have been completed, the extent of compliance with quality performance standards in providing services, and proposals related to developing the service and ensuring transparency and good performance.

The decision stressed that a sufficient number of employees of government entities and private agencies associated with providing public services should be attached to the Investment Services Centre, to take charge of issuing approvals, permits and licences that belong to these entities.

The representative of the competent authority at the Investment Services Centre shall have all the powers prescribed for the competent authority in the field of issuing approvals, permits and licences that fall within the competence of the authority they represents, in accordance with the conditions stipulated in the laws and regulations, and in accordance with the periods and procedures specified in the investment guide.

Representatives of the competent authorities are subject to the administrative supervision of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, throughout their working peri-

ods at the centre, and they must abide by the rules and regulations of work at the Centre.

The decision indicated that some places at the centre can be allocated to private sector companies and entities to provide their services to investors, such as telecommunications companies, banks and finance companies, provided that they adhere to secure electronic connectivity with government agencies within a maximum period of 90 days, in order to exchange requests, data, documents, approvals, permits and special licences.

The decision specified that the issuance of the necessary approvals, permits and licences for investment projects, and the allocation of land and real estate for them, be either by the automatic licencing system, which is the investment project obtaining approval, permit or licence by notifying the centre on the form prepared for that, or by the prior licencing system, which is the investment project obtaining approval or permission, or a licence from the competent authority before starting the activity, as determined by the investment guide.

The fees charged by the Ministry for the services provided through the Center shall be determined by a decision of the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, after the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

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GCC MINISTERIAL COUNCIL



Oman chairs 156th session of GCC Ministerial Council

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman on Sunday chaired the 156th session of the GCC Ministerial Council, which was held at the GCC Secretariat General in Riyadh.

Oman's delegation was led by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

The meeting focused on the path of implementing decisions of the GCC Supreme Council, aiming at enhancing the joint Gulf action.

On the occasion of the 42nd anniversary of foundation of the GCC, which launched a blessed march of achievements that made the GCC a lofty edifice, Sayyid Badr, Chairman of the current session of the 156th session of the GCC Ministerial Council, said that the GCC accomplishments

call for sustained efforts to preserve the gains.

This success, Sayyid Badr added, encourages the GCC to look forward for the realisation of more milestones, notably in the areas of citizenship, the Customs Union and the Gulf Common Market. Such an approach would secure the durability of the GCC march of development and prosperity, he explained.

Sayyid Badr stressed that the approach of peace and cooperation is the only way, the safest and most ideal model for the region and the world at large.

In this context, Sayyid Badr commended the promising developments in the region which, he said, usher in a new era of welfare for all.

Speaking about the environ-

mental and climatic challenges currently posed to the world, Sayyid Badr said that GCC member states have already charted a balanced approach through gradual transition (to clean energy) to reduce harmful carbon emissions. This, he said, requires more cooperation and partnership among all sectors and more concerted action at the national, regional and international levels.

This approach also mandates support for innovation, capacity building and espousal of the best practices and experiences, to ensure a more sustainable and stable future, so that the member states could realize their national visions and so that they could consolidate their blessed renaissance in all walks of life, through knowledge and sciences. -OMA

Dominating MFA clinch Al Shabiba Cheltenham Muscat Challenge Cup



The inaugural tournament witnessed 65 players showcasing their talents in front of a large number of kids and parents

MUSCAT: A dominant Muscat Football Academy (MFA) clinched the inaugural Al Shabiba Cheltenham Muscat Challenge Cup 23 recently.

The U17 age-group tournament, organised by MFA, was held at the Cheltenham Muscat on June 10 and witnessed the participation of four Muscat-based football academy teams.

Played on a round-robin format, the nine-a-side tournament provided a lot of thrill and excitement.

Besides the hosts MFA team, the other teams that took part in the Al Shabiba Cheltenham Muscat Challenge Cup were Algeria Academy, Brazil Academy and Alpha Academy.

MFA won all their three matches to claim the title while Algeria Academy took the runner-up spot, having won one, lost one and drawn one.

Brazil Academy claimed the bronze medal after losing the runner-up spot on goal difference to Algeria.

The inaugural tournament witnessed 65 players showcasing their talents in front of a large number of kids and parents.

After the summer break, MFA will host the first edition of the Muscat Academies Youth League (MAYL) in October. The MAYL is expected to bring together hundreds of young footballers to compete against each other over a period of six months



TWO HONORARY AWARDS

Oman gets gold at FIAP Youth Biennial in Norway

Times News Service

OSLO: Represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Sultanate of Oman won a gold medal at the FIAP International Youth Photography Biennial (FIAP) in the Kingdom of Norway at the individual level (under 21-year-old category).

The medal was bagged by female photographer Nouf Salim Al

Siyabi, who was awarded top prize for her artwork themed "Mystery".

Oman also picked two honorary awards after occupying 6th and 7th places at country level, when it collected 324 points at the U-21 category and 353 points in the U-16 category.

Oman presented 40 artworks that were contributed by 25 male and female photographers.

Nouf Salim Al Siyabi said that

winning the gold medal in this competition is a great achievement for my photography, and it means more motivation and harder work for me in this field. "I love my work 'Mystery' and its advantage is that it is a spontaneous picture of a little girl looking at the camera with a bit of mystery and astonishment," she said.

It is worth noting that the participation of the Ministry

of Culture, Sports and Youth in such international competitions comes out of its keenness to support young people and their creativity and urge them to develop their skills and raise the level of artistic taste for their creations, which in turn is reflected in their representation of the Sultanate of Oman and their getting of advanced and honorable positions for the country.





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Dhofar, Musandam, South Al Batinah proposals praised

The proposals for development were unveiled at an open meeting between the ministry’s officials and governors in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced that the proposals of the governorates of Dhofar, Musandam, South Al Batinah took the lead in a contest for submitting the best proposal for a development project that can be implemented in one of the governorates.

This was unveiled at an open meeting between the ministry’s officials and governors in Muscat on Sunday.

After the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning evaluates the top three winning projects and approves them, the Ministry of Finance provides financial allocations for them.

The initiative seeks to encourage the governorates to find de-



velopment projects that are compatible with the National Strategy for Urban Development, which constitutes a template for urban growth in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The strategy accords priority to the development of governorates and the establishment of sustainable cities, notably by providing an incentive for competition to come up with new and innovative projects.

Eleven projects from all governorates were submitted for the contest.

The committee that assessed the projects during the competition was headed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and it comprised members from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The committee hosted the governors and project operators and listened to their views as they outlined their respective projects.

The open meeting was held in

implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan requiring all units of the State’s Administrative Apparatus to coordinate on a regular manner with the governors in all matters pertaining to their governorates. The aim is to ensure integration in performance and avoid duplication.

During the meeting, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning made a visual presentation about Sultan Haitham City project. It elaborated on Royal directives to promote housing assistance programmes and the system of giving addresses.

The meeting dealt with the ministry’s future plans and projects within the purviews of the urban strategy, projects of the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods (Sorouh), investment aspects related to land use contracts (usufructs), the promotion of decentralisation and the delegation of powers to directors-general in the governorates. -ONA

OMAN TOURISM HUB

Oman launches new digital platform for tourism sector

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Wednesday launched a Partner Support Platform, titled Oman Tourism Hub, to extend prompt services to partners in the travel and tourism sector in Oman.

The platform was launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, as part of a comprehensive tourism development plan.

Tourism Undersecretary Azzan Qasim Al Busaidi said that the launch of the platform caps up an effective communication that con-



nects Omani travel and tourism service providers. The platform constitutes a direct link that ensures a smooth flow of all types of services offered to partners, besides events organised by the ministry, he added.

The platform also reflects the

ministry’s approach to continuously update the database of partners in the field of business development. It represents a medium of instruction for partners in the local market, as it outlines the tourism strategy and provides general information about Omani tourism products.

It is worth mentioning that the ministry launched an elite programme called “Majan”, which provides access to competitive advantages offered by the ministry to the tourism sector’s partners via the platform. -ONA



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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GREEN ENERGY

Oman to produce over one million tonnes of green hydrogen

<FROM A1 The delegation was headed by Eng. Salim Nasser Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Oman has allocated an area of more than 50,000 square kilometres in the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar for green hydrogen projects to be floated in stages. This is in addition to 15,000 square kilometres in other governorates for clean energy projects.

Oman plans to produce more than one million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030.

The plan provides for the exploitation (by the year 2050) of up to 30 percent of the land currently allocated, to produce about 8 million tons. The investment value of the projects is expected to stand at \$140 billion.

Recently, Oman has taken major steps to keep pace with global developments in energy transition and climate change. As a



result, Oman announced its commitment to achieve carbon neutrality, or zero carbon emissions, by 2050.

The country also outlined salient features of its green hydrogen strategy. It also announced having finalized regulatory and legal frameworks, as well as the preparation of policies necessary for the march forward in projects and plans of green energy transition. -ONA



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OMAN

COMMENTARY

Oman, Uzbekistan have a lot in common to grow stronger bonds



UTKIR ALIMOV, TASHKENT*

TASHKENT: Oman football team is the only invited team to Central Asian Football Association Nations Cup, which began in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on June 10.

Oman takes on one of the joint hosts, Uzbekistan, in their opening clash on June 11, Sunday.

Besides the two hosts nations, the other nations in the fray are Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

As both the countries play on the field, I discuss areas of cooperation between Oman and Uzbekistan that has a huge potential.

For Uzbekistan, which is geographically separated from the

sea, cooperation with the Arab countries plays an important role in establishing a transit, transport and communication network in Central Asia.

I would like to think a little about the important prospect of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and Uzbekistan.

Common culture

The fact that our countries are united by a common culture, religion, tradition and spiritual values makes one happy. The image of the Sultanate of Oman painted in my mind is that it is a country of peace. When talking about Oman, be it a senior politician, a thinker, an intellectual, a journalist or an ordinary person, the one picture that comes to my mind is of peace and its beautiful landscape.

Under the leadership of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, the country is striving to increase economic competitiveness and social well-being, and build an enlightened society based on an excellent education system, based on the Oman Vision 2040 programme.

Diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Oman were established on April 22, 1992. The embassy of Uzbekistan operates in Muscat, and the embassy of Oman operates in Tashkent.

The Omani embassy in Tashkent was opened in April 2010 and relations between the two countries are witnessing remarkable progress.

In recent years, effective work has been done to activate

trade and economic relations between our countries, increase the volume of trade, attract investment, and implement joint projects.

There were trade exchanges along the Silk Road towards the flourishing Omani ports, through which Omani products such as frankincense and copper were exported, along with other goods including goods re-exported from the African continent.

On April 23, 2016, an agreement on the creation of an international transport and transit corridor between the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan entered into force.

Currently, the sub-regional transport corridor "Russia-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman-India" is being formed within the framework of this Ashgabat Agreement. This effort is aimed at creating a reliable transport corridor for continuous transportation and transit of goods through the ports of Central Asia and the Gulf region.

The activities of the Uzbek-Omani investment company UzOman Capital, are on right track with investment projects totaling about \$200 million implemented. The governments agreed to actively use the created effective joint platform to attract investments from Omani investors, as well as foreign investors in general.

In December 2020, a cooperation agreement was signed between Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies and Sultan Qaboos University. We believe that the two friendly countries will continue effective cooperation towards development and growth.

Today, sport plays an important role in the emergence of any country on the world stage. There are also relations between our countries in this field. In particular, over the past few years, various cooperation agreements have been signed between the National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan and the Oman Olympic Committee.

The cooperation will go a long way in improving the skills of athletes, sharing experience, and implementing various programmes.

In general, Oman is keen to further develop cooperation in the field of sports with Uzbekistan.

We can also explore opportunities in implementing joint projects in the transport sector, attracting investments in the tourism sector, launching joint tourist exchange programmes, as well as practical measures to increase mutual passenger and cargo flows and conducting bilateral events aimed at enhancing cultural exchange between the two countries.

**(The writer is a senior journalist and presently working as Junior editor of Uzbekistan National News Agency).*

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G20 DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS' MEETING

Agreement signed for research project

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation have signed an agreement to carry out a research project on establishing a bank for the conservation of wild animals' genetic resources and protecting their economic value.

The preservation process is envisaged to be realised through freezing of the genes outside the animals' habitats.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Abdullah Ali Al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Dr. Saif Abdullah Al Haddabi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation.

The agreement seeks to preserve the genetic substance of wild animals, particularly those in danger of extinction, to ensure their sustainability. — **ONA**

Oman's health ministry expands its coverage of fees exemption

Expats married to Omani women among many other beneficiaries of the latest ministerial decision

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health's commitment to serving the citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman by providing world-class healthcare has been lauded across the region.

Healthcare has been a top priority for the government of Oman and the recent ministerial decision is another example of the emphasis on providing top healthcare to its people.

Dr Hilal Al Sabti, Minister of Health, issued Ministerial Resolution No. 126/2023, providing free treatment services, including for foreigners under certain conditions.

The decision issued a regulation for fees for treatment of services, and the new decision cancelled the

previous decision of No. 55/2009.

All health institutions have been instructed to take all necessary measures to ensure that only the prescribed fees are collected and that the fees payment does not come in between the treatment of emergency cases.

Free treatment

With the exception of injuries resulting from traffic accidents and cases covered by insurance coverage, the following categories enjoy free treatment of services:

Omanis, and citizens of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) coun-

tries residing in the Sultanate of Oman for a period of no less than three months.

Free treatment services will also be provided to expatriates married to Omani women, be it husband, children born to an Omani wife from the marriage, expat women married to Omanis, expat parents of an Omani residing with him in Oman, children of an expat husband or wife of Omani origin residing with him in Oman, expat working in the government and their families according to their service contracts, expat members of the diplomatic corps

and their family members.

Also the decision said that primary healthcare services, emergency and ambulance services, and treatment of critical emergency cases that require accommodation in the health institution will be provided free of charge for the following categories: nationals of the GCC states residing in Oman for a period of less than three months, members of delegations visiting Oman, including delegations of sports and cultural clubs invited by official authorities.

Exemption from paying fees

The following have been exempted from paying any fees: Patients who are infected with an epidemic or contagious disease that threatens public health, their contacts, and those suspected of being infected.

Also, blood donors and organ donors when they donate, persons benefiting from social security and their families, including those on the waiting list at the Ministry of Social Development, orphans registered in the institutions of the Ministry of Social Development, Omani persons with disabilities, Omani children under the age of two years and children benefiting from the expanded programme on immunisation are exempted.

The other beneficiaries are all members of the national vaccination campaigns, Omanis benefiting

from early screening programmes, pregnant Omani women, Omani women benefiting from maternal and child care services, including the birth spacing programme, Omani chronic dialysis patients and cancer patients, prison inmates and under trial detainees, medical examination for scouts and guides, circumcision operations for people converting to Islam in Oman.

Also, the following are exempted from paying registration and consultation fees:

Students transferred from schools during the official working hours of the school, poor Omani patients, patients who visit the same health institution on the same day.

The following cases are exempted from payment of hospital admission fees: Those infected or suspected of being infected with an infectious or epidemic disease who are in isolation rooms or beds, patients who are admitted for surgery or medical procedure but are forced to leave the hospital due to shortage of medicines, equipment, doctors, or any other reason related to the institution itself.

This does not include in the case of postponement of surgery due to unexpected or unavoidable medical complications, or due to the refusal of the patient or those accompanying him to perform the medical procedure.

Pharmacy regulations

Non-admitted patients from categories not eligible for free treatment services shall not be given medicines from the pharmacies of health institutions except after presenting evidence that the medicines prescribed to them are not available in private pharmacies.

In this case, these patients are obligated to pay the value of the medicine according to the lists approved by the ministry, in addition to 20 percent of the value of the medicine as a service fee.

Annual renewal

The decision also said that fees for registration, annual renewal, and admission to tertiary, secondary, and primary health care hospitals for categories (VIPs, private nursing ward, and a private room in the general ward) have not changed.

As for the groups who are not eligible for free treatment, these fees have been raised.

The decision also includes fees for additional services, and includes fees for pilgrims and Umrah performers, which is OMR 2 for those who are eligible for free treatment.

The decision also prescribed fees for using ambulances in situations with medical coverage and without medical coverage for those who are not eligible for free treatment.

NORTH AL BATINAH

Labour ministry announces job vacancies

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A number of job vacancies have been announced in the private sector institutions located in North Al Batinah Governorate.

"The Ministry of Labour, represented by the Directorate General of Labour in North Al Batinah, announces the availability of job opportunities in the private sector institutions operating in the governorate for various specialties and qualifications," the Ministry said. "Those wishing to compete and nominate for the offered job opportunities can apply through the Job Opportunities Service on the Ministry's website."

WORLD BLOOD DONATION DAY

ROHM announces blood donation campaign 2023

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) is launching its blood donation campaign for 2023 under the slogan 'Your act of kindness brings colour to people's lives! Give Blood, Give Life'.

The campaign, running in collaboration with the Ministry of Health Blood Bank Services will take place on 14 June to coincide with World Blood Donation Day.

Donors will be welcomed through the main entrance of the Royal Opera House Muscat to take their seats in the donation clinic set up in the South Porch from 9am on Tuesday until 6pm the same day.

The campaign by the Royal Op-

era House Muscat hopes to attract record numbers of donors by appealing to everyone who attends shows but also to people who may

not otherwise have visited.

The Royal Opera House Muscat is a wonderful location to use as a venue for community-based initiatives, offering a beautiful space which promotes access to musical arts for everyone.

Helping accident victims

Blood donations play a vital role in saving lives each day, with donations supporting a range of treatments from helping accident victims or patients with blood cancers to helping mothers and new-born babies during childbirth. Any healthy person between the age of 18 and 65 can join the campaign to give blood.

If donors are worried about what to expect, rest assured that each person will be carefully guided through the process.

Qualified practitioners will carry out health checks before you are committed to donating.

The actual process of giving blood takes approximately five to ten minutes to complete and will be carried out in privacy behind temporary screens, on comfortable reclining seats.

Once 475ml (just under a pint) of blood has been collected, a sterile dressing will be applied.

The experience is designed to minimise all your concerns, so that you feel comfortable at every stage.

The Royal Opera House Muscat extends its warmest thanks to everyone who takes part in the campaign. It is a privilege to provide this platform for members of the community, so that everyone can contribute to adequate blood supply for those who need it across Oman.

Trump calls federal indictment as ‘ridiculous’ and ‘baseless’

Trump cast his federal indictment as “election interference,” telling Georgia Republicans it represented an abuse of power by the Biden administration

WASHINGTON: Former US President Donald Trump has described his federal indictment as “ridiculous” and “baseless”. He made the remarks at a Republi-

can Party convention in Georgia during his first public appearance since the charges were unsealed, accusing him of 37 counts, including 31 counts of willful retention of sensitive documents related to national defence information at his Mar-a-Lago property, CNN reported.

Trump on Saturday cast his federal indictment as “election interference,” telling Georgia Republicans it represented an abuse of power by the Biden administration, it reported. “This is a political hit job. Republicans are treated far different at the Justice Department than Democrats,” said Trump who offered no evidence for his claims at a state GOP convention in Columbus.

Former US President Donald Trump faces a total of 37 counts, including 31 counts of willful retention of national defense information. While addressing the people in Georgia, he said that any other Republican at the top of the

party’s 2024 ticket will face similar scrutiny and legal challenges, as per the CNN report.

“The ridiculous and baseless indictment of me by the Biden administration’s weaponized department of injustice will go down as among the most horrific abuses of power in the history of our country,” CNN quoted the former president as saying.

Trump’s remarks were reminiscent of his first rally after last summer’s FBI search of his Mar-A-Lago estate. Speaking to supporters in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in September, Trump accused Biden of weaponizing federal law enforcement in what he said was “one of the most shocking abuses of power by any administration in American history,” as per the news report.

Donald Trump said, “Somebody else? They’re not going to withstand that fire.” While speaking about his second indictment in less than three months, he said,

“Our people are angry.” He denied wrongdoing and called the probe as “a sad day for the country.” He is scheduled to appear in a federal courtroom in Miami on Tuesday, where he will be read the charges against him.

Trump has avoided legal culpability in his personal, professional and political lives. He has settled a number of private civil legal cases through the years and paid his way out of disputes concerning the Trump Organisation, according to CNN report.

After leaving office, the US Justice Department’s criminal probe into the alleged retention of classified information at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort and his efforts to overturn the 2020 election cast dark clouds over the former president. Earlier in March, the Manhattan district attorney in New York indicted Trump on charges related to hush-money payments to a former adult star.



ELECTIONS

Montenegro holds parliamentary vote to secure reforms

PODGORICA: Voters in Montenegro were electing new lawmakers on Sunday in an early parliamentary vote.

Approximately 542,000 voters will choose from 15 diverse parties, ranging from pro-Western to pro-Serbian and pro-Russian coalitions.

The outcome could indicate whether the small NATO member in the Balkans would move closer to European Union membership.



Poll results suggest coalition government

It was the first parliamentary vote in more than 30 years that does not feature former President Milo Djukanovic, who lost the presidential election in April.

The current president, Jakov Milatovic’s centrist Europe Now movement (PES), was most likely to be the top vote-getter on Sunday according to polls.

A poll conducted by Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) last month put Europe Now Movement in the lead with 29.1% of the vote.

The pro-EU Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the party formerly led by Djukanovic, were predicted to come second and the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian Democratic Front (DF) third.

Promises of the PES party

According to polls, PES was unlikely to secure an absolute majority, and its leading candidate, Miloško Spajic, would probably need partners for a coalition.

He vowed to rejuvenate the

economy, which is plagued by mismanagement and is heavily dependent on revenues from the Adriatic seaside tourism.

“We’re the only ones talking about infrastructure, about tax reforms,” he said.

The party backs accession to the European but also favors closer ties with neighboring Serbia.

Montenegro hopes for EU membership

Montenegro is a candidate to join the EU, but it must first root out corruption, nepotism and organized crime.

Over the years, the country with a population just over 600,000 has been divided between those who identify as Montenegrins and those who see themselves as Serbs.

In 2017, after a botched coup attempt that the-then government blamed on Russian agents and Serbian nationalists, the country joined NATO.

Back then, Moscow dismissed claims of leading a coup as absurd and the Serbian government denied any involvement. — **DW**

CLIMATE ACTIVIST GROUP

Germany accuses activists of 580 offences

HAMBURG: Germany has recorded 580 criminal offences committed by the climate activist group Last Generation, or Letzte Generation, German weekly Bild am Sonntag reported.

The group has been raising climate awareness by using controversial protest methods in Germany, including gluing themselves to streets.

Since the beginning of 2022, “740 people have come to the attention of the police” said Interior Minister Nancy Faeser to the newspaper.



Activism at crossroads with law

Most of the offenses the group’s members have been accused of relate to coercion and damage to property.

Defending the police intervention, Faeser made it clear that activists were not above the law and cannot “violate the rights of others.”

Last Generation members counter that their rights are vio-

lated by companies, officials and individuals who take inadequate steps to protect the environment and increase the likelihood of catastrophic future effects of climate change. Referring to the protest methods used by the group, she said “It does not help climate protection at all.”

On the contrary, she said the activists are doing “massive damage” to being accepted or raising awareness.

Chequered history

The Last Generation has made headlines with street blockades where activists glued their hands to the road and threw soup on famous artwork. The artworks were protected by plastic or glass and were not damaged.

A member of the group was issued a €400 (\$430) fine last Thursday for damage to property after a protest at the Audimax of Hamburg University.

The German police, in May, conducted multiple raids in different places linked to the Last Generation as they were suspected of helping finance a criminal enterprise.

The group is demanding that the German government act faster and formulate a plan to meet an international goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial times. — **DW**

SERBIA

Mass protests held in shadow of tragedies

BELGRADE: Tens of thousands of people participated in anti-government protests in the Serbian capital of Belgrade on Friday.

This was the sixth protest after 18 people were killed in two unrelated mass shootings in May.

Serbians blame the government and certain tabloids for promoting a culture of violence and hatred.

Left-wing and liberal opposition parties gathered in front of

the parliament in the city center and called for the protest.

They marched in two separate columns to the government building and chanted slogans like “Vucic out!” referring to President Aleksandar Vucic while holding banners that read “Students against violence.”

They demanded the resignation of the president, Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic and secret service chief Aleksandar Vulin, who they

blame for failing to bring criminal groups to justice.

Other demands

The other demands include the withdrawal of national broadcast licenses for television channels Pink TV and Happy TV and a ban on certain tabloids who they say contribute to creating a climate of violence.

Serbia’s Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said on Wednesday that

she was willing to resign. She invited the opposition parties that have backed the protests to engage in a dialog.

However, protest leaders said they would not speak to the government until all their demands were met. Vucic said that his government was not at fault for the shootings. “Is the government to blame for crimes that happened? I cannot accept that,” he said on Friday. — **DW**

EUROPEAN UNION

EU leaders set to talk migration curbs, aid for Tunisia

TUNIS: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni are traveling to Tunisia on Sunday for talks on migration and possible financial aid with the country’s president.

Their visit comes as the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, says most migrants recently registering in Italy came from the North African country, which is in the grips of a worsening economic crisis.

Ahead of the trip, Tunisian President Kais Saied said his country was not prepared to protect the borders of other countries.

What is on the talks agenda?

Although the EU delegation will discuss increased cooperation with Tunisia on economic and energy issues, a major focus of talks is likely to be the growing number of migrants seeking to enter the EU via irregular methods.

According to the Italian Interior Ministry, more than 53,800 migrants have reached Italy over the Mediterranean since the beginning of the year, up from 21,700 at



the same time last year.

Most of the irregular entries came via Tunisia, the UN refugee agency UNHCR has said.

Many Tunisians are motivated to take the dangerous sea journey

by their country’s dire economic situation and high unemployment.

Italy’s far-right Meloni said ahead of the trip that the EU would offer aid to Tunisia to help mitigate the crisis.

“Tunisia is a priority, because destabilisation in Tunisia would have serious repercussions on the stability of all Northern Africa, and those repercussions inevitably arrive here [Italy],” Meloni said on

Thursday. The EU recently struck a deal on stricter measures against “irregular migration” that critics say represents a violation of basic human rights.

The plan may still meet resist-

ance at the European Parliament.

What is the situation in Tunisia?

On Friday, Tunisian debt was downgraded further into “junk” territory by the Fitch credit ratings agency.

The move underscores the possibility that the country could default on its loans, something that could cause state finances to collapse and lead to much hardship for the country’s population.

A rescue package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been stalled for months, as Saied has refused to implement the economic reforms on which it is contingent, despite urgings from Italy and donor countries.

Saied has warned that the required reforms, which include cuts to flour and fuel subsidies and to the large public administration sector, as well as the privatization of loss-making public companies, would cause social unrest.

Meloni said that the European delegation would bring a packet of security initiatives that will pave the way for the IMF help. — **DW**

SPORTS



Australia on top of the Test world

Pat Cummins' side crowned ICC World Test Champions with a facile 209-run victory over India

LONDON: Australia are World Test Champions after completing a 209-run win over India in the World Test Championship (WTC) Final at The Oval on Sunday.

Superb first-innings centuries from Travis Head and Steve Smith gave Australia control of the Test early on, but India responded well to force the match to a fifth day, falling short of what would have been an all-time record chase to win a Test as they were bowled out

for 234. Scott Boland got the ball rolling with two early dismissals in the day, with Nathan Lyon and Mitchell Starc also among the wickets as Australia rattled through India to win the WTC title.

Australia were the dominant team during the WTC cycle, finishing top of the standings to qualify for the showpiece final against India thanks to 11 wins from 19 matches.

Nathan Lyon ended this Test Championship campaign as the world's highest wicket-taker.

And four of the top six run-scorers in the WTC cycle were Australian, with only Joe Root scoring more than Usman Khawaja (1621) and Marnus Labuschagne (1576), and the first innings heroes Head and Smith scoring 1407 and 1389 runs respectively in the Championship.

India's strong finish to their campaign saw them bag the second spot in the standings and qualify for the final against Australia in south London.

But defeat means that India have

now lost each of the two WTC Finals to have been held since the conception of the tournament.

Day five of this 2023 Final had resumed with all results still possible, with Australia requiring seven wickets to win and India needing 280 more runs at the start of play.

With Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane unbeaten overnight there was still some hope for India that they could pull off a record fourth-innings chase.

But Boland got the ball rolling in the first hour. A tempter that moved away from Virat Kohli lured the Indian talisman into a risky drive, and Smith held on brilliantly in the cordon as the ball flew off the edge.

And Boland struck again two balls later, sending down a peach that left Ravindra Jadeja just enough to find the edge, with Alex Carey the grateful recipient behind the stumps.

It was a matter of when not if when Mitchell Starc removed Ajinkya Rahane, and wickets tum-

bled throughout the remainder of the morning session, with Australia wrapping it up before lunch.

Lyon got in on the action, trapping Shardul Thakur in front and then helping clean up the tail.

A fiery delivery from Starc did for Umesh Yadav, with Carey taking a superb catch above his head. And Lyon bagged the last two wickets for fall, picking up the scalps of KS Bharat and Mohammed Siraj to finish with 4/41.

India will rue the display on day one, which left them behind the eight ball for the remainder of the match. While for Australia this WTC Final victory adds the one piece of major ICC silverware that the nation had been missing from its trophy cabinet.

Brief scores: Australia 469 and 270/8 decl beat India 296 and 234 (Rohit Sharma 43, Cheteshwar Pujara 27, Virat Kohli 49, Ajinkya Rahane 46; Nathan Lyon 4/41, Scott Boland 3/46, Mitchell Starc 2/77). (www.icc-cricket.com)

PAKISTAN AND SRI LANKA TO BE VENUES

All set for hybrid model Asia Cup: Report

MUMBAI: The proposed hybrid model by Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for the Asia Cup 2023 is likely to be approved by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), with Sri Lanka as the neutral venue where India can play their games, according to *ESPNCricinfo* report on Sunday.

The model sees four - and possibly five - of the tournament's 13 games being played in Pakistan. All the India-Pakistan games will be played in Sri Lanka, as will the final if India is involved.

An official announcement is likely after the weekend. The window set aside for the tournament

currently is between September 1-17. For the Pakistan leg, the games are likely to be played in Lahore.

The likely approval represents a significant breakthrough in an impasse which has not only dragged on for some time but has also threatened fallout for ICC events, most pressingly the World Cup in India this year but also the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

There is a possibility now that an agreement here could ease Pakistan's path to traveling to India for the World Cup.

The hybrid model was proposed as a solution due to India and Paki-

stan unwilling to travel to the other's country. India's refusal to tour Pakistan prompted Pakistan to go with this model in order to retain the hosting rights.

The PCB head Najam Sethi had presented details of the hybrid model to Pankaj Khimji, head of Oman Cricket and the ACC's vice-president, in a meeting in Dubai a couple of weeks ago. It was the solution the PCB had proposed to account for the fact that India will not travel to Pakistan for the tournament because of ongoing political tensions between the governments of the two countries.

India and Pakistan have been

grouped together along with Nepal in the six-nation Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in the 50-over format as preparation for the World Cup. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in the other group.

A total of 13 matches, including the final, are expected to be played across 13 days.

Like the format from 2022, it is expected that the top two teams from each group will advance to a Super 4s round, before the top two teams from that contest the final. That leaves open the possibility of India and Pakistan playing each other three times, should they make the final.

TEAM ARRIVES IN ZIMBABWE

Oman announce final 15 for Cricket World Cup Qualifier

MUSCAT: Oman arrived in Zimbabwe capital Harare on Sunday high on confidence for the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier after a successful preparatory tour in South Africa. The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier will be held in Zimbabwe (Harare and Bulawayo) from June 18-July 9.

Following the trip to Durban in South Africa, where Oman played five warm-up matches and won four, the national team head coach Duleep Mendis picked his final 15 for the Qualifier.

It may be recalled Oman had selected 17-member squad for Durban warm-up tour.

Oman played all five games against a competitive South African side, Hollywoodbets Dolphins, that included few South African international cricketers.

Oman had included three wicketkeepers in the squad and as expected, dropped one from the final 15. Adeel Shafique failed to make the cut. He was joined by uncapped young all-rounder Rafiullah on the side lines as



the pair missed the Qualifier.

During the Durban trip, Oman had few matches interrupted by rain but got off to a winning start to the tour with a 36-run win over Dolphins. The hosts bounced back to register a convincing seven-wicket win in the next match, but Oman took the third game in their

favour with an easy eight-wicket win and continued their winning streak as they posted an 82-run win in the fourth match and concluded the tour with a five-wicket win on DLS method.

During the five matches, Oman's star batter Jatinder Singh scored three half-centuries while the



other batters who were among runs were Kashyap Prajapati, vice-captain Aqib Ilyas, skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, Sandeep Goud, and Ayaan Khan. In the bowling department, pacers Bilal Khan and Kaleemullah along with Fayyaz Butt and Ilyas were among wickets.

Maqsood's 81 was the top score

FRENCH OPEN FINAL



History in Paris! Djokovic seals record 23rd Grand Slam title

PARIS: Serbian Novak Djokovic displayed his greatness once again by overcoming a shaky start to win a men's record 23rd Grand Slam title with victory over Norway's Casper Ruud in the French Open final on Sunday.

Djokovic, 36, was far from his best in the initial stages but his quality in a first-set tie-break laid the platform for a 7-6 (7-1) 6-3 7-5 victory, his third French Open title. The title also meant Djokovic regains world No. 1 ranking.

The Serb moves into the outright lead of men's Grand Slam ahead of Rafael Nadal. He also becomes the first man to win all four majors at least three times. Victory on the Paris clay moves him alongside Serena Williams in terms of major titles, with only Margaret Court now standing in front of him on 24 Grand Slams. His 23 Grand Slams include 10 at the Australian Open, seven at Wimbledon, three at the US Open and now three at the French Open after previous victories at Roland Garros in 2016 and 2021.

Speaking after his landmark victory, Djokovic said: "Thank you very much one more time for such a special atmosphere. I am very happy to share such a special moment in my career with you. Thank you very much."

"It's no coincidence that my 23rd Grand Slam title has come here because it has been the hardest one for me to win in my career. I am very emotional right now and I am very, very proud to be here. Thank you for all your support and all the energy I have gained from you."

Djokovic's date with destiny. Djokovic pulled level with the Nadal and Federer on 20 triumphs at Wimbledon in 2021, but fell behind Nadal after missing the 2022 Australian Open. Nadal extended the advantage when he won last year's French Open but Djokovic has surged ahead after winning three of the past four Grand Slams.

Even before 14-time champion Nadal pulled out of this year's Roland Garros with injury, Djokovic was considered by many as the favourite.

In the early part of Sunday's final against 24-year-old Ruud, who was aiming for his first major after twice losing finals last year, it was Djokovic who looked more nervous.

Tight and tense, the third seed made a number of unforced errors as Ruud pushed him deep in the court and trailed 4-2 in the first set. But Djokovic grew in stature as the opener wore on.

Djokovic used all of his vast experience to dominate the tie-break as fourth seed Ruud wilted, and from that point on there was only ever going to be one outcome.

Soon after Djokovic's win, Nadal, who has 22 Grand Slam titles, tweeted and said: "Many congrats on this amazing achievement @DjokerNole 23 is a number that just a few years back was impossible to think about, and you made it happen! It's tough to explain how incredible it is, how good you are and what an inspiration you are to so many people around the world, so congratulations to you, to your team. I know this tastes the best of all." - Agencies

OBA AND IMF MEETING

The Oman Banks Association (OBA) in cooperation with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) organised a meeting between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) team visiting the Sultanate of Oman and some of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of banks operating in Oman.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



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MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,669.37 points, up by 0.23 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.17 per cent at 468.43 points. DIDIC, up 9.68 per cent, was the top gainer while Al Madina Investments, down 6.25 per cent, was the top loser.

Total net profits of MSX-listed firms rise 17.4% to over \$466mn

This was on the back of higher profits of the banking, telecom, and diversified financial sectors during the first quarter of 2023

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Total net profits of MSX-listed companies in Oman increased by 17.4 percent in the first quarter of 2023 to reach \$466.4 million compared to \$397.2 million in the first quarter of 2022, according to a new report.

This was on the back of higher profits of the banking, telecom, and diversified financial sectors during the first quarter, the Kuwait-based investment, strategy and research firm Kamco Invest said in its GCC Corporate Earnings Report: Q1-2023 report.

The banking sector witnessed net profits growth of 19.4 per cent to reach \$290.9 million in the first quarter of 2023, up from



\$243.6 million in the first quarter of 2021. In the banking sector, seven out of the eight constituents reported growth in their net earnings while Ahli Bank reported a 26.2 percent decline in profits that reached \$14.4 million during the first quarter (Q1) 2023. HSBC Oman led the banks in terms of absolute growth in year-on-year (y-o-y) profits that reached \$31.7 million against \$14.0 million.

Comparatively, NBO reported the largest absolute profits among the banks in the sector at \$37.3 million up from \$26.6 million in Q1-2022. HSBC Oman's quarterly profit growth was primarily driven by a 42.8 percent growth in net operating income and lower operating expenses. NBO's strong performance was induced by increasing net interest income and decreasing net impairment.

Total Q1-2023 net profits of the telecoms sector increased by 4.4 percent year-on-year (y-o-y) to reach \$62.3 million in Q1-2023 as compared to \$59.6 million in Q1-2022. OmanTel posted a net profit of \$55.1 million in Q1-2023 recording a 14.6 percent y-o-y growth from \$48.0 million in Q1-2022. OmanTel's improved quarterly net profit was attributed to an increase in gross margins in the retail and wholesale segment, a decrease in finance costs and an increase in dividend income from the Zain group. On the other hand, Q1-2023 net earnings for Ooredoo Oman fell 38 percent y-o-y to \$7.2 million.

In the food, beverage and tobacco sector, aggregate Q1-2023 reached \$6.8 million in Q1-2023 as compared to \$0.2 million in Q1-2022. The profits jump was mainly due to the return to profitability of Salalah Mills and A'Saffa Food Company. Q1-2023 net profits of Salalah Mills reached \$1.1 million bouncing back from a loss of \$0.3 million whereas A'Saffa Food Company bounced back from a loss of \$1.2 million in Q1-2022 to a net profit of \$2 million in Q1-2023.

Oman's utilities sector was the only sector with total net losses during Q1-2023 after four out of the eight companies in the sector reported net losses during the pe-

riod. Phoenix Power recorded the biggest net loss during the quarter at \$11.5 million in Q1-2023 as compared to a \$11.1 million loss in the corresponding quarter of the previous year. ACWA Power Barka was the only one of the four power companies in the sector which recorded a profit during Q1-2023 with \$0.61 million in net profits up from \$0.4 million in Q1-2022.

GCC-listed companies

The Kamco Invest report further said that quarterly profits reported by GCC-listed companies declined y-o-y during Q1-2023 mainly led by a fall in energy and commodity prices. Most commodity prices witnessed a demand-led decline during the quarter that was reflected in the biggest q-o-q drop in the Bloomberg Commodity index since the pandemic during Q1-2023 (-6.5 percent).

A fall in profits for the Diversified Financials sector was also reflected in lower profits during the quarter after the MSCI GCC index declined for four quarters in a row. That said, aggregate GCC profits showed the first q-o-q growth in Q1-2023 after two consecutive quarters of declines during the previous two quarters.

Aggregate net profit for GCC-listed companies reached \$61.5 billion during Q1-2023 as com-

pared to \$57.0 billion during Q4-2022 resulting in a q-o-q growth of 7.9 percent. The y-o-y performance showed a decline of 9.1 percent when compared to Q1-2022 profits of \$67.9 billion, which was the second-biggest profit on record for the GCC markets.

Energy, materials and diversified financials were the top three sectors by absolute y-o-y profit decline against Q1-2022 as these sectors accounted for 56 percent of total profits during Q1-2023 as compared to 70 percent of profits during Q1-2022. In terms of q-o-q performance, the profit growth was led by higher profits for the Banks and Utilities sectors that were partially offset by a drop in profits mainly for the Energy, Capital Goods and Materials sectors.

In terms of regional trends, the q-o-q profit growth was seen across the GCC exchanges during the quarter, barring Saudi Arabia. Aggregated profits for the Kingdom reached \$38.9 billion during Q1-2023 as compared to \$40.6 billion during Q4-2022, a decline of 4.2 percent mainly led by a fall in profits for energy, materials and utility sectors. On the other hand, Qatari companies reported the biggest profit growth of 65.9 percent followed by Dubai-listed companies with q-o-q profit growth of 43.7 percent.

NCSI DATA

Exchange rate index of Omani Rial rises by 5%

MUSCAT: The effective exchange rate index of the Omani Rial rose by 5 per cent to 113.7 points by the end of March 2023, compared to 108.3 points at the end of the same period in 2022, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics showed that local liquidity grew by OMR503 million (2.4 per cent) to reach OMR21,052.6 million.

The total currency issued by the end of March 2023 declined by 5.2 per cent to reach OMR1,632.4 million compared to OMR1,722.1 million by the end of the corresponding period in 2022.

Narrow Money Supply (M1) went up by 0.3 per cent to reach OMR6,027.1 million compared to OMR6,007.2 million during the same period in 2022.

Meanwhile, the total foreign as-

sets at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) decreased by 10.7 per cent by the end of March 2023 to stand at OMR6,476.5 million compared to OMR7,251.7 million during the same period in 2022.

The private sector's deposits in commercial banks and Islamic windows in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 1.4 per cent to reach OMR17,731.8 million at the end of March 2023 compared to OMR17,491.8 million during the same period in 2022.

The total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 6.9 per cent to reach OMR29,899.1 million by the end of March 2023 compared to OMR27,956.5 million during the corresponding period in 2022. The average interest rate on total credit declined by 1.9 per cent at the end of March 2023. -OMA

MARITIME EMPLOYMENT



Ministry of Transport receives Saudi delegation

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology received yesterday a delegation from the Transport General Authority (TGA) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The visit aimed to enhance co-operation in the field of exchanging educational and training expertise and maritime employment.

The visit comes within the context of activating the memorandum of understanding signed between Oman and the KSA last September with respect to the mutual recognition of certificates of competency and eligibility for seafarers. During the visit, the two sides discussed the restrictions imposed on competency certificates and the requirements for holding mandatory and qualifying courses.

The meeting also reviewed the Sultanate of Oman's experience in building an administrative system for seafarers' certificates, quality standards for training and qualifying seafarers, a mechanism for issuing certificates and requirements for maritime service, in addition to the mechanism for conducting a medical examination for seafarers and a system for holding exams.

The Saudi delegation also visited the Oman Maritime College to view the registration and admission system, accredited educational programmes and mechanisms for creating, accrediting and updating educational curricula. They also viewed the training facilities and the examination systems, as well as assessment mechanisms and maritime training. -OMA

ACQUISITION

Bank Dhofar's announcement for shareholders

MUSCAT: This is an announcement of an offer (the offer) to all of the shareholders (together the ABO shareholders and each an ABO shareholder) of Ahli Bank SAOG (ABO) by Bank Dhofar SAOG (the offeror) to acquire the entire issued share capital of ABO (the issued capital) pursuant to the takeover and acquisition regulation (e/2/2019) (the takeover regulation) this announcement is dated June 11, 2023.

Offer details

The Offeror: Bank Dhofar SAOG, a public joint stock company incorporated under the laws of Oman with commercial registration number 1291106 and its registered office at P.O. Box, 1507, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muttrah, Oman.

The Trust: A joint account registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (MCD) established by shareholders of the Offeror to act in concert with the Offeror with respect to the Offer in order to pay part of the Cash Consideration in return for the registration of the relevant ABO shares under the Trust

The Target: ABO, a public joint stock company registered in Oman with commercial registration number 1558560 and its registered office at Muscat Governorate / Muttrah / Alwattayah, Postal Code 116, PO Box 545, Oman.

The Offer Opening Date: A date to be agreed with the Capital Market Authority (CMA) pursuant to the Takeover Regulation.

The Offer Closing Date: A date to be agreed with the CMA pursuant to the Takeover Regulation.

Record Date (for purpose of the Offer): The day prior to the Offer Opening Date.

Offer: The offer by the Offeror to all of the ABO Shareholders to acquire the Issued Capital.

Consideration Shares: 1.2910 newly issued ordinary shares in the Offeror per ABO share, valuing each ABO share at OMR0.223 based on the Offerors share price as at 8 June, 2023 (i.e. the closing share price as at last trading day immediately before the date of this Offer announcement).

Cash Consideration: OMR0.215 per ABO share.

Choice of Consideration: Any ABO Shareholder who as at the date of this Offer announcement:

* (i) is a Sharia-compliant juristic shareholder or is a subsidiary of a Sharia-compliant juristic shareholder; and (ii) holds a valid Sharia investment licence (the All Cash Acceptance Qualification), has the option to elect to receive up to 100% of its consideration as Cash



Consideration to reflect its (or its parent shareholder's, as the case may be) de jure inability to receive shares in a conventional bank (as at the Record Date, it is understood that only Ahli United Bank meets the All Cash Acceptance

Qualification); or does not meet the All Cash Acceptance Qualification, has the option to elect to receive consideration for up to 25% of their shares in ABO as Cash Consideration and the rest of the consideration for their shares in ABO will be paid in the form of Consideration Shares.

Mechanism to Fund the Cash Consideration: Any Cash Consideration due to any ABO Shareholder who:

* meets the All Cash Acceptance Qualification and elects to receive consideration for up to 100% of its shares in ABO as Cash Consideration, shall be funded by the Offeror from internal liquidity and capital sources; or

* does not meet the All Cash Acceptance Qualification and elects to receive consideration for up to 25% of their shares in ABO as Cash Consideration, shall be funded by the Offeror and/or the Trust from internal liquidity and capital sources.

Offer Rationale: With total assets of over OMR4.6 billion as at 31 March, 2023, the Offeror has a strong presence in corporate banking, consumer banking, treasury and project finance in Oman. The Offeror continuously evaluates avenues for accelerating its growth, advancing its customer service, attracting and developing talent, and ultimately creating better shareholder returns.

The Offeror has determined that attaining a larger scale through a combination with another bank would facilitate achieving all of these objectives. More specifically,

a combination of the Offeror and ABO is a compelling opportunity to:

* create a leading domestically-focused Omani bank with a robust competitive position, well placed to serve the entirety of the market with leading market positions across a number of customer segments;

* combine the banks' highly complementary activities and expertise across retail, corporate and Islamic banking for the benefit of the combined group and its customers;

* provide career development opportunities for both banks' employees;

* provide opportunities to create value for both sets of shareholders, notably through an improvement in the combined group's cost of funds; and

* provide enhanced liquidity for both sets of shareholders.

All in all, the proposed transaction offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long-term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalised bank on day one.

Other details

Voting shares in ABO already held by the Offeror and the Trust: The Offeror and the Trust, respectively, hold no voting shares in ABO as of date of this Offer.

Existing or proposed arrangements between the Offeror and the ABO Shareholders: An ABO Shareholder, who meets the All Cash Acceptance Qualification and holds 35 per cent of the Issued Capital, has agreed to sell its shares to the Offeror in return for all Cash Consideration in accordance with the terms of a share purchase agreement entered into between the Offeror and such ABO Shareholder dated on or around the date of this Offer.

Acceptance of offer - terms, conditions, & procedure

Notice Procedure: Only an electronic copy of this announcement and the Offer document will be emailed to ABO Shareholders based on MCD data and will be available on the Offeror's and the CMA's websites.

Acceptance Form: The acceptance form to be used by ABO Shareholders to submit their acceptance of the Offer pursuant to the terms of the Offer document will be sent to each ABO Shareholder through email. The acceptance form will also be available on the Offeror's and the CMA's websites.

Procedure for acceptance of offer by ABO Shareholders: 1. In order to accept the Offer, the ABO Shareholders are required to:

i. send the Acceptance Form duly completed and signed, delivered to the Offer Manager at the address below, or alternatively,

ii. send an email to the Offer Manager at p.mathur@bankdhofar.com clearly providing their selected option, on or before 2 pm on the Offer Closing Date. Please ensure that the Acceptance Form (or email) clearly specifies the ABO Shareholder's choice of one of the following consideration options: (i) all Consideration Shares, (ii) all Cash Consideration or (iii) a combination of Consideration Shares and Cash Consideration and attach the requisite documents (as set out below).

2. Completed Acceptance Form / Email once submitted cannot be revoked by ABO Shareholders.

3. The Offer will remain open for acceptance for a period to be agreed with the CMA pursuant to the Takeover Regulation, during business hours i.e. 8 am - 2 pm. Acceptances received after working hours on the Offer Closing Date shall not be entertained.

Required Documents: 1. Acceptance Form or email furnished by the ABO Shareholder(s) without the requisite documents may be rejected by the Offer Manager as being incomplete and invalid.

2. Acceptance Form or email must be accompanied by the following documents:

For individual applicants:

* A copy of Omani ID for Omani national ABO Shareholders and passport copy for non-Omani national ABO Shareholders.

* Birth Certificate of the minor ABO Shareholder, if father is accepting on behalf of his minor children.

* A copy of valid power of attorney duly endorsed by the competent legal authorities must be included in the event the acceptance is on behalf of another person (with the exception of an acceptance made by a father on behalf of his minor children).

For corporate applicants:

* a certified copy of a board or shareholder resolution authorising persons to accept the Offer with specimen signatures of such authorised persons; and

* if electing to receive all Cash Consideration, a certified copy of the valid Sharia investment licence of the ABO Shareholder or its parent company (as the case may be).

Acceptance by the Offeror: The acceptance by the Offeror and the Trust of the ABO shares tendered by the ABO Shareholders.



STUDY REVEALS HOW IMMUNE SYSTEM'S TRIPWIRE DETECTS COVID-19

Inflammasomes are part of a complex network of molecular sensors that our bodies utilise to detect infection. However, immunologists have been intrigued by the processes behind these sensors, which activate responses to dangers such as invading infections.

University of California San Diego researchers disclose a previously undiscovered manner that the immune system recognises some viruses in a new study. CARD8, an inflammasome immune protein, they discovered, may act as a tripwire to identify a variety of viruses, including SARS-Cov-2, which causes COVID-19. Researchers led by Matt Daugherty of the School of Biological Sciences and colleagues from the University of Washington and UC Berkeley discovered that CARD8 acts differently between animals and even amongst people in the human population. The findings, which came from a series of tests involving human cell lines and an examination of CARD8 genetic diversity in mammalian species, were published in the journal PLOS Biology.

"In a version of CARD8, we

found that some humans have lost the ability to sense coronavirus infections based on a single genetic difference but have gained the ability to sense viruses in a different family, the enteroviruses—which includes rhinovirus (common cold) and poliovirus," said Daugherty, an associate professor in the Department of Molecular Biology

found that some humans have lost the ability to sense coronavirus infections based on a single genetic difference but have gained the ability to sense viruses in a different family, the enteroviruses—which includes rhinovirus (common cold) and poliovirus," said Daugherty, an associate professor in the Department of Molecular Biology. "So that means it's an evolutionary tradeoff and CARD8 diversity in humans impacts which viruses can be sensed and which ones cannot."

The research team found that the bat version of CARD8 is not able to sense coronaviruses. This could explain how coronaviruses are able to infect bats so easily and become a virus "reservoir."

The findings provide evidence that CARD8 has evolved substantially across different species of mammals and individual humans. According to the authors, "Our findings establish CARD8 as a rapidly evolving, polymorphic, innate immune sensor of positive-

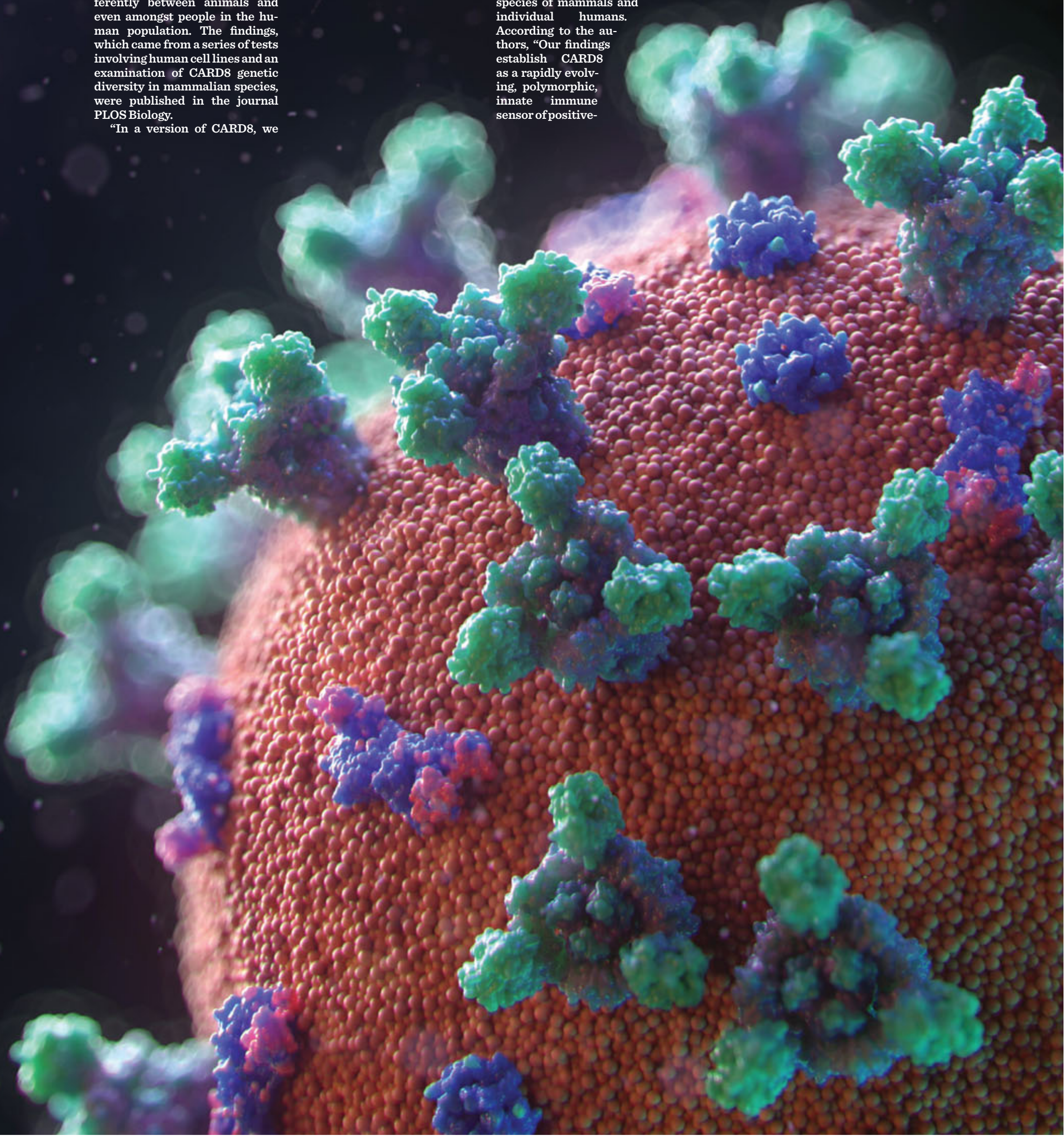
sense RNA viruses."

Daugherty said researchers have only found the tip of the iceberg in terms of the way immune sensors sound the alarm about pathogens and infection.

"It's amazing to see this evolutionary balance of one virus to another going from sensing to not sensing—it's mind-blowing," said Daugherty.

More studies are needed to thoroughly determine CARD8's role in the severity of COVID-19 infections and long COVID symptoms.

"It is tempting to speculate that diminished CARD8 inflammasome activation may be a contributing factor to variation in COVID-19 disease outcomes, and more generally for other human pathogenic coronavirus and picornavirus infections," the authors note. -ANI



SPORTS

City are European champs



Pep Guardiola's side claim first Champions League title to secure a historic treble

ISTANBUL: English Premier League champions Manchester City finally did it. Pep Guardiola's team secured their first Champions League title and a historic treble with a hard fought 1-0 win over Inter Milan in Istanbul on Saturday night in a thrilling final. Rodri's second-half strike meant Manchester City became

just the second English side to win the Premier League, FA Cup and Europe's top competition in the same season following arch-rivals Manchester United in 1999. City are the eighth team to win the treble of league, domestic cup and European Cup. The others are Celtic (1967), Ajax (1972), PSV (1988), Man-

chester United (1999), Barcelona (2009, 2015), Inter (2010), Bayern (2013, 2020). City entered the final in Istanbul as hot favourites but were frustrated for long spells against their dogged Italian opponents and had to rely on some late heroics from goalkeeper Ederson at the death. They started the night brightly enough and went close twice early on, with Erling Haaland firing over from close range and Bernardo Silva hitting the upright with a curled shot from a tight angle. But after that their usually silky football was stifled by a well-organised Inter side who pressed high and energetically.

With humidity and the Ataturk Stadium's wide pitch sapping the pace out of the game, City grew frustrated, and their night took a turn for the worse when Kevin De Bruyne was forced off with a hamstring strain. It was the second time a Champions League final had ended prematurely for De Bruyne after he suffered nose and facial injuries in a collision with Chelsea's Antonio Rudiger in 2021. Chelsea went on to win the title. With Rodri and captain Ilkay Gundogan struggling to dictate in midfield, Guardiola had some thinking to do as the first half fizzled out at 0-0.

But the first change after the break came from opposite number Simone Inzaghi, who brought Romelu Lukaku on to replace former City striker Edin Dzeko. City then almost gifted Inter the lead and had Ederson to thank after he saved from Lautaro Martinez who had pounced on a backwards pass that Manuel Akanji sloppily let slide. Guardiola's patience in his team was eventually rewarded as Silva was put through by Akanji and cut back for Rodri via a deflection. The midfielder powered a precise side-footed shot into the corner from 15 yards out to send City's fans delirious.

Their work did not stop there however, with Martinez hitting the cross-bar moments later and Lukaku stinging Ederson's palms. With Inter chasing, the game became more open and De Bruyne's replacement Phil Foden had a glorious chance to double City's lead but shot straight at Andre Onana. City would have regretted that miss were it not for the razor-sharp reactions of Ederson, who somehow managed to keep out a Lukaku header from point-blank range in the dying minutes before tipping over a header from Robin Gosens with the last touch of the game. - Agencies

EMOTIONAL PEP GUARDIOLA

'This final was written in the stars'

ISTANBUL: Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola said that "this final was written in the stars." City clinched their first-ever UEFA Champions League title and a historic treble, only the second English club to complete the feat of winning the Premier League, FA Cup, and Champions League in a single footballing season. Earlier, in the 1998/99 season, Manchester United became the first English Club to win a treble under Sir Alex Ferguson. "I'm tired, calm and satisfied. It's so difficult to win," said Guardiola, who also won the treble with Barcelona. Guardiola said, "Sometimes it looks like this competition this year, this final was written in the stars. It belongs to us." He further complimented his goalkeeper Ederson, "The goal, the chances they had. Ederson's save where in extra-time you could lose the game." Guardiola became the first manager to win two trebles with two different teams. First with Barcelona in 2008/09 and then with Manchester City in 2022/23. The 52-year-old said, "I will be the same person and we will be the



same team and we will be the same club. Today was our year, but in the past we are incredibly satisfied to achieve something unique, the treble for this club." Guardiola joins United legend Sir Alex Ferguson as the only managers to win the Treble with an English side.

"It is an honour for me to be alongside Sir Alex Ferguson. I got a message from him this morning and it is an honour," added Guardiola. "People say I have to win trebles every season. I am a good manager, but no. I like this competition because we won it, it is part of history

and players will be remembered for the rest of their lives. "But now give credit for the five Premier Leagues won in six years. It is important now that people don't forget what we have done. Maybe they can create a museum so the fans can look at the trophies." City are still waiting for the result of the 115 Premier League financial charges against the club. They have denied financial wrongdoing and Guardiola said last month he wants the charges dealt with "as soon as possible". After their Champions League triumph the manager praised the influence of owner Sheikh Mansour, who was watching on in the stands in Istanbul. "One of the main reasons why this club became where we are is people from Abu Dhabi - Sheikh Mansour taking over the club. Without that we wouldn't be here. They are the most important people," he said. "They support me unconditional in the defeats in this competition. In many clubs you are sacked so I give incredible credit to my hierarchy and to my CEO." - Agencies

HAALAND SPEAKS

'Guardiola is the best coach in the world'

ISTANBUL: Manchester City striker Erling Haaland was delighted after the title and said: "In my wildest dreams I would never think of this." Speaking to BT Sport, he said: "It shows it's possible for a guy from a small hometown in Norway. It gives hope to younger people in my hometown. It's unbelievable. "After a couple of days when this settles a bit and this feeling of winning this trophy, I will want to do it again for sure. I know myself and I know this is how I will think." Haaland said it was "really special" to work with Guardiola, who won two Champions League trophies with Barcelona before guiding City to their first. "We have a good relationship and I look forward to next season to develop even more," he added. "To be getting trained by him every single day, the best coach in the world, is a good place to be."



England international Jack Grealish, was in tears at full-time. "This is what you work your whole life for. I'm so happy. I was awful [in the final] but I don't care. To win the treble with this group of players is so special," Grealish said. "I just said to the manager 'I want to thank you'. He has put so much faith in me. He is a genius." - Agencies

INTER MILAN

We played well, but lacked final touch: Inter's manager

ISTANBUL: Inter Milan's heart was shattered as they were defeated 1-0 by Manchester City in the UEFA Champions League final on Sunday at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul. "On a night like this, I can't single players out who played below par. I said yesterday I would not change my players for anyone else, and tonight the world saw why," Inter Milan's manager, Simone Inzaghi told Sky Sports Italia after the final. "They showed the whole world how well they stood up to Manchester City, a side that everyone knows has so much quality. "I hugged my players one by one, as they were extraordinary, just as our fans were and deserved a different result, but I hope they were happy seeing the way the team played tonight." Inzaghi has faced harsh criticism from fans and media. "Both I and my players were attacked and admittedly we lost some games that we shouldn't have lost, but I think we learned valuable lessons from those defeats," he said, pointing out that the team had won four trophies over the last two years. "With this spirit, organisation and determination, I think we will be back here again in future," he added. On the defeat, he said: "In the first



half we didn't suffer much, but in terms of movement we could have done better. In the second half, on the other hand, we played well and created many scoring chances, but we lacked the final touch."



The former Italian national said, "In the last 20 minutes we came close to scoring several times and I would have gladly played extra time because the team deserved it." The 47-year-old added, "The path in this Champions League has been exceptional, we want to return to the final and we have the chances to do so. We arrived on 10 June having already played 57 games, for me it is an extraordinary path. I am proud of these guys because they deserved more."

'Not inferior to anyone' After the loss, Inter Milan's president, Steven Zhang said, "Winning and losing is part of the sport of football. However, I want to congratulate the players, head coach, and staff for what they displayed on the pitch tonight; they were superb and gave 100 percent."

He further added, "Also want to congratulate City, who have had an outstanding season. We are so proud to have got here, to have played against the best, and to have shown our quality without fear, regardless of the result." Zhang said, "Our players have the quality and mentality of the highest level and tonight they showed that. We are not inferior to anyone. What I have learned in football is that a winning side calls for equilibrium between mental strength and youthful energy. So, energy is needed for the future but at the same time experienced players, like those who have brought us here to this final today. "You can win or lose, but at least we got here. It is always a combination of these elements; these are the things we are looking for every year." - ANI

IN PICTURES



Sonali Bendre and Shilpa Tulaskar at the launch of author Pragati Deshmukh's book 'A Dark and Shiny Place'
Actresses Sonali Bendre and Shilpa Tulaskar pose for a photo at the launch of author Pragati Deshmukh's book 'A Dark and Shiny Place' at Title Waves, Bandra, in Mumbai.
ANI Photo

Train market held at Madrid Train Museum in Spain
This picture shows the train market at the Madrid Train Museum in Madrid, Spain. The train market is a traditional event at the Madrid Train Museum. During the second weekend of each month, designers, artisans and artists exhibit and sell their creations at the event. **xinhua**



Bed Race held in Dunnville, Canada
Participants compete during the Bed Race of the 2023 Dunnville Mudcat Festival in Dunnville, Ontario, Canada. **xinhua**



Grand Floral Parade held during Portland Rose Festival
This picture shows a float at the Grand Floral Parade during the Portland Rose Festival in Portland, the United States. **xinhua**



Tibetan opera hits high notes among youngsters
This picture shows Dampa Phuntsok wearing Tibetan opera costumes in Shexing Village, Tohlung Dechen District in Lhasa, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. **xinhua**



Tea Master demonstrates tea ceremony with matcha in Japan
Tea Master Asami Yaeko demonstrates the drinking of matcha in the tea ceremony room at her home in Saitama, Japan. Unlike regular teas, matcha needs to be grounded before brewing and serving. Tea Master Asami Yaeko, who is near her 80, has been in touch with tea ceremony since childhood under the influence of her grandmother, and has been involved in tea for a lifetime. **xinhua**

ROUND-UP

Taageer Finance launches first-of-its-kind loyalty rewards programme

A first-of-its-kind offering from a Finance and Leasing Company, the ‘Mumayyaz’ Loyalty Rewards Programme is designed to reward and recognise customers who have demonstrated a proven track record

MUSCAT: With its ongoing commitment to excellence and innovation at every step, Oman’s premier Finance and Leasing Company (FLC), Taageer Finance announced the launch of its highly-anticipated ‘Mumayyaz’ Loyalty Rewards programme.

Launched at Comex 2023, one of the region’s leading technology exhibitions, ‘Mumayyaz’ has been conceptualised to strengthen customer relationships and retention.

A first-of-its-kind offering from an FLC, the ‘Mumayyaz’ Loyalty Rewards Programme is designed to reward and recognise customers who have demonstrated a proven track record. Under this programme, Taageer’s valued customers receive ‘Platinum’, ‘Diamond’ or ‘Gold’ cards that make them eligible for exclusive privileges such as pre-approved loans, preferential interest rates, and exclusive priority lounge access at the company’s Head Office in Al Khuwair, to name a few.

Explaining the relevance of ‘Mumayyaz’, Shahin Mohamed Al Balushi, CEO of Taageer



Finance stated, “We are proud to be the Sultanate’s first finance and leasing company to launch a loyalty rewards program, thereby strengthening our commitment to providing innovative, top-notch financial experiences tailored to the needs of our discerning clients. It has always been Taageer’s endeavour to ensure that its customers always deserve the best, and through this programme, we aim to provide increased opportunities for them. ‘Mumayyaz’ is a token of our appreciation for our clients, and is in line with our efforts to enrich their experience beyond conventional service.”

Taageer Finance offers a diverse

HIGHLIGHTS

- Designed to reward and recognise Taageer’s customers with a proven track record.
- Customers are eligible for exclusive privileges such as pre-approved loans and preferential interest rates.
- Gain access to an exclusive priority lounge at the company’s head office in Al Khuwair.

range of financial and leasing solutions for businesses and individuals. Headquartered in Al Khuwair in Muscat, the company boasts of

an extensive nationwide network, through branches at Wattayah, Sohar, Al Kamil Al Wafi, Barka, Nizwa, Salalah and most recently

Seeb. By offering customers a cutting-edge digital platform, upholding the highest corporate governance standards, implementing resilient systems and procedures, and utilizing state-of-the-art technology, Taageer has established itself as a trusted ally for customers. This includes the integration of Point of Sale (POS) machines at all branches to facilitate a streamlined cashless payment process, as well as the efficient processing of customer requests through its mobile application.

Taageer takes pride in being a responsible corporate citizen, actively supporting the community and contributing to the nation’s

socio-economic development goals. To drive its business growth, the company focuses on nurturing local talent and continuously enhancing its business processes, customer service standards, and finance solutions portfolio to meet evolving market demands. In line with this commitment, Taageer Finance has introduced the ‘Mumayyaz’ Loyalty Rewards programme, aimed at enhancing the experience of its loyal customers. Through this innovative programme, the company aims to offer exclusive benefits and opportunities, fostering a stronger bond between the company and its esteemed clientele.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Alizz Bank launches ‘Manahil Alizz’ educational programme

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank announced the launch of the ‘Manahil Alizz’ internship programme during a celebratory event which has been designed to empower and prepare third-year university and college students and augment their capabilities by equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge required to successfully enter and thrive in the job market.

The programme aims to not only enhance their leadership, personal development and project management skills but also teach them how to overcome challenges in the business sector and find suitable solutions. The programme will broaden the students’ perspectives and equip them with skills beyond their academic specialisation. This holistic approach is demonstrated through a comprehensive range of lectures and classes encompassing topics such as Islamic economics, Islamic banking, endowment (waqf), voluntary work, and other relevant disciplines.

Additionally, the 3-month program boasts a distinguished group of both internal and external experts, including specialized instructors well-versed in the principles and regulations of Islamic law as it pertains to Islamic banking. Alizz Islamic Bank’s Learning and Develop-



ment Department has meticulously crafted an integrated curriculum that seamlessly blends theoretical knowledge with practical training.

The inaugural batch of the program consists of 21 male and female students from various universities and colleges across the Sultanate. The selection process involved nominations from their respective academic institutions and Alizz Islamic Bank has meticulously prepared a suitable framework, comprehensive curriculum and high-level classes and sessions to enhance their educational skills using the latest modern techniques. This approach ensures that knowledge is accessible to all students, obtained flexibly and easily equips them to understand the corporate working environment and banking sector characteristics and fosters inno-

vative thinking that enables them to become decision-makers and effective initiators in addressing key industry needs.

Ali Al Mani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, emphasised that the demand for specialised personnel in the Islamic banking sector has led to the development of this programme. Its primary objective is to provide students with theoretical and practical knowledge of Islamic banking, including its principles which are based on Islamic Sharia and the fundamental distinctions between Islamic and conventional banks. Students will also benefit from a distinguished group of lecturers who will transfer knowledge and expertise to them. “We firmly believe that the growth of individuals leads to the prosperity of the societies we live in,” Al Mani said.

FIVE VARIETIES



Papa Johns launches Papadias: Satisfying alternative to your usual sandwich

MUSCAT: Papa Johns is upgrading guests’ routines with the new Papadia – a toasty, hearty alternative to the same old sandwich routine, for just OMR 2.1 (Plus Taxes).

The Papadia is crafted from Papa Johns fresh, never-frozen original dough and filled with delicious, fresh ingredients.

“The Papadia is inspired by the ‘piadina,’ an Italian folded flatbread sandwich from Northern Italy. It combines the original Papa Johns crust people crave along with fresh toppings, making it the best of both worlds – it’s both a pizza and a sandwich,” said Paul Fabre, SVP Product Innovation at Papa John’s.

With five varieties, each hand-stretched, oven-baked and hand-folded to order, there’s a Papadia for everyone.

Spicy Chicken Ranch Papadia: Italian flatbread-style sandwich made from original fresh dough with grilled chicken, mushroom, jalapenos, fresh-cut tomatoes and real cheese made from mozzarella, drizzled with Ranch sauce.

BBQ Chicken Papadia: Italian flatbread-style sandwich made from original fresh dough with grilled chicken, fresh-cut onions and real cheese made from mozzarella, drizzled with sweet and smoky BBQ Sauce.

Italian Sausage & Pepperoni Papadia: Italian flatbread-style

sandwich made from original fresh dough with pizza sauce, Italian Beef sausage, pepperoni, real cheese made from mozzarella.

Philly Veggie Papadia: Italian flatbread-style sandwich made from original fresh dough with Ranch sauce, fresh-cut onions, green peppers, mushrooms and real cheese made from mozzarella.

Grilled Buffalo Chicken Papadia: Italian flatbread-style sandwich made from original fresh dough and loaded with grilled chicken, onions, our signature Mozzarella cheese, ranch sauce, and buffalo sauce.

Additionally, Papa Johns introduced Chocolate Scrolls to its desert menu for Oman customers.



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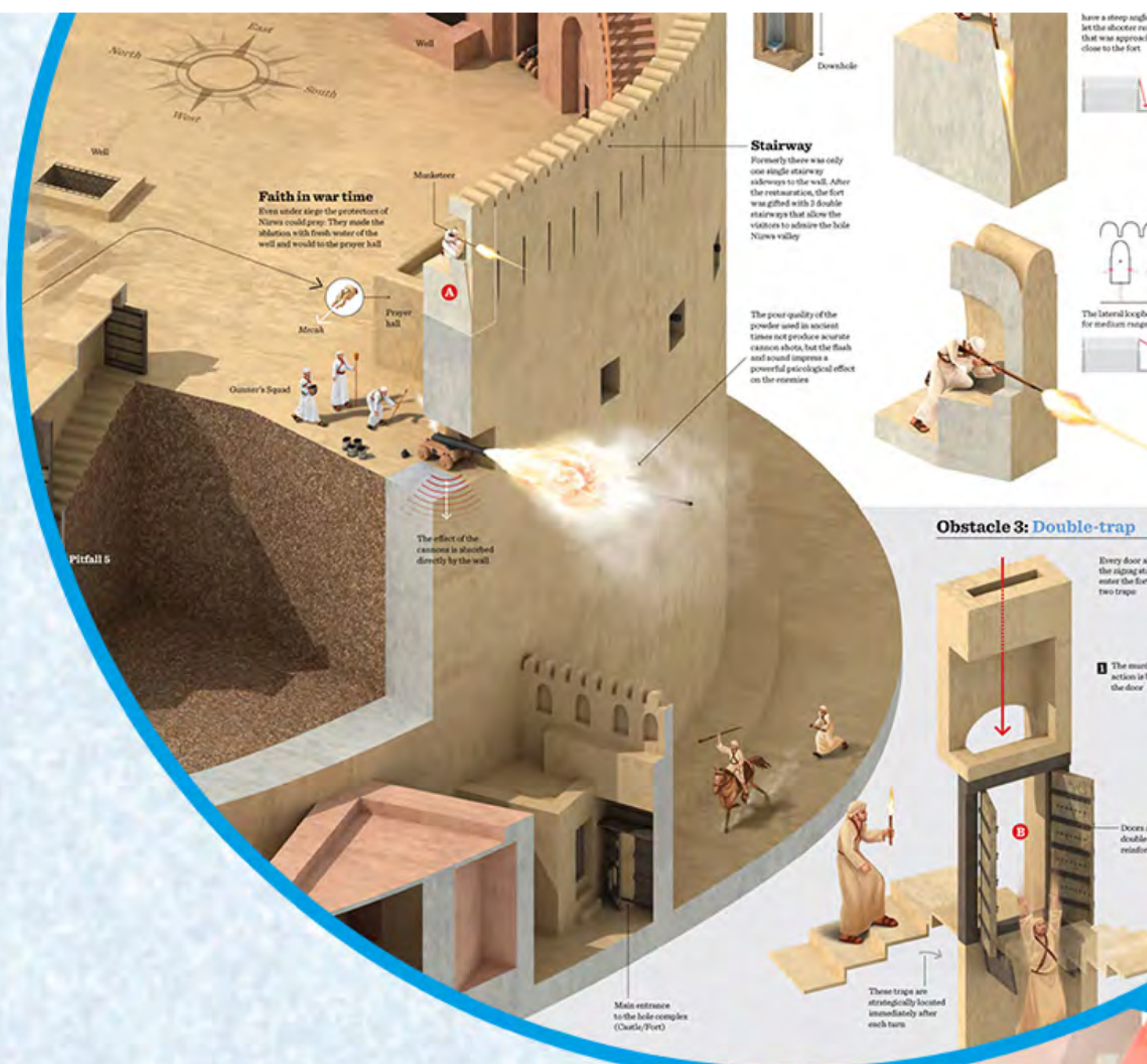
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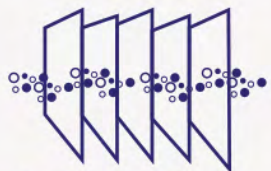
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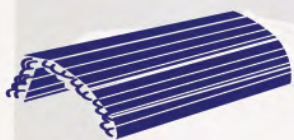
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