

Rains to continue until weekend

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P12

RASPADORI FIRES NAPOLI PAST JUVE TO BRINK OF TITLE GLORY



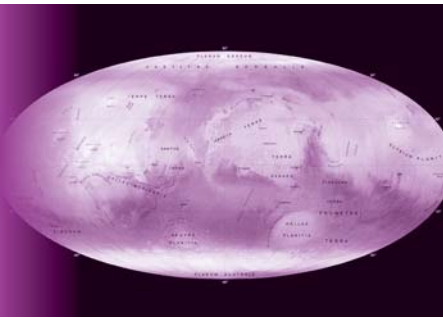
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FRESH IMPETUS FOR OMAN'S GREEN BUNKERING TERMINALS' INITIATIVE



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NEW MARS MAP LETS YOU 'SEE THE WHOLE PLANET AT ONCE'



MUSCAT

811 RELEASED BY FAK KURBA

With eight more prisoners released with the support of Oman Youth Group (Together for Oman), the total number of prisoners released through Fak Kurba initiative rose to 811, according to the members of the Oman Lawyers Association which runs the initiative. The Fak Kurba is a programme for securing those who are facing detention or are detained for minor financial offences and is used to save both citizens and expatriates from imprisonment. **DETAILS ON P2**

DHAKA

BANGLADESH SWEARS IN NEW PRESIDENT

Mohammed Shahabuddin, a former judge and a ruling party official, was sworn in as the president of Bangladesh on Monday, just months before a general election. Shahabuddin, 73, was an anti-corruption commissioner and fought in the country's 1971 war of independence, the presidential palace said. "He was sworn in as the 22nd president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh today," Shampad Barua, secretary of the president, said. He was elected by lawmakers in February after the ruling Awami League party nominated him instead of the speaker of parliament, who had been seen as the favourite. **DETAILS ON P6**



OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH

Tiwi, one of the most difficult and spectacular wadis to cross, is a favourite for many. In the past, it was one of the most arduous wadis in the Sultanate of Oman that took two days to explore, but the trip became much easier since the dirt road reaches the village of Umq. Even now, one needs to plan a two-day trip to be able to complete the crossing of Wadi Tiwi from the village of Umq Bir to the village of Mibam. **DETAILS ON P20**

World's longest Khasab zipline to boost tourism

1,800-metre dual zipline project to diversify market

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The official opening of the Oman Adventure Centre and the launch of the world's longest zipline over water will take place on Wednesday in Musandam Governorate. The Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) recently announced the soft opening for the 1,800-metre dual zipline project in the Wilayat of Khasab. The zipline project is the first activity offered by the Oman Adventure Centre, which is being developed as part of a comprehensive development plan for the region.

Through this plan, Musandam Governorate will be able to diversify its tourism market by providing a wide variety of quality products and experiences. This will enable it to draw out its potential and highlight its position as a prominent tourist destination in the region.



The zipline project will be managed and operated by LEOS, a specialist operator which runs adventure and entertainment projects on a regional and international scale.

Said bin Hareb al Obaidani, Director General of Tourism Development at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: "The ministry is working to stimulate development and investment in various key tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, especially in the Governorate of

Musandam."

Currently in its soft opening phase, the zipline project serves as a quality benchmark for developing tourism products and enhanced tourism experiences.

In addition to the zipline project, "We are also developing several hiking and mountain biking trails in Musandam Governorate, installing informational and guiding signboards that meet all required safety and security standards."

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INSIDE



EUROPE AIMS TO BOOST WIND ENERGY

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MITIGATING HUMANITARIAN NIGHTMARE

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This white cat has more than 1m followers on social media

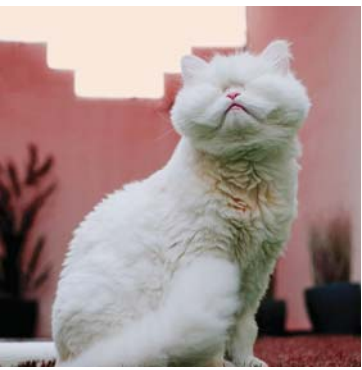
KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

There is a white cat in Muscat. She is smart, gifted with special skills and has a big fan following on social media. She easily attracts pet lovers, while others get attracted out of curiosity to ensure that she is real and not a battery-operated toy.

Going by her social media accounts, she has 1.1 million followers on TikTok; 225,000 on Instagram; 50,400 on Twitter; 16,000 on Facebook; and 1,300 on YouTube.

She is special in the way that she is blind. Moet the cat surprises followers with her perfection of reaching for her food, navigating the house and even hunting the bugs and catching a fly despite being blind.

"She definitely has some quirks, such as sleeping in the fruit bowl on my coffee table (a much-loved habit with her followers). However, I feel Moet has the ability to 'see' without eyes. She can be incredibly perceptive and uses her other



Moet is very cute, and without eyes, often looks like a stuffed toy! She also has a unique meow, and it was one of these videos that helped her go viral a few years ago

EMILY SHOTTER

senses to seek things out and get what she wants. She is also a great hunter and I have often seen her in the garden swatting at bugs or even catching a fly. It is incredible to watch," says Moet's owner Emily Shotter.

"Moet is very cute, and without eyes, often looks like a stuffed toy! She also has a unique meow, and it was one of these videos that helped her go viral a few years ago. She has a diva-like personality and demands attention. It's Moet's way or the highway and I think her fans love that about her," says Emily explaining the cat's popularity on the Internet.

Commenting on the challenges of rearing a blind cat, Moet's owner said, "Honestly there aren't that many 'challenges'. Moet finds her food, the litter box, her beds and toys perfectly well. There are a few things I have done to my house to make it safe, such as enclosing the stairwell, so she can't fall through the bannisters, enclosing my garden so that it's a safe space for her to explore and also making sure there's nowhere she can fall. It can also be important to keep things in the same place as much as possible, as blind cats form a mental map of their surroundings, thus allowing them to navigate so well."

TURN TO P2

UN chief warns Sudan on 'edge of abyss'

KHARTOUM: Foreign nations pushed on Monday with evacuations of their citizens from chaos-torn Sudan which, the UN chief warned, is on "the edge of the abyss" after 10 days of brutal fighting between rival forces.

But millions of Sudanese are unable to flee battles between the army and paramilitary troops clashing again in Khartoum and across the country. They are trying to survive acute shortages of water, food, medicines and fuel as well as power and Internet blackouts.

The United States and multiple European, Middle Eastern, African and Asian nations have launched emergency missions to bring to safety their embassy staff and Sudan-based citizens by road, air and sea.

At least 427 people have been killed and more than 3,700 wounded, according to UN agencies, which reported Sudanese civilians "fleeing areas affected by fighting, including to Chad, Egypt and South Sudan".

"Morgues are full. Corpses litter the streets" said Attiya Abdallah, head of the doctors'



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the UN headquarters in New York on Monday. — Reuters

union, which on Monday reported scores more casualties after sites in south Khartoum were "heavily shelled".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the violence in Sudan — already one of the world's poorest countries, with a history of military coups — "could engulf the whole region and beyond".

"We must all do everything within our power to pull Sudan back from the edge of the abyss," Guterres said, calling again for a ceasefire. Britain has requested an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Sudan, which is expected to take place on Tuesday, according to a diplomat. **SEE ALSO P6**



811 prisoners released through Fak Kurba

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With eight more prisoners released with the support of Oman Youth Group (Together for Oman), the total number of prisoners got released through the Fak Kurba annual programme rose to 811, according to the members of the Oman Lawyers Association which runs the initiative.

Ran till mid of April, the Fak Kurba is a Programme for securing those who are facing detention or are detained for minor financial offences and is used to save both citizens and expatriates from imprisonment.

The initiative, currently in its 10th edition, has so far released more than 4,969 people who meet the conditions, with the Royal blessings and with the cooperation of institutions and individuals across the country and helped them resume a better life after the release.

Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Head of the Initiative, told Observer that this initiative comes under the slogan “Because we believe that a person deserves a second chance,” aims to collect financial donations to release the families of the insolvent in prisons due to claims arising from civil, commercial, sharia, and labour cases.



“We have secured the release of nearly 811 people comprising both citizens and expatriates who are caught in some small financial offences or are facing jail term for minor financial issues, and the release was made possible with the donations from individuals, corporates and the like,” Dr Al Zadjali said.

He further added that the Fak Kurba programme aims at relieving humanity from distress for 2023, which is adopted by the Omani Lawyers Association, in commitment to divine wisdom, and following the example of the Prophet (PBUH) in extending his oath, and based on synergy and cohesion and generosity, benevolence and good character. This platform also allows the public to be partners in supporting society and offer to relieve the distress of our brothers, because a person always deserves a second chance.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Satellite image have shown extensive activity of thunderclouds, indicating heavy rains of varying intensity expected in Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, parts of Muscat, and scattered clouds in parts of Al Dakhiliyah, Dhofar and Al Wusta on Tuesday.

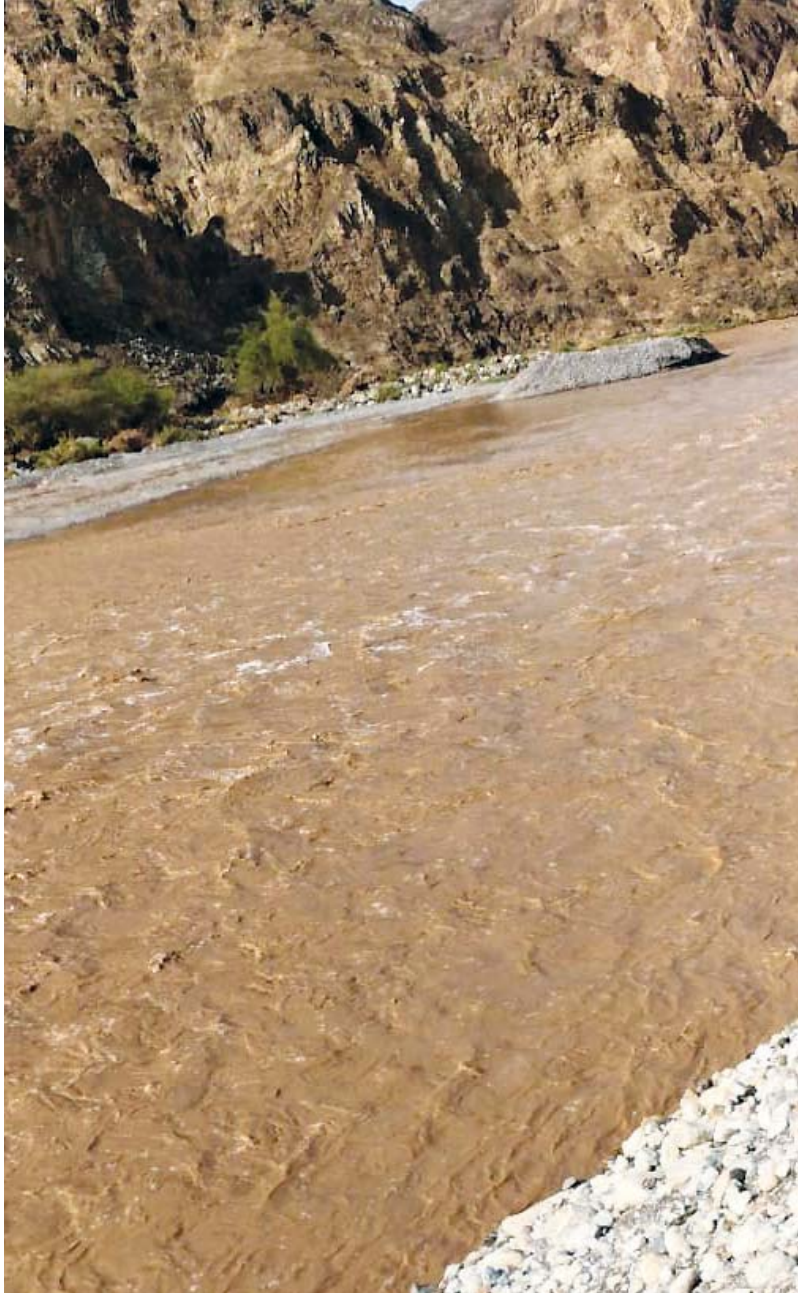
The weather conditions are expected to be heavier in Masirah, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Jaalan Bani Bu Hasan during the night.

The impact of upper air trough approaching Sultanate of Oman could bring in heavy thundershowers with chance for hail and the rainfall is expected to range between 20 to 50 mm.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Center issued a weather alert. The Royal Oman Police also said users of Al Dakhiliyah Road-Muscat will witness heavy traffic congestion, starting from the Wilayat of Samayil and extending to the Al Jafnain area. Drivers have been cautioned to be careful and maintain enough safety distance to avoid any mishaps.

Forecaster at Met Office also said there are chances for flash floods. The sea is expected to be rough during thundershowers due to downdraft fresh winds and the weather is expected to continue

until the end of this week.



By day after tomorrow the impact of upper air trough is

expected to expand towards Al Hajar Mountains, Al Dakhiliyah, North and South Al Batinah and

Al Awabi, Al Sharqiyah receive rains

AL AWABI: Rains fell last evening in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, Al Batinah South Governorate, ranging from medium to light intensity.

The villages of Staal, Sunaiba, Shuh, Thaqb, Al Hajar, Misfat Al Sharqiyyin, Hades, Al Musannah and Al Alia in Wadi Bani Kharus also witnessed light to medium rains.

On Sunday, thunderstorms of varying intensity fell in a number of wilayats in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

The areas adjacent to Hajar Mountains witnessed varying amounts of rain, ranging from heavy to medium. Ibra, Dima W'attayeen, Bidiya, Al Qabil and Wadi Bani Khalid witnessed heavy rains, which led to the flowing of most of the valleys.

Parts of Al Mudhaibi and Sinaw also witnessed light to moderate rains.

Rains also led to the filling of the wadis in Al Naba Dam in the Wilayat of Al Qabil after most of the valleys had overflowed, causing traffic interruption in some villages of the wilayat. — ONA

North and South Al Sharqiyah in addition to parts of Al Wusta as per the updates.



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank seeks best proposal for the following services from reputed vendors which are specialized providing Business solution system.

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
ODB/DT/ 2023/02/[07]	Microsoft 365 Environment	100 OMR Non-refundable	2/5/2023	21/5/2023

- Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (**Strategy Department – Digital Transformation**) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion during working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 8 AM and 2 PM on payment of non-refundable tender fee. Vendors should enclose scan copy of bank guarantee submitted.
- The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to **M365 Digital Transformation Team, Oman Development Bank SAOC**, proposal should be submitted in the reception at Grand Floor by **2:00 PM** on or before **21/5/2023**.

Interested vendors should remit the stated tenders fees as per as the below bank details.

Bank Name: **Oman Development Bank**
Bank Account: **000-10121129300-45**
Bank Name: **Bank Muscat Corporate Branch**
Swift Code: **BMUSOMRXXXX**

Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee's decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726983 email:tm841@odb.om odb.om



Blind cat with special skills amasses over 1 million social media followers

FROM PAGE 1

“That doesn’t mean I never get new things or move things around, but not often and I will sometimes ‘show’ Moet the new arrangement, for her to become familiar with them. But, if I didn’t, she wouldn’t take too long to adjust.”

Emily put Moet on social media back in 2015, initially on Twitter, and when she realised she was gaining traction, she opened her Instagram account in 2018, followed by Facebook and eventually TikTok. Primarily her goal was to raise awareness of blind cats, by showing people just how amazing they are.

Moet and her owner Emily Shotter (pictured) are ‘members’



of Omani Paws, a group of animal lovers who come together to help to rescue and rehome abandoned or neglected cats and also help community cats and dogs with

TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return), and treat those animals who are sick or injured.

“This is all carried out on the back of generous donations from like-minded people. We, therefore, donate regularly but more importantly, give 100 per cent of the profits from Moet’s merchandise store sales to Omani Paws. We also have a book out ‘Moet the Blind Cat’s Rules for Cat Owners’ — a small illustrated book essential for every cat owner — written from the cat’s perspective of course. We donate all of the profits from these book sales to Omani Paws also. ... And watch this space for a short storybook coming out this year,” she says.



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TUESDAY | APRIL 25 | 2023

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Eid activities continue in wilayats



LIWA: The Municipal Affairs Department in the Wilayat of Liwa, Al Batinah North Governorate organised entertainment activities during the occasion of Eid al Fitr. The event included a variety of Omani arts performed with the participation of enthusiastic bands, as well as various competitions for children like face painting, and an exhibition of plastic arts. Eid al Fitr event comes as a continuation of 'Siraj' Ramadhan activities which witnessed various programmes throughout the holy month.

AL RUSTAQ: Wilayats of Al Awabi and Wadi Al Maawil in Al Batinah South Governorate, saw recreational activities organised by the municipality during the festival holidays. They were also held in five different locations in the wilayats. Badr bin Mohammed al Saidi, Director-General, Municipality, Al Batinah South Governorate, said the festival activities continues until Wednesday and includes competitions and entertainment activities for children, theatre, in addition to families corner.

He also added that the activities held in Wadi Al Maawil Public Park continues until the fourth day of Eid and includes a range of entertainment, cultural, and awareness events and activities, including children's games, horse and camel riding, and traditional arts. — ONA

Oman Across Ages Museum holds cultural events



MANAH: The Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate organised activities and programmes for the visitors to celebrate Eid al Fitr.

Wadha bint Hamoud al Hadidiyah, Head of the Events Department, Oman Across Ages Museum, said the museum organised many heritage, cultural and artistic shows with the

participation of theatre groups, traditional arts, and theatrical performances.

Wadha al Hadidiyah pointed out the museum's keenness to highlight the civilisational and historical role of the Sultanate of Oman through eras of time, as well as its contribution to enriching the cultural and artistic side in cooperation with the concerned authorities. — ONA



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank seeks tenders for the following services from reputed vendors which specialized in providing IT equipment's:

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
13/23	KVM (HQ & DR)	0	3/5/2023	7/5/2023

♦ Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Ground Floor) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion on any working day (Sunday to Thursday) between 8 AM and 2 PM.

♦ The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to IT Department, Oman Development Bank SAOC, should be submitted to the reception at Grand Floor by 1:00 PM on or before 7/05/2023.

Interested vendors should remit the stated tenders fees as per as the below bank details.

Bank Name: **Oman Development Bank**

Bank Account: **000-10121129300-45**

Bank Name: **Bank Muscat**

Corporate Branch

Swift Code: **BMUSOMRXXXX**

Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee's decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726828 kabri@odb.om odb.om



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank seeks tenders for the following services from reputed vendors which specialized in providing IT equipment's:

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
14/23	Purchase the Desk-tops and laptops	100 Non-Refundable	2/5/2023	8/5/2023

♦ Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Ground Floor) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion on any working day (Sunday to Thursday) between 8 AM and 2 PM on payment of non-refundable tender fee. Vendors should enclose scan copy of bank guarantee submitted.

♦ The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to IT Department, Oman Development Bank SAOC, should be submitted to the reception at Grand Floor by 2:00 PM on or before 8/5/2023.

Interested vendors should remit the stated tenders fees as per as the below bank details.

Bank Name: **Oman Development Bank**

Bank Account: **000-10121129300-45**

Bank Name: **Bank Muscat**

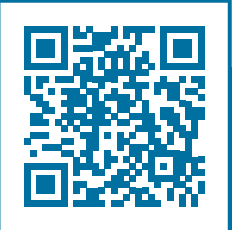
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OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726991 ozeidi@odb.om odb.om



TIPS TO STAY SAFE DURING HEATWAVES

OMAN BRACES FOR UNUSUAL **HEAT WAVES** AS SUMMER APPROACHES.
WHO ISSUES LIFE-SAVING TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE DURING **EXTREME TEMPERATURES**



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

This year's holy month of Ramadhan passed quickly, by perception, mainly due to the moderate weather as most parts of the country benefited from prolonged rains due to the upper air trough.

As we step into the month of May, which is usually the third hottest month of the Sultanate of Oman after June and July, all eyes are on the possibility of unusual heat waves.

While several parts of the Sultanate of Oman are expected to get rain in the coming months, places such as Maqshin, Marmul,

Fahud, and Haima already have temperatures nearing the 40°C.

It may be noted that temperatures in the first quarter of this year have been above average for each month.

Though the frequency of rainfall due to low-pressure developments in the Arabian Sea, has increased over the past few years, the summers have been getting hotter while winters have got less severe.

There are already apprehensions over the severity of summer heat during May and July as several countries in Asia are now fighting heat waves without any success.

According to reports, temperatures have been regularly

crossing 40°C in several cities and even taking lives due to heat strokes.

The tourist destination of Thailand had temperatures crossing 45°C for the first time in its history, promoting the authorities to warn residents to avoid outdoor activities and be wary of the danger of heat stroke.

The WHO has warned that people should keep their bodies cool and hydrated by taking cool showers or baths during a heatwave.

Other measures include the use of cold packs and wraps, towels, sponging, and foot baths to keep cool, and wearing light, loose-fitting clothes of natural materials.

It also suggests drinking water regularly but avoiding too much caffeine and sugar. Eat small meals and eat more often.

If you feel dizzy, weak, anxious, or have intense thirst and headache during a heatwave, it is best to move to a cool place as soon as possible and measure your body temperature. Drink some water or fruit juice to rehydrate, WHO said.

During a heatwave, ideally, the room temperature should be kept below 32°C during the day and 24°C during the night. This is especially important for infants or adults over the age of 60 or who have chronic health conditions.



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■ EXERCISE COPE INDIA 2023



Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel stand next to a Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet during the joint 'Exercise Cope India 2023' between the United States Air Force (USAF) and IAF at the air force station in Kalaikunda, in India's West Bengal state on Monday.

— AFP

UN launches urgent push for child vaccination

GENEVA: The United Nations kicked off a campaign on Monday to reverse dangerous declines in childhood vaccination due to the pandemic, sparking rising outbreaks of diseases like measles and polio.

The World Health Organization and the UN children's agency Unicef, along with Gavi, the Gates Foundation and other partners launched "The Big Catch-up", to boost child vaccination worldwide.

"Millions of children and adolescents, particularly in lower-income countries, have missed out on life-saving vaccinations, while outbreaks of these deadly diseases have risen," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"Catching up is a top priority. No child should die of a vaccine-preventable disease."

The effort comes after essential immunisation levels decreased in more than 100 countries as the Covid-19 pandemic raged, leading to overburdened health services, closed clinics, and disrupted imports and exports of medical supplies. Communities also experienced lockdowns that restricted travel and access to services.

In 2021, more than 25 million children missed at least one vaccination, the WHO said, with 18 million of those missing out on routine vaccines entirely. As a result, "outbreaks of preventable diseases, including measles, diphtheria, polio and

yellow fever are already becoming more prevalent and severe," it said.

WHO said the campaign would focus in particular on 20 countries where three quarters of all children who missed vaccines in 2021 live. They are Afghanistan, Angola, Brazil, Cameroon, Chad, North Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Tanzania, Vietnam.

WHO vaccines chief Kate O'Brien cautioned that the "sharp decline" in vaccination seen during the pandemic "follows almost a decade of stalled progress". — AFP

Senior WHO official fired over misconduct

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said on Monday it had dismissed a senior official over "findings of misconduct" following at least three reported accusations against him in recent years. The Fijian doctor "Temo Waqanivalu has been dismissed from WHO following findings of misconduct against him and corresponding disciplinary process," spokeswoman Marcia Poole said in an email.

The UN health agency, which has been working to improve its record on tackling misconduct and abuse allegations, did not provide more details about its findings.

But media have reported that the top official in WHO's non-communicable diseases division stands accused of at least three different instances of alleged misconduct since 2017.

— AFP

Biden likely to announce re-election bid today

WASHINGTON: After months of teasing, President Joe Biden is expected finally to announce his bid for a second term on Tuesday, defying lukewarm polls and, at 80, boldly pushing what were once considered age boundaries for one of the planet's most stressful jobs.

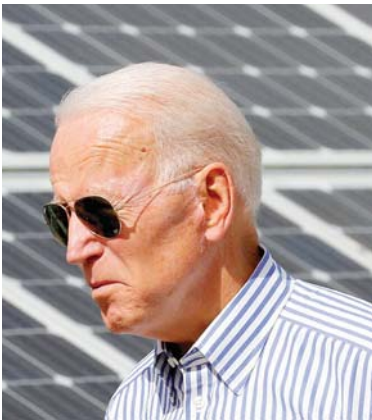
Neither the White House, the Democratic Party nor the president himself have confirmed he will announce but multiple US media reports, citing unnamed sources, say the move will come early on Tuesday in a video address.

This would fall exactly four years after Biden announced his candidacy for the 2020 election in which he defeated Donald Trump. That too was made in the low-key format of a video, as was Barack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign announcement.

By contrast, Trump formally launched his bid for a second term in 2019 at one of his signature rallies.

The 76-year-old Republican has also already announced his bid for a 2024 comeback and is the strong frontrunner to be his party's nominee, despite having been criminally indicted and remaining under multiple other investigations on serious allegations.

Biden's Tuesday schedule



President Joe Biden

currently features an address on the economy at a Washington hotel conference room.

While not a campaign event, the scheduled theme — "how his investing in America agenda is bringing manufacturing back, rebuilding the middle class, and creating good-paying union jobs" — is clearly set to be at the heart of the Democrat's 2024 message.

In the evening, Biden and First Lady Jill Biden will visit Washington's Korean War Memorial along with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife Kim Keon Hee, as they kick off a state visit — and give Biden an opportunity to highlight his foreign policy record.

History shows that as the incumbent, Biden would have an immediate advantage.

Trump, dragged down by his

management of the Covid-19 pandemic and fears among Democrats that he was a threat to democracy, was the first sitting president in three decades to lose re-election.

Biden is also presiding over a powerful post-pandemic economic revival — usually a key factor in deciding presidential elections. However, Biden faces unique headwinds. Chief among these is worry over his age.

He'd be 82 when he began his second term and 86 when he left office. At 80, he is already the oldest person ever in the Oval Office.

An official medical report this year found Biden to be physically in good condition.

But the president's noticeably slow walk — notwithstanding his habit of throwing in a few steps at a jog — and his frequent moments of becoming tongue tied during public speaking have spooked even supporters.

An NBC News poll released over the weekend found that 70 per cent of Americans, including 51 per cent of Democrats, believe he should not run for a second term. Forty eight per cent cited concerns over his age as the main reason and another 21 per cent cited that as a minor reason.

— AFP

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors/consultant specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
004/2023	Civil Works - MAM	Excellent	04 May 2023	05 Jun 2023	815/-
013/2023	Supply and Install Diesel Generator - RAYSOOT	Grad (C) and Above - registered in (DCRP)	04 May 2023	05 Jun 2023	65/-

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill3**)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE-22-112 2023/MM/QS-55 Re-Call-02	Annual Contract for Maintenance of Cables in Muscat Governorate (Re-Tender)	25	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-024 2023/MM/QS-14 Re-Call-01	Supply of Autodesk Software (Re-Tender)	25	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Excellent
PRE-23-061 2023/MM/QS-22	Construction of Side Protection for Internal Road in Bousher	25	09/05/2023	29/05/2023	Second
PRE-23-064 2023/MM/HQ-9	Supply & Installation of Playground Equipment, outdoor Fitness Equipment at Golden Jubilee Walkway at Al-Mawaleh	25	09/05/2023	29/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-075 2023/MM/HQ-10	Upgrade and centralize Avaya Call Manager for DGs at MM	25	09/05/2023	29/05/2023	Excellent
PRE-23-078 2023/MM/QS-23	Pavement Works opposite to the (Al-Safinat building) in Al Seeb	40	09/05/2023	29/05/2023	First
PRE-23-082 2023/MM/QS-24	Digital Activities for Muscat Summer 2023	38	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-083 2023/MM/QS-25	Kids Activities for Muscat Summer 2023	35	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-084 2023/MM/QS-26	Entertainment Activities for Muscat Summer 2023	75	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-087 2023/MM/QS-27	Supply & laying of Asphalt in Muscat Governorate 2023-2024	200	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Excellent
PRE-23-088 2023/MM/HQ-11	Provide Cleaners for Muscat Municipality	106	09/05/2023	29/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-079 2023/MM/QS-28	Maintenance of Fountains in Muscat Governorate	90	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist
PRE-23-080 2023/MM/QS-29	Supply Chain Management System	25	29/04/2023	04/05/2023	Specialist

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
- Clarification and Support:
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
 - For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



Bangladesh swears in new president ahead of election

DHAKA: Mohammed Shahabuddin, a former judge and a ruling party official, was sworn in as the president of Bangladesh on Monday, just months before a general election.

Shahabuddin, 73, was an anti-corruption commissioner and fought in the country's 1971 war of independence, the presidential palace said.

"He was sworn in as the 22nd president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh today," Shampad Barua, secretary of the president said.

He was elected by lawmakers in February after the ruling Awami League party nominated him instead of the speaker of parliament, who had been seen as the favourite.

Shahabuddin replaces Abdul Hamid, a former speaker and Awami League stalwart, whose second term expired on Monday.

The election comes as the country faces mounting protests over the next general election, scheduled to be held in January 2024.

The opposition has staged a series of giant protests in recent months, demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down and let a caretaker government hold a free and fair election.

The opposition accuses Hasina, who has been in power since 2009, of rigging



Mohammed Shahabuddin

the previous two votes, and Western countries and rights groups have also raised concerns. Hasina has rejected the demand.

If Hasina was forced to resign or the protests descend into chaos, the otherwise largely ceremonial presidential office could end up playing a bigger role.

Although he enjoys few powers in his new position, Shahabuddin now oversees the military.

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday sent a message of congratulations to Shahabuddin.

China and Western countries are vying for influence in the South Asian country of 170 million people, with Beijing investing billions of dollars on infrastructure projects there under its Belt and Road initiative.

Bangladesh has agreed to pay Russia about \$300 million in yuan to settle payment for building the facility as reported last week. — AFP

Mass exodus of foreigners as fighting rages in Sudan



People evacuated from Sudan arrive at a military airport in Amman. — AFP

KHARTOUM: Multiple nations pushed on Monday with frantic evacuations of their citizens from chaos-torn Sudan, where fighting raged for a 10th day between forces loyal to two rival generals.

As army and paramilitary forces again clashed in Khartoum and across the country, terrified Sudanese have endured acute shortages of water, food, medicines and fuel as well as power and internet blackouts, the UN said.

At least 427 people have been killed and more than 3,700 wounded, according to United Nations agencies, which also reported Sudanese civilians "fleeing areas affected by fighting, including to Chad, Egypt and

South Sudan."

"Morgues are full, corpses litter the streets" and overwhelmed hospitals often have to stop operations for security reasons, said Dr Attiya Abdallah, head of the doctors' union.

The United States and European, Middle Eastern, African and Asian nations have launched emergency missions to bring to safety their embassy staff and Sudan-based citizens by road, air and sea.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said more than 1,000 of the bloc's citizens had been taken out during a "long and intense weekend" involving missions by France, Germany and other

member nations.

With Khartoum international airport disabled after battles that left charred airplanes on the runways, many foreigners were airlifted out from smaller airstrips and taken to safety in countries including Djibouti and Jordan.

China said on Monday it had "safely evacuated" a first group of citizens and would "try every means to protect the lives, properties and safety of 1,500 plus Chinese compatriots in Sudan".

Long convoys of UN cars and buses have made their way from the capital, where gunfire and explosions have echoed through the streets, to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast, an arduous 850

kilometre road trip away.

As foreigners who can get out flee the country, the growing impact of the violence on Sudan's already dire humanitarian situation worsens.

Five aid workers have been killed, said the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to suspend operations.

The health care system is close to collapse, with the World Health Organization (WHO) verifying 11 attacks on hospitals and clinics, some of which have been overrun by the rival forces and used as military bases.

— AFP

Israeli forces kill Palestinian in West Bank raid

JERICHO: Israeli forces killed a Palestinian man on Monday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, during what the army described as a "counter violence" operation.

The health ministry said Suleiman Ayash, 20, was "killed by the occupation bullets, in Aqabat Jaber camp", the site of previous deadly Israeli raids this year, near the city of Jericho.

The military said Israeli forces had arrested a "wanted suspect" during the raid, without elaborating on the accusations against them.

"During the activity, two suspects were spotted fleeing the scene. The soldiers responded with live fire," an army statement added, confirming "hits".

The army did not specify when asked whether Ayash was one of the two shot while fleeing.

Jericho governor Jihad Abu al-Assal said that Ayash's body was being held by the Israeli military.

Israel regularly withholds the bodies of Palestinians killed during army raids or alleged attacks against Israelis.

The killing is the first in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for



Israeli security forces and rescue workers work at the scene following an incident by Jerusalem's main market. — Reuters

almost two weeks, following a cooling of tensions during the second half of the holy month of Ramadhan.

The conflict has claimed this year the lives of at least 97 Palestinians.

Meanwhile, Israel's army shelled a position in southern Syria near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, a war monitor said, the second such bombardment in days.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "Israeli ground forces" bombarded a location on the outskirts of

Quneitra where fighters from the Syrian Resistance to Liberate the Golan are located, without reporting any casualties.

Earlier this month, amid escalating violence in the region, Israel launched strikes on Syria after several rockets were fired from there and landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Israel rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria.

The Syrian army regained control of the southern part of Quneitra in mid-2018, five years after rebel fighters had overrun it. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KATHMANDU

Nepal issues record 454 permits for Everest

Nepal has issued a record 454 permits to climb Mount Everest this spring, officials said on Monday, four years after at least four deaths on the world's highest peak were blamed on overcrowding.

"This is the highest number of permits the department has issued to summit Mount Everest," Bigyan Koirala from the tourism department said, adding that numbers could rise further.

As most of these mountaineers will attempt to summit Everest



with the help of a Nepali guide, over 900 climbers will be heading for the summit in the next few weeks. This could cause heavy traffic and bottlenecks en route to the summit. — AFP

MALABO

Marburg toll outbreak rises to 12

The death toll in Equatorial Guinea from an outbreak of Marburg virus, a cousin of Ebola haemorrhagic fever, has risen to 12, the health ministry said on Monday.

The figures are a provisional toll based on lab-confirmed tests as of April 21, it said in an update, adding that 116 people were currently being monitored as contact risks.

The first known deaths were documented on January 7 in the eastern province of Kie-Ntem



before the outbreak spread to Bata, the West African nation's economic capital.

The latest known fatality occurred on April 11, the ministry said. — AFP

TRIPOLI

Deadly shipwreck claims 34 lives

The bodies of a total of 34 migrants have been recovered since their boat sank off Libya's coast five days ago, the Libyan Red Crescent said on Monday.

The latest toll follows the recovery of 11 bodies on Monday, which were "handed over to authorities" in the Mediterranean city of Sabratha, west of Tripoli, the Red Crescent confirmed.

A security source said "the number of victims could increase" after the "rubber boat



carrying dozens of migrants overturned not far from the coast of Sabratha on Wednesday".

"In this kind of incident, the chances of survival are slim....," the source added. — AFP



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In brief

■ NAIROBI



DEATH TOLL IN STARVATION CULT RISES TO 58

Kenyan police have recovered 58 bodies, mostly from mass graves in a forest in eastern Kenya, thought to be followers of a Christian cult who believed they would go to heaven if they starved themselves, the country's police chief said on Monday.

The death toll, which has repeatedly risen as exhumations have been carried out, could rise further. The Kenyan Red Cross said 112 people have been reported missing to a tracing and counselling desk. Paul Mackenzie, was arrested.

"Mr Mackenzie ... pretends and postures as a pastor when in fact he is a terrible criminal," said President William Ruto, who was delivering a speech at an unrelated public event just outside Nairobi. — Reuters

■ BERLIN



CLIMATE ACTIVISTS GLUE THEMSELVES TO ROADS

Environmental activists glued themselves to the asphalt in dozens of street blockades across Berlin on Monday to demand the government do more to tackle climate change, an action condemned by Germany's finance minister as "physical violence".

"We no longer accept that the government has no plan to stop the destruction of the basis of our existence," Carla Rochel, a spokeswoman for Last Generation, the group behind the protests, said in a statement.

The action was swiftly rejected by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government, with spokesman Steffen Hebestreit saying: "We do not support such forms of protest". — AFP

■ MEXICO CITY



PRESIDENT SELF-ISOLATING AFTER CATCHING COVID-19

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is receiving medical treatment and self-isolating after testing positive for COVID-19, the country's Interior Minister Adan Augusto said on Monday in a morning press conference.

Augusto said that Lopez Obrador was at the presidential headquarters and that the president had shown cold-like symptoms since Saturday.

On Sunday, local newspaper Diario de Yucatan reported that Lopez Obrador had suffered an apparent heart attack while on a trip to the Yucatan Peninsula. This is the third known Covid-19 diagnosis for Lopez Obrador, 69, who had a serious heart attack in 2013. — Reuters



Belgian PM shakes hands with German Chancellor as they attend the second North Sea Summit, in Ostend, Belgium. — Reuters

European countries aim to boost wind energy production

OSTEND: Nine European countries were holding a summit on Monday aimed at scaling up wind power generation in the North Sea, spurred by the fallout of the Ukraine war and the push for renewables.

Hosted by Belgium in the coastal town of Ostend, the meeting will gather the leaders of EU members France, Germany, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen also attending.

Norway and Britain will participate, too, though the UK's energy minister was leading his delegation.

"We need offshore wind turbines — and we need a lot of them," the leaders of the countries, including French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Sunak, said in a joint op-ed published in

The North Sea summit is the second one to be held, after the four countries in the inaugural gathering last year — Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands — decided it was necessary to broaden cooperation. They recognised this was "a massive undertaking" requiring "huge investments in infrastructure"

Politico.

"We need them to reach our climate goals ensuring a more secure and independent Europe."

The collective goal, they said, was to boost offshore wind power generation to 120 gigawatts by 2030 and at least 300 GW by 2050.

The North Sea summit is the second one to be held, after the four countries in the inaugural gathering last year — Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands — decided it was necessary to broaden cooperation. They recognised this was

"a massive undertaking" requiring "huge investments in infrastructure".

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said ahead of the summit that it would be focused on "speed of execution" and standardising equipment to build the offshore wind farms faster and cheaper.

Around 100 bosses of companies in the wind turbine supply chain were also participating in the summit.

The leaders' op-ed emphasised the need to source expertise and

parts from Europe rather than elsewhere.

"We need to make space for European value chains when it comes to green tech and diversify our sources of critical raw materials for wind turbines, batteries and the like," they said.

Wind-Europe, the federation representing Europe's wind energy industry, believes the summit's ambitions are doable.

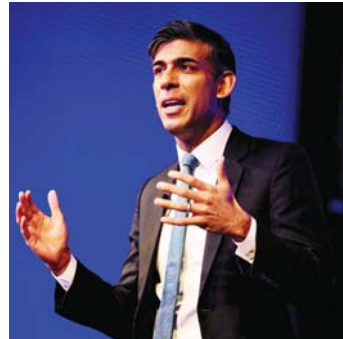
But it highlighted a lack of "adequate funding mechanisms" and recruitment in the sector.

Current policy, aimed at getting to a carbon-neutral future in Europe, "is overly focused on technological breakthroughs, rather than actual scaling up of existing supply chains", Wind-Europe said in a statement.

The European Union recently set a goal to double the proportion of renewables in its energy mix.

— AFP

Sunak seeks to boost business links amid crisis



Britain's PM Rishi Sunak gestures during a speech as he hosts a Business Connect event in North London. — Reuters

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak sought to repair the government's tarnished economic record on Monday, reaching out to the business community rocked by a scandal engulfing the Confederation of British Industry.

Sunak's Conservatives and the main opposition Labour party are jockeying for position ahead of a general election expected next year.

The Tories, traditionally regarded as the party of business, have lost ground with the cost of living crisis and after former premier Liz Truss sparked chaos with unfunded tax cuts last year.

Sunak told business leaders on Monday that his so-called "Business Connect" platform will enable companies to engage directly with his administration.

The news comes as a small number of high-profile firms withdrew from the CBI on Friday after the nation's business lobby was rocked by fresh rape allegations.

Business Connect will look to boost economic growth, Sunak insisted on Monday before an audience of more than 200 high-profile chief executives and business figures.

"We are going to keep engaging to make (Britain) the most pro-business pro-growth country in the world," Sunak said. The UK remains plagued by double-digit inflation that has sparked a cost-of-living crunch, prompting calls from many employers for the government to do more to stimulate economic output.

— AFP

Russia says it repels naval drone attack on Sevastopol

SEVASTOPOL: Russia repelled an attack by naval drones on its Black Sea fleet stationed in the Crimean port of Sevastopol in the early hours of Monday, Russia's defence ministry said.

Sevastopol has come under repeated air attack since Russia sent troops into Ukraine last February. Russian officials have blamed the attacks on Ukraine.

"At about 3.30 a.m. the Kyiv regime tried to attack the base of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol with three unmanned high-speed boats," the ministry said in a statement.

Russia destroyed all three of the naval drones, suffering no casualties or losses in the process, it said.

Residents in the city said that they were concerned about the wave of drone attacks they faced living in Sevastopol, but some had adjusted to the threats.

"When the drones attack, it wakes you up, of course. There's



Russian navy vessels near the Black Sea port of Sevastopol, Crimea. — Reuters

nowhere you can sleep peacefully, the house shakes. You worry for your children," Elena Kudrenko said on Monday.

"But we are confident the anti-missile system works well and that Sevastopol is well protected," she added, standing on the waterside

near the city's ferry port.

"We've got used to the constant noise and constant (military) drills. We barely notice it any

more," another resident, Olga Lonshakova, said.

There was no immediate reaction from Ukraine. Kyiv almost never publicly claims responsibility for attacks inside Russia and on Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine.

Russia annexed Sevastopol, along with the rest of the Crimean peninsula which juts into the Black Sea, in 2014 but it is internationally recognised as part of Ukraine. The city has been a major base for Russia's navy for more than two centuries.

Separately on Monday, a local Russian official said a Ukrainian-made drone packed with explosives had been found crashed in a forest in the Moscow region. No casualties were reported.

Last month three people were injured and apartment blocks were damaged when Russia said it downed a Ukrainian drone south of the Russian capital.

— Reuters

Time to thank God and express gratitude



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

As we completed the holy month of Ramadhan, Muslims around the world celebrated Eid al Fitr, a festive season where we celebrate the achievements of 30 days of fasting and worshipping. During Eid day's, people exchange greetings and spend time with families and friends eating different types of food and remembering the poor who are unable to have the same level of festivity. We also see food dishes being exchanged between the houses and small children receiving their Eid money from their parents, uncles, and aunties. I remember as a child the excitement that precedes Eid day

and the new clothes that are still a tradition these days even when people are able to afford new clothes at any time of the year. Wearing new clothes for Eid is a must, regardless of your age. Eid, like another festive season, is an opportunity to thank God for giving us the strength to complete fasting during the month of Ramadhan and to express gratitude for all the good things that God granted us. It is also a time to feel peace and amend our relationships with people around us, sometimes people from the same families have quarrels and misunderstandings which leads them to lose contact with one another despite feeling the hurt of the broken relationship,

‘EID IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO THANK GOD FOR GIVING US THE STRENGTH TO COMPLETE FASTING DURING RAMADHAN AND TO EXPRESS GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE GOOD THINGS THAT GOD GRANTED US’ some people hide behind their pride and ego and avoid reconciliation. If you find yourself in such a situation, be the first to extend your hand and forgive, make Eid the occasion for new binging like other festivities. Eid is a time to enjoy special meals, be it sweets or meat dishes,

yet one has to be mindful that after 30 days of fasting your digestive system is unable to process a large amount of food at the same time so be kind to your stomach and take it easy with food to avoid unnecessary visits to the hospital emergency department where doctors and nurses are expected to manage emergencies and save lives. Since the first day of Eid marks the end of Ramadhan some people may experience different adjusting their sleeping time since the majority of us stay up late during Ramadhan to eat and then sleep during the day. For some people, the shift back to the pre-Ramadhan sleeping schedule may be difficult so they end up sleeping during the day and missing out on different activities.

If you find yourself experiencing such a problem, try to limit your caffeine intake and go to bed early so you can get up fresh the following morning. Some people travel to their villages to spend time with their extended families which means sleeping in a different place and beds than you are used to. Make sure the room temperature is adjusted and the level of darkness is appropriate to help you fall asleep during the day. Remember to schedule some time for physical exercise in the evening to help your body feel tired just enough for natural sleep to kick in. Finally, wherever you spend your Eid, stay safe and have yourself a wonderful time.

Australia unveils biggest defence reform in decades

MAX BLENKIN & ANDREW BEATTY

Australia launched its biggest defence overhaul in decades on Monday, vowing to turn a military that is “no longer fit for purpose” into a fighting force that could deter any would-be foe. Defence Minister Richard Marles unveiled a strategic review that called for a sharp shift towards long-range deterrence — using missiles, submarines and cyber tools to keep adversaries at arm’s length. “Today, for the first time in 35 years, we are recasting the mission of the Australian Defence Force,” Marles said. The review warns “the risks of military escalation or miscalculation are rising”. In response to that threat, Australia’s military will develop the ability to strike from air, land and sea, strengthen northern bases and recruit more troops. “We aim to change the calculus so no potential aggressor can ever conclude that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks,” the review said. Asked about the overhaul and the reasons given for it, Beijing said it hoped some countries would “refrain from using China as an excuse to expand their military power. China’s military policy is “defensive in nature” and poses “no threat to any country”, foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular press briefing. Australia has already announced a key tool in its new strategy — the development of stealthy long-range nuclear-powered submarines that could retaliate with a barrage of cruise missiles and little warning. There will be a short, independent review this year of the navy’s surface combatant fleet to ensure its size, structure and composition complement the capabilities provided by the new nuclear-powered submarines. The biggest changes may be felt in the Australian army, which will now have a sharper focus on coastal defence, particularly in the country’s vast north. Australia’s northern city of Darwin was bombed by Japan in World War II, but until recently defence planners believed they would get a decade’s warning before any new attack was imminent. “The rise of the ‘missile age’ in modern warfare, crystallised by the proliferation of long-range precision strike weapons, has radically reduced Australia’s geographic benefits,” the review concluded. As a result, the army will also be tasked with providing “a long-range strike capability”, while existing land-focused projects will be put to the knife. — AFP

As Gaza celebrates Eid, a gift for women — and a duty for men



Raja Abdulrahim

The writer is a correspondent in Jerusalem for NYT

On the morning of Eid al Fitr, Arafat Helles starts the day with a special prayer at the mosque to mark the end of Ramadhan, and eat a breakfast of salty cheeses to line his stomach for what is to come. Then, he will set out with his three brothers and father across the Gaza Strip. They will begin with their mother but eventually visit some 15 sisters, aunts and nieces, doling out dinars and shekels as part of a Palestinian custom of men marking the holiday by giving an eidiya, a gift of money, to female relatives. The visits will follow an almost choreographed routine. At each home, the men will be plied with coffee and sweets. After little more than 15 minutes, the social calls will end — a rarity in a society where such visits may last for hours, and often end in an invitation to stay for dinner. “This is the eidiya visit,” said Helles, 48, a professor of social services at Al Quds Open University, in Gaza. “It’s one of our important traditions.” Giving an eidiya has long been a practice — though it has no religious basis — and is believed by some to date back 1,000 years to the Fatimid dynasty and the practice of emirs giving gold coins or gifts during festivities. But in most Muslim cultures, adults give an eidiya to children, sometimes in small, token amounts. Palestinians give the money to both children and adult female relatives, making the tradition far more expensive, with the kind of financial burden and expectations that Christmas gift giving has in the West. The amounts can range from 20 shekels, about \$6, to 365 shekels, about \$100. These days, coming up with the money for the eidiya is especially onerous. The 16-year blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt has undermined the living conditions of more than 2 million Palestinians, and led to a nearly 50 per cent unemployment rate that is among the highest in the world. To give the eidiya, some men will go into debt. Others will wait until their wives get their eidiya from relatives



Hanadi Tawaahena prepares pastries for Eid al Fitr with relatives at her home in Deir al Balah in central Gaza Strip.

THE EIDIYA PRACTICE COMES AT THE END OF A MONTH OF ALREADY ADDED EXPENSES FOR RAMADHAN, WITH THE ELABORATE DINNERS AFTER DAILY FASTS, DECORATION OF HOMES, PURCHASE OF NEW CLOTHES TO BE WORN ON EID

before turning around and using that money to give the gift to their other female relatives. “However bad one’s financial situation is, we have to go and give,” said Helles’ father, Hamid al Abid Helles, 74. “This is a tradition we won’t abandon.” The practice comes at the end of a month of already added expenses for Ramadhan, with the elaborate dinners after daily fasts, and decoration of homes and purchase of new clothes to be worn on Eid. In the weeks leading up to the holiday shopping districts in Gaza were packed, with seasonal religious music just audible over the din of shoppers and honking horns. At each relative’s house, Arafat Helles, his brothers and father will be served strong Turkish coffee, Eid date cookies and chocolates — part of the

Eid diyafah, or hospitality. They will eat just enough to be polite but remain conscious that at the next stop they will be offered the same spread and encouraged to indulge. “By the end we have a stomachache,” said Helles, a father of six. “We put all the chocolate in our pockets and tell them we’ll eat it later.” “He comes back home and his pocket is bulging with chocolates,” said his wife, Basima Helles, 44. Every year Basima Helles tells her own brother not to give her an eidiya, because she knows that his financial situation is precarious, and that she is one of six sisters. “We say, ‘we forgive you, we excuse you,’ but he’s not willing to come empty-handed,” she said. “He considers this a social obligation.” The next day, when women go to visit their families for Eid, she will return the money by giving it as an eidiya to his children. As the economic situation in Gaza has worsened in recent years, men unable to afford the gift giving have stopped visiting relatives altogether during Eid to avoid embarrassment. But religious leaders urge men not to abandon a religious obligation — visiting family — for the sake of a cultural one — the eidiya. — New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Holidaying and handling social anxiety

We are back with meetings with coffee breaks and sipping water and thinking of number of glasses of water to consume everyday.

The fasting culminated with feasting and holidaying and now it is time to bring back life to normalcy.

The pace of life will change too because we are slowly approaching summer. Something about summer makes you think of holidays as well. It is programmed in such a way due to our schooling system. For more than 10 years we are into the calendar that sticks to us and that makes one wonder why do we not take up courses in school on management of finance and eating right.

Life would be perfect then... would it not?

It is not that simple, because for children who would also seem to be yet another text book to study to be tested later. But some parents get it right and they somehow get children involved in life skills. It is just like the topic of whose responsibility is it anyway?

We want to push more and more responsibilities to schools and they in turn have to give assignments where parents also have to be involved.

Initially it is exciting and then it is interesting only to find the path getting to be challenging for parents.

The years pass by so quickly that you are soon looking at a youth armed with ambitions and insecurities wanting to take a leap.

Wonder how would they fare in real life because parents themselves are battling it out.

How do some find the right call and how are they lucky to have been able to make the decision early in life?

Mentors make a difference.

While parents are busy molding a child, mentors open up the potential of the world. Friends could fulfill all kind of roles. From throwing in the peer pressure of judging and defining they can also help each other grow. They can also be the game changers. They can bring in a sense of belonging or create a tone of isolation.



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

BRIDGING OF GAPS AND CONNECTING THE GENERATIONS MAY NOT NEED RESEARCH OR DISCOVERIES

The bridging of the gaps and connecting the generations may not need research or discoveries but the fact is we are still not working towards eliminating loneliness that could be playing a crucial role in a variety of health ailments.

The short holidays we all have had together has brought many families and friends together, and even here there must have been the ones who dreaded the gatherings because they suffer from social anxiety.

They say social anxiety is all about having a persistent fear of being watched and judged. The social media influencers really opened up our eyes on how so many people excel in the art of being in the spotlight like never before. The difference today is the individuals are creating their own space.

This of course had created opportunities to excel but even here only the strong ones can last because cyber bullying can be even more powerful. Of course one has a choice of vanishing from the scene by deleting the identity but the scars might not be easily healed.

Could this lead to social anxiety in people who once used to be confident?

In social anxiety one often thinks others can notice they are nervous and it can be an ordeal making people wonder whether it is necessary to put oneself through the challenging experience. Once people withdraw it might be difficult to make a comeback but as they say once you know cycling or swimming there is never really a chance for a person to forget the skills that have been acquired.

People with social anxiety are often misunderstood as being arrogant. Only psychiatrist or a psychologist who can tell us more about how introverts are different from people with social anxiety.

But from what we understand is the introverts are quite comfortable the way they are. In fact they are happy in their own company and space. As a matter of fact they gain more energy and hardly goes through any stress.

Now comes about the individuals who are shy. Might never know whether it is shyness that keeps them away from interactions or is it social anxiety.

FROM THE TOP!



■ A man performs bungee jumping from a crane at Martyrs Square in Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday. – AFP

Mitigating humanitarian nightmare

Since 2017, IS-affiliated insurgents have wreaked havoc on Mozambique. Terrorising the northern province of Cabo Delgado, the militants have killed more than 6,500 people, ravaged infrastructure, recruited child soldiers, and committed gender-based violence. All told, the conflict has displaced nearly one million people.

The World Food Programme Representative and Country Director for Mozambique has called the resulting humanitarian crisis a “catastrophe beyond epic proportions.” Chief among the challenges facing the population is reduced access to healthcare. The insurgency has forced the closure of nearly half of Cabo Delgado’s health centres. As thousands of Mozambicans move south to escape the violence, their basic healthcare needs are straining the infrastructure in other provinces, thereby weakening the country’s overall health security.

The international response has been substantial: the United Nations has appealed for \$437 million in humanitarian aid to address the massive internal displacement in northern Mozambique, and the United States, in particular, is funnelling considerable resources into the country. In addition to the sizeable US development assistance allocated to Mozambique each year, USAID announced a plan last July to provide \$116 million in supplemental aid – mostly for food and nutrition



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purposes, though some funds are intended to meet healthcare needs.

But President Joe Biden’s administration would be wise to make health security and infrastructure a central focus of its Mozambique strategy, using the new direction and flexibility offered by recent legislation. Guided by lessons from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress passed the Global Fragility Act (GFA) in 2019 to prevent violent conflict and promote stability around the world. Enacted with broad bipartisan support, the law mandates officials to rethink US foreign policy in conflict-prone areas and to deepen engagement with civil society and local partners.

In April 2022, the Biden administration designated Mozambique a priority country under the GFA. Over the next ten years, the administration plans to transform US government agencies and pursue partnerships at all levels as a means to tackle instability and prevent future outbreaks of violence in Mozambique and other target areas.

But crafting an effective response to displacement is difficult, and many efforts to reach Mozambique’s most vulnerable have been hindered by

logistical challenges like flooding from cyclones and widespread destruction of infrastructure. Poor health systems, in particular, are a roadblock to recovery and development, and the State Department’s 2020 strategy for implementing the GFA makes clear that health – alongside education, food security, and other factors – is a critical and necessary component of a stable country. On this front, Mozambique falls short.

Mozambique faces the current crisis from an already precarious position in terms of public health. It has an alarmingly high infectious-disease burden: HIV affects 13 per cent of the adult population, and the country has Africa’s second-largest HIV+ population. Moreover, annual tuberculosis (TB) cases increased by 35 per cent between 2011 and

2021, and around one-third of the population contracted malaria in 2020. Since both HIV and TB require continuous and often supervised medical treatment, hospital and clinic closures and forced displacement make it even more difficult for patients to access the necessary care. The combination of existing health challenges and the ongoing insurgency has only intensified the country’s fragility.

To be sure, Mozambique has made great strides in addressing its many public-health concerns, which could provide a helpful model for interventions under the GFA. The Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria estimates that, through grants totalling more than \$2.2 billion to fund infectious-disease programmes and efforts to strengthen Mozambique’s health

system, nearly three million new HIV infections and 220,000 TB deaths were averted between the Global Fund’s founding in 2002 and 2021.

Such successes illustrate for US policymakers the importance of civil-society engagement in a long-term strategy. Together with the Mozambican Ministry of Health, three organisations – Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade, Centro de Colaboração em Saúde (CCS), and World Vision International – implement the Global Fund grants in Mozambique. These organisations perform essential functions, like providing medicine, educating community groups on prevention techniques, and funding community health workers.

Building ties with local partners isn’t a foreign approach for the US, making the Biden administration’s strategy to address the causes of fragility that much more attainable. In fact, under the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, the US partnered with CCS in 2010 to begin the transition to a country-led HIV- and TB-response model. Since then, CCS has expanded its clinical work from Maputo, the capital, to eight other provinces, including Cabo Delgado.

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The conflict has displaced nearly one million people.

sport



Manchester United players celebrate after winning the penalty shoot-out against Brighton & Hove Albion in the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley, London. — Reuters

Man Utd edge Brighton to reach FA Cup final

LONDON: Manchester United beat Brighton & Hove Albion in a thrilling penalty shoot-out after their FA Cup semifinal at Wembley on Sunday finished 0-0 after extra time to set up the first all-Manchester clash in the final.

Solly March, Brighton's seventh player to step up to the spot in the shoot-out, launched the ball over the bar, before Victor Lindelof found the net to secure a 7-6 shoot-out victory for United.

"It felt great," Lindelof told the BBC. "It was a great relief and we're glad to be in the final."

"I have confidence in myself and I knew which penalty I wanted to take and that's what I did."

The nail-biting finale was a fitting ending after 120 goalless minutes of wild swings in a game

that careened from end to end all night.

The quality of the penalties in a torrential downpour was superb with United finding the net with all seven of their spotkicks.

Brighton's first six efforts were equally impressive until March fired wildly off target.

"They were great penalties," United keeper David De Gea said. "I was prepared as always. I tried to put pressure on the takers."

"There's still a long way to the final but it will be a big game against one of the best teams in Europe and the world."

Erik ten Hag's United, 12-time FA Cup winners, are chasing a cup double after winning the League Cup in February.

Treble-chasing Manchester



Brighton & Hove Albion's Robert Sanchez in action as Manchester United's Marcel Sabitzer scores a penalty in the shoot-out. — Reuters

City await in the final after they beat Sheffield United 3-0 in their semi on Saturday.

"We showed at home we can beat them (Manchester City) so let's hope," De Gea said. United beat City 2-1 in the Premier League at Old Trafford on January 14.

"We are on the right track. One trophy, another final and fighting for the top four. It's not enough but it's a big step from last season."

Sunday's semi was a rematch of the 1983 final, when Brighton lost to United in the south coast side's only appearance in the showcase game.

It had fans on the edge of their seats at Wembley with numerous chances for both sides to break the deadlock, including several in extra time.

Marcus Rashford's deflected shot in the extra period was pushed wide by Brighton's diving keeper Robert Sanchez, and then he fired a long shot that sailed just wide.

Kaoru Mitoma nearly won it for Brighton late in extra time, but collided with De Gea in the box.

"It was a very tight game we played a very good team," De Gea said. "Brighton play really good football. We are now in the final but we have another big game on Thursday (against Tottenham in the Premier League) so we need to go home and recover."

The loss ended Brighton's superb run and ended The Seagulls' hopes of clinching a first-ever major trophy.

The FA Cup final is on June 3 at Wembley. — Reuters

Atletico chief hopes to see Messi, Ronaldo back in LaLiga

MADRID: Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo would like to see Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo face off in LaLiga before both players retire.

Messi has been repeatedly linked with a return to Barcelona, with whom he spent 21 years prior to leaving for Paris Saint-Germain as a free agent in August 2021. The 35-year-old is a free agent again in July.

Ronaldo enjoyed nine trophy-laden seasons with Real Madrid, meanwhile, prior to playing for Juventus, Manchester United and now Saudi Arabian side Al Nassr.

While there has been little talk of 38-year-old Ronaldo heading back to the Spanish top flight, Cerezo believes it would benefit the league for the two superstar forwards to return one day.

"It would seem fantastic to me if Messi returned to the league,



the same as Cristiano Ronaldo," he told reporters.

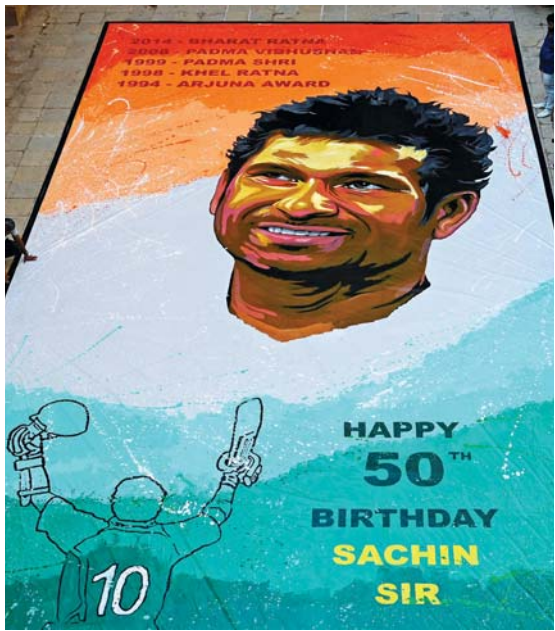
"Both are still playing and it would be fantastic if they returned."

Atletico's lost 1-0 on Sunday at Barcelona, which leaves Diego Simeone's side 16 points adrift of the leaders and five behind second-place Real Madrid.

Yannick Carrasco played a full part for Atletico, though he may find himself at Barcelona next season as the Catalan giants have the option to sign the versatile wide player.

"Yannick is a very good player, fantastic," Cerezo said when asked about Carrasco's future.

"In the world of football, there are people who want to achieve many things and don't get to, and others who don't want anything and get it. I don't know [what will happen next]." — dpa



People stand near a painting of Indian former international cricketer Sachin Tendulkar made on the occasion of his 50th birthday, in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

Sydney Cricket Ground gates named after Tendulkar, Lara

SYDNEY: A set of gates at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) have been named in honour of Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara to mark the Indian's 50th birthday and the 30th anniversary of the West Indies batsman's innings of 277 at the ground.

Cricket Australia said that visiting players would pass through the gates on their way to the pitch from the away dressing room in the Members Pavilion. Home players access the field via gates named after Australian great Don Bradman.

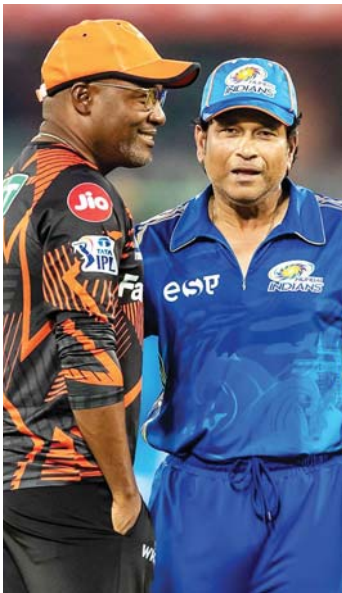
"The Sydney Cricket Ground has been my favourite ground away from India," Tendulkar, who scored three centuries in five Tests at the SCG and celebrated his birthday on Monday, said in a Cricket Australia news release.

"I have had some great memories at the SCG right from my first tour of Australia. It is a great honour to have the gates used by all visiting cricketers to access the field of play at the SCG named after me and my good friend Brian."

Lara, a frequent visitor to Australia, scored his brilliant double century in his first Test at the ground in January 1993.

"I'm deeply honoured to be recognised at the Sydney Cricket Ground, as I'm sure Sachin is," said the 53-year-old Trinidadian.

"The ground holds many special memories for me and my family and I always enjoy visiting whenever I'm in Australia." — Reuters



Rahane magic helps CSK steamroll Kolkata

KOLKATA: An electric 71 not out off just 29 balls by Ajinkya Rahane helped Chennai Super Kings rack up this season's highest total of 234-5 as they blew away Kolkata Knight Riders and moved top of the IPL table on Sunday.

Despite a blistering 61 off 26 by Jason Roy and a valiant half-century by Rinku Singh, Kolkata fell 49 runs short in front of 60,000 fans at a noisy Eden Gardens stadium to suffer their fourth straight defeat.

Put in to bat, opener Devon Conway hit his fourth consecutive half-century before Rahane and Shivam Dube launched into the Kolkata attack with a barrage of 10 sixes and eight fours to put on 85 off just 32 balls.

Once Kulwant Khejroliya dismissed Dube in the 18th over Rahane moved up a gear, smashing 21 runs off the final five balls he faced to give Chennai their third-highest total in IPL history.

"I came into the season with a clear mind and trying to enjoy my batting," Rahane said. "Playing with (Chennai captain) MS Dhoni, he makes you feel that you can achieve anything."

Kolkata got off to a disastrous start, with Sunil Narine falling for a duck to Akash Singh and Narayan Jagadeesan back in the hutch for one to leave the hosts flailing on 1-2.

Venkatesh Iyer struck a useful 20 before falling leg-before to Moeen Ali and Nitish Rana made 27 as Roy raced to his 50 accompanied by the dangerous Rinku.

But the English bruiser was out-foxed by Maheesh Theekshana and Rinku -- who made 53 not out -- lost partners, with Andre Russell, David Wiese, Umesh Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy all out cheaply.

Theekshana ended with 2 for 32 and Tushar Deshpande figures of 2 for 43. — AFP



Chennai Super Kings' Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot during the IPL Twenty20 match against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata. — AFP



Sri Lanka's Nishan Madushka (L) drops the catch of Ireland's Lorcan Tucker (R) during the first day of the second and final Test match between Sri Lanka and Ireland at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on Monday. — AFP

Balbirnie helps Ireland bounce back in Sri Lanka Test

GALLE, Sri Lanka: A career-best 95 by Andy Balbirnie helped Ireland reach a strong 319 for four at stumps on day one of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Galle on Monday.

In a strong comeback after a heavy innings defeat in the first Test, at the close of play Ireland's Lorcan Tucker was unbeaten on 78 and Curtis Campher was not out 27.

Having made three changes, Ireland began nervously as Peter Moor departed for five and Sri Lanka's first Test hero Prabath Jayasuriya removed James McCollum for 10.

But captain Balbirnie held firm in hot and humid conditions, grinding out a 115-run partnership with the returning Paul Stirling after Harry Tector fell to Jayasuriya for 18.

It was the highest partnership for Ireland in their brief Test history — this is only their sixth match — surpassing a 114-run stand from their inaugural Test in 2018.

Stirling, who had missed the first Test, exhibited his experience punishing loose balls as he reached his maiden half-century in Test cricket off 64 balls.

But his promising knock was cut short when he had to retire hurt with cramps. His 74 came off 133 balls with six fours and three sixes.

Balbirnie, meanwhile, raced to his third half-century off just 43 balls with 10 boundaries but was sedate after the milestone as he built the crucial partnership with Stirling.

Balbirnie missed out on the chance to become only the third Irishman to score a Test century, caught after a wild paddle sweep off Kusal Mendis for 95, beating his previous best of 82.

Tucker was then caught bat-pad by Mendis off Jayasuriya but the appeal was turned down and skipper Dimuth Karunaratne chose not to review.

This is now Ireland's second-highest total in Test cricket behind the 339 all out against Pakistan in 2018. — AFP

Gujarat aim to snap jinx against Mumbai



If this is the last feature of Mahendra Singh Dhoni, then he has made sure that he has shown us the best of himself and these memories are going to last forever.

Players like Ajinkya Rahane and Shivam Dube, who were written off as T20 capable players are currently becoming prime contenders for the Indian national team. This capability of bringing out the best from players makes him precious. On one side, we see RCB writing off players year-after-year and then those players going to other teams and performing and then we have the vintage Dhoni that brings gold out from stones.

One prime example of how is he does all of this is that, in the match against Kolkata Knight Riders, he had the option of sending Moeen Ali and Ambati Rayudu to bat.

Yet he held on to both of them and rather sent Ravindra Jadeja, who was looking rusty in the previous

encounters. What happens with this is that, by the time the team reaches play-offs, all the eleven players would have had a top-quality knock under their belt and hence the odds of them succeeding in a pressure game increases by a big margin. Hats off to Dhoni — a leader in the true sense!

GT VS MI AT AHMEDABAD

TEAM INFO - The defending champions Gujarat who have dominated and conquered the Indian Premier League, would want to add this feather to their existing glorious crown. One team that they haven't been able to beat is Mumbai. It will be interesting to see if Arjun Tendulkar is treated like a cricketer and dropped after a major failure or given another chance, just like how it would happen to any player with a golden spoon.

HEAD-TO-HEAD - Played - 1; Won by GT - 0; Won by MI - 1

GT POSSIBLE XI - Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Shubman Gill, Hardik Pandya (c), Vijay Shankar, Abhinav Manohar, David Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Mohammed Shami, Noor Ahmad, Mohit Sharma



Gujarat Titans' Rashid Khan (2R) celebrates with team-mates after taking the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants' Kyle Mayers (not pictured) during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match between Lucknow Super Giants and Gujarat Titans at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow. — AFP

MI POSSIBLE XI - Rohit Sharma (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Tilak Varma, Suryakumar Yadav, Tim David, Cameron Green, Nehal Wadhwa, Arjun Tendulkar, Piyush Chawla, Jason Behrendorff, Hrithik Shokeen

PITCH & WEATHER REPORT - The previous match at this venue saw a

hard-fought contest between bat and ball. While the slower bowlers are expected to get a fair bit of assistance from the surface in Ahmedabad, the batters will also chance their arm with relatively shorter boundaries on offer at the venue. It will be a slightly warm evening in Ahmedabad with 1%

chance of rain, which should not be a concern.

MATCH PREDICTION - Gujarat have looked like a very solid and settled side, yet they had a few hiccups here and there. The main USP of this side is in its all-around capabilities with unbelievable quality in its batting and bowling department. On the other side, even after Mumbai having a short winning streak, which was recently broken by Punjab, there are a lot of concerns with the bowling department. The team mainly relies on the batting of Rohit Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav, their consistency has also been a matter of concern and they would like to look into it. For the time being, I would surely like to back the team in form, that's Gujarat Titans.

FAN COMMENTS

"Cricket is a fantastic game in helping people connect and unite. Some enjoy playing it, while others enjoy watching it. Being a Mumbaikar, I have been a big fan of five-time champions Mumbai Indians and I hope that they stand up to their calibre and get the sixth trophy home." — **Ashok Borkar**, CEO/Oman Concrete Products LLC, Indian.

"It's a match-up between the place where I was born and where I reside currently. Both these champion sides are warriors and all that I want is a good and closely fought contest between both, which would assure that cricket is a winner at the end of the day. #warofchampions" — **Jaypal Dinesh Udeshi**, 39, senior telecaller/spinny cars, Indian.

"Kung-fu Pandya has set a new template for T20 success under the guidance of legendary Ashish Nehra. Both together have killed it in the Indian Premier League. I really want Sri Lankan national team to also pick up on this and become world leader in the T20 and do justice with their talent." — **Govinnage Dushan Praveena Perera**, 34, FOH at Maya Restaurant, Sri Lankan.

"It was 3 years back that I started watching IPL at my school friend's house in get-together meets. After that, I started playing this game at one of the local academies and now I am my team captain. 'Go aamchi Mumbai go, changla kheltos tumhi!'" — **Reehan al Amri**, 11, Student, Omani.



Napoli players celebrate after winning the Italian Serie A match between Juventus and Napoli at the Juventus stadium in Turin. – AFP

RASPADORI FIRES NAPOLI PAST JUVE TO BRINK OF TITLE GLORY

MILAN: Giacomo Raspadori fired Napoli to the brink of their first Serie A title in over three decades on Sunday with his stoppage-time winner in a 1-0 triumph at Juventus which was packed with late drama.

Italy international Raspadori was left completely unmarked to lash home a volley from Eljif Elmas's cross in the 93rd minute of a pulsating encounter in Turin, pushing Napoli 17 points ahead of second-placed Lazio, who lost at home to Torino on Saturday.

Raspadori's late winner means that Napoli, who were knocked out of the Champions League by AC Milan on Tuesday, can win Serie A for the first time since 1990 next weekend if they beat Salernitana and Lazio fail to win at Inter Milan.

"It was a very important goal, but we still have matches to win. Today gave us a great hand as we came from disappointment in the Champions League," said Raspadori.

"We only have one thing on our minds, get three points against Salernitana."

Juve stay third, where they rose to on Thursday following the decision to revoke their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity, after their third straight league defeat.

However they await a new ruling from the Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) appeals court to see if they will be handed a new points penalty, a decision which will have a big impact in Serie



Napoli's Italian defender Giovanni Di Lorenzo (C) fights for the ball with Juventus' Brazilian defender Danilo (L) and Juventus' Italian forward Federico Chiesa during the Italian Serie A match at the Juventus stadium in Turin. – AFP

A's race for the Champions League.

"We played well but we conceded a really idiotic goal," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri.

"It's the 93rd minute you have to have bodies into the box to defend."

LATE DRAMA

Juve thought they had snatched the points for themselves when substitute Angel Di Maria netted a brilliant solo effort with eight minutes remaining, only for referee Michael Fabbri to then rule it out for a foul on

Stanislav Lobotka which Juve were convinced was a good tackle.

By that point Victor Osimhen should have already put Napoli ahead through one of the three golden chances he missed midway through the second half.

First he clipped the outside of the post in the 70th minute following great work from Elmas and then headed a great opportunity straight at Wojciech Szczesny from the subsequent corner.

The away fans then had their heads in their hands three minutes later when

Osimhen was brilliantly fed by Giovanni Di Lorenzo but could only smash his close-range finish over the bar.

However after Di Maria had another goal chalked off for the ball going out of play, and Osimhen miscontrolled when clean through on goal, Raspadori popped up to take Napoli to potentially one match from fulfilling the dream of a generation of fans.

LEAO, LUKAKU HIT BRACES

Rafael Leao and Romelu Lukaku both hit braces as the Milan giants earned straight-

forward wins over Lecce and Empoli days after setting up a derby Champions League semifinal.

On a high from his stellar display which knocked Napoli out of Europe on Tuesday, Leao scored his first home goals since November in fifth-placed Milan's 2-0 success over lowly Lecce, heading them in front in the 40th minute at the San Siro before slinking up the pitch and rolling home the second with 15 minutes remaining.

"I thought about that before the match, that I needed to score because it was such a long time since I had here," the AC Milan player said after taking his league tally to 12.

Stefano Pioli's side are outside the Champions League positions on goal difference behind Roma, who are at Atalanta on Monday night.

Milan are also two points ahead of Inter following their 3-0 win at Empoli which came thanks to two fine low finishes in the second half from Lukaku, his first league goals from open play since the opening day of the season.

Lukaku, who also set up Lautaro Martinez's late strike, then hailed as a "step forward for Italian football" the FIGC overturning his one-match ban for being sent off in the first leg of their Italian Cup semifinal with Juventus, as he was racially abused before being dismissed.

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Empoli 0 Inter Milan 3 (Lukaku 48, 76, Martinez 88)

Juventus 0 Napoli 1 (Raspadori 90+2)

AC Milan 2 (Leao 40, 75) Lecce 0

Monza 3 (Biraghi 26-og, Dany Mota 43, Pessina 59-pen) Fiorentina 2 (Kouame 8, Saponara 13)

Udinese 3 (Samardzic 2, Perez 27, Success 36) Cremonese 0

PLAYED ON SATURDAY

Lazio 0 Torino 1 (Ilic 43)

Salernitana 3 (Pirola 9, Dia 20, Coulibaly 65) Sassuolo 0

Sampdoria 1 (Amione 23) Spezia 1 (Verde 59)

ON FRIDAY

Verona 2 (Verdi 45+6-pen, 62) Bologna 1 (Dominguez 90+4)

ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Napoli	31	25	3	3	67	21	78
Lazio	31	18	7	6	49	21	61
Juventus	31	18	5	8	47	26	59
Roma	30	17	5	8	42	26	56
AC Milan	31	16	8	7	51	37	56
Inter Milan	31	17	3	11	51	34	54
Atalanta	30	14	7	9	48	35	49
Bologna	31	12	8	11	40	39	44
Udinese	31	10	12	9	42	39	42
Fiorentina	31	11	9	11	37	36	42
Torino	31	11	9	11	32	36	42
Monza	31	11	8	12	38	43	41
Sassuolo	31	11	7	13	38	46	40
Salernitana	31	7	12	12	37	50	33
Empoli	31	7	11	13	25	40	32
Lecce	31	6	10	15	26	38	28
Spezia	31	5	12	14	26	49	27
Hellas Verona	31	6	8	17	26	44	26
Cremonese	31	3	10	18	27	57	19
Sampdoria	31	3	8	20	20	52	17

NOTE: Top four qualify for Champions League; team in fifth qualifies for the Europa League; sixth-placed team goes into the Europa Conference League play-offs; bottom three are relegated



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Oman ranked 43rd on World Bank’s 2023 Logistics Performance Index

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Sultanate of Oman has been ranked 43rd out of 139 economies around the globe in the World Bank’s 2023 Logistics Performance Index, signalling that the country is able to maintain its logistics infrastructure and systems.

The Logistics Performance Index (LPI) is a comprehensive measure of a country’s logistics performance that rates countries across six different dimensions: customs, infrastructure, international shipments, logistics quality and competence, tracking and tracing and timeliness.

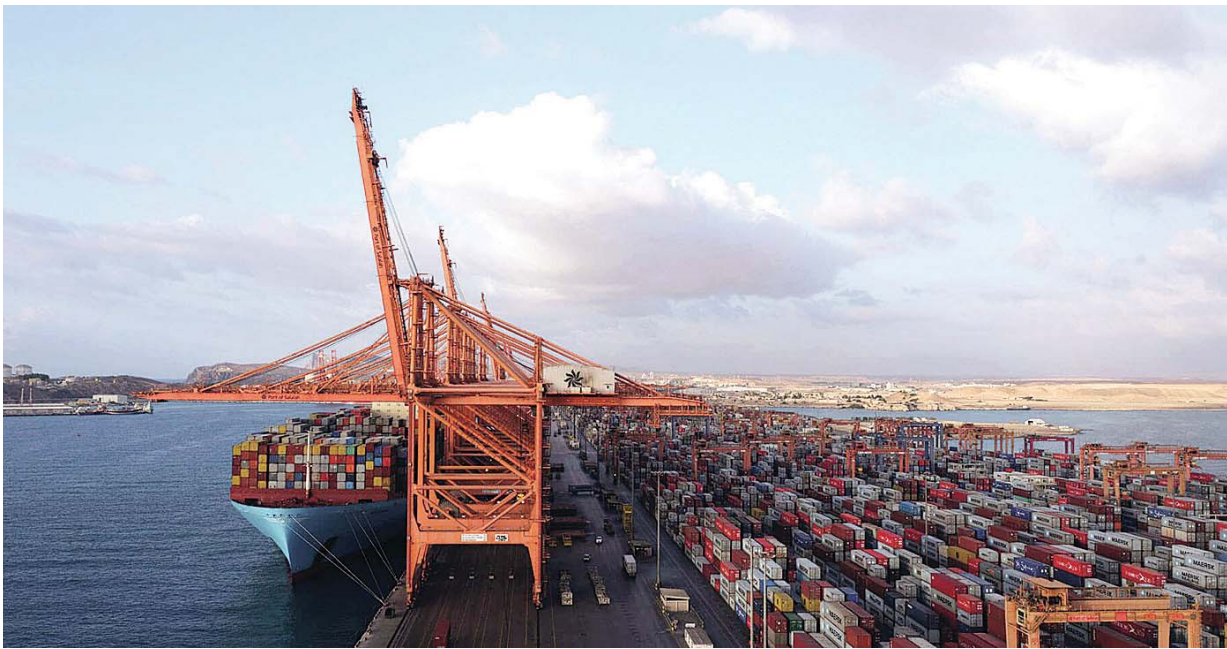
The report shows that Oman is tied with seven other economies, including the Philippines, Croatia, Malta, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Vietnam.

Although Oman’s ranking remains at 43rd, the country’s score on 5 criteria significantly improved compared to its 2018 score. Oman is also among the top five Arab countries in logistics services.

The improvement in Oman’s logistics performance is attributed to the government’s initiatives aimed at enhancing the logistics infrastructure, regulatory environment and trade facilitation.

The government of Oman has been prioritising the improvement of the country’s logistics infrastructure, investing significantly in developing ports, airports and road networks.

As a testament, the Port of Salalah



is ranked as the second most efficient container port in the Middle East and is considered one of the world’s most technologically advanced ports with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment.

The government has also developed the Duqm Special Economic Zone, which provides world-class infrastructure and logistics services to investors.

In addition to infrastructure development, the Oman government has implemented regulatory reforms aimed at simplifying trade procedures and reducing bureaucratic barriers.

Regulations have been issued specifically aimed to improve business environment and to attract foreign investors.

The government has also invested

in training and development programmes aimed at enhancing the skills and developing national talents in the logistics industry.

The improvement in Oman’s logistics performance has significant implications for the country’s economy.

Logistics is a critical enabler of trade, and improved logistics performance can boost trade volumes, reduce costs and enhance competitiveness.

Oman’s ranking at 43rd in the Logistics Performance Index is expected to boost investor confidence in the country, attracting new investments and creating job opportunities.

The World Bank noted that the 2023 edition of the LPI comes after three years of unprecedented supply chain disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic, when delivery times soared.

“Logistics are the lifeblood of international trade, and trade in turn is a powerful force for economic growth and poverty reduction.

The Logistics Performance Index helps developing countries identify where improvements can be made to boost competitiveness,” Mona Haddad, World Bank’s global director for trade, investment and competitiveness, said.

OPAZ leverages ChatGPT to drive AI adoption across SEZs, free zones

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced that it has started using ChatGPT service, reflecting its direction of urging employees to use artificial intelligence techniques.

Introducing this service is aimed at improving the quality of services provided by OPAZ and increasing the efficiency of internal operations and employees’ performance. This serves uplifting the provided services and expediting processing and completing investors’ applications.

Mohammed bin Abdulmajeed al Hooti (pictured), In charge of managing OPAZ’s digital transformation programme, said the Authority will allow its employees in the different divisions to use the



ChatGPT service in order to improve the quality of services, increase data analysis and provide integrated and innovative experiences for the challenges encountered at work and when processing investors’ applications.

“Employees will be able to access this service on their desktops and mobiles while getting continuous and immediate support at any time, and from anywhere, to carry out their tasks in a faster and more efficient manner.

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تأجير للتحويل

Taageer Finance

 Co. S.A.O.G

Board of Directors' Report for the period ended 31 March 2023

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, I am pleased to present the un-audited financial statements for the period ended 31 March, 2023.

Performance Summary

Gross portfolio registered a growth of 20.84 % YOY and stood at RO 327.339 million as on 31 March, 2023 (March 31, 2022: RO 270.885 million). Accumulated provisions as on March 31, 2023 were RO 26.352 million (March 31, 2022: RO 21.130 million) showing an increase

of 24.71%. Total borrowings including corporate deposits and unsecured non-convertible bonds stood at RO 170.347 million (March 31, 2022: RO 138.546 million), an increase in 22.95%.

Revenues for the first quarter 2023 of RO 6.602 million were up 21.97% as compared to RO 5.413 million revenues for the same period last year. Interest Expenses for the quarter stood at RO 2.701 million as against RO 2.119 million for same period last year, an increase of 27.46%. Overheads during the period were RO 1.536 million as against RO 1.431 million for the same period last year, up by 7.33%.

The Company registered Profit of RO 2.365 million before Expected Credit Losses (ECL) charge and taxation for the period which was higher by the same period profit of RO 1.863 million by 26.95 %. ECL was up from 0.909 million to RO 1.318 million during the period showing a 44.99% increase, reflecting prudence judgment. Net Profit for quarter ended March 31, 2023 was RO 0.890 million as against net profit of RO 0.811 million as on 31 March, 2022 an increase of 9.74%.

Market Outlook

High oil prices and fiscal consolidation have improved fiscal and external balances and will enable the Government to start spending on the infra projects which in turn will have a positive benefit for the overall economic growth. The broad array of structural reforms under Oman Vision 2040 helps achieve strong, job-rich, and sustainable private sector- growth

The Company is continuously working to support the SME sector and improve the overall growth parameters. With timely support from the regulator combined with strong leadership and management team and Company is committed to maintaining high standards of business operations and profitability.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to express sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimour for his vision and wise leadership. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement for the guidance and support from the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market. We are also grateful to our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Finally, the Board would like to appreciate and thank the management and the staff for all their hard work and efforts.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Rashid bin Saif Al Saadi
Chairman

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

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MARCH 2023

	Mar-2023 RO'000	Mar-2022 RO'000	Dec-2022 RO'000
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	14,639	13,218	17,329
Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	205,768	173,302	193,805
Other receivables and prepayments	821	1,078	646
Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets	808	383	852
Deferred tax asset – net	79	89	79
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	222,365	188,320	212,961
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors, accruals and other liabilities	4,457	4,555	2,895
Provision for employees' end of service benefits	241	208	247
Short-term loans	48,433	63,498	40,040
Unsecured non-convertible bonds	28,569	13,580	28,088
Tax payable	757	614	600
Corporate and security deposits	27,582	10,914	21,911
Long-term loans	65,763	50,554	72,214
Total liabilities	175,802	143,923	165,995
EQUITY			
Share capital	26,384	25,866	25,866
Legal reserve	5,733	5,395	5,733
Impairment reserve	2,222	2,222	2,222
Fair value reserve	(441)	(441)	(441)
General reserve	152	-	152
Retained earnings	12,513	11,355	13,434
Total equity	46,563	44,397	46,966
Total equity and liabilities	222,365	188,320	212,961
Net assets per share (baizas)	176	172	182

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Mar-2023 RO'000	Mar-2022 RO'000
Income		
Finance income	5,970	4,926
Interest expense	(2,701)	(2,119)
Net finance income	3,269	2,807
Other operating income	632	487
	3,901	3,294
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(1,429)	(1,330)
Depreciation	(107)	(101)
Impairment on net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	(1,318)	(909)
	2,854	(2,340)
Profit before taxation	1,047	954
Taxation	(157)	(143)
Profit for the year	890	811
Basic and diluted earnings per share (baizas)	13.49	12.79

Oil prices steady on uncertain global outlook and supply concerns



Workers walk as oil pumps are seen in the background in the Uzen oil and gas field in the Mangistau Region of Kazakhstan. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices were steady on Monday as concern over rising interest rates, the global economy and the outlook for fuel demand were balanced by the prospect of tightening supplies. Brent crude slipped 22 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$81.44 a barrel by 11:35 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude was down 13 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$77.74. Both contracts fell more than 5% last week for their first weekly declines in five as US implied gasoline demand fell from a year earlier. Weak US economic data and worse than expected corporate earnings from the technology sector sparked growth concerns among investors, CMC Markets analyst Tina Teng said. The stabilising US dollar and climbing bond yields are also adding pressure on commodity markets, she added. Central banks from the

United States to Britain and Europe are all expected to raise interest rates when they meet in the first week of May, seeking to tackle stubbornly high inflation. China's bumpy economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic is also clouding the oil demand outlook. China's imports from leading suppliers Russia and Saudi Arabia topped 2 million barrels per day (bpd) each. Refining margins in Asia, meanwhile, have weakened on record production from top refiners China and India, curbing the region's appetite for Middle East supplies loading in June. Yet analysts and traders remained bullish about China's fuel demand recovery towards the second half of 2023 and potential supply tightness owing to additional supply cuts planned by the Opec+ producer group from May. — Reuters

Fresh impetus for Oman's green bunkering terminals' initiative

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Preliminary plans for the establishment of a pair of first-ever, green fuel-based bunkering terminals on Oman's coast have received a significant boost with key international partners now weighing the feasibility of setting up a similar facility on the US East Coast. If proven to be feasible, Oman will be part of a pioneering global initiative to promote green fuels, based on green ammonia and green methanol, as bunker for maritime shipping in place of emission-heavy fossil-based bunker fuels. Global trading and investment giant Sumitomo Corporation, which is a key partner in the green ammonia-based bunkering terminal proposed at the Port of Savannah on the US East Coast, said the initiative bodes well for the growth of a wider network that includes terminals in Oman as well. In a statement issued during the recent signing of an MoU to explore the feasibility of the US project, Koji Endo, General Manager of Energy Division at Sumitomo Corporation, said "We embark on our ambition to build the first Ship-to-Ship ammonia bunkering base in the US in addition to Singapore and Oman, which highlight our commitment to offer our customers the best available and technologically proven solution to reduce the emission footprint from maritime transport." In the Sultanate of Oman, the



(Picture for illustration only. © Maersk)

Middle East arm of Sumitomo Corporation has partnered with an international consortium that includes OQ Alternative Energy (part of OQ Group of Oman), to jointly conduct the feasibility of introducing green fuel bunkering at the ports of Duqm and Salalah. A Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) signed to this effect last December includes Omani integrated logistics group Asyad and Denmark-based global shipping major AP Moller-Maersk as partners in the initiative. As part of the Oman-focused MoC, the partners will study, on the one hand, the technical and commercial feasibility of green ammonia and/or green methanol bunkering at the ports of Duqm and/or Salalah, as well as the export of these green bunker fuels to overseas markets. On the other, the partners will assess the potential for green fuel ship-to-ship bunkering operations

and green fuel loading operations in Oman ports. Common to the Omani and the US bunkering project initiatives is the presence of two key players: Sumitomo Corporation and AP Moller-Maersk. Sumitomo's role in the US venture is to structure, integrate and promote the end-to-end supply chain of green/blue ammonia, which includes sourcing, transportation, storage and bunkering. AP Moller Maersk is tasked with providing input specific to container vessels, as well as to work on development of safe and reliable ammonia bunkering procedures. As in Oman, where the major ports of Duqm and Salalah are tipped to host the green fuel bunker terminals, the project partners in the US venture have zeroed in on the Port of Savannah, currently the third busiest gateway for containerised trade in the US.

Both initiatives are underpinned by a desire to promote the use of green ammonia as a zero-carbon alternative to fossil-fuel based bunkers currently responsible for a significant contribute to planet-warming greenhouse gases. Given Oman's strategic geographical location abutting major international shipping lanes, the ports of Duqm and Salalah are ideally situated to host green ammonia or methanol based bunker terminals. Omani integrated energy group OQ also has major investments planned in future green energy projects that will come up in the hinterlands of the two ports. Coupled with the presence of established petrochemical industries in these two locations, OQ is well-positioned to drive the growth of a green fuel maritime bunkering industry that supports both local and international demand.

OPAZ leverages ChatGPT to drive AI adoption across SEZs, free zones

FROM PAGE 13
The service will also improve internal processes within departments, especially for new employees and projects, where new information is required about them, and from multiple resources that can be compared in an immediate manner," Al Hooti explained. "OPAZ aims to increase efficiency and productivity, and hones employees' communication skills and to make the most of their time. Instead of training a large number of employees to answer common questions, ChatGPT can be implemented to answer these questions automatically and immediately, and at times when employees are not even on duty," Al Hooti further commented. Moreover, employees will be able to analyse the data they receive from clients and potential investors more effectively, allowing the follow-up and quality control departments to obtain valuable data about the services provided by OPAZ. These insights can be used to uplift OPAZ overall performance and implement operations in a more resourceful and effective manner, in addition to the possibility of using ChatGPT to enhance the experience of investors and customers with OPAZ services.



Through this new service, investors can get quick and accurate answers to their inquiries related to the services provided, which facilitate their procedures and ensures their satisfaction. The ChatGPT service is considered one of the artificial intelligence techniques and one of its most important applications, as it allows users to analyse data in a more accurate and effective way. Likewise, problems can be identified and responded to rapidly, a matter that would achieve work efficiency and easier management. Using artificial intelligence technology and ChatGPT service marks a valuable addition to the smart services provided by OPAZ

and reflects its aspirations to improve the quality of services, increase the efficiency of internal operations, and enhance communication with investors and beneficiaries of its services. The Authority aims to introduce the ChatGPT service in all its affiliated zones in the future as part of its vision to fully benefit from advanced technologies and apply international best practices in managing its zones, being incubators for artificial intelligence technologies. This comes within OPAZ efforts to achieve its strategic objectives by enhancing the investment environment in the 14 economic, free and industrial zones supervised by OPAZ, in addition to the new under construction zones.

China guides banks to further cut deposit rates

BEIJING: China nudged banks this month to cut deposit interest rates further, seven people with knowledge of the matter said, in the latest effort to channel the country's vast savings pool into spending and more productive investments. Members of China's "interest rate self-regulatory mechanism," mostly banks, met this month and were urged to reduce deposit rates, according to two attendees and two other bank sources who were closely briefed on the meeting. China's central bank does not set bank rates directly but guides them through the market-based mechanism, which comprises banks big and small. The guidance comes as banks and the economy groan under the weight of huge inflows of savings and deposits. Activity in the world's second-largest economy has gained momentum since the lifting of stringent zero-Covid policy in December, but investors remain cautious as businesses grapple with debt risks, structural woes and a slowing global economy. "The message is that banks need to collectively bring down deposit rates," one person with knowledge of the directive said.



People walk along at financial district of Lujiazui in Shanghai, China, in this file photo. — Reuters

Money is being injected into the banking system, but "what's the point if people save every cent they get, instead of spending, or investing?" he said. One of China's "big four" state lenders plans to cut some personal and corporate rates next week, another person briefed on the plans said. Products to be affected include "call deposits" and "agreement deposits". Other people familiar with the meeting said the mechanism asked for a roughly 10-basis-point cut to weighted average term deposit rates in the quarter from a year earlier, and some

banks were urged to dial back high-yield deposit products. All agreed to speak on condition of anonymity as they are not authorised to discuss the matter publicly. Several small and mid-sized Chinese lenders lowered their deposit interest rates this month, after larger rivals did so last year. The latest guidance will likely trigger a fresh round of cuts. While the benchmark one-year loan prime rate (LPR) has been slashed by 60 basis points since 2019 to 3.65%, deposit rates have lagged behind as banks compete for accounts. — Reuters

Hong Kong’s dollar stress gets more fundamental



PETE SWEENEY

The author joined Reuters Breakingviews in Hong Kong in September 2016. Previously he served as Reuters’ chief correspondent for China Economy and Markets, running teams in Shanghai and Beijing.

Hong Kong’s currency peg to the greenback is stuck between a rock and a hard place. The wide yield spread between US government debt and the Asian hub’s equivalent has forced the monetary authority in the special administrative region of China to repeatedly intervene to prevent the currency from crossing the weak end of its official trading band of between 7.75 and 7.85 per dollar. In the short term that’s manageable, but it highlights investors’ deeper concerns about the city’s economic future. In the process of maintaining

the defence, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority’s aggregate balance — a key gauge of cash in the banking system — has plunged from HK\$458 billion (\$58 billion) to below HK\$50 billion since September. That is the lowest level since 2008, and the steepness of the slope is striking; the last comparable decline took nearly four years. In the past 12 months, the de-facto central bank has stepped in to buy Hong Kong dollars from the market roughly 40 times. Some foreign financiers, including Pershing Square boss Bill Ackman, argue Hong Kong’s financial system can’t sustain the

peg and question its rationale. The system, in place since 1983, effectively links local interest rates to American monetary conditions, so Hong Kong was forced to hike even as its China-facing economy contracted for four consecutive quarters in 2022. Relief is on the way, but it’s not clear how much. Predictions that the end of draconian pandemic controls in China would lead to a massive influx of mainland capital into Hong Kong dollars, buttressing the exchange rate, have yet to be realised. The Hang Seng Index is treading water; up barely over 1% this

year, it’s one of the world’s worst-performing major stock exchanges, Refinitiv data shows. Private equity interest in China has plunged and cumulative northbound flows through the Stock Connect equity trading scheme cooled in April. Both are bad news for the Asian financial entrepôt, which benefits from channelling money into the People’s Republic. Officials have financial tools to maintain ample liquidity in the system. Meanwhile, business activity is reviving, and if the Fed decides to stop raising rates, a lot of pressure will come off the city’s currency. But in the long run, demand for

Hong Kong dollars depends on confidence in its economic strategy. Its population is shrinking, mostly thanks to aging but also emigration, and it is unclear whether it can attract enough immigrants to offset the decline. Chief Executive John Lee has removed onerous Covid-19 measures that choked growth, but the city remains on the receiving end of geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing that are dampening capital flows, while key industries including trade, retail and technology look stagnant. Hong Kong’s peg is durable enough for now, but its future is in doubt nevertheless. — Reuters

Wall Street aces its real-life stress test

JOHN FOLEY

Every year the biggest US banks endure a tedious exercise, where their businesses are put through a series of theoretical contortions to see how they’d perform in a crisis. One flaw in this plan is that the Federal Reserve, which designs the stress test, has tended to assume that when bad times come, interest rates would fall, not rise. This misconception was corrected by the market, which just staged an exam of its own. Wall Street aced it. The anxiety was palpable. Financial institutions’ stock prices swung around in March after a year of record-fast rate hikes led to the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, as well as the voluntary windup of cryptocurrency banking specialist Silvergate Capital. The Refinitiv Financials price return index dropped 16% in 13 days of trading, a magnitude only matched once in the past decade, when Covid-19 first struck. Even now that fears of ricocheting bank runs have subsided, the sector has only regained about half of that decline. The main learning: The largest lenders weathered the real-life pop quiz without breaking a sweat. Tighter monetary policy demolished the valuation of securities on some smaller balance sheets. But soaring rates have been a boon for mega-banks. Ones that make money from the spread between lending to customers and borrowing from depositors made a mint. While they are passing some of the hikes onto savers, there’s enough left to ensure they are anything but stressed. Interest income at JPMorgan, Bank of America, Citigroup and Wells Fargo increased by more than one-third making up nearly 60% of their total revenue. There’s little to raise cortisol levels in Wall Street trading results either. Because their clients also fear sudden shifts in interest rates, they call on fixed-income securities desks to help offload the risk. Big banks enjoyed revenue that, while more muted than a year earlier when the war in Ukraine sent a jolt through commodity markets, was unusually strong.

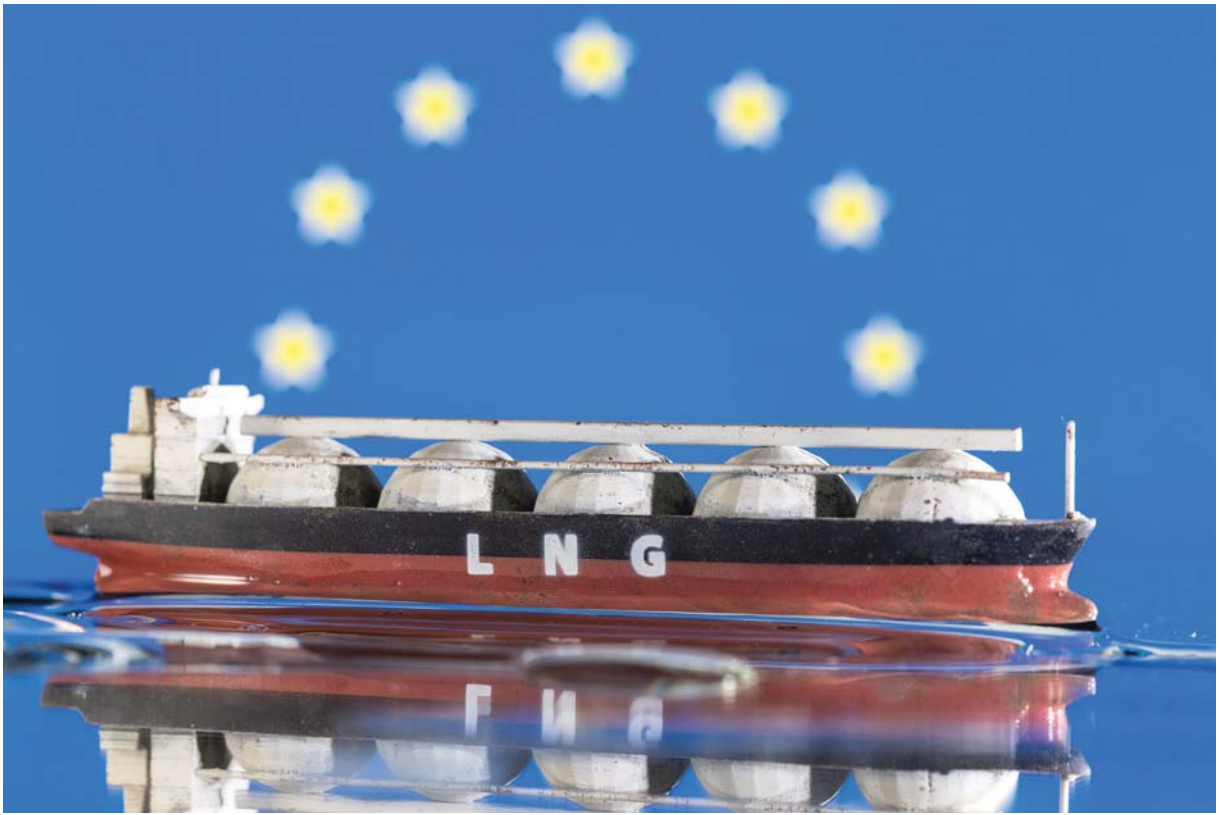
For Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan, it was the third-best quarter in a decade. At Bank of America, fuelled by mortgage trading desks, it was the most lucrative since 2012. Before Covid-19, a good year on Wall Street’s five biggest trading desks netted a collective \$75 billion; over the last four quarters, they have generated nearly \$110 billion. An unanswered question is what rising rates will do to borrowers, and the economy more broadly. Office towers, shopping malls, warehouses and other commercial real estate are a worry. Morgan Stanley’s investment bank wrote off \$70 million of debt in the last quarter, centred on its holdings of such property. It’s a drop in a bucket that holds \$223 billion of loans, but it’s also a reminder that it’s hard to see from the outside where these risks will surface. Real estate varies widely from one property to the next, and banks are often skimpy with the details. Wells Fargo, with big property exposures, told investors that one-quarter of its commercial real estate loans are for office buildings. It added that its book is diverse with high-caliber backers, but investors essentially have to take that on trust. If one set of bankers has genuinely faced a stress test, it’s those that arrange to raise capital and structure mergers for clients. Investment banking remains in the doldrums. At the big five, such advisory fees fell 24% to less than half what they were this time two years ago. The drop-off translates into lower earnings, but it has little impact on the rest of the bank. Since those rainmakers are typically paid based on what they produce, their businesses also tend to remain profit centres. More trials await. One clear outcome of higher interest rates is that banks are lending less, and more carefully. Bosses from JPMorgan’s Jamie Dimon to Bank of America’s Brian Moynihan are keen to avoid the impression there will be a “credit crunch,” an understandable concern since a sharp withdrawal of money flowing into the economy would bring into question the very purpose of bending over backward to keep banks safe in the first place. — Reuters

Europe’s new energy map



EDOARDO CAMPANELLA

The author, Senior Fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, is co-author (with Marta Dassù) of *Anglo Nostalgia: The Politics of Emotion in a Fractured West* (Oxford University Press, 2019).



Since Russia launched its war on Ukraine, European countries have had to rethink their energy strategies and secure supplies of natural gas and oil from elsewhere. The economic and geopolitical effects of these changes will be profound, and they will not be confined to Europe. The war in Ukraine is transforming Europe’s energy map. With Europeans increasingly purchasing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Norway, Qatar, and the United States, as well as natural gas from North African and Central Asian producers, Russia is no longer the key supplier. The composition of European oil imports is also changing now that EU banson Russian crude and petroleum products are in force, targeting around 2.5 million barrels per day (b/d). The Middle East is likely to benefit most from these adjustments, allowing it to reclaim the prominent market position that it partly lost with the US shale revolution and the global transition to cleaner energy sources over the past decade. In theory, redrawing the oil map is easier than redrawing the gas map. The oil market is globally integrated and largely free of major barriers to the international flow of crude shipments. By contrast, the natural-gas market is more regionally fragmented, because gas has traditionally been transported through pipelines. A massive global proliferation of liquefaction and regasification facilities would be required to make the LNG market as wide-ranging and efficient as the oil market. In practice, however, the variability of oil from one country to another tends to limit substitutability. The two primary qualities that differentiate one type of oil

SINCE RUSSIA LAUNCHED ITS WAR ON UKRAINE, EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE HAD TO RETHINK THEIR ENERGY STRATEGIES AND SECURE SUPPLIES OF NATURAL GAS AND OIL FROM ELSEWHERE. THE ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL EFFECTS OF THESE CHANGES WILL BE PROFOUND, AND THEY WILL NOT BE CONFINED TO EUROPE of switching over, because US shale oil is generally too light to substitute for Russian crude on a large scale. But there are obstacles to diverting trade away from Asia. Chief among these are the long-term contracts that tie Asian customers to Middle Eastern producers, and the greater appeal of the Asian market relative to Europe, owing to Europe’s stricter environmental standards and lower growth potential. Moreover, as the global competition to secure Middle Eastern oil intensifies, Opec’s pricing power will increase. The Middle East’s growing role in supplying oil to Europe is already visible. Europe used to be a net importer of Russian petroleum products, particularly the diesel used to power cars, trucks, ships, construction and manufacturing equipment, and more. Hence, by early 2023, investors had become quite concerned that the continent would experience a debilitating diesel shortage once the EU ban on Russian products went into force in February. But, so far, Europe’s supply-diversification strategy has proven effective. The strategy has many moving parts. For example, last year, Germany signed a contract with Abu Dhabi to receive diesel in quantities equivalent to around two-thirds of its previous imports from Russia. But, according to the Energy Information Administration, the

largest increase in diesel imports to Europe has come from Saudi Arabia. As of February, shipments had risen to 202,000 b/d, up from an average of 68,000 b/d between October 2021 and September 2022. Turkey’s role is also likely to grow. Since it is not an EU member, it is still allowed to import Russian diesel within the price-cap framework. These imports could be used to satisfy domestic demand while Turkish diesel is exported to Europe. And in the future, if the green transition truly picks up and leads to a reduction in global oil consumption, Middle Eastern producers’ market share and pricing power will increase. Because their production costs are among the lowest in the world, a drop in oil demand would imply that the least cost-efficient producers, such as North American suppliers, would be priced out. These changes to Europe’s oil map mark a significant geopolitical shift. In some ways, they represent a return to the situation four decades ago. Europe became a major consumer of natural gas in the 1980s precisely because it wanted to reduce its exposure to the Middle East, following the instability from the 1970s oil shocks. That is why Middle Eastern oil still represents less than 20% of total European oil imports. By the same token, increased reliance on Middle Eastern oil will make Europe much more vulnerable to geopolitical tensions in the region. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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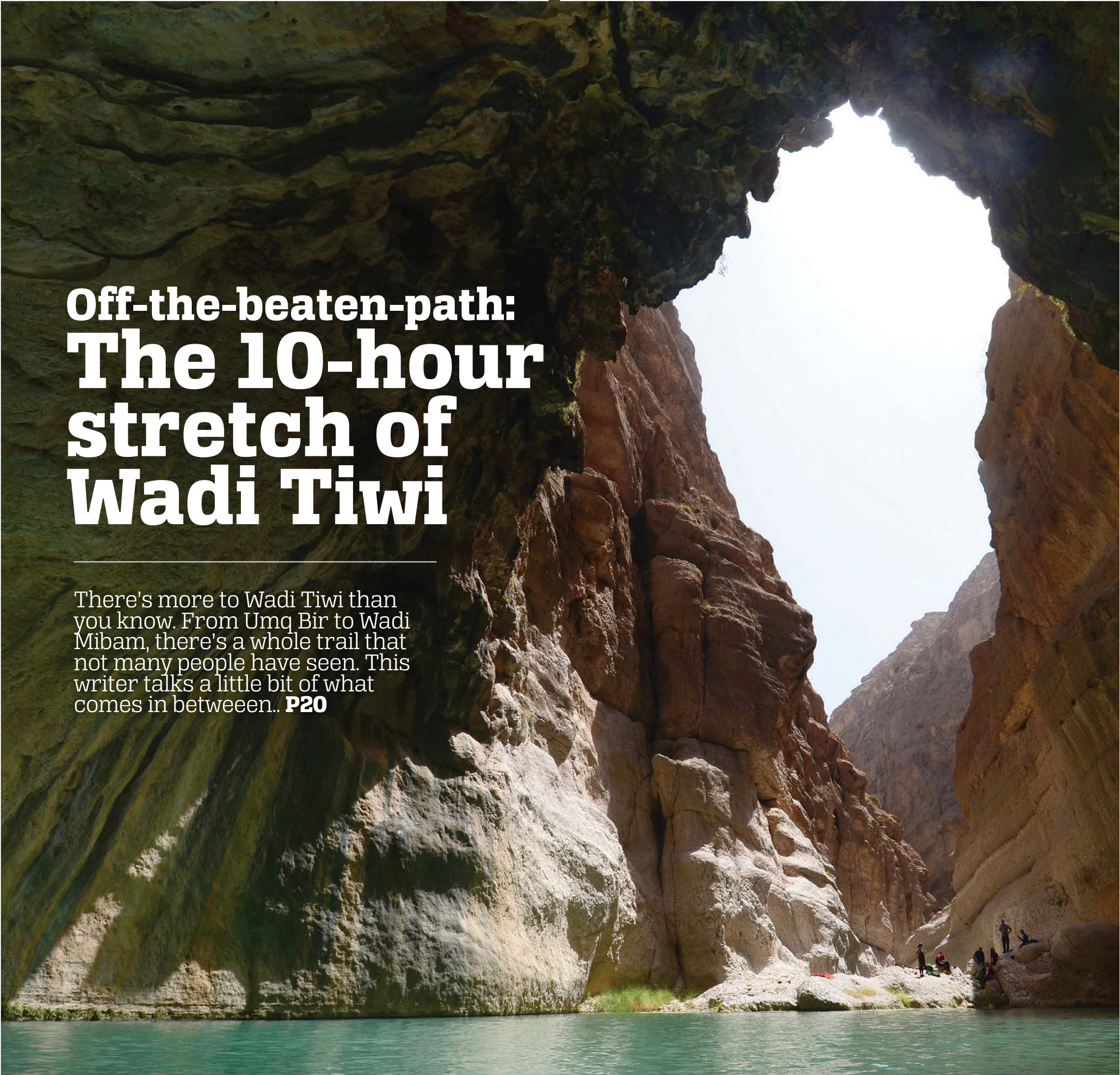
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Off-the-beaten-path: The 10-hour stretch of Wadi Tiwi

There's more to Wadi Tiwi than you know. From Umq Bir to Wadi Mibam, there's a whole trail that not many people have seen. This writer talks a little bit of what comes in between. **P20**



New Mars Map Lets You 'See the Whole Planet at Once'

A new global map of Mars offers a fresh perspective on the planet.

The map, released earlier this month, was pieced together from 3,000 pictures taken by the United Arab Emirates' Hope spacecraft, and it shows the red planet in its true light.

"These are all natural colours on Mars," said Dimitra Atri, a research scientist at the Center for Space Science at NYU Abu Dhabi.

The main scientific objective of Hope, which entered orbit around Mars a little more than two years ago, is to study how dust storms and other weather conditions near the surface affect the speed at which Martian air leaks into outer space.

But the orbiter also carries a camera.

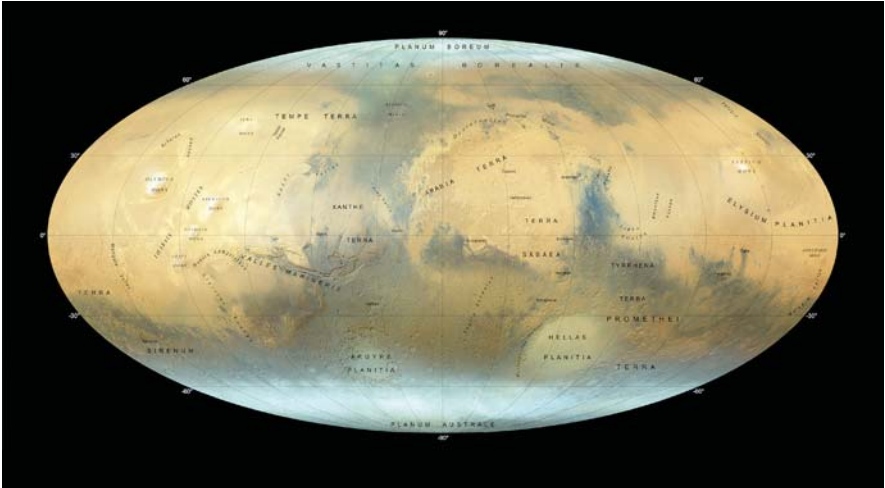
When Atri saw the first image sent back by Hope, "I was just blown away by the quality of the image showing the full disk,"

he said. "I had never seen Mars like this."

Maps of Mars are nothing new. In the 1890s, American businessman Percival Lowell used his wealth to build the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, and as he gazed at Mars through a 24-inch telescope, he sketched what he thought were artificial canals built by a Martian civilisation. (He observed spokelike structures on Venus; it was later demonstrated that he may have inadvertently turned his telescope into a mirror and been viewing the back of his own eyeball.)

In the Space Age, numerous spacecraft have flown past Mars or entered orbit around it.

But previous orbiters, like Nasa's Mars Global Surveyor and Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, have generally swooped much closer to the Martian surface, usually in



orbits devised to repeatedly pass above a given location at the same time of day. Those images have provided increasingly sharp details of the surface, including sand dunes, gullies and boulders that had rolled down hills.

"Those are amazing, spectacular images," Atri said. "But you don't see the whole planet at once." Lighting conditions that varied from place to place made it difficult to put together a single, global view.

Lighting conditions are not a problem

for other types of maps. The Global Surveyor carried an altimeter instrument that bounced a laser beam off the surface. By measuring the time the pulse of light took to travel to the surface and back, the instrument could measure the height of every nook and cranny on the surface. Scientists used the data to make a detailed topographic map.

For views in visible light, the Hubble Space Telescope, in orbit around Earth, can see one entire side of Mars. Scientists

pieced together many such images into a global map similar to the new map from the Hope spacecraft.

But Mars, at its closest, is nearly 34 million miles from Earth, so the Hubble images lack sharpness. Hope travels around Mars in an elliptical orbit ranging from 12,400 miles to 27,000 miles above the Martian surface. That is considerably higher up than the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, but much closer than Hubble.

"We thought, OK, we should have an atlas, because we may be able to photograph Mars over a period of several years," Atri said. "So we should first have an atlas where we not only map the whole planet, but we show how it changes throughout the Martian year."

Atri was able to find images with similar lighting conditions to stitch together, omitting ones in which clouds obscured the surface. The process took months. "It is extremely hard to remove all the boundaries and stuff," he said.

Atri said that he and his colleagues were currently writing a scientific paper to describe the algorithm they devised. The same method could be applied to other spacecraft visiting other worlds, including the European Space Agency's Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer, or Juice, which launched on Friday.

"These icy moons look so pretty," Atri said. "So we should be able to apply the same technique." — NYT

READ

HOMEcoming

BY KATE MORTON

An unemployed journalist connects events in a true-crime book, which details a long-buried murder in 1959 in South Australia, to her own family.



FASHION

A photo shows a skeleton from an ancient necropolis at Port-Royal metro station in Paris. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Visitors are pictured aboard the Logos Hope vessel, the world's largest floating bookfair, docked at Al Rashid port in Dubai. — AFP





Can Boracay Beat Overtourism?

WHEN THE PHILIPPINE ISLAND of Boracay was in the rogues' gallery of destinations marred by overtourism, large sections of its 2.5-mile main White Beach were jammed with thousands of visitors and long trains of beach beds and umbrellas. Fleets of boats motored up to the sand's edge, and multitudes of peddlers sold trips and trinkets and gave massages, braided hair and applied henna tattoos right on the beach.

At night, a cacophony of music spilled from a phalanx of makeshift dining rooms in the sand, couches and cabanas unfurled toward the water, and fire spinners filled the air with flames and fumes.

Oil from the boats, litter from the beach and sewage illegally piped into the sea polluted the waters.

Early in 2018, however, then-President Rodrigo Duterte — known for his radical approaches — declared Boracay a "cesspool" and abruptly shut it down from April to October.

The government demolished or chopped off sections of several hundred hotels, restaurants and other businesses that had been built too close to the water and in forests and wetlands. It uprooted dozens of illegal sewer pipes along the beaches and upgraded the sewer system. It widened the notoriously clogged narrow roads and put in sidewalks. It devised a new promotion of Boracay as a sustainable ecotourism island rather than a 24/7 party hot spot.

And in one of the rarest and most extreme responses to unbridled tourism growth, the national task force created to oversee the island imposed a limit on the number of visitors, setting the carrying capacity at 6,400 arrivals per day, or 19,215 tourists at any given time.

These days, the captivating White Beach is an open expanse of pristine sand, motorboats are confined to two floating docks and the aquamarine water has been cleaned up.

On a mid-February night, Tyler O'Dowd was part of a steady stream of tourists strolling on the sandy path up from the beach, pointing out to his fiancée where the action used to be. The couple, on a four-day trip to celebrate O'Dowd's 38th birthday, said they wouldn't mind dining in the sand or a nightlife spot or two on the beach. Still, they said, they preferred the new vibe.

"I was younger back then so I liked the party lifestyle," said O'Dowd, an American teacher living in Manila, referring to his first visit, in 2013. "Now I'm older so I do enjoy this mellowness."

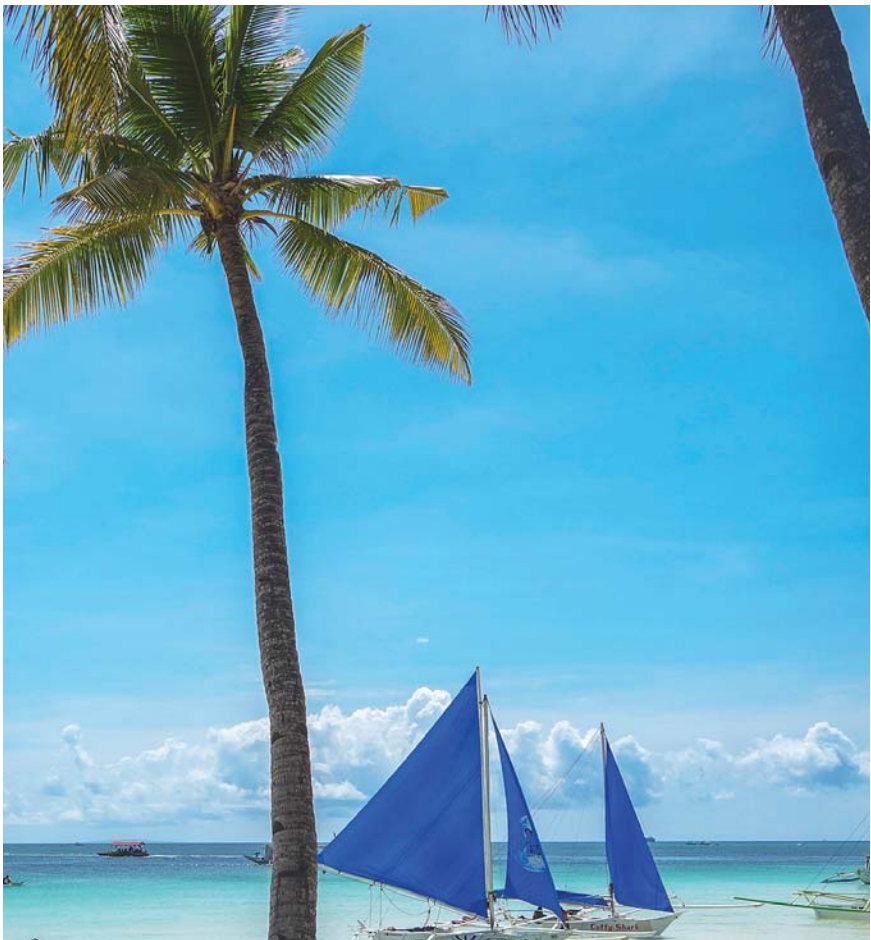
Few hot spots across the globe have implemented caps on the number of visitors long term, so it's an open question as to whether this little island in the central Philippines, about an hour south of Manila by plane, can find a real and lasting solution to overtourism.

Islanders and local business owners said in interviews that they were generally pleased with the improvements to Boracay's beaches and roads. But there was still debate over the carrying capacity.

Although a resolution by the national task force capped visitors, there was no provision for enforcement. So no one is in charge of limiting arrivals — not the airlines, not the boats that bring tourists from the main island of Panay, not the hotels on the island. According to the Malay-Boracay Tourism Office's monthly tally of visitors, the number exceeded

the cap in busy spring months in 2019 and again last spring. That prompted a new carrying capacity study by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which led the national task force, though its results have not yet been released.

In the coming months, the cap will surely be tested again. Flights are rapidly increasing at the nearby airports of Kalibo and Caticlan. And tourists from China and Korea — the biggest sources of visitors, accounting for 40 per cent of tourists before the pandemic — are poised to return in the coming months.



What's more, the national task force was dissolved in June 2022, and oversight of the island was returned to local government officials, some of whom want to lift some of the restrictions.

Dante Pagsugiron, the longest-serving member of the Malay municipal council that includes Boracay, said in an interview in February that he's opposed to any capacity cap and that the island could support triple the current 14,000 government-accredited hotel rooms. He supports bringing back beach beds and limited dining on the beach.

"To me, if there's tourists coming to Boracay, regardless of the numbers, then we need to accept them," Pagsugiron said.

It's unclear what will happen next. Pagsugiron and others speculated that the DENR study will raise the arrivals cap by 25 per cent to 40 per cent, allowing for up to 9,000 arrivals a day. The DENR did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

In March, the governor of Aklan province, which includes Boracay,

created a new oversight body for the island, the Boracay-Caticlan Sustainable Development Council, to sustain the gains of the rehabilitation. According to the province administrator, Selwyn Ibarreta, the new council has agreed that an independent entity should conduct another carrying capacity study.

Rehabilitation, then Covid. Boracay first became popular in the 1970s, when it appeared in a German guidebook and was the location of the war movie "Too Late the Hero." By the 1990s, more than 100,000 backpackers and adventurers annually were visiting its

of them foreigners, but then evaporated again in early 2020 with the onslaught of Covid-19.

Boracay remained closed to foreigners during the pandemic for two years until early 2022, devastating the local economy.

SMOOTH NEW ROADS AND A CLEANED-UP BEACH

On a visit in mid-February, when daily arrivals averaged 5,750, the island felt pleasantly crowded, and the vast majority of tourists were Filipino.

The smooth, new road with brick sidewalks running up the spine of the island bustles with families, couples and groups of friends and a steady convoy of electric, three-wheeled motorbike buggies. But the road is also blighted with dingy, shuttered restaurants and intermittent metal walls hiding abandoned or demolished buildings.

On the White Beach at night, I could enjoy myriad international cuisines and listen to live music ranging from Queen covers to duos crooning Adele. I was also repeatedly offered menus by polite waiters.

The seven hotels of one of the island's biggest resort chains, the Henann Group, were more than 80 per cent full in February, mostly with Filipinos, said Dindo Salazar, a vice president of Henann's operations on Boracay. He was expecting the return of Chinese tourists in the second quarter and saw a conundrum in carrying capacity: If local officials allow too many people on the island, the worry is that the national government could step back in and take over, he said.

Salazar is also the chair of the Boracay Foundation, a tourism business group, which objected to the 2018 closure and capacity limit. The Foundation argued that only owners who violated the setback and sewer rules should be penalised and that the 14,000 government-approved hotels could accommodate thousands more tourists than the 19,215 limit set by the task force.

In the end, Salazar said, the closure was good for the island, because local laws that were long flouted were being enforced, including the beach setback, sewer hookups and a ban on single-use plastics.

"There was a free-for-all to get as many on the island without regard to impact," Salazar said, "and now there is control."

Just down the new brick promenade, surfers traded stories at Habagat Kiteboarding's open-air bar. The German owner, Winnie Levai, opened the first kiting school on the island in 2002, and within a few years the sport took off with about 10 schools, he said.

In 2018, his business was among the dozens on Bulabog targeted to be partly or entirely torn down. "I had all the legal papers to build," he said. "So it was a kind of shock." Levai had to demolish his school and restaurant in the sand and move them back at a cost of \$200,000, though his 10-room hotel was outside the 33-yard buffer. He said he's pleased with the brick walkway and wider road out back, but said that five years on, the rehabilitation and the quest to find the right balance of tourists on the little island are ongoing.

"My hope is that they do a good job, keep going on the situation and that they can finish it in a proper way," he said. — **NYT**

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Is Tofu Good for You?



Q: I'VE HEARD CONFLICTING STORIES ABOUT TOFU. IT'S EITHER A GREAT SOURCE OF PROTEIN OR LOADED WITH ESTROGEN AND THEREFORE UNHEALTHY. WHICH IS TRUE?

If tofu and other soy foods were interviewing for a spot in your weekly meal rotation, they would offer an impressive résumé of nutrition credentials.

A 3-ounce serving of tofu, for instance, can provide between 4 and 14 grams of protein (depending on the style), including all nine of the essential amino acids.

It also supplies B vitamins, healthy unsaturated fatty acids and minerals like calcium, magnesium, zinc and iron, said Amy Bragagnini, a dietitian and a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Yet soy foods are also burdened by an unsavoury reputation. Bragagnini's clients, for instance, routinely ask if soy foods are linked with cancer, a concern stemming from their relatively high levels of isoflavones, plant-based compounds that are structurally similar to the hormone estrogen.

The presence of isoflavones has also led to the worry that soy might negatively affect fertility or give men more feminine characteristics.

But overall, studies have shown that including soy foods in your diet is not only safe, it may also benefit your heart and metabolic health, said Dr. Qi Sun, an associate professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health.

And while it's true that the isoflavones in soy can weakly mimic estrogen, he added, they also seem to have anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

Here's what we know.

CANCER

One historical worry about soy has been that its estrogen-like isoflavones might promote breast cancer, but many studies have shown that women who eat higher amounts of soy foods have no greater risk — or even a lower risk — of developing breast cancer than those who eat little or no soy, said Xiao-Ou Shu, a professor of epidemiology at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

The protective association is strongest in studies conducted in Asian countries, she noted, where soy is commonly consumed from infancy to old age.

In a study published in 2012, Shu and her colleagues found that among women in China and the United States who had been diagnosed with breast cancer, those who ate about half a serving or more of soy foods per day after their diagnoses were less likely to have a recurrence than those who ate smaller amounts.

FERTILITY AND MENOPAUSE

The concern that soy might interfere with fertility — including by affecting sperm count or quality, the ability to conceive, or testosterone or estrogen levels in men — has also not held up to the evidence, Sun said.

Some small studies have found that soy can modestly reduce menopause-related hot flashes, but these results have been mixed, Bragagnini said. Still, she added, if you're dealing with these symptoms, "it can't hurt to add a serving or two a day" of whole soy foods to see if they help.

Some research has also found that greater soy intake is associated with a lower risk of osteoporotic fractures in postmenopausal women.

HEART HEALTH

There's some evidence that including soy in your diet can benefit your heart, Sun said.

He led a study published in 2020 that found that consuming more soy isoflavones, particularly from tofu, was associated with a moderately lower risk of coronary heart disease.

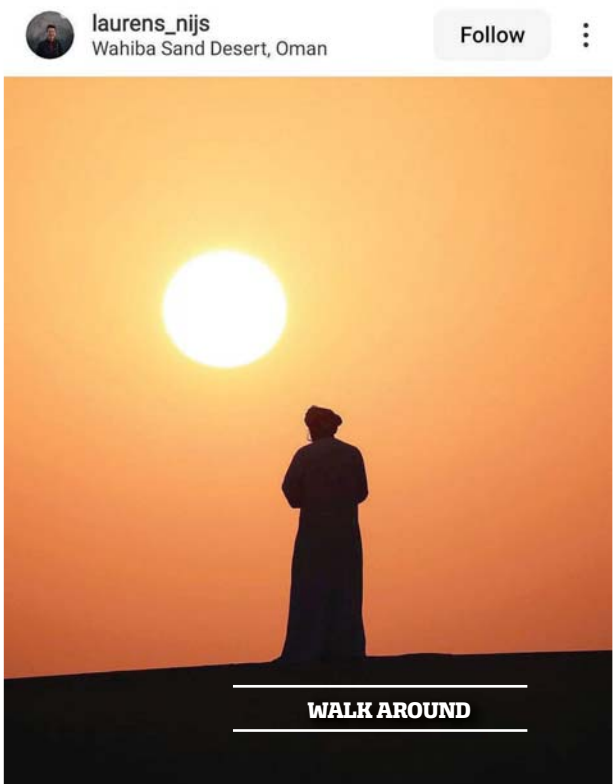
And in another study, of nearly 120,000 health care professionals in the United States, Sun and his colleagues found that during the more than 30 years of follow-up, those who consumed at least one serving of tofu or soy milk per week were 15 per cent to 16 per cent less likely to die than those who ate less than one serving per month.

"It's almost a no-brainer that people should choose tofu and other plant-based proteins instead of animal source proteins," particularly those from processed and red meats, which are associated with a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, colorectal cancer and earlier death, Sun said. And, he added, eating more plant-based foods can "not only improve human health, but also improve the health of the globe," because protein sources like soy, beans, peas and nuts have lower greenhouse gas footprints than meat, cheese or eggs. — **NYT**



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AROUND THE WORLD

SCIENCE

This Is What It Sounds Like When Plants Cry



HUMANS HAVE glorious ways of vocalising discontent: We grumble, grouse, gripe, groan, moan. One might think airing complaints requires, at the very least, a mouth. But recent research from the plant kingdom shows that a mouth isn't essential.

Stressed plants make audible sounds, and the type of sound corresponds with the kind of bad day they are having. The results were published last month in the journal *Cell*.

The researchers suspect a nervous, popping noise is a by-product of cavitation, when tiny bubbles burst and produce mini-shock waves inside the plant's vascular system, not unlike what happens in your joints when you crack your knuckles.

Plants communicate with other life-forms, including other plants, by emitting chemicals, called volatiles. But when it came to research on plants detecting — or producing — audible sounds, the literature had been silent.

Lilach Hadany, a biologist at Tel Aviv University in Israel, worked with Yossi Yovel, who studies bat sounds, to tackle the subject. Tomato and tobacco plants were placed in soundproof boxes with two microphones pointing at their stems. The researchers found not only that the plants made sounds, but also that the plants made more noise when they were dehydrated or having their stems cut (simulating an herbivore attack).

"That the plants are making different noises that have some information seems like the main contribution of this study," said Richard Karban, an ecologist at the University of California, Davis, who was not involved with the research. — **DARREN INCORVAIA/NYT**

LIFESTYLE

New York City Ballet to Honour Past and Present in 75th Year



NEW YORK CITY Ballet will celebrate its 75th anniversary next season with a mix of old and new, honouring the legacy of its co-founder, George Balanchine, as well as more recent contributions to the repertoire, the company announced on Monday.

The season will feature Balanchine classics such as "Serenade" and "Prodigal Son," as well as several world premieres, including by Alexei Ratmansky, the renowned choreographer, who joins the company in August as artist in residence.

Wendy Whelan, City Ballet's associate artistic director, said the season was meant to showcase the company's "real legacy for innovation."

dancers who worked with Balanchine, including Merrill Ashley and Suzanne Farrell, to help rehearse the dancers.

Jonathan Stafford, City Ballet's artistic director, called Balanchine, who died in 1983, "our driving force." His legacy continues to be discussed and debated in popular culture, with the recent release of a biography, memoir and podcast about him. Stafford said his impact could still be felt onstage.

"He championed the idea that the music drives the dance, and how important musicality was to everything we do," he said in an interview. "The roots of what he laid are still very much a part of our daily work."

"Red Angels" and Ratmansky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," among other works.

The company's announcement in January that it had hired Ratmansky, one of ballet's most in-demand and respected artists, was a coup. He has spent the past 13 years at American Ballet Theatre.

Ratmansky, who is of mixed Russian and Ukrainian background and grew up in Kyiv, has yet to offer details about his new work. The season will also feature his "Odessa," which premiered at City Ballet in 2017.

"We're excited to see what he comes up with," Whelan said.

City Ballet has been working to restore a sense of normalcy after



"We've enjoyed the idea of a tree," she said in an interview, "the idea of the roots building out into a flowering tree."

The season, which will feature some 160 performances, will open on September 19 with Balanchine's pure-dance triptych "Jewels." In October, the company will recreate its first-ever performance, on Oct. 11, 1948, with a programme of Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco," "Orpheus" and "Symphony in C." Much of the rest of the fall season will be devoted to his works, with 27 all-Balanchine performances.

The company will also bring in

The winter and spring seasons will include work by more contemporary artists, with world premieres by Ratmansky and Justin Peck, the company's resident choreographer and artistic adviser. (Peck's full-length "Copland Dance Episodes," which premiered this year, will also return.)

Tiler Peck, a principal dancer with the company, and Amy Hall Garner, a choreographer, will debut their first works for City Ballet. The lineup also includes Christopher Wheeldon's "Carnival of the Animals," Ulysses Dove's

the turmoil of the pandemic, which disrupted the careers of many rising stars and resulted in the loss of millions in ticket revenue.

Whelan said the company was now in a stronger position.

"The audiences are back," she said. "The dancers are back. There's a fresh new crop that are rising up within the company, and it feels extraordinary."

"That's been part of our 75 years," she added. "All these generations of newness that have come along the way. And that's part of what we honour." — **NYT**

DISCOVERY

Ancient necropolis unearthed next to busy Paris train station



JUST METRES FROM a busy train station in the heart of Paris, scientists have uncovered 50 graves in an ancient necropolis which offer a rare glimpse of life in the French capital's precursor Lutetia nearly 2,000 years ago. Somehow the buried necropolis was never stumbled upon during multiple road works over the years, as well as the construction of the Port-Royal station on the historic Left Bank in the 1970s.

However, plans for a new exit for the train station prompted an archaeological excavation.

Camille Colonna, an anthropologist at France's National Institute of Preventive Archaeological Research (INRAP), told a press conference that there were already "strong suspicions" the site was close to Lutetia's southern necropolis.

The "Saint Jacques" necropolis, the largest burial site in the Gallo-Roman town of Lutetia, was previously partially excavated in the 1800s.

However, only objects considered precious were taken from the graves, with the many skeletons, burial offerings and other artefacts abandoned.

The necropolis was then covered over and again lost to time.

The INRAP team discovered one section that had never before been excavated.

"No one has seen it since antiquity," said INRAP president Dominique Garcia.

Colonna said the team was also "very happy" to have found a skeleton with a coin in its mouth, allowing them to date the burial to the 2nd century AD.

The excavation, which began in March, has uncovered 50 graves, all of which were used for burial — not cremation, which was also common at the time.

FERRYMAN OF HADES

The remains of the men, women and children are believed to be Parisii, a Gallic people who lived in Lutetia, from when the town on the banks of the Seine river was under the control of the Roman Empire.

The skeletons were buried in wooden coffins, which were now only identifiable by their nails.

More than half were buried alongside offerings such as ceramic jugs and goblets.

Sometimes a coin was placed in the coffin, or even in the mouth of the dead, a common practice at the time called Charon's obol.

In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of Hades, and the coin was considered a bribe to carry the souls of the dead across the river Styx.

The archaeologists also found shoes inside the graves, identifying them by the small nails that would be seen in the soles.

Colonna said the shoes were placed "either at the feet of the dead or next to them, like an offering".

Jewellery, hairpins, belts were also discovered.

The entire skeleton of a pig and another small animal was discovered in a pit where animals were thought to have been sacrificed to the gods.

Unlike the excavation in the 1800s, this time the team plans to remove everything from the necropolis for analysis.

"This will allow us to understand the life of the Parisii through their funeral rites, as well as their health by studying their DNA," Colonna said.

Garcia said that the ancient history of Paris was "generally not well known".

The unearthed graves open "a window into the world of Paris during antiquity," he added. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

f t i y w v @omanobserver

TUESDAY | APRIL 25 | 2023

Off-the-beaten-path: The 10-hour stretch of Wadi Tiwi

By Dr Khaled Abdul Malek

Tiwi, one of the most difficult and spectacular wadis in Oman that took two days to explore, is among my favourites.

In the past, it was one of the most arduous wadis in Oman that took two days to explore, but the trip became much easier since the dirt road reached the village of Umq.

Even now, one needs to plan a two-day trip to be able to complete the crossing of Wadi Tiwi from the village of Umq Bir to the village of Mibam.

One should spend the night on the terraces of Umq Bir before starting early the next morning on the journey that will take around 10 hours. It takes abseiling in two places and a lot of swimming. The total distance that one has to swim is approximately 4 kilometres, as some pools are 400 metres long!

After 2 hours of bouldering, swimming, and abseiling, you will reach the most beautiful spot in the wadi: the cave, which is around 80 metres long and has a ceiling that is about 40 metres high. There, you have to abseil a 15-metre-high waterfall and land in the dark, in a long, thin pool. Once you come out of the pool, you reach a round basin with superb, crystal-clear blue and green water. On the sides, plenty of concretions grew over the years, taking on a very special shape, that of tubes out of which water is flowing.

A few years ago, I managed to open a climbing route to cross over the ceiling of the cave and abseil on the other side; I named the drop "Mona's Drop" after my daughter, who was the first person to abseil it. I did two previous trips with my friends Kester and Ahmed to be able to complete setting the anchors and reach the roof of the cave.

Beyond the cave, the journey becomes very aquatic, as one has to swim through an endless number of pools before reaching the trail that leads to Mibam.

The anatomy of the wadi changes a lot after heavy rain or exceptional weather conditions. In 2007, following cyclone Gonu, one of the longest pools of Wadi Tiwi was totally dry as it was filled with gravel. It was again full of water when we crossed the wadi a year later.

Just before reaching the final trail and on the right bank of the canyon, we saw a rope with knots that villagers from Mibam and Umq Bir climb to reach a ledge that they follow at around 300m above the wadi bed. They climb down using the same kind of ropes when they reach the village of Umq Bir below.

Crossing Wadi Tiwi requires a lot of endurance, and one has to be ready for long swims in the canyon! The best time to cross this superb canyon would be during the months of April, May, September, or October.

Make sure to check the weather before starting any canyoning trip because a flash flood won't give you any chance to reach the other end alive!

