

BANKS AGREE TO SEAL MERGER

Sohar International Bank and HSBC Bank Oman signed a binding merger agreement after talks that kicked off in June 2022. The two banks agreed to take necessary steps to seal the merger so that all assets and liabilities of HSBC Bank Oman will be transferred to Sohar International upon the conclusion of the merger. Thereafter, HSBC Bank Oman will be dissolved and cease to exist as a legal entity. **DETAILS ON P13**



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ROLAND GARROS GOES WILD



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INDIAN CEMENT COMPANIES KEEN ON BUYING PETCOKE FROM OMAN



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THE ARTISAN MASTER SILVERSMITH OF SUHAR



**MUSCAT**

**13,855 PILGRIMS TO PERFORM HAJ**

The number of pilgrims who applied to perform Haj from Oman this year stood at 13,855 pilgrims, of whom 99 per cent completed all travel requirements of travel to the holy places, with 1 per cent of the pilgrims are undertaking medical examinations. This was unveiled at a press conference by Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, who heads the Omani Haj Mission this year. **DETAILS ON P2**

**‘WHIPPLE PROCEDURE’ DONE BY SURGEONS**

The surgical team of the Gastrointestinal Cancers Programme at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre successfully performed the first laparoscopic tumor resection in a complex area between the pancreas, duodenum and bile duct. The operation is known as ‘Whipple procedure’, during which the tumor is resected along with the head of the pancreas, the duodenum, and part of the bile duct. After performing the Whipple procedure, the remaining organs are reconnected to allow the patient to digest food normally after surgery. **DETAILS ON P3**

**CRUDE PRICE AT \$74.12 A BARREL**

Oman oil price for July delivery on Tuesday reached \$74.12, comprising a drop by \$1.58 from the price of Monday, which was \$75.70. The average price of Oman oil for May delivery has stabilised at \$78.49 per barrel, thus \$3.74 per barrel lower than April delivery. Brent crude was last down 2 per cent to \$75.54 per barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 1.89 per cent to \$71.31. Gold was slightly lower with the spot price at \$1,935.72 per ounce.

**FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR OF PHILIPPINES**



Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Imelda Macapundag Panolong, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. HH Sayyid Shihab expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassador to enhance bilateral relations, wishing her success. On her turn, the ambassador lauded the advanced relations between the two countries. She also expressed her thanks for the cooperation extended to her during her tour of duty in the Sultanate of Oman. – **ONA**

## With a day to go, taxi drivers keep fingers crossed on new rule

**VINOD NAIR**  
@vinot\_nair

With just a day to go, the Orange and White taxi operators in the Sultanate of Oman are keeping their fingers crossed on the regulations which will come into effect from June 1.

From June 1, all Orange and White taxi drivers will charge their clients or passengers based on the fares calculated by the Aber digital or mobile fare meter.

“The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology seeks

to regulate taxis in the country as per the provisions of Ministerial Resolution No 195/2018 issued on December 26, 2018, regarding determining the tariff for taxis,” an official statement said.

The Aber digital meter will be used only in street taxis, while the on-demand services will operate as per the pre-determined fares in line with the regulations of the ministry.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed, a taxi operator, said, “We have no option but to use this mobile-based meter as per the law, but the area of contention

is that will some of our lowly-paid travellers can afford to pay the new fare structure.”

Khalid, another taxi operator, said, “The rule will have little impact, except on some migrant workers who prefer to travel on a shared basis. Mostly, taxi users now depend on the on-demand services, which have now become competitive as the market currently has eight operators.”

With regard to fares, the starting fare of 300 baisas will be set on the meter at the beginning of the trip, 130 baisas will be added to the fare... **TURN TO P4**

## State Council, Majlis debate divergent views on draft laws

**MUSCAT:** The State Council and Majlis AshShura on Tuesday held the first joint session of the 4th regular session of Oman Council’s 7th Term. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

Al Khalili said that the session dealt with reports of joint committees, including reports on the draft Labour Law, Social Protection Law and the Biometric Fingerprints bill.

This session follows the two councils’ forming joint committees to discuss the divergence of views on draft laws. The two sides reached agreement about all debated items, except for a limited number of items of dispute in the draft biometrics law.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Ma’awali, Chairman of Majlis AshShura, and the two councils’ members and secretaries general.

The chairman of the State Council affirmed that the first joint session comes in implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik regarding the resumption to the joint sessions in the case the two chambers failed to reach a unified opinion on draft laws

**“**

**The legislative development the country is witnessing reflects the system of cooperation and joint coordination that His Majesty has called for to further consolidate the concept of the state of institutions**

**SHAIKH AL KHALILI**  
*Chairman of the State Council*

referred by the government. The convening of joint sessions was suspended due to the pandemic.

Earlier, the State Council and Majlis AshShura discussed the draft Labour Law, Social Protection Law and the Biometric Fingerprint Law. Having agreed on some articles and disagreed on others, the two councils formed joint committees to discuss the points of discrepancies between them all of which have been settled as a result of the committee’s work, the chairman of the State Council said. **TURN TO P4**

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RO 11M PROJECTS IN AL DAKHLIYAH GOVERNORATE

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## Chinese explorer’s monument unveiled

**QASIM AL MAASHANI**  
SALALAH, MAY 30

A monument commemorating the Chinese explorer Zheng He was unveiled on Tuesday under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The monument, located at a picturesque seafront site in Dhofar Governorate, is the result of collaboration between the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Oman, and the Dhofar Municipality.

The construction of the monument began in November 2022 and was completed in May 2023. Standing at approximately 10 metres tall and weighing 10 tonnes, the monument is a 3D-printed sculpture depicting Zheng He’s renowned flagship, the Treasure Ship.

The ceremony was attended by officials from both Oman and China, including Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, Li Lingping, Chinese Ambassador to Oman, and Ambassador Yousuf bin Issa al Zadjali, Head



of the Asia and Pacific Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor of Dhofar emphasised that the monument symbolises the enduring friendship between Oman and China, as well as the extensive history of trade and cultural exchange

between the two countries. Li Lingping remarked: “Zheng He’s voyages to the Western Ocean fostered friendly exchanges between ancient China and the countries along the Indian Ocean coast. These voyages facilitated economic, trade, and cultural ties between China and these nations.” **TURN TO P4**



# Pacts for RO 11m development projects in Al Dakhiliyah

AMAL AL RIYAMI  
NIZWA, MAY 30

Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, signed several agreements to implement municipal and development projects and services on Tuesday in his office.

In attendance during the signing ceremony were members of the Municipal Council.

The agreements are within the

framework of the governorate's efforts to develop and improve municipal services in all the Wilayats. The projects under the agreements will contribute to upgrading services.

The value of the contracts amounts to more than RO 11 million with the involvement of several companies.

They align with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to implement development projects in the

provinces within the provincial development programme and the development budget.

Among the projects is the first phase of the 2 km Nizwa entrance project walkways and green spaces.

The agreements include establishing a food market and toilets in the central market in the Wilayat of Adam, a park in Bidbid, and the development of commercial areas in Bidbid, Bahla, Nizwa and Manah.

The projects also include the paving of internal roads in the Wilayat of Al Hamra (the second package), with a length of 19 km, and internal roads in the Wilayat of Bahla (the first package). In addition to designing and implementing 15 km internal roads in the Wilayat of Samayil.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has also plans and financial appropriations to launch a tender to implement the Nizwa Public Park this year.

## Oman braces for Haj; 99 pc of pilgrims meet requirements

MUSCAT: The number of pilgrims who applied to perform Haj from Oman this year (1444 AH) stood at 13,855 pilgrims, of whom 99 per cent completed all travel requirements of travel to the Holy Places, with 1 per cent of the pilgrims undertaking medical examinations.

This was unveiled at a press conference held on Tuesday by Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, who heads the Omani Haj Mission this year.

He outlined the mechanism set for managing the pilgrimage electronically, besides providing details about the service package at the camps of Mina and Arafat, among other particulars.

Al Hinai said that Oman's share of pilgrims this year stands at 14,000. Giving a breakup, he said



that 13,500 of the pilgrims are Omanis, 250 Arab residents and 250 non-Arab residents.

The majority of the pilgrims (43 per cent) belong to the age group of 30-45 years, followed by the 46-60 years segment, which constitutes 35.1 per cent of the pilgrims, the group aged above 60 years (16.6 per cent) and the age group of 18-30 years (5.3 per cent), Al Hinai explained.

Speaking about the cost of Haj this year, Al Hinai said that air travel pilgrims pay an average of RO 2,054 and that was less by 7.5 per cent, compared to RO 2,221 last year, said Al Hinai.

He added that the cost of travel for Haj by road dropped by 7.1 per cent from RO 1,472 to RO 1,367 last year.

Al Hinai said that pilgrims' contracts with Haj firms were

valued at RO 24,191,480.

In reply to a question, Al Hinai said that Haj cancellation request cases stood at 2,657. This, he observed, calls for a re-evaluation of mechanism for submitting requests to go to Haj. He explained that cancellations from Dhofar Governorate topped the list (669 cases), followed by cancellations from Muscat Governorate (573 cases). — ONA

## CAA warns against rumors on tropical conditions

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) warned that it is necessary to obtain correct weather information from the official source.

CAA's statement was in the context of the rumours and the dissemination of false information about tropical conditions other than what is published by Omani meteorology.

The authority referred to Articles 30 and 63 of the Civil Aviation Law, which stipulates, 'It is prohibited to practice civil aviation activities, air navigation, and meteorological services without the approval of

the competent authority.'

The second article states, 'Whoever violates the provisions of Article (30) shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of no less than one year and not exceeding three years, and a fine of no less than RO15,000 and not exceeding RO50,000 or one of these two penalties.'

Article 46 of the law, states that forecasts, warnings, and meteorological reports issued by the authority or Omani Metrology are the only official sources for such.

It is also prohibited to publish or broadcast meteorological information, data, alerts or warnings that are deceptive or misleading.

# Global cybersecurity roadshow reaches Oman

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A global cybersecurity roadshow is creating awareness among individuals and corporates against online threats and attempts to sabotage the functioning of business houses.

The cybersecurity roadshow, part of Trend Micro's 'Risk to Resilience' programme, reached Muscat recently in the course of covering 120 global cities, including 13 cities in the Middle East and Africa.

The idea is to unveil new perspectives and critical approaches for better breach defence, reduced security costs



and improved operational continuity.

Speaking to the Observer, Assad Arabi, Managing Director of Gulf and Emerging Markets, said that in today's interconnected world,

cyberattacks pose a significant global threat that warrants the urgent need for the adoption of a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy.

"This is a world tour that aims

to cover 120 countries across the world, including 13 cities in the region, and Oman is one of the cities where we are meeting with individuals as well as corporates and educating them face to face on the latest challenges and ways to protect their digital presence as our 'Risk to Resilience' world tour exemplifies our unwavering commitment.

We empower regional organisations with the tools they need to combat modern threat actors and effectively enhance their security posture. As we navigate the complexities of the digital age, our prime objective is to establish new standards in cybersecurity," Assad Arabi added.

In Oman, the tour brought together industry experts, leaders, and IT professionals to discuss the latest cybersecurity trends, challenges, and solutions. Attendees gained valuable insights into emerging threats and knowledge to implement practical solutions to protect their businesses against modern threat actors.

The roadshow has visited 13 cities across the region, including Muscat, Manama, Doha, Kuwait, Jeddah, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Tunis, Rabat, Cairo, Amman, and Johannesburg.

The tour, which coincided with the recently held COMEX 2023, offered organisations in the

Sultanate of Oman the opportunity to witness first-hand the fortifying capabilities of the company's cutting-edge technologies.

The powerful range of cybersecurity solutions, including Trend Vision One, Trend Cloud One, Trend Network One, Email Security, Tipping Point and SMB solutions, were showcased during COMEX 2023.

According to the experts who accompany the world tour, the company's security solutions blocked and detected over 870 million cyber threats in 2022 across the Middle East and Africa region, as is mentioned in the annual cybersecurity report for 2022 Rethinking Tactics.



# Forum seeks public, private health services integration

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Health experts emphasised the need for proactive collaboration between public and private healthcare providers to enhance the quality of healthcare services to patients in the Sultanate of Oman. They were speaking at a forum titled 'Unifying efforts to improve healthcare' held at the conference hall of the National Bank of Oman head office in Athaiba.

The forum was organised by the Directorate-General of Health Services, Governorate of Muscat, represented by the Department of Private Health Institutions. The forum shed light on the current state of private health institutions in the Governorate of Muscat, where the number of establishments encompassing hospitals, medical complexes, medical centres, and others crossed more than a thousand.

Dr Noura bint Saif al Hosaniyah, Director of the Private Health Institutions at the Directorate-General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat, stated that the forum's objective was to



establish a shared understanding of government practices and requirements pertaining to the private health sector. She further highlighted the importance of facilitating communication and coordination between private and public healthcare institutions.

Distinguished speakers at the event included Dr Thamara bint Said al Ghafriyah, Director-General of Health Services for the Governorate of Muscat, representatives from the General Directorate of Private Health Institutions, heads of health institutions in relevant government sectors, officials from the Ministry

and the Directorate, as well as specialists from government and private health establishments. They delivered insightful lectures on various topics related to the theme of the forum.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Mughairi, Director of the 'Lean' project in the Quality and Patient Safety Department at Khoula Hospital, presented an overview of the quality of private health services, providing updates on the latest advancements in private health institutions based on the health indicators set by the Ministry of Health. Moreover, an overview of the healthcare aspect

of Oman Vision 2040, including the most significant pillars, was shared with the attendees.

During the event, be'ah's specialists showcased the company's contribution to the proper disposal of medical waste through a visual presentation. The Consumer Protection Authority and Muscat Municipality also discussed their roles in supporting the private health sector.

Furthermore, an Omani investor shared his successful experience in establishing a private medical clinic, addressing the challenges he encountered and the strategies he employed to overcome them.

The forum facilitated interactive discussions between the speakers and attendees, allowing for the exchange of knowledge and expertise on the scientific topics presented. The experts addressed the queries raised by the audience, fostering a productive environment for knowledge sharing. At the conclusion of the forum, the organisers and contributors were honoured for their significant contributions to its success.

## Companies urged to follow midday break rule



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The Ministry of Labour has warned all establishments and cautioned them against employing the workforce (mainly the outdoor activities) during midday hours, between 12:30 and 3:30 pm.

The implementation of the rule has been eagerly awaited, with temperatures touching the mid-forties over the past few across the country, except down in Salalah, which is awaiting the Khareef season.

Article 16 of the Ministry of Labour decision 286/2008 bars outdoor workers from working in high temperatures for three months, with working hours usually split between two shifts.

The Ministry of Labour has mandated all construction sites and open areas to suspend work during midday hours to ensure the protection of workers.

An awareness campaign was conducted in all governorates by officials of the ministry.

The special provisions for workers include the provision of air-conditioned rest areas, rescheduling of physically demanding

tasks to cooler hours, and implementing a rotational system where employees work for 45 minutes followed by a 15-minute break.

In relation to fuel stations, the ministry is actively engaged in community awareness campaigns to discourage refuelling during the midday period unless necessary.

"In the event of any infractions identified by establishments operating during midday hours, the ministry will take legal measures in accordance with stipulations of Article 118 of the Labour Law.

"A dedicated task force will be monitoring the establishment following the violation, verifying its adherence, or referring the case to judicial authorities in the event of recurrence," the statement said.

Violations may incur fines of up to RO 500 and a maximum imprisonment period of one month or a combination of both penalties.

Reports on non-compliant establishments can be submitted via phone or through the ministry's websites, and the specialised team properly verifies the claims and undertakes the requisite actions.

## Oman, Mexico explore joint cooperation



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, met with Carmen Moreno Toscano, Under-Secretary of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Gabriel Yorio, Mexican Deputy of Finance and Public Credit.

The meeting discussed aspects of bilateral cooperation in various fields, particularly means of enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries.

They also touched on the regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by Anibal Gomez Toledo, Ambassador of Mexico to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

## Laparoscopic tumor resection performed at SQCCCRC

MUSCAT: The surgical team of the Gastrointestinal Cancers Programme at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCRC) managed to successfully perform the first laparoscopic tumor resection in a complex area between the pancreas, duodenum and bile duct.

The operation is known as 'Whipple procedure', during which the tumor is resected along with the head of the pancreas, the duodenum, and part of the bile duct. After performing the Whipple procedure, the remaining organs are reconnected to allow the patient to digest food normally after surgery.

This procedure is a complex surgical procedure that carries potential risks and represents a major surgical challenge. Therefore, it requires a specialised medical team, a high level of experience and competence in surgery and minimally invasive surgery, and advanced medical support to ensure patient safety during and after the operation.

Dr Abdallah bin Yahya al Far'i, Consultant Surgical Oncologist, said: "We performed the first totally laparoscopic Whipple operation on a patient who is less than 60 years old and had a tumor in the area between pancreas, duodenum and bile duct. Despite the difficulty of the operation, the team was able to complete it successfully without any complications." He added that the patient's recovery after the operation was smooth and the patient was discharged home in less than two weeks.

The Whipple procedure is one of the major operations that are performed either through open or minimally invasive surgery in some specialised medical centres around the world, and it usually takes between four to eight hours.

Performing pancreatoduodenectomy using Laparoscopic is a minimally invasive procedure that requires making a number of small incisions in the abdomen to insert the surgical instruments and extract the tumor. This method offers several advantages for



patients, such as reducing pain, surgical scars, and reducing the level of complications associated with the operation compared to open surgery. In addition, it cuts down the patient's recovery period.

The surgical team of the Gastrointestinal Cancers Programme expressed their happiness at presenting this surgical

option (minimally invasive) to cancer patients in the Sultanate of Oman, for those whose health condition allows it. This is added to the many surgical interventions that the team performs to resect tumors laparoscopically, including laparoscopic resection of the tail of the pancreas.

This comes within the

framework of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre's ongoing efforts to introduce the latest and safest therapeutic technologies, with the aim of reducing potential risks of operations, ensuring patient safety, and improving the quality of clinical care.

— ONA

## SQU Hospital performs mitral valve repair

MUSCAT: A medical team from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) succeeded in performing mitral valve regurgitation operations using a modern technology. The operation deals with the use of a "mitral valve clip" system, which spares the patient open-heart surgery in high-risk cases.

The operations were led by a qualified medical team comprising Dr Fahad al Kindi, Senior Consultant in the Department of Cardiac Catheterisation, and Dr Adel al Kindi, Senior Consultant at the Department of Cardiac Surgery, SQUH.

This advanced technique constitutes a safe and effective alternative to traditional open-heart surgery. It enables the patient to discharge within 1 to 3 days after the operation.

— ONA



MOUNT EVEREST DAY CELEBRATED IN OMAN

# RISING TEMPERATURES HARMFUL TO MOUNTAINS



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Majestic mountains are facing enormous challenges due to rising temperature and extreme weather condition and collective efforts from humans can only save our environment from perils, experts have opined.

Speaking to the Observer on the occasion the Mount Everest Day which was celebrated on May 29 at the Embassy of Nepal Oman,

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman, said that mountains are not only eye-catching beauty, but also are sources of fresh water.

“Rising temperatures are extremely harmful to our environment and mountains in particular as the ecosystem and flora and fauna are affected while fresh water sources are damaged. They significantly help maintain mountain ecological balance in oceans as you know mountains

are crowns and property of all humankind and the impact of climate change will have a toll on our future generations,” he said.

The Mount Everest Day was celebrated on May 29 at the Embassy of Nepal in Oman in the presence of Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of National Museum of Oman, Mohammed bin Salim Jadad al Kathiri, Minister Plenipotentiary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, heads of

diplomatic missions and other diplomats, media persons, businesspersons, travel agents and representatives of Oman-based Nepali organisations.

The event, that coincided with the Republic Day, saw Nadira al Harthy, the first Omani woman to climb Mount Everest share her experiences of Nepal. A movie titled ‘The Project Everest’ by Anirban Ray in the backdrop of the scenic Nepal was launched at the event.



## RAS AL KHAIMAH RULER RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF OMAN TO UAE



Shaikh Saud bin Saqr al Qasimi, Ruler of the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, on Tuesday received Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Arab Emirates, in Qasr Al Dhait. – ONA

## Joint session discusses divergence of draft law



### FROM PAGE 1

The joint session discussed reports submitted by the joint committees on the draft Labour Law, the Social Protection Law and the Biometric Fingerprint Law in accordance with the rules and procedures related to the holding of the joint sessions and articles 49 and 50 of the Law of the Council of Oman promulgated by Royal Decree No 7/2021, Al Khalili said.

The chairman of the State Council confirmed that the legislative development the country is witnessing reflects the system of cooperation and joint coordination that His Majesty the Sultan has called for to further consolidate the concept of the state of institutions and the rule of law. He stressed that the State Council, Majlis Ashishura and the Council of Ministers function in harmony and constructive cooperation.

The joint session convened

after the two councils formed joint committees comprising some of their members to discuss the points of disagreement vis-à-vis draft acts. The committees have reached an agreement on majority of the articles with only few articles of the draft Biometric Fingerprint Law remained unsettled.

According to the law, the State Council and Majlis Ashishura may form a joint committee to debate the points of disagreement. The joint committee submits a report to be discussed at a joint session invited and chaired by the chairman of the State Council. The draft law undergoes a voting process at the joint session and the decisions are taken by the absolute majority of the attending members. At all events, the chairman of the State Council should submit the draft law to His Majesty the Sultan attached with the visions of both councils.

— ONA

## With a day to go, taxi drivers keep fingers crossed on new rule

### FROM PAGE 1

after every 1 km, while 50 baisas will be added as a waiting period after the free five minutes of waiting.

A driver is obligated to use the meter at the start of the trip; otherwise, the entire journey will be deemed free.

In the case of multiple passengers, the fare will be equally

divided between them.

While the decision to implement operate all taxis as per fare meters has been implemented several times in the past, it failed due to resistance from drivers who questioned the high cost involved in installing such meters, apart from the regular maintenance costs.

“The new app-based meter will address those issues, and

we expect cooperation also from the customers, who should ensure that drivers operate as per regulations and report any violations,” sources in the ministry said.

Nasser, a citizen and occasional taxi traveller, said, “We hope this rule will contribute to improving the quality of service and achieving the satisfaction of both passengers and drivers. We

hope that this step will be the beginning of improvements and innovations in the public transport sector in the country.”

A source in the ministry said: “Some glitches are expected in the coming days, but this time we will make sure that the decision is implemented at its fullest. It is important to promote Oman as a welcoming destination for both the local population and visitors.”

# Chinese explorer’s monument unveiled



### FROM PAGE 1

The monument dedicated to Zheng He serves as a valuable addition to Salalah’s growing cultural landscape, serving as a

reminder of Oman’s significant role in the historical trade and cultural interactions within the Indian Ocean region.

In conjunction with the monument dedication, a

celebration was organised in Salalah to commemorate the enduring friendship between Oman and China.

The celebration featured a video presentation chronicling the

historical journey from Muscat to China, as well as the construction process of the Zheng He Memorial Monument.

Furthermore, interactive exhibits and engaging

presentations showcased the strong bilateral relations between Oman and China. The celebration culminated with a Chinese-Omani artistic performance.

The event stood as a remarkable

testament to the unwavering and ever-growing friendship between Oman and China, exemplifying the harmonious blend of cultures and the strong bilateral ties between the two nations.



# Plans to expand access road to botanic garden

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With the prestigious Oman Botanic Garden set to open this year or early next, Muscat Municipality has announced a project to ensure easy access for visitors to this destination.

Keeping in mind the geographic terrain of the area, and traffic flow, especially during heavy rains, Muscat Municipality has plans to construct a dual carriageway with two lanes in each direction, starting from the Muscat Expressway to the Botanic Garden in Al Khoud with all essential safety measures. This is to ensure smooth traffic flow in the area.

Now, there is a single road starting from the Muscat Expressway to the old Al Khoud



area, which is subject to landslides and flowing wadis.

The new road will be built with the highest level of engineering and safety standards to protect it from extreme weather conditions, apart from ensuring easy access to the upcoming Oman Botanic Garden, which is one of its kind not only in

the region but also in the world.

The road will cover 14 kilometres with a width of 3,651 metres for each track.

There will be a walkway adjacent to the new road, 800 metres long and 1.5 metres wide, on both sides of the road. It will include a project to drain rainwater.

The Oman Botanic Garden project is expected to be ready in 2023, and its major attractions will include cable cars, according to Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, earlier told the *Observer*, "Oman Botanic Garden project is nearly 75 per cent complete, and we hope to complete it by the end of this year. The project will showcase the all-natural habitat of the Sultanate at one place in the heart of the city." The garden will be one of the largest botanic gardens in the world and will consist of a nursery, visitor centre, research centre, field study centre, outdoor habitat gardens, northern mountain biome, southern mountain biome, and nature reserve area.

Developed on 423 hectares, the Botanic Garden will present an opportunity for visitors to experience the flora and vegetation of Oman while learning about the agricultural heritage, rich cultural traditions, and legendary hospitality of the country.

Recently, the project was transferred from the Diwan of the Royal Court to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

## RNO acting commander receives Indian military delegation



MUSCAT: Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, Acting Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday a military delegation from the Republic of India, headed by Commodore Anil Jaggi, Director of the Indian Navy's Foreign Cooperation.

The delegation, currently visiting Oman, is taking part in the Oman-India naval staff talks for 2023. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed several matters of common interest. They also touched on means of enhancing cooperation between the two sides.

The meeting was attended by Commodore Jassim bin Mohammed al Balushi, RNO Director of Operations and Plans, and a number of senior RNO officers.

Meanwhile, the military delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

The members of the delegation toured the MSC's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. They were also briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the Omani maritime environment. — ONA

## Omani research team designs integrated monitoring system for smart grid

MUSCAT: A research team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) succeeded in designing an integrated system for measuring and monitoring the wide area of Oman's electricity transmission network. The system indicates the status and stability of the electrical network, with a view to achieving safe operation and raising its reliability.

Dr Amer bin Saif al Hinaï, Associate Professor at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University for Postgraduate Studies and Research, said that the research team embarked on a simulation model for the smart grid.

The project seeks to identify the weaknesses and forge appropriate



solutions, he added.

He pointed out that Oman is linked with other GCC states via the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority. The smart grid technology will be essential in providing homes and establishments in Oman with reliable and sustainable energy. — ONA

## Oman participates in education ministers conference in Morocco

RABAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, is currently participating in the 13th Conference of the Arab Education Ministers in the Moroccan Kingdom. The event, themed "Future of Education in Arab World in the Digital Transformation Era", is organised by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO).

The conference discussed a set of topics including means



of promoting education systems in a manner that meets the requirements of digital transformation era, formulating Arab directions and vision for the school of the future and honing digital skills in the educational field in the context of this digital transformation, in addition to developing digital infrastructure and educational administration. — ONA



**MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY**  
Advertisement No. (19/2023)

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| Reference No.               | Description                                                                                                                                           | Deadline for Document Submission |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2023/MM/HQ -19 (PRE/23/095) | Request For Prequalification for Contractors for the Construction of Drainage Structures and Remedial Measures at Sultan Qaboos Street, Phase 1C & 2A | 13/06/2023                       |
| 2023/MM/HQ -20 (PRE/23/097) | Request For Prequalification for Contractors for the Construction of Storm Water Drainage Channel in AL Ghubrah North – Phase 1C                      | 13/06/2023                       |

1. Participated companies shall submit their Documents electronically in the above mentioned website.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding Prequalification, please send it through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to [etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

**OMREN launches bulk SMS service**

OMREN (Oman Research and Education Network), the research arm of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), announced the launch of a bulk SMS service to enable member institutions to communicate quickly and effectively with students, academic teams and affiliates to spread awareness and updates via SMS to ensure better interaction between the stakeholders.

Najah al Rashdi, Director of Innovation Park Muscat, said a capacity of half a million bulk SMS service provided by OMREN would empower the members to meet various requirements by easily and efficiently sending updates or promotional short messages without thinking about the cost.

The advantage of using the service provided by OMREN is free service with automatic renewal annually.



**Tender Announcement**  
T-24-2023

**"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:**

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                     |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tender Name     | Provision & Installation of Epoxy Flooring for Mwasalat Minibus Workshop.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                     |
| Project Summary | Mwasalat is seeking an experienced and capable supplier to maintain the existing floor of the workshop. The scope include leveling of the whole area, painting the floor and safety marking with Epoxy paint as per the drawing. This must be executed in compliance with the terms and conditions outlined in the tender documents. |                                                                     |
| Tender Fee      | NIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Grade & Specialty<br>Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field |

Start date for tender document distribution  
Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023

Last date for tender document distribution  
Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Last date for submission  
Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023

- The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.
- Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email [tenders@mwasalat.om](mailto:tenders@mwasalat.om) and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email.
- The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.
- Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C "MWASALAT" at Ghalia, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"  
Head Quarter, Ghalia Tel: +968 1551  
P.O.Box: 911 , Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to:  
[tenders@mwasalat.om](mailto:tenders@mwasalat.om)



# Fighting subsides in Sudan’s capital after ceasefire extended



Tuk-tuks (motorised rickshaws) wait for passengers along al Sittin road in the south of Khartoum. — AFP

**DUBAI:** Clashes subsided in Sudan’s capital on Tuesday though fighting could be heard in some areas, residents said, after military factions battling for more than six weeks agreed to extend a ceasefire aimed at allowing aid to reach civilians.

The army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to extend a week-long ceasefire deal by five days just before it was due to expire late on Monday.

The truce was brokered and is being remotely monitored by Saudi Arabia and the United States, which say it has been violated by both sides but has still allowed for the delivery of aid to an estimated

two million people. “We hope this truce succeeds even if only to stop the war a little and that we can return to our normal lives.

We have hope in the truce and we don’t have other options,” said Hind Saber, a 53-year-old resident of Khartoum.

Hours before the ceasefire extension was signed, residents reported intensive fighting in all three of the adjoining cities that make up Sudan’s greater capital around the confluence of the Nile — Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri.

The war has caused nearly 1.4 million people to flee their homes, including more than 350,000 that

have crossed into neighbouring countries.

Areas of the capital have been hit by widespread looting and frequent cuts to power and water supplies. Most hospitals have been put out of service.

The United Nations, some aid agencies, embassies and parts of Sudan’s central government have moved operations to Port Sudan, in Sudan’s Red Sea state, the main shipping hub which has seen little unrest.

On Tuesday, the state’s security committee said it had caught several “rebellious” sleeper cells that it said had sneaked in from outside and warned that they were

planning activities.

“We thank the citizens of Red Sea state for their total cooperation and for immediately reporting the presence of these rebellious elements and their agents within their neighbourhoods,” it said, without specifying their identity.

Army leader General Abdel Fattah al Burhan appeared in a video on Tuesday greeting troops.

He said that the army had agreed to the ceasefire extension to ease citizens’ access to services.

“The army hasn’t used its full deadly power, but it will be forced to do so if the enemy does not obey or listen to the voice of reason,” he said in a statement. — Reuters

## Senegalese oppn leader calls for mass protests

**DHAKA:** Senegalese opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on Tuesday called for mass protests as the country braced for the outcome of his trial on rape charges.

Escalating a tug-of-war with President Macky Sall’s government, Sonko said he was being “illegally held” by security forces.

“I urge all Senegalese people to come out onto the streets,” he said on social media.

He added: “Everyone should rise up as one, because power should remain with the people.”

Sonko, 48-year-old leader of the PASTEF-Patriots party, is a fiery critic of head of state Macky Sall and wields a big following among young people.

He came third in the 2019 presidential elections and has already declared he will contest next year’s ballot.

He faces the expected verdict on Thursday of a rape trial whose details have left the conservative West African state riveted. Sonko denies the allegations and says his prosecution is a political plot to bar him from the 2024 vote.

Tensions have stoked fears

of a repeat of deadly violence that has battered Senegal’s standing as a beacon of stability in troubled West Africa.

When Sonko was arrested in 2021, several days of clashes left at least 12 people dead.

Sonko boycotted the first two sessions of the trial, citing security reasons.

But last Friday, he set out for Dakar at the head of a so-called “caravan of freedom” of supporters from Ziguinchor, a city in southern Senegal where he is mayor.

The convoy led to clashes with security forces in which one man died before police swooped in and took him to Dakar.

Sonko resurfaced on social media overnight on Monday to say he was being “illegally held” and make the call for mass protests.

“How can a country that calls itself a democracy justify confining without any legal basis a citizen whose only wrong was to be a fervent and unflinching opponent of Macky Sall’s regime?” he asked.

— AFP



A member of security forces stands next to a burning barricade set by supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko in Dakar. — Reuters

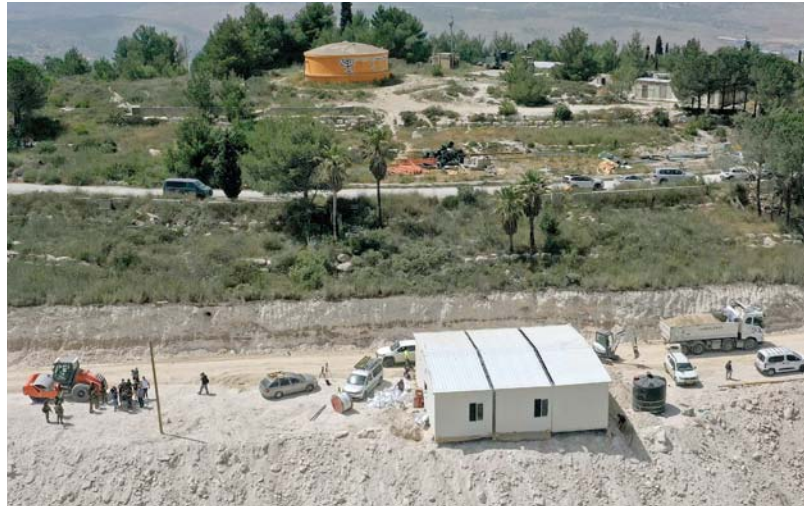
# Israeli shot dead at entrance to West Bank settlement

**JERUSALEM:** An Israeli man was shot dead on Tuesday at the entrance to a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, medics and military officials said.

The 32-year-old was identified as Meir Tamari by the Shomron Regional Council, the Israeli body which administers settlements in the northern West Bank.

He was fatally wounded beside the Hermesh settlement, where he had lived for the past four years according to the council.

Tamari was transferred to Hillel Yaffe hospital in Israel where he was pronounced dead,



An aerial view shows people around a portable building under construction at the Israeli settler outpost of Homesh in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

a statement from the facility said.

The Israeli military said troops clashed behind the shooting at the settlement entrance, without identifying the alleged assailants.

The Al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas’s Fatah party, said “our soldiers” were behind the attack.

“On the road to Hermesh settlement, they opened fire towards a vehicle which was carrying a settler,” the group said in a statement.

The West Bank has been occupied by Israel since the Six-

Day War of 1967 and settlements built in the Palestinian territory are deemed illegal under international law.

The office of Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said he would “hold a situation assessment together with senior officials in the defence establishment” following the shooting.

Earlier on Tuesday, Israeli forces detained five people during multiple raids in Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

In the northern Nur Shams refugee camp, the military said troops “responded with live fire”

to people shooting at them and throwing Molotov cocktails.

Israelis started reviving a flashpoint outpost settlement in the occupied West Bank on Monday constructing a building at the site which has drawn international attention.

Using a truck, diggers and an earth roller, work got underway to erect a portable building at the northern West Bank site. Israeli soldiers were seen guarding around 20 people carrying out construction work at the Homesh site, which Israel evacuated nearly two decades ago. — AFP

## SHORT TAKES

### BEIRUT

#### Kidnapped in Lebanon freed in ‘special operation’

A Saudi national who had been kidnapped in Beirut has been freed in a “special operation” by the Lebanese army near the border with Syria, the military said on Tuesday.

Soldiers had also raided homes in Baalbek in connection with the kidnapping, and that army said in a statement.

“An army intelligence patrol managed to free kidnapped Saudi national Mashari al Mutairi during a special operation on the Syrian border,”



it said in a separate statement.

Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi told a news conference nine people had been arrested over the kidnapping, and that Mutairi was “doing well”. — AFP

### LAHORE

#### Khan gets bail on new charge of abetting violence

Pakistani former prime minister Imran Khan was on Tuesday granted bail on a new charge of abetting violence against the military by his protesting supporters after he was arrested and detained on May 9 in a corruption case, his lawyer said.

The embattled Khan is embroiled in a confrontation with the military.

His lawyer, Intezar Hussain Punjotha, said an anti-terrorism court confirmed the bail on the new charge after the former



premier appeared before it and submitted surety bonds.

Khan has denied the charge saying he was in detention when the violence took place. — Reuters

### CAIRO

#### Egypt and Turkiye agree to upgrade ties

The leaders of Egypt and Turkiye agreed to upgrade diplomatic ties and exchange ambassadors, in a fresh sign of a thaw in ties between the two countries after decade-long strains.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi called his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan to congratulate him on his re-election, according to a statement by the Egyptian presidency spokesman.

The presidents “agreed to strengthen ties and cooperation



between the two sides, and decided to begin immediately upgrading diplomatic relations between the two countries and exchange ambassadors,” the statement added. — dpa



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## In brief

■ LONDON



### SUNAK TO MEET BIDEN IN WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will meet US President Joe Biden in Washington next week for talks, Downing Street announced on Tuesday.

Biden invited Sunak to the White House when he was in San Diego in March for the launch of a nuclear submarine deal with Australia.

The meeting will build on talks the pair have had about closer cooperation on economic challenges such as supply chain security and net-zero transition.

"It will also be an opportunity to discuss issues including sustaining our support for Ukraine," official spokesman said. Sunak is expected to be at July's Nato summit. — **AFP**

■ WIESBADEN



### TAX FRAUD MASTERMIND HANDED 8-YEAR JAIL

Hanno Berger, a former tax inspector turned legal tax expert, was sentenced on Tuesday to eight years and three months in jail by a court in Wiesbaden, as the nation comes to terms with one of its biggest post-war frauds.

Berger had already been sentenced to eight years in jail in December after a similar trial. He has been the most high-profile professional to be convicted after sprawling investigations into the cum-ex dividend stripping scheme.

Berger's sentences follow investigations that government officials say span around 1,500 suspects and 100 banks on four continents. — **Reuters**

■ GEORGETOWN



### TEENAGER CHARGED WITH 19 MURDERS IN DORMITORY FIRE

A 15-year-old girl who is accused of having started a fire at a school dormitory in Guyana last week was charged with 19 murders. The fire killed 18 mostly Indigenous girls and one five-year-old boy in the building in the central city of Mahdia. The girl started the fire after her phone was confiscated, police said. The girl is being held in Guyana's juvenile detention centre and the charges against her were formalised in Magistrate's Court.

Nearly 30 children were hospitalised while one girl in critical condition was flown to New York to seek further medical attention. — **Reuters**

# PUTIN SLAMS UKRAINE AS ATTACK DRONES HIT MOSCOW HIGH-RISES

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday accused Kyiv of seeking to "frighten" Russians after drones hit Moscow high-rises in the first such attack since the beginning of the Kremlin's assault on Ukraine.

As drones struck in and around Moscow, Russian drones targeted Kyiv for a third straight day while Ukraine gears up for a major offensive against Russian forces.

Officials said no one was seriously injured in Moscow and there was only "minor" damage to residential buildings but some ordinary people said they never thought the Russian capital could be hit in this way.

"I somehow thought that all of this was somewhere far away, that this would not affect us, and suddenly this has become very close," pensioner Tatyana Kalinina said in southwest Moscow near one of the damaged residential buildings.

The Russian defence ministry said that eight drones were used in the attack, adding that five of them were downed and three disabled.

Putin said that Moscow's air defence had worked in a satisfactory manner, noting that the attacks were Kyiv's "response" to a Russian strike on Ukraine's army intelligence headquarters.

He said Ukraine was trying to "frighten" Russians.

"We have spoken about hitting command centres (in Ukraine)," the Russian president added.

"In response, the Kyiv regime has chosen a different path, the path of trying to frighten Russia, frighten the citizens of Russia



A specialist inspects the damaged facade of a multi-storey apartment building after a reported drone attack in Moscow. — **AFP**

and of strikes on residential buildings."

Of the three drones that hit residential buildings, two crashed into high-rises located in Moscow's affluent southwest, while a third damaged a residential building in a suburb.

The other drones fell outside Moscow. Some of the debris was found around 15 kilometres from Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence.

**Putin said that Moscow's air defence had worked in a satisfactory manner, noting that the attacks were Kyiv's "response" to a Russian strike on Ukraine's army intelligence headquarters**

One video shared on social media showed an explosion followed by a column of smoke rising into the sky.

This month two drones were intercepted over the Kremlin, but Tuesday's attacks were the first time that unmanned aerial vehicles hit residential areas of Moscow, hundreds of kilometres from the front lines in Ukraine.

The residents of buildings damaged in the strikes were briefly

evacuated. On Profsoyuznaya Street, a residential building with a blown-out window was cordoned off by police but the atmosphere was calm, with children playing outside and locals walking their dogs.

Ukraine said it had downed 29 out of 31 drones, mainly over Kyiv and the Kyiv region in the latest Russian barrage — the third on the Ukrainian capital in 24 hours. — **AFP**

## Nato on guard in Kosovo town, protesters smash two cars

LEPOSAVIC: Serbian protesters smashed two cars belonging to journalists in Kosovo's Leposavic town on Tuesday, a day after 30 Nato soldiers and 52 protesters were hurt in clashes, as EU and Nato officials urged a de-escalation of the violence.

Unrest in the region has intensified since ethnic Albanian mayors took office in northern Kosovo's Serb-majority area after April elections that the Serbs boycotted, a move that led the US and its allies to rebuke Pristina.

Nato said in a statement it would send additional forces to Kosovo to curb the violence, adding it "has directed the deployment of the Operational Reserve Forces (ORF) for the Western Balkans."

Masked men smashed the windshield of a car with an Albanian licence plate marked as "A2, CNN affiliate," a reporter who witnessed the incident said. A separate car belonging to another media outlet was smashed as well.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell urged Kosovo and Serbian leaders to find a way to de-escalate tensions through dialogue.

"We have too much violence already in Europe today, we cannot afford another conflict," Borrell told a news briefing in



Nato soldiers and International military police secure the area near Zvecan, northern Kosovo. — **AFP**

Brussels.

Northern Kosovo's majority Serbs have never accepted Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia, and consider Belgrade their capital more than two decades after the Kosovo Albanian uprising against repressive Serbian rule.

Ethnic Albanians make up more than 90 per cent of the population in Kosovo as a whole, but northern Serbs have long demanded the implementation of an EU-brokered 2013 deal for the creation of an association of autonomous municipalities in their area.

Serbs refused to take part in

local elections in April and ethnic Albanian candidates won the mayoralities in four Serb-majority municipalities with a 3.5 per cent turnout.

Russia, which has long had close ties with Serbia and shares its Slavic and Orthodox Christian traditions, called on Tuesday for "decisive steps" to quell the unrest in Kosovo.

The Russian foreign ministry urged "the West to finally silence its false propaganda and stop blaming incidents in Kosovo on Serbs driven to despair, who are peaceful, unarmed, trying to defend their legitimate rights and freedoms." — **Reuters**

## EU legislation up after Spain accelerates elections

MADRID: Key European Union legislation including reforms of its power market and climate change goals are up in the air after Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called a snap election just as Spain is due to take the reins of the bloc.

Sanchez surprised even many in his own government on Monday by calling a snap national election for July 23 when he was expected to hold out until the last moment in December.

Diplomats in Brussels fear the elections could be not only a distraction but could also slow the EU's agenda if it results in a change of government - and policy - during a period when the bloc hoped to sign off landmark laws and regulations.

"The expectations with Spain were very high, there were a lot of dossiers to complete," said a senior EU source. "It's going to be

much more difficult now."

Spain's will be the last full presidency before EU parliament elections in June 2024, adding more urgency to the need to complete pending legislation, an EU diplomat said.

The elections will not affect Spain's EU presidency since much of the groundwork has already been done, Sanchez's press office said.

Sanchez announced the snap election after his Socialist party and its left-wing coalition partners Podemos suffered greater-than-expected losses in regional elections on Sunday.

The momentum is now with the conservative People's Party (PP), which won outright control of two regional governments and could run six more in partnership if it can negotiate coalitions with far-right Vox. — **Reuters**

# Makers and players, from Ras al Hamra to Comex



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi  
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

“There is a special feeling of satisfaction when we make any item with our own hands,” my dear friend Sofia Henriques told me when we were chatting about life, culture and entrepreneurship a few years ago. I felt how deep and meaningful her statement was when friends and me recently visited one of the most magnificent modern monuments not only in the Sultanate of Oman but also in the world — Oman Across Ages Museum, or OAAM, where Sofia works and invests her unique international design genius with one of the most energetic and friendly cultural teams.

There are few cultural places around the world that would be able to inspire you immediately, for me OAAM took me on a journey to explore the journey of “making”

and in particular how inhabitants of Oman contributed to humanity by making items using nature, across ages for thousands of years, starting around 8,000 years ago with the settlers in Ras Al Hamra, to present day innovative startup ecosystem players.

What is inspiring is that our predecessors, the inhabitants of this land turned every blessing that earth granted them into something beautiful. In Ras al Hamra settlements (not far from Crowne Plaza Hotel in Al Qurm) early Oman residents used the sea coast, the dry riverbeds or wadis and the mangroves to harness resources and build a culture. Finds show that they used their skills not only to hunt, fish and gather but also to innovate and make useful tools and

THERE ARE FEW CULTURAL PLACES AROUND THE WORLD THAT WOULD BE ABLE TO INSPIRE YOU IMMEDIATELY

equipment and beautiful jewelry using their own hands.

Ancient ceramics from Mesopotamian civilisations in present day Iraq, to jars from Iran, among other findings constitute evidence of international trade and regional relations continuity at the hands of early Ras al Hamra settlers who dared to venture into voyages across the vast and treacherous waters to trade with other people around the world.

Comex technology show

Fasting forward to the present day, you would see that the buzzing vibe at Comex technology show was not surprising. Comex’s visitors exceeded 70,000, visiting hundreds of public and private exhibitors, including almost 100 tech startups, all of whom together made around 50 deals, with a total amount of investments reached around RO 40 million (\$104 million) in less than a week, according the exhibition’s main backer the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s Under-Secretary for ICT Dr Ali al Shithani.

Exhibitors included diverse tech startups powered by the SME Authority, Central Bank of Oman, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and the brilliant Omantel Innovation

Labs. Startup specialities included fintechs, Artificial Intelligence (AI), e-commerce, clean tech, advanced manufacturing, co-working spaces, drones, VR and creatives to name only a few.

The makers of Ras Al Hamra tools and jewellery would be immensely proud of the continuous innovation with today’s startup ecosystem players at Comex and beyond. When you visit OAAM, I believe you will be as inspired as I am with this deeply rooted historic connections, between the making skills of our ancestors and predecessors and the valuable innovating skills of today’s startup ecosystem. Looking forward to how this will evolve into an inspiring ecosystem, not only locally but also globally.

## How drone warfare has evolved in Ukraine

FABIEN ZAMORA

From tiny quadcopters buzzing over front-line trenches with cameras and grenades to flying bombs lugging warheads weighing dozens of kilogrammes into Kyiv and Moscow, drones have marked the Ukraine war like none before it.

In recent months, Russian troops have sent waves of drones at Kyiv and other major cities, while Ukraine has launched unmanned attacks of its own in Crimea and Russian border region Belgorod. The Russian government even accused Ukraine on Tuesday of attacking Moscow with such devices.

Today’s picture is a far cry from the hype surrounding Bayraktar TB2 drones in the early months of the war.

The aircraft made headlines and were praised in song for their role in smashing Moscow’s armoured columns and the Black Sea fleet flagship, the Moskva. But such models — known as MALE, for Medium Altitude, Long Endurance — have lost relevance as the conflict has dragged on. “The front has stabilised and become impenetrable, as the Russians have deployed systems” to defend against attack from the air, an anonymous European defence industry source said. Now the drone war has become a numbers game. Most suicide drones are downed by air defences, “used to force the defenders to fire their missiles and run down reserves”, a senior French military source said.

“You also create terror and uncertainty at all times. Over the long term, that has value,” the source added.

Eroding enemy air defence cheaply is especially vital for Russia, whose production of long-range missiles is limited to around 40 per month, analysts Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds of British defence think-tank RUSI wrote in a recent report.

Moscow’s air force “launches large numbers of aircraft to increase the number of potential axes of threat... (and) to identify gaps in Ukrainian air defence” where traditional missiles could get through, they said. Kyiv also uses “commercially available Chinese propeller-powered drones or old Soviet jet-powered reconnaissance drones” that can attack “well inside Russian territory”, the European industrial source said.

The vast majority of drones are smaller models used on the front lines for both reconnaissance and attack.

Ukrainian troops have published many videos on social media showing modified commercially available drones dropping bombs onto Russian soldiers’ positions. — **AFP**

## Nato struggles in the shadows to find new leader



Andrew Gray

The writer is a senior correspondent for European security and diplomacy, based in Brussels. He covers Nato and the foreign policy of the European Union

The race to be the next Nato boss is heating up. But it is a race run largely in the dark, with no sign of a winner yet.

Jens Stoltenberg, the transatlantic military alliance’s Norwegian Secretary-General, is due to step down at the end of September after nine years in post.

Many alliance members would like his succession settled at, or even before, a Nato summit in Lithuania in mid-July.

That does not give Nato’s 31 nations, spanning from the United States through new member Finland to Türkiye, much time to forge the consensus needed to pick a new leader. They could also ask Stoltenberg to extend his term for a fourth time.

Whoever takes the reins will do so at a critical time, facing the twin challenges of keeping allies together in supporting Ukraine while guarding against any escalation that would draw Nato directly into a war with Russia.

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace declared last week that he would like the job. But, as some governments push for a first female Nato Secretary-General, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen is also emerging as a serious contender.

Though a very public role, the contest is extremely opaque, played out mainly in consultations among leaders and diplomats. Those consultations continue until all Nato members agree they have reached a consensus.

Jamie Shea, a former senior Nato official who served with the alliance for 38 years, said leaders will be looking for a highly skilled politician, communicator and diplomat.

“Keeping the family together, keeping everybody on board constantly, being in touch with all of the allies to make sure that you’re addressing their concerns, is an important part of the job,” said Shea, now with the Chatham House think tank.

Many diplomats see Wallace as a long shot for the job, although he is widely respected across the alliance. The desire to pick a woman counts against him with some members.

Many would also prefer a former prime minister or president to ensure Nato’s boss has top-level political clout.



Banners displaying the Nato logo are placed at the entrance of new Nato headquarters during the move to the new building, in Brussels, Belgium. – **Reuters file photo**

WHOEVER TAKES THE REINS WILL DO SO AT A CRITICAL TIME, FACING THE TWIN CHALLENGES OF KEEPING ALLIES TOGETHER

Stoltenberg, 64, was prime minister of Norway.

And some, notably France, want someone from a European Union country, hoping for closer cooperation between Nato and the EU.

Frederiksen meets all of the above criteria. Although she says she is not a candidate, she has stopped short of saying she is not interested in the job. Nato diplomats say that behind the scenes she is being seriously considered.

Frederiksen’s name first surfaced publicly in a report by Norwegian newspaper VG last month and there was a flurry of media interest again this week when the White House announced she would visit US

President Joe Biden in early June.

“I’m not applying for any job postings,” she told reporters in Copenhagen on Wednesday, playing down speculation that the visit might amount to a job interview for the Nato role.

While the post traditionally goes to a European, any serious candidate needs buy-in from Washington, Nato’s dominant power. A source familiar with US thinking said the Biden administration does not yet have a favoured candidate and a “lively debate” among top aides was ongoing.

A State Department spokesperson said it was “too early in the process to speculate on who the United States will support”.

Social Democrat Frederiksen, 45, became Denmark’s youngest prime minister in 2019. She was praised for crisis management in the Covid-19 pandemic and won a second term last year.

She would have to give up her post as prime minister if she got the Nato job, which political commentators have said would bring her fragile government to the brink of collapse. And a campaign for the Nato post would not be plain sailing.

Her country falls well short of the Nato goal of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence. Denmark is at 1.38 per cent, although Frederiksen has pledged to speed up efforts to hit the target.

# Caught in the digital impacts

Digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any innovation in our history. Unlike the generations before, we have many choices today to make!

With the rise of the Internet of Things and mobile devices, our lives and habits have clearly changed. Everything is now connected to the Internet. The governments, businesses and individuals together are pouring in tonnes of money for digital transformation.

At the beginning of the second quarter of the current year, according to DataPortal, there was a total of 5.18 billion people around the world who were using the Internet, equaling 64.6 per cent of the world's total population. The latest data indicates that the world's connected population grew by close to 147 million users in the 12 months to April 2023.

Increases in global Internet access mean that the number of people who remain "unconnected" to the Internet has fallen to 2.85 billion, with the majority of these people living in Southern and Eastern Asia, and Africa.

The vast majority of the world's Internet users – 95 per cent – use mobile phones to go online at least some of the time, and mobile phones now account for more than 57 per cent of our online time, as well as close to 60 per cent of the world's web traffic.

This means digital technology has made our world more reachable, now more than ever. The impact is seen in many different areas of interaction.

While video calling and work-from-home options are becoming permanent options, data pooling and artificial intelligence are being used to track and diagnose issues in agriculture, health, and the environment, or to perform daily tasks



Samuel Kutty  
@samkuttyvp

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

WHILE DIGITAL TOOLS HELP US ENHANCE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF OUR LIFE, CONCERNS ARE MOUNTING ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL IMPACTS

such as navigating traffic or paying a bill.

For instance, in the health sector frontier technologies including artificial intelligence are helping to save lives, diagnose diseases and extend life expectancy.

In education, virtual learning environments and distance learning have opened up programmes to students who would otherwise be excluded.

Social media connects almost half of the entire global population. It enables people to make their voices heard and to talk to people across the world in real-time.

While digital tools help us enhance different aspects of our lives, concerns are also mounting about the personal and societal impacts of technology.

There are thousands of cases in which people are exposed to scams in online spaces such as social media platforms and online marketplaces costing hapless people billions every year.

Experts agree that some harm will arise in the future, especially to the vulnerable. There is anxiety that people's online activities may undermine truth, foment distrust, jeopardise individuals' well-being, kill privacy, make institutions less secure and open up larger social divisions.

Also, social media scams add to the level of stress, in some cases forcing many people to end their lives and negatively affecting workplaces and social settings. They can also reinforce prejudices and sow discord, by giving hate speech and misinformation a platform.

In the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres "such a divide could establish a digital Berlin Wall"! Still, all eyes are on new metrics in the digital world! The entire planet is going digital!

## ROYAL VICTORIAN ORDER



Britain's King Charles presents the Royal Victorian Order to members of the Royal Navy for their part in Queen Elizabeth II's funeral procession, on the Quadrangle at Windsor Castle, Britain, on Tuesday. – Reuters

# The US debt ceiling debacle is not over

The tentative deal that was just struck to raise the United States' debt ceiling won't make the problem go away.

Partisan standoffs over the federal debt limit have become a predictable feature of American political life. And while some blame an ill-conceived rule, that argument misses the point.

The real source of the problem is that politicians today have little incentive to compromise. In an environment of gerrymandered electoral districts and ideologically-siloed traditional and social media (amplified by bots, algorithms, and economic incentives), the instability will only worsen in the foreseeable future.

That could mean more frequent government shutdowns or more restrictions on central bank independence. With former US president Donald Trump very much in the mix to return to the White House after the 2024 election, who knows what else.

The idea that hitting the debt limit will force the US to immediately default on its bond obligations is a canard. The government takes in more than enough tax dollars to pay the interest on debt, and the debt ceiling creates no obstacles to rolling over maturing debt as it comes due.

Of course, the government would be constrained from spending above its income, because there would be no way to do that without issuing new debt. So, the Treasury would be pushed into hard choices. Since no one wants to touch Social Security or Medicare, it would become necessary to delay or scale back payments on other items, possibly leading to a partial government shutdown (which



Kenneth Rogoff

The writer is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics

THE LATEST LAST-MINUTE DEAL TO RAISE THE US DEBT LIMIT DOES NOT SOLVE THE UNDERLYING POLITICAL PROBLEM

would not be the first time).

Nothing would force the US Treasury to stop honouring existing US debt and thrust the global financial system into chaos. This could happen only if the stalemate went on for so long (months?) that political pressures simply exploded.

That is what typically happens in debt-distressed emerging markets, where outright default typically happens long before ability to pay is actually the constraint. Unlike emerging markets, of course, where debts are often denominated in foreign currency and the state's capacity to tax is sharply circumscribed, the US can issue more debt by waving a magic wand, though spending too much too fast would stoke inflation.

Some of the ideas that have been bandied about to circumvent the debt ceiling are very risky power grabs that could backfire. For example, invoking the Fourteenth Amendment risks being overturned by the Supreme Court. And, much sooner than that would happen, congressional Republicans could refuse to pass basic spending bills needed to keep the government operating. Minting a trillion dollar coin and depositing it at the Federal Reserve in order to circumvent Congress would put the central bank in an untenable position.

The debate has never been about debt; it is about power. If the Republicans sweep into power in 2024 and end up controlling the House, Senate and presidency, there is little question they will want to pass a large tax



The real source of the problem is that politicians today have little incentive to compromise.

cut, steepening the trajectory of debt. If Democrats take back the House, and keep the presidency and Senate, there is little question they will want to use debt finance to expand the footprint of government.

Conservatives think deficits caused by tax cuts don't matter because they incentivise work and entrepreneurship, thereby generating sufficient growth to repay debt later. Left-leaning economists argue that even without such incentive effects, growth is likely to outstrip interest payments most of the time, so the debt burden never becomes anything meaningful to worry about.

Both sides' idea that debt is always free as long as it is used the "right" way is stupefyingly naive. Real (inflation-adjusted) interest rates had fallen sharply after the

2008-09 financial crisis, stayed low throughout the ensuing decade, and fell sharply again during the pandemic. But now, forward-looking measures of real interest rates, such as ten-year inflation-indexed government bonds, are far higher today across the advanced economies than they were during the pandemic years. Moreover, the world has become more unstable, and it is extremely likely that many Western countries will need to raise spending on defence, placing further strains on budgets.

To hear unabashedly Democratic commentators tell it, the Republicans are 100 per cent to blame for the recent stalemate. That is true. It is also true that President Joe Biden campaigned as a centrist, then used two years with razor-thin legislative majorities to

pass generational changes in policy that promise to affect the country for years. The Republicans want to revisit some of these changes.

Democrats object that the Republicans are trying to prevent the government from borrowing to cover spending that Congress has already approved. That is nonsense; the government can always revise its long-term spending plans. But an effective government should be able to find ways to reach long-term spending agreements that are not subject to constant re-evaluation.

The latest last-minute deal to raise the US debt ceiling does not do that. On the contrary, with the country on track for a Biden-Trump rematch next year — a contest that Trump just might win — any truce is likely to be short-lived.

# sport

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MEDVEDEV OUT; RYBAKINA, GAUFF AND ZVEREV ADVANCE

## ROLAND GARROS GOES WILD

**PARIS:** World number two Daniil Medvedev was knocked out of the French Open in the first round, losing in five sets to 172nd-ranked Thiago Seyboth Wild of Brazil as Alexander Zverev made a winning return to Roland Garros on Tuesday.

Seyboth Wild, who came through the qualifiers and had never previously won a Grand Slam match, triumphed 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

It was Medvedev's fifth loss in the opening round at Roland Garros in seven appearances.

"I have watched Daniil play in my junior years. It's a dream come true to beat these kinds of players on this court," said the 23-year-old Brazilian who unleashed 69 winners past the Russian.

"I just wanted to get my angles right, get to the net as much as possible and use my forehand as much as possible against his — I guess it worked pretty well."

He added: "I was cramping in the second set and couldn't really serve the way I wanted to but I tried to play my best tennis. I'm really happy with the way I played."

Seyboth Wild, without a win on the main tour since February 2022, had squandered two set points which would have given him a two-sets lead.

Medvedev made him pay, levelling the tie and then claiming a double break in the third set. But the Brazilian hit back, a double break of his own in the fourth set levelling the clash as a fractious Medvedev bickered with the crowd.

In the final set, Seyboth Wild twice saw breaks retrieved by the Russian before he finally backed up a third break with a hold for 5-3.

He held his nerve to clinch the four-hour 15-minute match courtesy of two giant forehands and will face either Guido Pella or Quentin Halys for a place in the last 32.

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina brushed off a slow start to dispatch Czech teenager Brenda Fruhvirtova in straight sets and book a place in round two.

The Kazakh world number four, among the three main favourites for the title alongside Iga Swiatek and Aryna Sabalenka, beat the talented 16-year-old 6-4, 6-2.

"Didn't start that well, took me a while to figure out how to play this... But I'm very happy," said Rybakina.

She will face another Czech teen, Linda Noskova, in the next round.

### FIVE-HOUR EPIC

Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori saved five match points to knock out Serb 31st seed Miomir Kecmanovic in a five-hour 10-minute French Open epic.

Vavassori hit a colossal 106 winners in his 5-7, 2-6, 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (11/9) first round win.

Ranked 148 in the world, the 28-year-old from Turin is making his Roland Garros debut this year.

He goes on to face Argentinian qualifier Genaro Olivieri, ranked 231, who defeated France's Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 4-6, 7-5, 6-1.

Meanwhile, last year's runner-up Coco Gauff recovered from losing the first set to beat Spain's Rebeka Masarova and reach the second round.

The American sixth seed battled to a 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 success and will take on either Dutch qualifier Arantxa Rus or Austria's Julia Grabher next. "Rebeka played a great match but I'm pleased I managed to turn it around," said Gauff. "I know that I'm confident on the surface and these conditions."

Gauff, who lost to Iga Swiatek in last year's final, was broken early in the match and then saw eight break points come and go as Masarova held on to take the first set.

But the 19-year-old Gauff raced through the second and then wasted little time in wrapping up the match as she broke serve three times in the decider.

### WINNING RETURN

Germany's Zverev made a winning return to Roland Garros with a straight-set win over Lloyd Harris in the first round, 12 months since suffering a serious ankle injury in the semifinals.

The German had to retire injured from a dramatic last-four clash with Rafael Nadal last season after twisting his ankle and did not play again in 2022. The former US Open finalist had enough to beat South African Harris 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/0), 6-1. "It's nice to be back. I've marked this day in bold on my calendar since last year," Zverev said.

In women's section, World No 7 Ons Jabeur made a near-flawless start to her French Open campaign as she brushed aside unseeded Italian Lucia Bronzetti 6-4, 6-1 to reach round two, while 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva grabbed her first Grand Slam main draw win. — AFP

Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild returns a shot to Russia's Daniil Medvedev at the French Open. — AFP

### FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

#### Men (first round)

Genaro Olivieri (ARG) bt Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard (FRA) 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 4-6, 7-5, 6-1; Tommy Paul (USA x16) bt Dominic Stricker (SUI) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; Nicolas Jarry (CHI) bt Hugo Dellien (BOL) 6-4, 6-4, 6-2; Casper Ruud (NOR x4) bt Elias Ymer (SWE) 6-4, 6-3, 6-2; Alexander Zverev (GER x22) bt Lloyd Harris (RSA) 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/0), 6-1; Alex Molcan (SVK) bt Hugo Gaston (FRA) 6-1, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4; Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN x27) bt JJ Wolf (USA) 1-6, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3; Max Purcell (AUS) bt Jordan Thompson (AUS) 7-5, 1-6, 6-4, 6-4

#### Women (first round)

Rebecca Peterson (SWE) bt Fiona Ferro (FRA) 6-2, 6-0; Wang Xinyu (CHN) bt Marie Bouzkova (CZE x31) 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Diane Parry (FRA) bt Anhelina Kalinina (UKR x25) 6-2, 6-3; Mirra Andreeva bt Alison Riske (USA) 6-2, 6-1; Julia Grabher (AUT) bt Arantxa Rus (NED) 6-2, 6-3; Coco Gauff (USA x6) bt Rebeka Masarova (ESP) 3-6, 6-1, 6-2; Linda Noskova (CZE) bt Danka Kovinic (MNE) 6-3, 2-1 - retired; Olga Danilovic (SRB) bt Kateryna Baindl (UKR) 6-3, 6-2; Oceane Dodin (FRA) bt Selena Janicijevic (FRA) 0-6, 6-2, 6-1; Ons Jabeur (TUN x7) bt Lucia Bronzetti (ITA) 6-4, 6-1

# Oman to take on USA on Sept 12



ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic affirmed that the Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 will be an excellent event to gear up for the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals and the qualifiers for Asian teams on road to the Fifa World Cup 2026 as well as the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

“There will be a strong friendly which is confirmed against USA on September 12 in an away match. The team will have a short camp in the USA and there are talks ongoing to set up another preparatory game against Mexico or Canada on September 9 and this is to be confirmed yet. Playing against top international teams such as the USA will be a great opportunity for the national team players to adapt with top teams style,” Ivankovic told



*Oman Daily Observer* during the first training session of the team.

Red Warriors reported back to the training sessions on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex after their last presence in the holy month of Ramadhan. The camp featured a friendly match against Lebanon. The preparatory fixture ended in favour of Oman 2-0 and both goals were scored by striker Essam al Subhi.

The Croatian coach explained the preparatory long term plans of Red Warriors as he unveiled the programme. “The underway domestic camp in Muscat which

started on Monday is part of the team’s gearing up for Cafa Nations Cup 2023. Later, the players will be back to their clubs to gear up for the 2023-2024 league start in August. After a few weeks of the top domestic league, the national team will be back to their local and external camps in September. In October, the team members will resume their duty at the domestic clubs. In the following month, the qualifiers matches of Fifa World Cup 2026 as well as the AFC Asian Cup 2027 will begin while in December the team will be in a comprehensive programme ahead of the start of AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023,” he added.

Responding to an inquiry on the comeback of Mohsin al Ghassani, the 69-year-old said: “The Seeb striker performed very well in this season and he ended the league with clinching the top-scorer award. He deserves a place

in the national team. He is a young player and can deliver more in the field. Muscat club’s goalkeeper Mazin Saleh joined the camp for a purpose of learning and adapting with the training environment of the national team. He was one of the potential candidates in the Olympic team,” he concluded.

Oman were drawn in Group F along with Asian favourites Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals. The Asian championship will be hosted in Doha during January 12 to February 10, 2024. The national team will vie the hosts Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in Group A in the first edition of the Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 while Iran, Kyrgyzstan (hosts) and Afghanistan teams comprised Group B. The event is scheduled in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan during June 10 to 20.

# Al Nahda bow out with goalless draw against Al Ahly Tripoli

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Al Nahda Club bid farewell to the King Salman Club Championship after a goalless tie against Al Ahly Tripoli of Libya in the second leg of the second preliminary round of the competition.

The match took place at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex Stadium, showcasing an intense battle between the two teams.

Having lost the first leg with a score of 4-2 at the Benina Martyrs Stadium in Benghazi, Al Nahda faced an uphill challenge to qualify for the subsequent rounds of the tournament.

Ultimately, the Libyan club, Al Ahly Tripoli, emerged victorious and secured their place in the next stages of the competition.

Al Ahly Tripoli now joins the group comprising Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal, Qatar’s Al Sadd and Moroccan Wydad and the forthcoming matches of this group will be held in Saudi Arabia.

The encounter between Al Nahda and Al Ahly Tripoli began on a strong note, with both teams



launching continuous attacks in pursuit of scoring opportunities. Al Nahda encountered difficulties in advancing towards Al Ahly Tripoli’s goal, with players losing focus and a series of erroneous passes impeding their progress. Consequently, they were unable to

breach Al Ahly Tripoli’s defence, while the relentless offensive pressure from the Libyan club posed a constant challenge for Al Nahda goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini and his defence. Despite their efforts, Al Nahda’s attempts to find the net through

several attacks led by Omar al Maliki were thwarted by the solid defences of Al Ahly Tripoli.

Entering the second half, Al Nahda displayed exceptional control over the match proceedings.

Their attackers created numerous perilous opportunities against Al Ahly Tripoli. However, luck was not on their side, and their endeavours failed to materialise into goals, resulting in a goalless draw between the two teams.

Al Nahda’s quest to overcome the Omani hurdle in the Arab Club Championship remained unfulfilled.

The participation of Omani clubs in this tournament over the past 35 years has not yielded positive outcomes, with the championship consistently eluding them in the preliminary rounds.

A noteworthy exception to this historical narrative is Fanja, who achieved fourth place in the sixth edition of the championship held in the UAE in 1988.

They also won the Gulf Clubs Championship in 1989.

## Oman Club to take part in Asian handball championship in Iran



WALEED AL JAHWARI  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Oman Club will be the Sultanate of Oman representatives in the 25th Asian Men’s Club League Handball Championship that will be staged in Isfahan, Islamic Republic of Iran, from June 1 to 11.

Oman Club are placed in Group A of the championship. The draw for the event was staged at the Asian Handball Federation headquarters at South Surrah, Kuwait on April 6. The eleven participating teams were divided into two groups, as follows:

Group A: Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan SC (Iran), India Club (India), Oman Club (Oman), Kazma SC (Kuwait), Al Rayyan Club (Qatar)

Group B: Al Kuwait Club (Kuwait), Junior Club (China), Tashkent Club

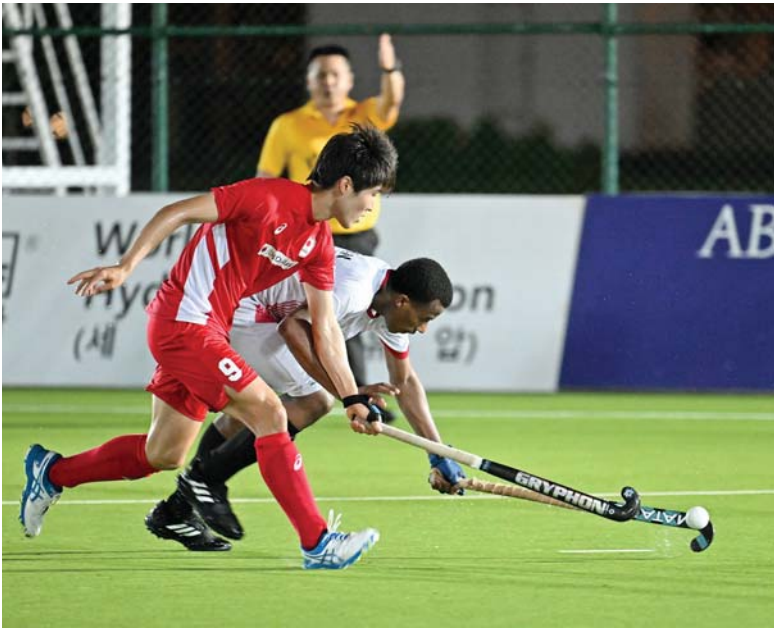
(Uzbekistan), Al Duhail Club (Qatar), Shahid Shamel Kazeroon Club (Iran), Al Najma Club (Bahrain).

Younis bin Hamid al Azzan, the club’s secretary, heads the Oman delegation, and Tunisia’s Mongi Boughtas leads the team. The Oman Club will have Tunisian goalkeeper Marouan Lasoussi to safeguard their nets.

Kuwait Club were crowned the 2022 champions in Hyderabad, India, when they beat Najma club-Bahrain 28-23 in the final match.

The Oman Club team will begin the competition on June 2, with India Club. On June 3, they will meet Kazma club – Kuwait and the Omani club’s third match will be with Iran’s Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan SC on June 5.

The top four teams will qualify to the semifinals, and then top two will play in the final match.



## Japan thrash Oman in classification match

ANUROOP  
ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Heavyweights Japan thrashed Oman 8-0 in the 5th-8th classification match at the Junior Asia Cup hockey championship in Salalah on Tuesday.

Hosts Oman were coming after a gutsy 1-0 defeat against Pool B toppers and semifinalists Malaysia overnight.

The only goal of the match was scored by Shahmie Irfan Suhaimi in the 48th minute of play after missing many chances in front of the Oman goalkeeper Ahmad al Farsi.

Ahmad Al Farsi deservedly won the player of the match award after several saves, which kept onrushing Malaysian players at bay.

Malaysia booked a semifinal against Pool A second-placed Pakistan after their fourth win in Pool B.

Malaysia ended toppers of the group with 12 points followed

Hosts Oman were coming after a gutsy 1-0 defeat against Pool B toppers and semifinalists Malaysia overnight

by South Korea on nine points. South Korea will meet Pool A toppers India in the last-four clash.

Both the semifinals will be held on Wednesday.

At the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex pitch on Tuesday, Oman were off-colour against an all-out attacking Japan in the 5-8th place match.

For Japan, Kumpei Yasuda scored three goals (19, 34, 58th minutes).

Ryoga Yamasaki (21), Hiro Saito (25), Ikumi Saeki (27-pc), Tsubasa Tanaka (44) and Yuto Higuchi (44) were also on target to complete the 8-0 win against the hosts.



# ‘Whistle Podu’



**AHMEDABAD, India:** Indian cricket superstar MS Dhoni said he will look to return for the next IPL season after he led Chennai Super Kings to a record-equalling fifth title over Gujarat Titans in what many believed to be his last match.

Ravindra Jadeja hit a six and four off the final two balls as Chennai chased down their revised target of 171 in 15 overs with five wickets to spare in a rain-hit final which went past 1.30 am local time on Tuesday on a reserve day in Ahmedabad following a washout on Sunday.

New Zealand’s Devon Conway led the chase with his 25-ball 47 before cameos from Ajinkya Rahane (27) and Shivam Dube, who hit an unbeaten 32, set the stage for Jadeja’s heroics.

Needing 13 off the final over, Mohit

Sharma bowled four good balls before Jadeja hit the winning runs to trigger wild celebrations at the world’s biggest cricket stadium.

“This is the best time to announce my retirement. But the amount of love I have received all over. The easy thing would be to walk away from here, but the harder thing would be working hard for nine months and try to play another IPL,” said the 41-year-old Dhoni.

“It would be a gift from me, won’t be easy on the body. You do get emotional, the first game at CSK everyone was chanting my name. My eyes were full of water, I needed to take some time off in the dugout.”

Chennai won the title for the fifth time to go level with Mumbai Indians.

Dhoni kept attracting huge crowds across venues this season and over 80,000 fans cheered the veteran, who had recently said he would take a call on his future later this year, in the final.

Playing his 250th IPL match, Dhoni got out for a first-ball duck as he went back to a stunned silence, but he had the last laugh in his 10th appearance in the final as Chennai captain.

**‘WIN TOGETHER, LOSE TOGETHER’**

Ambati Rayudu also hit a key 19 off eight balls in his last match after he announced his retirement ahead of the final.

Rain forced players off the ground when Chennai were four without loss after three balls of their innings.

The downpour lasted for about 15

minutes but covers came off from one of the pitches which got damp and the groundstaff worked for over two hours to get the field ready for play.

Sai Sudharsan smashed 96 off 47 balls to guide Gujarat, a team which won the crown in their debut season last year in the T20 competition and topped the table in this edition, to 214-4.

“I think we tick a lot of boxes as a team,” said captain Hardik Pandya.

“We play with a lot of heart, really proud of the way we kept fighting. We have a motto - we win together, we lose together.”

In-form Gujarat opener Shubman Gill hit a 20-ball 39 and was named most valuable player, earning the orange cap as the leading batsman with 890 runs.

Gujarat pace spearhead Mohammed Shami got the purple cap as the leading bowler for his 28 wickets with teammates Sharma and Afghanistan’s Rashid Khan one behind on 27 each.

Gill, fresh from his third century this season, was dropped on three when Deepak Chahar spilled an easy catch off fast bowler Tushar Deshpande.

The opener smashed Deshpande for three straight boundaries in the next over and kept up the attack with regular hits to the fence before Dhoni’s lightning quick glove work sent back the batsman, stumped off Jadeja.

Fellow opener Wriddhiman Saha made 54 and put on 64 runs with Sudharsan, who took charge after his partner’s departure. — AFP

## LIST OF IPL WINNERS

THE INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE T20 TOURNAMENT HAS GROWN INTO THE WORLD’S RICHEST CRICKET COMPETITION SINCE IT BEGAN IN 2008. THE WINNERS FROM THE FIRST EDITION TO THE CURRENT SEASON.

|      |                                                        |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 2008 | RAJASTHAN ROYALS (SKIPPER SHANE WARNE)                 |
| 2009 | DECCAN CHARGERS (NOW DEFUNCT - SKIPPER ADAM GILCHRIST) |
| 2010 | CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (SKIPPER MS DHONI)                 |
| 2011 | CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (SKIPPER MS DHONI)                 |
| 2012 | KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS (SKIPPER GAUTAM GAMBHIR)         |
| 2013 | MUMBAI INDIANS (SKIPPER ROHIT SHARMA)                  |
| 2014 | KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS (SKIPPER GAUTAM GAMBHIR)         |
| 2015 | MUMBAI INDIANS (SKIPPER ROHIT SHARMA)                  |

|      |                                            |
|------|--------------------------------------------|
| 2016 | SUNRISERS HYDERABAD (SKIPPER DAVID WARNER) |
| 2017 | MUMBAI INDIANS (SKIPPER ROHIT SHARMA)      |
| 2018 | CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (SKIPPER MS DHONI)     |
| 2019 | MUMBAI INDIANS (SKIPPER ROHIT SHARMA)      |
| 2020 | MUMBAI INDIANS (SKIPPER ROHIT SHARMA)      |
| 2021 | CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (SKIPPER MS DHONI)     |
| 2022 | GUJARAT TITANS (SKIPPER HARDIK PANDYA)     |
| 2023 | CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (SKIPPER MS DHONI)     |

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## Phase A Round 1 green hydrogen project agreements to be signed tomorrow

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

As part of Oman’s continuous efforts to be a worldwide hub for the production of green hydrogen, Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), a subsidiary of Energy Development Oman (EDO), will sign the first green hydrogen project agreements in Oman on Thursday, June 1, 2023.

These agreements fall within the Phase A Round 1 auction process that was kicked off last November. Building upon the progress achieved since the announcement of the Oman Green Hydrogen Strategy in October 2022, as well as the subsequent announcement of the first public auction bidding process, the issuance of Royal Decree 10/2023, and the signing of Commercial Terms with six legacy

Initiatives earlier this year, Hydrom will now proceed to sign its first project-related agreements, marking the commencement of the development stage for these projects.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Hydrom, will sign these agreements with the developers in a special event at Grand Millennium Muscat.

The occasion will also witness the signing of a Head-Usufruct Agreement between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and Hydrom, as well as other Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between various prominent entities related to the green economy.

The signing of these agreements is in line with Oman’s constant efforts to stimulate the growth of its hydrogen sector by strategically



creating attractive investment opportunities in this promising sector.

These efforts are also aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to create a bright future for renewable and sustainable energy to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

To lead the execution of Oman’s ambitious green hydrogen strategy in accordance with Royal directives, the Government established Hydrogen Oman SPC (Hydrom), a fully owned independent subsidiary of Energy Development Oman

SAOC. Regulated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM), Hydrom is the orchestrator and overall master planner of Oman’s green hydrogen sector.

Its mandate includes the delineation of government-owned land areas, the structuring of associated large-scale green hydrogen projects, managing the process for their allocation to developers, as well as facilitating the development of common infrastructure and connected ecosystem industries and hubs.

## HSBC Bank Oman and Sohar International Bank announce merger



QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

HSBC Bank Oman SAOG and Sohar International Bank SAOG have officially announced their plan to merge, following the approval of both banks’ Boards of Directors.

The proposed merger, subject to regulatory and shareholder approval, aims to establish a more robust and competitive banking institution in Oman.

Anticipated to be a transformative move, the merger will bring together the strengths of HSBC Oman and Sohar International, resulting in an expanded asset base, a wider array of products and services, and an extensive network of branches and ATMs.

The unified bank will be better equipped to meet the diverse needs of its customers and contribute to the growth of the Omani economy.

According to the terms outlined in the merger agreement, all assets and liabilities of HSBC Oman will be transferred to Sohar International.

As part of the transaction, HSBC Oman shareholders will be granted shares in Sohar International based on a determined ratio, with specifics to be disclosed at a later date.

The merger is expected to be finalised in the second half of 2023.

During the transition period, both HSBC Oman and Sohar International will continue their operations independently, ensuring uninterrupted services for their respective customers.

Customers of HSBC Oman and Sohar International have been assured both banks will maintain their regular operations and services until the merger process is completed.

Once the merger is finalised, customers will benefit from an expanded range of offerings provided by the unified bank.

Additionally, they will gain access to a larger asset base and a wider network of branches and ATMs, enhancing convenience and service accessibility.

HSBC Oman shareholders will have the opportunity to vote on the merger during an upcoming extraordinary general meeting (EGM). Likewise, Sohar International shareholders will participate in their own EGM to cast their votes.

Detailed information concerning the EGMs will be announced separately in adherence to applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

## Indian cement companies keen on buying petcoke from Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, MAY 31

Indian cement companies are reportedly showing interest in buying Omani petroleum coke, as they look to secure supplies of the fuel amid rising prices and a shortage of domestic production.

Oman is a major producer of petcoke, which is used as a fuel in the cement industry. Indian cement companies are among the world’s largest buyers of petcoke, and the shortage has forced them to look abroad for supplies.

Petcoke coke is a solid fuel made from coal, petroleum, or other carbon-based materials, and has a higher calorific value than coal. It is also considered



a cleaner fuel due to its lower emission of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide.

In a recent report by Argus, Indian cement makers are looking to expand petroleum coke use in their kilns through imports in order to benefit from competitive prices compared

with thermal coal.

The Indian cement industry raised petcoke imports by more than 72 per cent during Q1 2023 to 3.21 million tonnes, according to GAC Shipping data.

“Indian cement makers may have an additional supply

source by end of this year when Oman is expected to ship the first coke cargo from its upcoming 230,000 b/d Duqm refinery,” the report added.

Oman is a significant exporter of petcoke in the Middle East and has reportedly been approached by several Indian cement companies for the purchase of petcoke. The potential export of petcoke to India could further strengthen the trading relationship between Oman and India and provide new opportunities for Omani businesses.

In 2021, the Sultanate of Oman exported \$196 million worth of petroleum coke, making it the 30th largest exporter of petroleum coke in the world.

### TADOOM Signs Strategic Agreements at COMEX 2023 for The Development of Smart Cities

Tadoom, an Omani company at the forefront of providing smart city solutions in Oman, signed at COMEX 2023 cooperation agreements with IoT solution providers to provide Oman with innovative smart city solutions, including smart building management, industrial IoT, asset tracking, healthcare monitoring, smart lighting and energy efficiency, smart waste management and smart city platforms.

The agreements come at a tipping point in the growth of Tadoom, as the company signed a contract with Omantel and NEC for the expansion of a LoRaWan network, which will allow expediting a state-of-the-art IoT network with a capacity of 1m+ sensors all over the Sultanate, contributing to achieve the main goals of Oman Vision 2040.



According to Eng. Abdullah Al-Badi, the CEO of Tadoom: “We are proud of this achievement, and we cherish this trust. Our agreement with Omantel will be a qualitative leap in the field of IoT networks in the Sultanate of Oman. Our agreements with global partners are the way to globalization in the field of Internet of Things, and the company’s endeavor to present a role model to be imitated in accelerating technology development in Oman.”

Tadoom is a pioneer in developing public-private partnerships and implementing projects on a build-operate-transfer model in the field of smart cities in Oman. Relying on its great experience operating a portfolio of c. 400,000 smart water meters and a national LoRaWan network, Tadoom empowers the Sultanate’s economy by offering a robust digital infrastructure for implementing smart solutions with global expertise in cutting-edge technologies like IoT, AI, and big data.

KR announces launch of new inverter air conditioners from General



MUSCAT: As a progressive company committed to staying relevant to the evolving market needs, Khimji Ramdas Air Conditioning and Appliances business recently announced the launch of General's Inverter Air Conditioners during a gala event held at Sheraton Oman Hotel.

The exclusive distributor of General air conditioners in Oman, KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business has played a pivotal role in helping the brand establish a strong foothold in the local market.

The new environment-friendly air conditioner places innovation at its core and has been engineered to deliver optimal performance even when temperatures are soaring.

Incorporating additional heat exchangers, it also enhances cooling whilst ensuring energy efficiency.

KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business is strongly committed to sustainability of the nation and continuously supports its efforts to transition to a green, circular economy. Working in tandem, General also mirrors these values and the new inverter air conditioners are a testament to the same.

Hritik Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas said, "Khimji Ramdas Air Conditioning Division and Fujitsu General have enjoyed a long-standing partnership nearing five decades. Today, General is a household name and has become synonymous with reliability and superior performance, especially in challenging weather conditions.

As a brand, General has led with innovation, embracing the most modern technologies and versatile designs. It has, therefore, been revered as the most trusted air-conditioner brand in the Sultanate of Oman."

Bank Muscat and Metlife introduce comprehensive critical illness insurance plans

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has joined forces with MetLife to introduce an insurance solution benefit giving you financial peace of mind in case you are diagnosed with a serious illness.

Critical Illness and Critical Care plans aim to protect customers and their families by providing them with immediate financial relief should anything unexpected happen.

Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration, stating, "Bank Muscat is delighted to offer the Critical Care and Critical Illness Insurance plans in partnership with MetLife, a global leader in providing financial and wellness protection to millions of



customers globally.

The bank's partnership with MetLife highlights our commitment to delivering innovative and value-added insurance solutions to our customers and will help in advancing the insurance market in Oman. We thank all our customers for their strong

confidence in Bank Muscat and promise to continue launching new and globally innovative solutions for their benefit."

Raed Dawood, Country Manager at MetLife Oman, commented, "We are excited to partner with Bank Muscat in bringing innovative insurance solutions to the people living in

Oman. The Critical Illness and Critical Care plans are designed to expand coverage options, providing peace of mind during challenging health events. This partnership aligns with our mission to deliver accessible and affordable health and financial protection services.

These plans directly address real challenges faced by many, and we anticipate they will make a significant positive impact." The Critical Illness plan provides a lump sum to cover direct treatment costs for 11 critical illnesses upon diagnosis, ensuring that customers are not financially impacted in other areas of their lives.

In addition, the Critical Illness plan offers several competitive benefits, including a second medical opinion service and five coverage options ranging from RO 2,500 to RO 20,000, with premiums starting as low as RO

1.050 per month.

The Critical Care plan offers financial support as a lump sum of up to RO 40,000 through four different payment options immediately upon diagnosis of any of 32 common critical illnesses. No prior medical examination is required, nor must medical bills

be submitted to make a claim. Omani nationals and residents aged between 18 and 60 holding valid resident visas are eligible for the Critical Illness plan, and those between 18 and 59 years are eligible for the Critical Care plan; all plans come with a 30-day free look period.

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat is committed to providing diverse banking insurance options, including life, car, property, health insurance, protection during travel, and coverage for chronic diseases.

Bank Nizwa launches new branch in Al Mawaleh

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, proudly inaugurated its latest branch in Mawaleh, becoming the first bank in the country to introduce a hybrid branch that combines traditional banking services with cutting-edge digital services.

Held under the auspices of Hilal bin Hamed al Sarmi, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura for the Wilayat of Al Seeb and the presence of Khaled al Kayed the Chief Executive Officer and members of the executive management of Bank Nizwa.

"As we officially inaugurate our branch in Mawaleh, we are proud to expand our network and portfolio, whilst remaining committed to digitalisation and innovation. The Mawaleh branch is a prime example of our dedication to providing our customers with a seamless and secure banking experience.

Our goal with this branch was to create a space where our customers can easily manage their finances on their own terms. At Bank Nizwa, we are always exploring new ways to make banking more accessible as well as convenient for our customers and the Mawaleh branch is a testament to our ongoing



commitment to this goal," said Khaled.

The Mawaleh branch is strategically located in the heart of Muscat's bustling business district, surrounded by residential areas, shopping malls and other key commercial establishments. Its prime location makes it easily accessible for customers who are looking for a one-stop shop for their banking needs.

The branch is equipped with ramps for easy access, wide doorways to accommodate wheelchair users and designated parking spaces close to the entrance. Bank Nizwa takes pride in its commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

Oman United Insurance wins business excellence award

MUSCAT: Garnering yet another accolade for its industry-leading services, Oman United Insurance Co SAOG (OUIIC) has scooped the prestigious Business Excellence Award at the OER Business Summit recently held at Sheraton Oman Hotel.

Publicly-traded OUIIC, which is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, received the coveted award for 'Exemplary Customer Service and Claim Settlement' in recognition of its track record in building long-lasting customer relationships and swiftly processing insurance claims.

The announcement came at the 14th edition of the OER Business Summit, a signature annual event that celebrates business resilience and entrepreneurial ingenuity in Oman's corporate sector. Eng Bader bin Salim bin Marhoon al Maamari, Secretary-General, Oman Tender Board was the chief guest at the Summit. In attendance were luminaries from Oman's business community and



other leading personalities.

Yahya bin Khamis bin Muftah al Kharousi, General Manager – Claims, proudly received the award on behalf of OUIIC. In conferring the award on OUIIC, the jury citation read, "The company offers best in class customer service and prides itself on its quick, seamless and convenient claims settlement process. It strives to build long lasting relationships with its customers by satisfying their evolving needs and attempts to meet them by developing and creating new products."

Nassir bin Salim al Busaidy, Chief Management Executive – OUIIC, credited the staff's

professional ethos and passion for success in clinching the award in the company's honour.

"We owe this award to our loyal customers and our staff who made this accolade possible. It will collectively inspire us to strive more to better the standard of services towards our customers."

Ranked among Oman's leading insurers, OUIIC is one of Oman's oldest local insurers and takes pride in its extensive range of diversified products offerings, encompassing insurance segments such as Motor, Travel, Life, Medical, Home, Cyber and Personal, among others.

2023 GWM POER wows motoring enthusiasts in Oman

MUSCAT: A pick-up truck that combines the luxurious feel of an SUV, the offroad capabilities of a workhorse and cutting-edge automotive technologies, is wowing motoring enthusiasts in the Sultanate of Oman, and indeed the wider Middle East region, with its standout features.

POER (pronounced as 'POWER') is the latest offering from Great Wall Motor (GWM), a China based global intelligent technology company that produces an increasingly popular line-up of SUVs, sedans, pickups and new energy vehicles.

Making its debut in Oman is the all-new 2023 edition of POER as a new generation pickup

specially designed and crafted for a demographic that identifies with a brand that is equal parts performance and style.

As the product of GWM's world-class technology and superior automotive components from international companies, the POER is a truly versatile vehicle that has what it takes to handle the most challenging jobs and difficult terrain.

No ordinary pickup truck, the 2023 POER features a high-strength cage-type vehicle body with door impact beam and a double front impact absorption structure that afford armour-like protection.

Under the hood is a powerful



2.0L turbocharged petrol engine mated to the smooth ZF 8-speed automatic transmission with

Torque-on-Demand (TOD) all-wheel-drive. An intelligent 2WD/4WD

switch enables superior vehicle performance and even better anti-skidding capability. In keeping with its multifaceted persona, the POER comes with a cabin that is as spacious, equipped and cozy as an SUV.

Passengers enjoy almost the same motoring experience in an offroad setting as they would shopping or commuting within the city. This feature represents the hallmark of the POER's distinctive offering as a pickup truck that doubles as a lifestyle vehicle.

Underpinning the POER's laudable performance is a combination of smart automotive technologies and state-of-the-art safety system, including the latest

Bosch Generation 9.3 ESP system, emergency brake assist (HBA), traction control system (TCS), hill-start assist control (HAC), reversing camera, reversing radar, curbside visibility, and tyre pressure monitoring.

OTE Group is the exclusive dealer for the diverse product line-up of vehicles from Great Wall Motor, including the POER range of pickup trucks, in the Sultanate of Oman.

Backed by a nationwide service network, OTE Group offers excellent sales and after-sales service support on par with global standards. For more information, please contact 800-50004.

# Oman's oil production exceeds 17 billion cubic metres

**MUSCAT:** The exports of oil in the Sultanate of Oman till the end of April 2023 stood at RO 101, 548.4 million based on an average oil price of \$81.7. Oil exports constituted 79.5% of total oil production which stood at 127,768 million barrels, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The total production of crude oil increased by 1.7% to reach 100,547.9 million barrels. Condensates production also went up by 5% to reach 27,220.1 million.

Meanwhile, daily production



of oil reached 1,064,700 barrels by the end of April 2023.

China came on top of the list in terms of countries that imported oil from Oman, reaching 93,100,700 barrels. It was followed by Japan with 3,781,600 barrels and India with 2,215,300 barrels. Imports from other countries stood at 2,450,800 barrels.

Furthermore, gas production (including imports) in Oman registered a growth of 6.5% till the end of April 2023 to stand at 17,515.1 million cubic metres compared to 16,441.5 million cubic metres during the corresponding period in 2022.

Industrial projects took the lion's share of gas usage in Oman (61.8%) till the end of April 2023.

The consumption of gas for industrial projects stood at 10,825.4 million cubic metres.

Consumption of gas for various uses stood as the following: 4,453.4 million cubic metres for oil fields, 2,147 million cubic metres for power plants and 89.2 million cubic metres for industrial areas.

Production of Non-associated gas (including imports) stood at 14,032.5 million cubic metres.

Meanwhile, production of associated gas reached 3,482.6 million cubic metres. — ONA

## Hotels, restaurants and cafes exhibition kicks off



**HIBBA AL KINDI**  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The hotels, restaurants and cafes exhibition (HORECA) kicked off today under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

The two-day industry event, organised by Oman-based Al Nimr Expo and Lebanon-based Hospitality Services, aims to showcase the latest trends within the hospitality sector.

Speaking to the *Observer*, co-founder and managing director of Hospitality Services, Joumana Dammous-Salamé, explained the concept behind the event.

"The idea is for people to network to discover the latest technology, latest services, and the latest equipment available to plan for the future of their businesses and for the industry."

The event includes a vendor exhibition, multiple cooking competitions and various workshops.

THE IDEA IS FOR PEOPLE TO NETWORK TO DISCOVER THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, LATEST SERVICES, AND THE LATEST EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THEIR BUSINESSES AND FOR THE INDUSTRY.

"This year, more than a hundred exhibitors are participating, and more than 200 participants are participating in competitions. We have a line of [approximately] 20 guests, experts, celebrity judges, chefs coming locally and from the region," shared Dammous-Salamé.

When asked about the major trends within the industry, Dammous-Salamé shared that there's a shift towards wellness and sustainability.

In 2021, the tourism sector contributed 2.4 per cent to the country's GDP according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Oman plans to increase the sector's contribution to the GDP to 5 per cent by 2030, and to 10 per cent by 2040.

## Pacts signed for extracting potash, lithium in Oman

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Energy and Minerals yesterday signed three agreements in the mining sector for exploring potash and lithium ore in Al Dhahirah and Al Wusta governorates.

These agreements are in pursuit of a new methodology for the development of the mining sector, notably through the preparation of a concession agreement that covers legal, technical and financial instruments to be agreed by the Ministry and investors.

The pact will spearhead the



management of mineral ores' extraction from the specific

concession areas.

The agreements were signed

by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and the representatives of the companies concerned as follows: Mohammed bin Ali al Barwani, Chairman of Mawarid Potash Mining Company (for Concession Area No. 53-B), Mohit Khimji, CEO of Tasnim Projects Company (for Concession Area No. 53 - C) and Al Zubair bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Ara Natural Resources Company (for Concession Area No. 51 - C).

— ONA

## OPAZ workshop highlights competitive advantages of SEZs, free zones

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), represented by the investment development sector, organised a workshop highlighting the existing investments in different sectors and the competitive advantages of the special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities that are affiliated with OPAZ.

The workshop attracted a group of commercial affairs employees in the zones. The 2-day workshop was held to familiarise employees and participants of the key investment projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), Sohar Free Zone, Salalah Free Zone,



Al Mazunah Free Zone and the industrial cities, operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn".

The workshop also aimed at exchanging expertise and knowledge between OPAZ employees and other zones. Moreover, the workshop touched on the procedures related to regulating the investment

environment and managing investment opportunities, as well as the possibility of reforming the procedures for land leasing service and its digital transformation plan as the land selection e-service, implemented in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Furthermore, the workshop included discussion sessions to develop a joint business plan

aimed at promoting and ensuring integration between the zones affiliated with OPAZ. T

his serves providing a flexible and attractive work environment for employees of commercial affairs and specialised departments in the different zones. Accordingly, it will be contributing to achieving the target objectives of the plans and initiatives developed to improve the business environment and services provided to investors.

It is worth noting that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is executing a number of initiatives that will enhance the relative advantages of the special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities that are supervised by OPAZ.

## Dhofar Foods' stake acquisition in Omani Gulf Food approved

**QASIM AL MAASHANI**  
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Dhofar Foods & Investment Company SAOG has announced that it has won approval of its previously submitted offer by Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding SAOG and Dhofar Insurance SAOG.

As per the agreed terms, Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding SAOG will sell its stake in Omani Gulf Food Company LLC to Dhofar Foods & Investment Company SAOG, valuing the transaction at a total of RO 4,153,846.

Similarly, Dhofar Insurance SAOG will sell its stake in Omani Gulf Food Company LLC to Dhofar Foods & Investment Company SAOG, with the transaction amounting to RO



5,192,308. The per-share cost for both deals has been set at 80 baisas.

In return for selling their stakes, Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding SAOG and Dhofar Insurance SAOG will acquire equity stakes in Dhofar Foods & Investment Company SAOG through a private placement.

The completion of this transaction is

contingent upon obtaining the necessary regulatory approvals and meeting all applicable requirements.

Dhofar Foods & Investment Company SAOG is a prominent Oman-based food and beverage company, specialising in the production of canned food, juices, and dairy products.

Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding SAOG is a diversified investment company with interests spanning various sectors, including real estate, tourism, and manufacturing.

Dhofar Insurance SAOG is a leading insurance company in Oman, offering a comprehensive range of insurance products, including life insurance, property insurance, and motor insurance.

## Indian cement companies keen on buying petcoke from Oman

**FROM PAGE 13**

At the same year, petroleum coke was the 25th most exported product in Oman. India is the main destination of petroleum coke exports from Oman with value of \$112 million in 2021.

Other top markets of Oman's petroleum coke in 2021 include China (\$66.8 million), Indonesia (\$6.76 million), the United States (\$3.65 million) and Ethiopia (3.52 million.)

The fastest growing export markets for petroleum coke of Oman between 2020 and 2021 were India (\$82.4 million), China (\$54.9 million) and Indonesia (\$6.76 million).

"India, especially its west coast, is a natural market for Omani coke because of its very short voyage of 3-4 days.

OQ's Orpic refinery in Sohar, which produces 300,000-350,000 tonnes per year of anode-grade coke, has sold off-specification coke cargoes to Indian cement makers in the past for use in kilns.

Duqm is expected to produce around 500,000-600,000 tonnes per year of high-sulphur fuel-grade coke. Indian cement makers may be keen on buying Omani coke because of its short voyage, said another participant," the report added.

# State of economy is similar for both UK and Europe



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

The economic situation of Europe shows that the UK is not alone in undergoing an economic slump. Europe's major economies, led by Germany, its powerhouse, are also in the midst of a slump.

Figures out this month showed the bloc's biggest economy's industrial sector, which it relies on to generate a big part of its output, shrunk 3.4 per cent in March, plummeting far more than expected by analysts and a reversal from a more than 2 per cent increase in February. That batch of data led economists to roundly agree Germany is on the brink of a recession, which Britain has also been toying with for several months. In fact, production across the 20 members that make up the eurozone, is trending in line with Britain. Gross domestic product (GDP) grew just 0.1 per cent in the first three months of this year in the eurozone, the same as the UK's first quarter figure. Germany's economy stagnated after shrinking 0.5 per cent in the final months of 2022, meaning

they would slip into a recession if Eurostat – the statis agency that produces the continent's main economic data – revives its estimate lower. France grew 0.2 per cent; Italy 0.5 per cent; Spain 0.5 per cent and Ireland contracted 2.7 per cent. The dynamic that has cut UK's growth over the last year, shares similarities with that which is sweeping through Europe. Energy prices jolted higher after Russia sucked gas out of international markets in response to sanctions placed on it. That made large swathes of business activity in Europe unviable, crimping output. European consumers have also been squeezed by a historic inflation surge – peaking at over 10 per cent in October – sparking a spending slowdown. The European Central Bank, much like the Bank of England

(BoE), has responded to that price surge with aggressive interest rate rises, sending them to 3.25 per cent and is expected to keep hurting businesses and families in the coming months. Eurozone banks have also put more controls on lending sharply in response to US banking failures, adding to the squeeze on companies. BoE governor Andrew Bailey and co this month upgraded GDP by the greatest amount (about 2 per cent) since the central bank was made independent in 1997. Similarly, the European Commission, two weeks ago, raised its expectations for GDP growth across the bloc up to 1.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent this year and next. Stronger than expected demand and persistent price pressures concentrated in the food production sector mean inflation

this year will be higher than the Commission previously predicted at 5.8 per cent. What ties assessments of the UK and European economies – which, under the same pressures, have moved more in tandem than one might have thought – is that they have been overly pessimistic. Experts were not entirely correct with their recession warnings, justifiably so because of the huge energy price shock that at the time looked set to sweep through households and businesses' finances. Energy prices have come down considerably over the last few months, prompting the recent round of forecast reversals. Comparing two passages from the Commission and BoE's new projections, each of which explain why they lifted their GDP outlook. Commission: "Lower energy

prices, abating supply constraints, improved business confidence and a strong labour market underpinned this positive outcome." BoE: "This reflects stronger global growth, lower energy prices, the fiscal support in the Spring Budget, and the possibility of lower precautionary saving by households than previously assumed in turn related to a lower risk of job loss." The two passages reflect a similarity while both the UK and Europe may well be on the path to avoiding a recession. It was interesting that chancellor Jeremy Hunt said last week that he wouldn't mind Britain slipping into recession if it helped bring down inflation. He pledged full support for the BoE if it decided to raise interest rates again to rein in prices.

## Asia's seaborne thermal coal imports hit record high as prices slip

CLYDE RUSSELL

Asia's imports of seaborne thermal coal surged to the highest on record in May as cheaper prices tempted buyers in the region's developing economies. A total of 78.38 million tonnes of the fuel used primarily to generate electricity is likely to be off-loaded across Asia in May, according to data compiled by commodity analysts Kpler. This is the most in Kpler data going back to January 2017, while Refinitiv data also shows record imports in May in data stretching back to January 2015. The robust May outcome comes on the back of strength in both March and April, with those two months being the second- and third-strongest months according to Kpler data. Rising thermal coal imports come as seaborne prices for the fuel continue to decline, with two of the more popular grades slipping to 16-month lows in the week to May 26. Australian coal at Newcastle Port with an energy value of 5,500 kilocalories per kg (kcal/kg), as assessed by price reporting agency Argus, ended last week at \$96.54 a tonne, the first time since December 2021 that it has dropped below the \$100 level. Indonesian coal with an energy value of 4,200 kcal/kg slipped to \$65.28 a tonne, the lowest since January 2022 and just over half of the peak of \$120.86 reached in March last year in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both these grades are popular in China and India, the world's two biggest coal importers, as well as in other developing Asian economies such as Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. China's imports of thermal coal remained at elevated levels in May, with Kpler estimating arrivals of 28.24 million tonnes, slightly below April's 28.42 million and March's 28.40 million. It's worth noting that the past three months have been the strongest in Kpler's data going

back to January 2017, with May's imports being 137% higher than the same month in 2022. China has turned to seaborne thermal coal to meet rising electricity demand, with thermal power plants generating 83 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) more in the first four months of the year, compared with the same period in 2022. Coal-fired generation increased as hydropower struggled, with output from the clean power source dropping by 42 billion kWh in the January to April period. India, the world's second-biggest coal importer, has also ramped up purchases, with May arrivals of thermal grades estimated by Kpler at 16.62 million tonnes, up from April's 14.37 million and the most since July last year. Hotter than usual weather and solid economic growth are driving India's imports, with lower prices meaning coal-fired power plants that run on imported fuel can make profits even when selling into India's price-regulated electricity markets. Other buyers in developing Asian markets are also seeing rising thermal coal imports, with Vietnam expected to land 2.90 million tonnes in May, up from 2.09 million in April and the most since June 2020. Malaysia's imports are expected to be 3.26 million tonnes in May, up from 2.64 million in April and the most since March 2020. While lower prices and rising electricity demand are driving thermal coal imports in developing Asia, the advanced economies in north Asia are experiencing their usual seasonal lull between winter and summer peaks. Japan, Asia's third-biggest coal buyer, is estimated by Kpler to have imported 6.95 million tonnes of thermal grades in May, down from April's 8.55 million and 10.60 million in March. Fourth-ranked South Korea will import 6.03 million tonnes in May, down from 6.70 million in April and 6.42 million in March. — Reuters

## Give America a debt brake



JAMES BREIDING

The writer is the author of Swiss Made: The Untold Story Behind Switzerland's Success (Profile Books, 2013) and Too Small to Fail: Why Some Small Nations Outperform Larger Ones and How They Are Reshaping the World (Harper Business, 2019).

Since 1960, the United States has raised its debt ceiling 78 times – soon to be 79, if Congress approves the latest last-minute deal. On a wall in Manhattan, not far from Times Square, a billboard-size display has kept a running tally of the national debt amount. Since its inauguration in 1989, the National Debt Clock has ticked inexorably higher, from \$2.7 trillion to more than \$31 trillion today. Never before has America or the world economy been so indebted. And since 2000, the stock of global debt has soared, from \$87 trillion to over \$300 trillion today – a rate nearly double the pace of world GDP growth. Leaving aside the political theatrics, intrigue, and brinkmanship that nowadays accompany every increase in the US debt ceiling, can anything be done to stop – or even slow – the clock? At the turn of the century, Switzerland devised a solution called a "debt brake," which obliges the federal government to balance its budgets over the course of an economic cycle. In response to mounting public debt and repeating deficits in the 1990s, a group of Swiss economists and politicians began advocating for a constitutional amendment to limit government spending and borrowing. In 2001, the Swiss government proposed the debt brake, voters approved it overwhelmingly in a referendum, and it became a part of the country's constitution. The measure has yielded astonishing results. Since it was



A billboard shows the US debt limit in Washington DC. – AFP

enacted, total government debt as a share of GDP has declined from 30% to 20%. Over the same period, debt has ballooned to unprecedented levels in Britain (186%), Japan (227%), the US (123%), and elsewhere. Switzerland's debt brake works because it has a simple and compelling goal: to limit the growth of public debt by preventing the government from spending money it doesn't have. Moreover, because it is enshrined in the Swiss constitution, it has a high level of political legitimacy and is difficult to repeal or amend. And providing a clear benchmark against which progress can be measured makes elected officials' more accountable to the citizens they represent and eliminates the temptation to run up debt to secure re-election while passing the burden of repayment to future generations. At the same time, the debt brake is not a straitjacket. It includes automatic and countercyclical stabilisers, which allow for temporary deficits during periods of economic weakness, such as during the Covid-19 crisis, and encourages debt repayment during good times. Today, Switzerland enjoys a AAA credit rating, which matters in a world of rising borrowing costs. At current levels of debt

and interest rates, American taxpayers spend roughly 15 times more on interest payments than Swiss taxpayers. And while the Swiss thereby free up resources to invest in education, research, childcare, and other vital public goods and services, American taxpayers' grandchildren will have to service the debt without ever having seen the benefits. Nobody would deny the importance of the intergenerational social contract: the elderly pass their traditions and wisdom to the young, who bring fresh perspectives, ideas, and technological advances. But there must be a fair deal for everyone. The German word for debt, schuld, is also the word for "guilt" – a kind of moral synonym reminding us to keep our end of the bargain. Admittedly, the US Constitution is far more difficult to change than its Swiss counterpart. But the US founders regarded the accumulation of public debt as a matter of fundamental importance. They recognised that excessive debt could burden future generations, threaten economic stability, and compromise national independence. They knew that excessive debt led to the downfall of the Roman Empire, the French monarchy, the Dutch Republic, and the Spanish Empire. The recipe was

always the same: costly wars and extravagant spending. America's founders, by contrast, believed in the importance of fiscal responsibility and advocated for limited government spending and the avoidance of excessive debt. Alexander Hamilton argued that the government should have the authority to borrow money under the strict condition that "the creation of debt should always be accompanied with the means of extinguishment." And Thomas Jefferson believed that "to preserve [the people's] independence, we must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt." With that goal in mind, the US Constitution was designed with checks and balances to prevent abuses of power, including fiscal irresponsibility. While its framers assigned the power of the purse to the legislative branch, their intent was to ensure oversight and control of spending. The US Constitution has been amended only 27 times since 1787, whereas the Swiss constitution is amended regularly. But a rigorous and challenging process implies greater legitimacy. This is what happened when 85% of Swiss citizens voted in favour of including a debt brake. American citizens deserve a chance to decide if they want something similar. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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**HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER**

MUSCAT: Before the Deputy Sultan, Sultan bin Turki, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Ahmed bin Al-Busaidi, and Chairman of the Supreme Court, Sheikh Abdulhadi bin Al-Musallami, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, on Thursday, 10 July 2020, administered the oath of office to the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Dr. Saad bin Ahmed bin Al-Busaidi.

**STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN**

RAMADAN REMINDER: The frequent cases of COVID-19 reported by health officials, we should be more vigilant and follow social distancing guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus.

**SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES**

It is a sad reality that some people are not following the social distancing guidelines. It is necessary to follow the guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus.

**NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH**

MUSCAT: To mark the 100th anniversary of the Omani Revolution and the 50th anniversary of the Sultanate of Oman, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a new 50 Omani banknote.

**UN HALLS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN**

NEW YORK: Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Amina Mohammed, on Thursday, 9 July 2020, expressed the UN's support for the Omani efforts to establish peace and justice in Yemen.

**PEOPLE ARE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES**

It is a sad reality that some people are not following the social distancing guidelines. It is necessary to follow the guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus.



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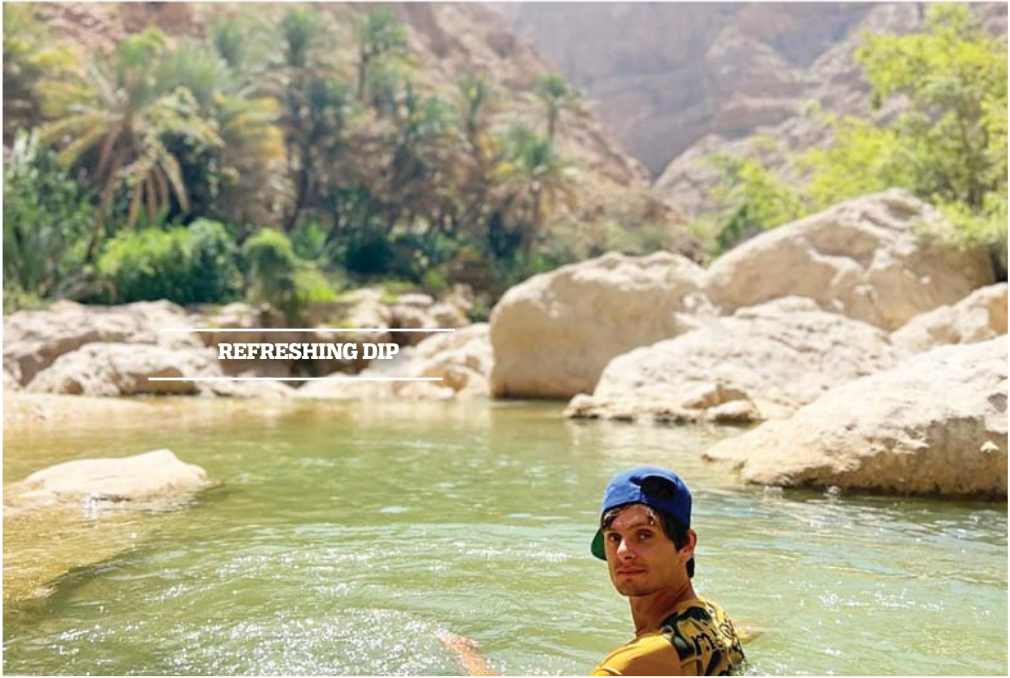
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By Zuwaina al Sulaimani

In the heart of Suhar, amidst the vibrant tapestry of cultures and customs, resides Hasan Bin Muhammad bin Ali Al Balushi. He is an Omani master and artisan of traditional silver and gold jewellery and daggers.

His commitment to preserving tradition through jewellery and dagger crafting has earned him respect in his community.

Hassan's journey reflects his dedication to preserving Oman's cultural legacy using his craft.

He was born in 1938 into a family immersed in the jewellery industry and the craft of ancient weaponry. He has inherited his extraordinary artistry of gold and silver craftsmanship of daggers and swords from his father, Muhammad bin Ali Al Balushi, who has passed on his legacy of crafting beautiful jewellery, adorned daggers, and other antiques that represent the spirit of Oman's rich past.

At the age of fifteen, he started learning his craft, which he continued until his youth at the age of twenty. After that age, he began a life-changing quest to broaden his knowledge and experience. In 1958, he travelled from Sohar to Sur in order to obtain experience and extend his knowledge of dagger crafting. He has strengthened his abilities and embraced the multiplicity of traditional weaponry, notably the Suri dagger, under the instruction of notable jewellers such as Ismail al Sayegh and Mohammed Abdullah.

Furthermore, his quest for excellence in his craft led him to Salalah and Nizwa, where he sought out skilled jewellers to study the art of making the special southern dagger and the dagger of Nizwa. In 1969, in Salalah, he was trained under Muhammad al-Shan-fari, learning the complexities of the southern dagger. Following that, he trained in Nizwa under jewellers Abdullah al Naabi and Muhsin al Sabahi, immersing himself in the methods and mysteries of the unique dagger of Nizwa.

Hasan returned to Sohar, where he became an important character in Oman's cultural scene, armed with extensive knowledge and great talents. He presented his work and illustrated



the fundamental relationship between creativity and heritage by participating in several festivals and exhibitions hosted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Hasan's artistry drew worldwide notice, resulting in renowned exhibitions, including one in Tokyo.

His dedication to his profession extends beyond his own craft. He gladly

shared his knowledge and experience with young jewellers, teaching people like Mohammed Murad and Mohammed Zaab, and he left an everlasting effect on the next generation of artisans. Hasan's commitment to preserving Oman's cultural history has encouraged many others to follow in his footsteps.

## MUSIC

### Italy's La Scala to open new season with Verdi classic

MILAN'S LA SCALA theatre will kick off its 2023-24 season in December with Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Don Carlo" and plans to step up efforts to burnish its green credentials.

The opening night of the La Scala season has become a highlight of the calendar for the country's business and political elite, coinciding with the city's Feast of St. Ambrose holiday.

However, the staging of Russian work "Boris Godunov" on the opening night last December prompted protesters against the Ukrainian war to demonstrate outside the venue.

Verdi's works have been performed at La Scala since 1839 and the choice of a historical work by a local favourite is likely to prove less contentious on Dec. 7.



Like other businesses, the opera house is struggling with sky-high energy bills after Russia's attack of Ukraine.

La Scala last year mitigated the impact by cutting consumption of gas and electricity by 22 per cent and around 15 per cent respectively, its artistic director Dominique Meyer said on Monday.

The theatre has also switched to digital musical scores to reduce paper waste, installed more efficient LED-lights and will replace its windows this autumn to cut

draughts.

Last year's revenues from single shows were 25 per cent higher compared with 2019 figures, Meyer said, adding international tourists represent 30 per cent of the theatre's audience.

Topic tickets cost 250 euros (\$275).

In its new season, La Scala will host 14 operas, seven ballets, as well as concerts featuring Italian conductor Riccardo Muti, Briton Daniel Harding and Russian-born Kirill Petrenko. — Reuters

## TRAVEL TALES

### Nepal celebrates 70 years since first Everest summit

THE SONS OF EDMUND Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa led celebrations in Nepal on Monday to mark the 70th anniversary of the historic first ascent of Everest.

The scaling of the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak on May 29, 1953, changed mountaineering forever and made the New Zealander and his Nepalese guide household names.

"In a whole lot of ways, it was not just Ed Hillary and Tenzing Norgay that reached the summit of Mount Everest, it was all of humanity," Peter Hillary said at a school founded by his father in the remote village of Khumjung at 3,790 metres.

"Suddenly, all of us could go," he said. And gone they have. In the past seven decades, more than 6,000 climbers have climbed the world's



highest mountain, according to the Himalayan Database.

It remains dangerous, with more than 300 losing their lives in the same period, including 12 this year. Five others are missing, putting 2023 on course to be a record deadly year.

As well as supporting tourism, the rapid growth in the climbing industry has raised revenue for Nepal, which today charges foreigners an Everest permit fee of \$11,000.

Family members of both the climbers joined locals and officials at the school on Monday morning to inaugurate the Sir Edmund Hillary Visitors Centre, housed in the original building, which opened in 1961. Butter lamps were lit in front of a photograph of Hillary and Tenzing, and

their sons, Peter Hillary and Jamling Norgay, cut a red ribbon to open the doors to the centre. A renovated museum also opened in Tenzing Norgay's name in Namche Bazaar, the largest tourist hub in the trek to the Everest base camp.

In Kathmandu, officials and hundreds from the mountaineering community joined a rally with celebratory banners. Top Nepali climbers, including the record holder for most Everest ascents Kami Rita Sherpa, were honoured in a ceremony.

Sanu Sherpa, the only person to climb the world's 14 highest peaks twice, called on the government to support the Nepali guides, who bear huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

"The government has not done much for the Sherpa. I think it would be of great help and we would be happy if the government helps educate children of those climbers who died on mountains," Sherpa said.

— AFP



TRAVEL TALES

# Iran: A country with great tourism potential

By KABEER YOUSUF

With round-the-year tourism attractions of diverse weather, time-tested civilisation, scintillating geographical features, antiquities like porcelain and intricate and anesthetic carpets, and above all, the highly hospitable people, Iran, aka Persia, is a sure bet for a year in tourism.

Iran is known as the land of four seasons, pulsating history and culture, a wide variety of souvenirs, and authenticity, because it is blessed with diverse cultural sites in addition to different tribes with different and fascinating traditions and customs, which make the land of countless monuments a treasury of tangible and intangible heritage.

"We can undoubtedly say that there is hardly any country or landmass that is, in one way or another, untouched by the aspects of Iranian civilisation," says Dr. Shiqayat Pervez, a thinker and expert in world politics.

"Iranian civilisation and culture have influenced almost every human being on the planet. However, how and since when it started to influence is to a great extent, where we need to focus our research," adds Shiqayat.

A look at three of the most attractive places, according to Kylen Yarzavak, a travel and tourism enthusiast, are the capital city of Isfahan, Kish Island, and the city of Shiraz.

Isfahan, also known as Esfahan, is Iran's capital of culture and boasts of many attractions. Scenically beautiful while traditionally aesthetic, Isfahan welcomes tourists during every season with its opulent palaces and gardens, its markets, and its bazaars.

This city is also popular for its finest decorative arts and marvellous bridges and is home to globally renowned mosques such as the Imam Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotun Palace, besides monumental places like Naqsh-e Jahan Sq, and the like.

Kish Island is Iran's answer to the beautiful yet traditionally kept secret of a well-known island.

Kish is known to have some of the most beautiful hotels and resorts in the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf, is highly modest in its approach towards tourists and other visitors, and is effectively connected with the GCC. Like in mainland Iran, the people of Kish are friendly and hospitable and treat guests with high regard.

Kish Island, which doesn't need an entry visa for outsiders, has a plethora of popular tourist attractions on this beautiful island that can only be experienced and felt.

The city of Shiraz is a land of historic events and historic personalities, as well as acclaimed poets. The graves of Hafez and Sa'di, major pilgrimage sites for Iranians are located in Shiraz, and is the birthplace for a wide variety of plants and flowers.

The city of Shiraz is embellished by exquisite mosques and the much popular Persepolis, which is the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire between 550 and 330 BC and is today the area's major tourist destination.

## HOSPITALITY OF IRANIANS

For Iranians, hospitality is in their DNA and the people are generous, kind, empathetic, and unconditionally loving, which make visitors feel at home.

They give hospitality a broader and deeper meaning and they are some of the most genuinely hospitable people a traveller can ever meet.

A tourist might be offered to stay with a random local person that he just met a few minutes ago, and chances are visitors from outside the country will be pampered by the local populace because they believe visiting their town means being their special guest who should be taken care of to the fullest.

They would also generously offer their food and snacks without expecting anything back, and no doubt Iran



is a place where you would not have to worry about accommodation, food, or safety.

## HM VISIT TO IRAN IN THE EYES OF A SCHOLAR

Ali bin Rashid bin Abdullah al Dahmani, Educational Supervisor, Ministry of Education and a scholar of international relations says that the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of strengthening the historically rooted relations and to continue the special relations that connect the two countries since the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos, may God bless him, is a highly ambitious one as far as the people of both countries are concerned.

"The Sultanate of Oman has been and continues to be a messenger of peace and a reliable source of security in the region and the world and Iran has reposed great hopes on Oman for it can play a crucial role in stabilising regional tensions and establish peace," said Dr Ali, adding,



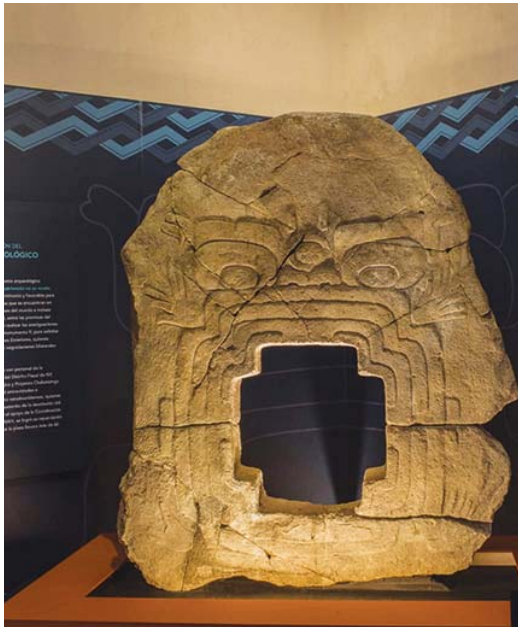
"This confirms the depth of the good relations and continuous developments between the two countries. Political and even military."

Oman has already been committed to its constant efforts to maintain good-neighbourly relations and cooperation between the countries of the region because of the settlements and the prosperity of the peoples.

"There is no secret about one of the pivotal roles played by the Sultanate of Oman in bringing together the viewpoints and solving the relationship issues between Iran and some Gulf and Arab countries, not least the rapprochement and growth of relations between Tehran and Riyadh, as well as the situation with Abu Dhabi and Manama," adds Dr Ali bin Rashid bin Abdullah al Dahmani, Educational Supervisor, Ministry of Education and a scholar of international relations.

[Photos from Iran Tourism and Touring Organisation]

## CULTURE



## Back in Mexico, 'Earth Monster' sculpture points to ancient beliefs

A MASSIVE STONE sculpture carved by Olmec artists more than 2,000 years ago that evokes ancient religious beliefs has returned to Mexico after decades in the United States in a homecoming cheered by officials and scholars.

Known today as the "Earth Monster," the sculpture was likely taken from central Mexico during the 1960s, spending time in the hands of private collectors as well as on public display before being seized by antiquities trafficking agents working with New York prosecutors.

The symbol-laden artifact weighs roughly a tonne (2,200 pounds) and was likely found several decades earlier at the Chalcatzingo archeological site in Morelos state, just south of Mexico City.

US officials coordinated with their Mexican counterparts to repatriate the sculpture earlier this week.

It was carved from volcanic rock sometime between 800-400 BC during the heyday of the Olmec civilization, one of Mexico's earliest complex societies with sites mostly clustered around the country's Gulf coast. The Olmecs are well-known for their



advanced artistic tradition, including colossal head sculptures.

The artifact depicts a mythological mountain and its stylised cave entrance in the form of a cross, according to Mario Cordova, an Olmec archeologist who travelled to the United States as part of the recovery mission.

The mountain was also made to resemble the head of a jaguar, ancient Mexico's most fearsome predator, with the cave doubling as its open jaws and the entrance into the underworld.

Some have speculated the sculpture may have been used in ritual acts as a sacred passageway.

"This is a very important piece," said archaeologist Sara Ladron de Guevara, a scholar of Mexico's Huastec culture, pointing in particular to the cross-shaped open mouth.

"I can't remember any other sculptures that include this kind of opening," she said.

Other scholars note how the worldview of the Olmecs as seen in the "Earth Monster" sculpture is a recurring theme across ancient Mexico, including up to the Aztecs, who began their rise to power around 1,700 years later and whose main temple also doubled as a sacred mountain.

"The mountain-cave-mouth symbolic complex acquired a high iconographic value throughout Mesoamerica from very early times, giving rise over the millennia to increasingly complex sets of images," according to a book written by the father-son scholarly duo Alfredo Lopez Austin and Leonardo Lopez Lujan.

Lopez Lujan currently leads excavations at the Aztecs' holiest shrine in downtown Mexico City.

The Olmec sculpture's return to Mexico was hailed by Mexico Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, who spoke just before it was carefully hauled onto a plane for its trip back home.

"This gives us back something that explains where we come from," Ebrard said. — Reuters