

**OMAN CONDEMNS STORMING
OF QATAR EMBASSY IN SUDAN**

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has condemned the storming and vandalising of Qatar embassy in Khartoum. In a statement on Saturday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed Oman's firm position rejecting any action targeting diplomatic missions, and the need to protect diplomatic buildings according to the customs and charters that govern and regulate diplomatic work. **-ONA**



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**HM THE SULTAN CONGRATULATES
PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan on his 70th birth anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. His Majesty also wished the people of Kazakhstan further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



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HM THE SULTAN'S VISIT TO BOOST OMAN-EGYPT BILATERAL RELATIONS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will be leaving on a two-day official visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt today

Times News Service

CAIRO: The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt on Sunday and HM's meeting with Egyptian President Abdul Fattah el Sisi would open a new chapter in Oman-Egypt ties, said Abdullah Nassir Al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

Al Rahbi said that the visit represents a continuation of cooperation in the joint interest of both the countries.

In a press conference held in Cairo on Saturday, in the wake of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt, Al Rahbi said that a high-ranking official delegation would



accompany His Majesty to boost ties in several fields.

"The two countries aspire to advance relations in economic, commerce and investment fields and increase trade, he said, adding that the Omani-Egyptian Business Forum would be organised during the visit to showcase the investment potentials available in the Sultanate, the regulations and the basic structures attractive to investors in many areas, includ-

ing renewable energy and green hydrogen.

He also pointed out that the two countries would sign a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding to boost economic ties, besides the MoUs, agreements, executive programmes signed during the visit of the Egyptian president to the Sultanate in June 2022. He also spoke on the joint principles of foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman

and the Arab Republic of Egypt and their keenness to support and serve the Arab causes.

The ambassador talked about the cultural cooperation between Oman and Egypt, pointing to the Egyptian teachers who have contributed to the educational march in Oman since the dawn of the blessed renaissance.

Khalid Mohammed Radi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman said that the upcoming visit of His



Abdullah Nassir Al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt and his meeting with President Abdul Fattah el Sisi will advance the deep-rooted relations between the two countries towards broader horizons.

Qualitative shift

The ambassador said in a statement to ONA that the visit will review various bilateral matters and international issues of common concern. The visit, he affirmed, represents a qualitative shift in the march of Oman-Egypt relations.

The Egyptian Ambassador added that His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President will discuss means of promoting rela-

tions on the political, economic, commercial, cultural and social levels. The meeting will also cater to Omani-Egyptian coordination on various regional and international issues.

Security and stability

He added that the region needs more coordination and cooperation to ensure peace, security and stability.

Ambassador Radi indicated that the volume of intra-trade between Oman and Egypt increased by 52 percent compared to 2021.

He said that Oman's investment-encouraging and positive milieu, in addition to its regulations and facilities provided for foreign investors, all encourage investors to come to Oman.

The ambassador stressed that the upgrades in Oman's credit rating is an indication of the efforts exerted under the Royal directives of His Majesty, which made Oman an oasis of security and stability. The Sultanate of Oman, he underscored, is a hub for foreign investors, including Egyptians.

He reiterated that the two countries share similar political views on various regional and international issues. This stems from shared values that are based on establishing principles of security, peace and adhering to international law. **-With ONA inputs**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN SalamAir to launch three new flights

1 SalamAir has announced the launch of flights to three new destinations in June and July 2023. These new destinations include Almaty in Kazakhstan, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and the Turkish city of Rize. Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said that the city of Almaty is one of the largest cities in Kazakhstan, and it has tourism potential. The company seeks to make the route continuous throughout the year and not seasonal. **>A3**

WORLD Kishida, Biden agree to work closely

2 Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a meeting with the United States President Joe Biden in which the two leaders concurred on continuing to work closely together in addressing several issues and also confirmed the importance of cooperating with China on shared challenges. The US President Biden is currently in Japan to attend the G7 summit which is being held in Hiroshima, Japan. **>A7**

SPORTS Double delight for Al Nahda

3 His Majesty's Cup champions Al Nahda completed a grand domestic double on Friday when they claimed the 2022-23 Omantel League title on Friday. On Friday, playing in their penultimate league round, Al Nahda outplayed Al Musannah 3-0 at the Buraimi Sports Complex to send the home crowd into raptures with their fourth league title. **>B6**

*Sayyid
Asa'ad
attends
Arab
Summit
in Jeddah*

A5



FIA-MERC 3RD ROUND

Historic Jordan Rally victory for Oman's Abdullah Al Rawahi



Times News Service

MUSCAT: His potential as a rally driver has even impressed rallying greats like Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah.

The 25-year-old Abdullah Al Rawahi underlined his credentials as one of the most promising rally drivers in the region on Saturday when he became the first Omani ever to win the Jordan Rally, the third round of 2023 FIA-Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) along with his co-driver Ata Al Hmoud from Jordan.

Racing in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas of the Kingdom that had world-class stages and amid a highly-competitive field, Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud withstood a dramatic fightback by 15-time event winner Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah, whose chare was thwarted by punctures on the closing stages of

a pulsating rally on Saturday.

Al Rawahi and local driver Al Hmoud had taken a lead of 2min 33.5sec into the final six special stages in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas in their Škoda Fabia Evo.

But defending champion Al Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France launched a full-scale fightback during the morning and reduced the deficit to 1min 20sec at the midday service point.

The pendulum appeared to have swung in the Qatari's favour when the Oman Rally Team crew clocked out of service three minutes late and incurred a 30-second time penalty, reducing the deficit to 50 seconds. But Al Attiyah was forced to change a punctured tyre on the first test after the restart and then punctured again with Al Rawahi reaching the finish 7min

04.2sec clear of the struggling defending champion.

With the pressure off on the final stage, it enabled Al-Rawahi to secure his third career MERC win and Al-Hmoud became the first Jordanian to win his home rally since Amjad Farrah and Khalid Zakaria prevailed on a dramatic final stage way back in 2004.

Al Rawahi's third success drew him level with the late Björn Waldegård, Jean-Pierre Nasrallah and Abdullah Bakhshab in the regional Hall of Fame. His previous two MERC wins came at home when he won the first-leg of Oman International Rally in 2022 and earlier in January this year

A delighted Al Rawahi said: "It's been a very tough weekend for us. The stages were really nice and we enjoyed them. We managed to win this rally. **>A2**



PRAYER
TIMINGS



Dhuhr.....12:08pm

Asr.....3:30pm

Maghrib.....6:49pm

Isha.....8:08pm

Fajr (Tomorrow).....3:58am

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SCHOOL EDUCATION LAW

HM issues Royal Decree promulgating School Education Law

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Decree No. 31/2023 promulgating the School Education Law, after presenting the same before the Council of Oman. The Royal decree reads as follows:

Article (1) states that the School Education Law attached to this decree shall be enforced.

Article (2) states that the Minister of Education shall issue the executive regulation for the attached law. The minister also issues the bylaws and decisions necessary for the implementation of the attached School Education Law. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of the attached law.

Article (3) annuls Royal Decree No. 68/77 on establishing private schools. It also cancels all that contradicts the attached law or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing. **-ONA**

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT

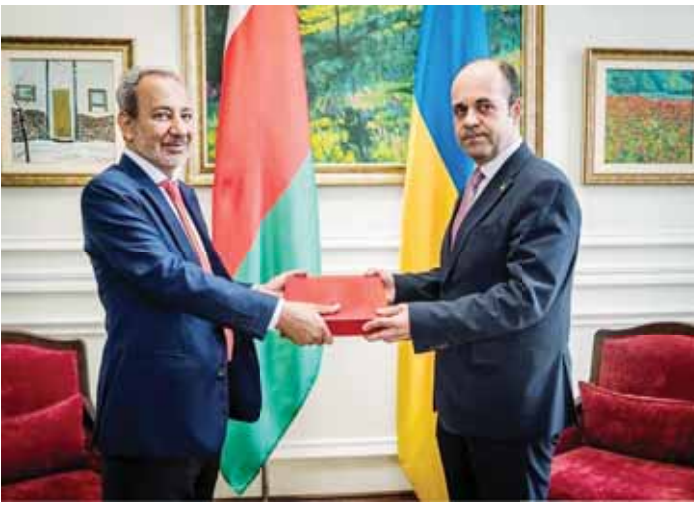
HM sends written message

JORDAN RALLY

< FROM
A1 ‘It’s an amazing feeling’

KYIV: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine.

The message deals with relations between Oman and Ukraine and means of promoting them, in addition to issues of common concern that serve international peace and security. The message was handed over by ambassador at large Sheikh Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Hinai, when Ukraine’s Special Envoy for the Middle East and Africa Ambassador Maxim Sobh received him in Kyiv. The meeting was attended by a number of officials at the foreign ministries of the two countries. **-ONA**



The second day was difficult, actually starting first on the road. Nasser [Al Attiyah] was trying to keep the pressure but we held on. Well done to my team. They have worked really hard this weekend. It’s an amazing feeling.

“When I started rallying my first rally was here in Jordan, so it’s a big thing for me. I have been gaining so much experience against the champion. Every rally we learn a lot, especially from the pressure we were in this weekend. We won the first rally and now this one. We will keep pushing and see what happens.”

Al Attiyah said: “This is my favourite race but, this year, it was not easy. Day one and day two, we were struggling a little bit with the problems. Today we had two flat tyres in the same stage and we tried to manage three stages with punctures and we had only one spare.

“We made it happen. It was important to finish and we finished second. Well done to Abdullah [Al Rawahi], he did an amazing race. Still, we are leading the championship and we look ahead to Lebanon. I am disappointed at one point but, on the other, I am happy to finish.”

Meshari Al-Thefiri teamed up with Qatar’s Nasser Al-Kuwari and were the class of the MERC2 field for the third successive event this season. The Kuwaiti rounded off the podium places and finished 6min 49.2sec clear of fourth-placed Jordanian Shaker Jweihan and his Omani co-driver Taha Al Zadjali.

Twenty-three crews and competitors from six nations competed in the Jordan Rally with 17 eligible for the FIA event and a further six able to score points for the Jordan National Championship.





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EXPANSION PLANS

SalamAir to launch flights to three new destinations

MUSCAT: SalamAir has announced the launch of flights to three new destinations in June and July 2023. These new destinations include Almaty in Kazakhstan, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and the Turkish city of Rize.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, expressed his excitement about the expansion plans, stating to ONA, “We are thrilled to introduce these new destinations to our growing network. Almaty, one of Kazakhstan’s prominent cities, offers great tourism potential. We aim to establish year-round connections to cater to the demand and not limit it to seasonal periods.”

He added that in addition to these developments, SalamAir is currently conducting an economic study of 20 new tourist destinations in Europe and Eastern Europe. The objective is to attract tourists to the Sultanate of Oman and invigorate the tourism industry. This initiative, he affirmed, aims to enhance the movement of tourists through Muscat and Salalah international airports.

Regarding seasonal destinations



tions during the upcoming summer, Captain Mohamed Ahmed mentioned that the following routes would be reopened: Muscat-Sarajevo, Muscat-Baku, Muscat-Bursa, Suhar-Trabzon, and Muscat-Beirut. He highlighted that the Muscat-Trabzon route have become a year-round direct connection due to its popularity.

SalamAir currently operates flights to 38 domestic and international destinations, including Suhar, Salalah, Duqm, Masirah, the GCC countries, and several Arab, Asian, and European destinations.

The airline is also excited to announce the addition of new aircraft to its fleet. Within the next two months, SalamAir will receive three new Airbus A321neo; by the end of the year, three more aircraft will join the fleet, bringing the total number of SalamAir’s aircraft to 17.

SalamAir places significant emphasis on Omanisation and is dedicated to providing employment opportunities. The company’s Omanisation percentage currently stands at 65%.

-ONA

WEATHER

Shinas receives rains

SHINAS: The Wilayat of Shinas in the Governorate of North Al Batinah witnessed rains of varying intensity. The precipitation was concentrated over the coastal and mountainous villages and the centre of the wilayat, in addition to the northern parts. -ONA



WORLD BEE DAY

Bees play a key role in food chain

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, along with the world, celebrated the World Bee Day, which falls on May 20 of each year to highlight its contribution to sustainable development and the threats it faces.

Bee is an important living organism that plays a key role in human life, as it is responsible for pollinating plants and improving the production of farm crops.

It is also an important source of honey and its other products, and contributes to preserving biological diversity and preserving the



natural environment.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is interested in local breeds of

honey bees in the Sultanate of Oman through programmes and projects implemented by the ministry in addition to research and scientific studies such as studying the characteristics and productivity of Omani bees.

The Directorate General of Marketing, Agricultural and Fisheries Investment works to raise the production of honey and bee products and. Such projects have many positive results in terms of increasing production, raising quality, providing jobs for Omani youth. -ONA

RAFO

Oman sends relief materials to Sudan



KHARTOUM: Flights carrying relief materials from the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Charitable Organisation, in cooperation with the Royal Air Force of Oman, arrived in Sudan aboard a number of transport aircraft of the Royal Air Force of Oman.

The military transport planes of the Royal Omani Air Force were received on their arrival at Port Sudan International Airport in Sudan by Ali bin Sulaiman Al Darmaki, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman accredited to the Republic of Sudan, Ahmed Adam Bakhit, Minister of Social Development and Chairman of the Higher Committee for Handling Humanitarian and Health Conditions, and Fathallah Haj Ahmed, the governor of the Red Sea State, and Othman Abu Fatima, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



The operation of these flights comes within the framework of the humanitarian efforts provided by the Sultanate of Oman for brothers and friends. These flights will continue over the coming days to meet the needs of Republic of Sudan. -ONA

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SEEB CLUB EMERGE CHAMPIONS OF INAUGURAL SHABIBA CHALLENGE CUP



MUSCAT: The youngsters hold promise and talent for the future. And a lot of potential and skills were on display at the inaugural Shabiba Challenge Cup, which was won by Seeb Club at Cheltenham Muscat on Friday.

The inaugural Shabiba Challenge Cup edition for U12 age category witnessed six teams, including two from Saudi Arabia, vying for the top honours over two days. The tournament was played on a round-robin basis followed by three finals to decide the Gold (overall), Silver and Bronze Cup winners.

Seeb and Bousher Academy Oman emerged as the best two teams after playing five round-robin matches. In the Gold Cup final that decided the overall winner of the inaugural Shabiba Challenge Cup, Seeb trounced Bousher Academy 3-0.

The Silver Cup was clinched by Juventus Khobar Saudi with a 3-0 win over Muscat Football Academy (MFA) PDO while the Bronze Cup was claimed by MFA Cheltenham with a 4-2 victory over Juventus Jeddah Saudi.

Christian Fisher of MFA Cheltenham was declared the player of the tournament.

Organised by MFA in association with Al Shabiba newspaper and Cheltenham Muscat, the tournament was full of thrill and ac-

tion and after two days of matches, the prize-distribution was held on Saturday.

The six teams that took part in the tournament were Juventus Jeddah Saudi, Juventus Khobar Saudi (both from Saudi Arabia), MFA Cheltenham, Seeb Club, Bousher Academy and MFA PDO (all from Oman).

Speaking after the successful conclusion of the tournament, MFA founder Chuck Martini said: "Despite the gruelling heat, the matches were a great spectacle and played in a good spirit. The results reflected the high level of performance showcased by the young players."

Martini added: "The Shabiba Challenger Cup tournament is the first of a series of events aimed to provide a platform for players of different age groups. In this edition, we had the tournament for the U12 age group but each team was allowed to field two U13 players. In the coming weeks, we will organise a tournament for the U14 and U16 age group categories."

Martini said: "The Shabiba Challenger aims to support Omani clubs and provide players with good exposure by competing against teams from other nations. This edition we had players from Saudi Arabia, who were happy to play in Oman against good teams."



Delegated by HM, Sayyid Asa’ad attends Arab Summit in Jeddah

Sayyid Asa’ad was received upon his arrival by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister



JEDDAH: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asa’ad bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, headed the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the 32nd Regular Arab Summit, which was held on Friday in the city of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in the presence of a number of leaders of states and heads of governments.

HH Sayyid Asa’ad was received upon his arrival by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

HH Sayyid Asa’ad delivered a speech at the opening of the Arab summit reading as follows:

“Upon the start of this blessed gathering, I am delighted to convey to you the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, and his sincere wishes, his support and his backing for the tasks of the 32nd Arab Summit on the land of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, headed by his brethren the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. We, in the Sultanate of Oman, perceive that the success of this summit has been achieved through the the Arab nation’ closing ranks, thanks to the wisdom of King Salman and the leaders of Arab countries.

Thanks and salutes to the sincere efforts of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, to the successful initiatives and to the monarch’s brethren, the Arab leaders, for their endeavours to revive Arab



solidarity, to end the region’s crises through Arab solutions and to pave the way for a bright stage in the nation’s march. This will benefit our countries, our peoples and our Arab nation. It will undoubtedly reflect positively on other countries of the world, since our Arab world represents an important pillar in the world.

We would also like to express our thanks to Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League, and to the Secretariat-General for their efforts in preparing for this summit and for their

constructive role in developing the joint Arab action.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Your Majesties, Your Highnesses and Your Excellencies, Heads of delegations,

In his first nation address after assuming power, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, pledged to continue backing the Arab League, cooperate with leaders of Arab countries, improve the lives of citizens, distance this region from conflicts and disagreements and take steps to achieve economic integration

Sayyid Asa’ad returns home



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Asa’ad bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, returned home on Friday after leading Oman’s delegation at the 32nd Arab Summit. — **ONA**

and stability without applying the principles and standards of the international law, as well as resolutions of international legitimacy, to the Palestinian cause or without granting the Palestinian people the right to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the lines of 4 June 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions issued in this regard, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of Land for Peace.

In conclusion,

We are confident that preserving and developing the Arab League will consolidate the bonds of cooperation, integration and exchange of benefits among our countries and other countries of the world. This confidence stems from the cultural heritage of the Arab nation, its civilized history and its scholarly contribution to humanity. We hereby affirm our ability, as an Arab nation, to elevate our countries to broader horizons of prosperity and progress and place our peoples in the position that they deserve.”

The Arab Summit discussed many issues of concern to the Arab nation, including the Palestinian cause, the Arab-Israeli conflict, solidarity with and support for Lebanon, the developments in Syria, support for peace and development in the Republic of Sudan, developments in Libya, developments in the Republic of Yemen, support for the Federal Republic of Somalia and the United Republic of the Comoros and an envisaged peaceful solution for the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea and the Ethiopian dam. — **ONA**

SECOND PHASE

Efforts on to protect beaches from erosion in Sohar

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Efforts are on to protect beaches from erosion in Karwan and Salan regions of the Wilayat of Sohar. As part of the second phase of the project to stop erosion, the Municipality of North Al Batinah, represented by the Department of Transportation, continues to implement the project for saving beaches from erosion in the Karwan and Salan regions in the Wilayat of Sohar, at a cost of OMR45,000.

The protection work has been completed from the fish market to the houses that were affected by the sea waves in 2022. Also, the work has been done to repair the dirt road leading to the houses from the beach side after it became inaccessible due to the impact of waves. The road has also been paved with barriers made of rocks from the sea side to ensure that the impact of waves on houses is reduced. The width of the barrier is not less than 10 metres. Engineer Omar bin Saeed Al Dhahli, the supervisor of the project, explained that the Transportation Department of Sohar Municipality had previously started implementing the project in its first phase, with a length of 500 metres and a period of 100 working days for the Karwan and Salan regions by the Department of Transportation in the Municipality of North Al Batinah.

The number of backfills has reached 200 shipments, with a height of 4 metres from the surface of the earth to a depth of 2 metres, and a width of 3.7 metres.

The space between the barrier and the housing area is 18 metres. The municipality hopes that the



project will contribute in reducing the impact of these sites from erosion and protect the homes and properties of citizens.

Engineer Omar Al Dhahli added that these efforts come within the framework of the initiatives presented by the Sohar Municipality Department. Limestone rocks of large sizes are lined up on sites affected by beach erosion. The efforts of the municipality is not enough to stop erosion, the issue needs in-depth studies by the specialists in beach erosion.

The treatment of such erosion requires a breakwater with accurate technical specifications to have positive effects in the future.

The municipality is trying to find a temporary solution to this phenomenon to reduce the damage done by beach erosion on the landscape. The solution should also be compatible with the marine environment.



TURKEY ELECTION RUNOFF

Voting opens for Turkish citizens abroad

ISTANBUL: Polls for the Turkish presidential runoff elections opened for the millions of Turks living outside the country on Saturday.

The second round of voting takes place domestically on May 28 after neither President Recep Tayyip Erdogan nor his main challenger, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, secured the majority

support needed for an outright victory in the first round last week.

Some 3.4 million Turks abroad are eligible to vote and form part of the 64 million registered to vote in the Turkish elections.

Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its nationalist allies won a comfortable parliamentary majority in the first round of voting on May 14.

Germany, home to the largest Turkish diaspora, has some 3 million people with Turkish roots, with 1.5 million of them being registered to vote. The Turkish electoral authority said Turks can vote until May 24 at any of the 17 polling stations in the country.

Turkish people and Germany-Turkish dual nationals from Berlin and Brandenburg can cast their

vote so long they had registered in the first round of voting, according to the Turkish Embassy in Berlin.

Kilicdaroglu urged Turks living abroad to vote, saying it was their "national duty" to do so.

"Wherever you are in the world, heading to the ballot box in this election is a national duty," Kilicdaroglu said in a video message on Twitter. — **DW**



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WHO launches new mRNA vaccine hub in Cape Town

The hub is seen as a major boost for science and health infrastructure in Africa



CAPE TOWN: The World Health Organization officially launched a new mRNA vaccine technology hub in Cape Town on Thursday. The hub aims to provide a complete package of services along the entire vaccine chain, from scientific research to vaccine manufacturing and licensing.

The hub is seen as a major boost for science and health infrastructure in Africa and a way to help low- and middle-income countries end their reliance on higher-income countries for vaccine development and shipments.

Boosting vaccine production for African countries

As of March 2023, 69.7% of the global population had received at least one dose of a COVID-19

vaccine. Notably, this proportion still remains below 30% in low-income countries.

Cape Town's vaccine hub aims to offer equitable access to mRNA vaccines — and not just for COVID-19. The hub wants to develop and manufacture vaccines for other diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS as well.

"Ours is the vision of the mRNA Technology Transfer Hub beyond just COVID-19. The capabilities we are building are looking to empower us to deal with other future pandemics whose vaccines could use the same mRNA technology platform," said Blade Nzi-

mande, South Africa's Minister of Higher Education and Science, in a press statement.

Public-private partnership

The initiative is a partnership between the public and private sectors, including Biovac, Afrigen and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC).

"I am immensely proud of the achievement of all those involved in this project; in less than two years we have shown that when we work collaboratively, we succeed collectively," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a press conference on Thursday.

A bumpy road to vaccine equity

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted major disparities in access to health care in different parts of the world. By summer 2021, COVID vaccines had become widely available in higher income countries like the United Kingdom and United States. Meanwhile many African countries were yet to receive their first shipments.

COVAX, the UN-backed global vaccine alliance, was tasked with ensuring that middle and lower-income countries received access to COVID vaccines, but plans failed when wealthier countries bought the bulk of vaccines for themselves, leaving little for low-income countries.

Back in 2022, Amnesty International stated pharmaceutical giants "tragically failed to rise to the challenge" of the coronavirus pandemic.

It was this global inequality of vaccine access that led African leaders to develop their own COVID vaccine. The WHO also stepped in to help establish the recently opened mRNA transfer technology hub in Cape Town.

BioNTech also set up create its own mRNA vaccine manufacturing facilities in Rwanda and Senegal. These enterprises are not related, however, to the vaccine hub in Cape Town. — **DW**

The first mRNA vaccine developed in Africa

The hub was initially launched in July 2021. Since then, early pilot operations have created the first batches of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines.

Afrigen Biologics used the publicly available sequence of Moderna's mRNA COVID vaccine to make its own version of the vaccine — AfriVac 2121.

AfriVac 2121 is the first mRNA vaccine designed, developed and produced on the African continent.

Afrigen is now scaling up production for manufacturing vaccine patches so it can be first tested on humans in Phase I/II clinical trials. It is unclear when these trials will take place.

32ND ARAB SUMMIT

UAE supports all efforts to promote regional stability, peace

JEDDAH: UAE Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Presidential Court, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, said the UAE supports all efforts to promote stability and peace in the region.

During the 32nd Arab Summit held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, His Highness Sheikh Mansour stressed that the best way to ensure development and prosperity in the Arab region is through cooperation. He also expressed his gratitude and appreciation to King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and King of Saudi Arabia, and Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, for their hospitality and excellent preparations for the summit.

He then conveyed his appreciation to Algeria for its work as president of previous Arab summits and the Secretariat-General of the Arab League for preparing the summit.

His Highness Sheikh Mansour said that despite the region's challenges, some hopeful developments could lead to the resolution of local conflicts, affirming the importance of building on related accomplishments. — **ANI/WAM**



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A TRADITION KEPT ALIVE

What were some of Greece's biggest election promises?

ATHENS: Georgios Papandreou, Greece's first postwar prime minister, once famously said that while making an election promise doesn't hurt, keeping it might.

Papandreou, the head of one of the country's most influential political clans, knew that the only way to get anywhere in national politics in Greece was to promise the electorate the Earth. It's become a tradition kept alive by many of his successors.



One particularly impressive example came in the run-up to the parliamentary election in 2012, which took place at the height of the Greek sovereign debt crisis. In a high-profile address on the national budget, opposition leader Alexis Tsipras promised to nullify the austerity dictates of the country's international creditors in a single day, with a single law — indeed, with a single paragraph. In short, Tsipras simply intended to ban austerity measures. Such fighting talk went down a storm with left-wing voters.

But things turned out very differently. After his election victory in 2015, the leftist Tsipras had to face the cold, harsh reality of his country's financial situation: He had no choice but to agree to new loans and austerity conditions.

Tsipras explained to the Greek parliament that the country had no alternative; the agreed program of reforms would have to be implemented. Any other course of action, he said, would lead to catastrophe.

Incorrect figures sent to Brussels

This does not mean Tsipras was responsible for the debt crisis. In the decades preceding his appointment as prime minister, Greece had been ruled by conservatives and socialists who had long been running up massive debts.

From 2004 to 2009 alone, conservative prime minister Kostas Karamanlis, a nephew of former premier Konstantinos Karamanlis, almost doubled the national debt while reporting incorrect figures to Brussels.

There was already speculation about the likelihood of Greek bankruptcy while Kostas Karamanlis was still in power. Nevertheless, just before the parliamentary election in 2009, his finance minister, Giorgos Alogoskoufis, assured the public there was no need to worry: Greece was well-equipped to deal with the international financial crisis, he said. This also turned out to be another empty campaign pledge.

'The money is there'

Around about this time, George Papandreou — whose father and grandfather before him had also been prime minister — enjoyed a boost to his popularity in opinion polls.

He, too, made big promises about social reform, pledging to distribute wealth in the country more evenly in his first 100 days in office. When asked by a journalist how he intended to pay for this pledge, Papandreou gave the now legendary reply: "The money is there" ("Lefta Yparchoun").

A 'titanic struggle' against bankruptcy

Papandreou went on to win an absolute majority in the election. But once again, the voters did not get what they were promised. Shortly after taking office, the socialist prime minister announced the start of a "titanic struggle" against his country's impending bankruptcy.

The rest is history: Papandreou asked the International Monetary Fund and the European Union for

financial assistance and in return, agreed to austerity measures that saw Greece's economic performance shrink by over 30%.

Promise of cheaper cars

Other recurring themes in Greek election campaigns are cheap loans and tax relief. One classic in this respect is the pledge made by the conservative opposition leader Constantine Mitsotakis in the run-up to the parliamentary election of 1985.

Mitsotakis — father of the current Greek prime minister — promised to drastically cut taxes and customs duties on cars so that every family would be able to afford a new car. In the 1980s, Greece's socialist government levied massive taxes on imported industrial products in order to protect Greece's industry and fill the state's coffers. This was possible at the time because the European single market had not yet come into force. At the time, a German mid-range car was completely out of reach for many families in Greece.

Mitsotakis hoped this pledge would once more make his party appeal to hard-working middle-class voters. But the ruling socialists responded with a campaign slogan that mobilised young voters in particular: "Better ride a moped than vote Mitsotakis!" Socialist Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou scored a clear victory in the poll and was reelected for a second term. — **DW**



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Indian PM Modi assures Ukrainian President to ‘resolve the conflict’

Since the Ukraine conflict began, PM Modi has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as President Zelenskyy a number of times

HIROSHIMA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima and assured him to resolve the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv. “India and I will do whatever we can for the resolution of the conflict,” said PM Modi. This is the first meeting between the two leaders since the Russia-Ukraine conflict that began last

year on February 24. “For the past 1-1.5 years we have had telephonic conversations, but after Glasgow, we are meeting after a long time,” said PM Modi. The Ukrainian President is attending the summit on an invitation by Japan, the current chair of the powerful grouping. Since the Ukraine conflict began, PM Modi has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as President Zelenskyy a number of times. New Delhi has sought a diplomatic solution to the conflict. At the same time, PM Modi told Russian President Vladimir Putin in September that now is “not an era of war”. Diplomatically, Prime Minister Modi’s advised to President Putin to a “cessation of violence” and for all sides to return to the dialogue table. PM Modi’s telephonic conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin underlined that Delhi for now will stick to a path of strategic ambivalence on the Ukraine crisis. This is a pragmatic choice, one that reflects the complexities of a realist world and Delhi’s own positions on territorial



integrity and sovereignty. In a phone conversation with President Zelenskyy on October 4 last year, PM Modi said there can be “no military solution” and that India is ready to contribute to any peace efforts. India has maintained that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. PM Modi is in Japan to attend the Group of Seven (G7) summit. The prime minister is visiting the East Asian country at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida.

“The war in Ukraine is a major concern for the world and it has affected the entire globe, but I don’t consider it as a political or economic issue, this is an issue of humanity, humanitarian values for me,” said PM Modi. Anguished at the pain of Ukrainians, PM Modi said, “What is the pain of the war, you know it better than us. Last year when our children (Indians) came from Ukraine and shared their experiences there, I came to know about your pain, the pain of Ukrainians.” Japan is hosting the G7 summit as the current chair of the powerful grouping. PM Modi will be in Hiroshima for the G7 summit from May 19 to May 21. He is expected to speak on global challenges, including food, fertiliser and energy security. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday landed in Hiroshima, Japan to attend the annual summit of the Group of Seven (G7) the world’s most industrialised countries. Live footage on Japan’s public broadcaster, NHK, showed Zelenskyy stepping off a French plane at an airport in Hiroshima. According to the New York Times, a

red carpet was rolled out minutes before his arrival, and he was immediately whisked away in a black sedan. “Important meetings with partners and friends of Ukraine. Security and enhanced cooperation for our victory. Peace will become closer today,” Zelenskyy tweeted on arrival in Japan. The Ukrainian leader, who made a surprise visit to an Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia on Friday, is looking to rally the international community to increase sanctions on Russia and pledge further support for Ukraine, according to a report in Al Jazeera. Zelenskyy’s visit comes a day after US President Biden informed the G7 leaders in Hiroshima that the US would support the joint allied training of Ukrainian pilots on fourth-generation fighter jets, including the F-16. Once the training gets underway, it would be decided when and how many aircraft would be delivered and who in the coalition would provide them. Biden said he was also prepared to let other countries give F-16s to Ukraine, reported The New York Times.

— ANI

G7 SUMMIT

Japanese PM, US President agree to work closely

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a meeting with US President Joe Biden in which the two leaders concurred on continuing to work closely together in addressing various issues and also confirmed the importance of cooperating with China on shared challenges. The two leaders exchanged views on regional issues, on the

basis of the recognition that any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia, must not be tolerated, a statement released by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. Biden is currently in Japan to attend the G7 summit in Hiroshima. “The two leaders concurred on continuing to work closely

together in addressing issues related to China. The two leaders also confirmed the importance of cooperating with China on shared challenges. Furthermore, the two leaders reiterated the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues,” the statement said. The two leaders exchanged

views on security cooperation between US and Japan and concurred to continue to cooperate for further strengthening deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-US alliance on the basis of the outcomes of the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee and the Japan-US Summit meeting in Japan. Joe Biden and Fumio Kishida

reaffirmed the critical role that US extended deterrence plays in ensuring the security of Japan and the peace and stability of the region. Biden welcomed improvement in the ties between Japan and South Korea, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. The two leaders concurred on

continuing to work closely together between Japan and the US as well as among Japan, the US and North Korea towards the complete denuclearization of North Korea as per the UN Security Council resolutions in strengthening regional deterrence, including security cooperation between Japan, US and South Korea and responses at the UNSC.— ANI

WAR-STRICKEN COUNTRY

Crisis in Afghanistan on rise, says Red Cross

KABUL: Successful droughts and a surge in humanitarian needs in Afghanistan in different sectors have resulted in an increase in the current crisis in the war-stricken country, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said in a new report, according to TOLOnews. Expressing concern over the situation of the Afghan people, the Red Cross in its report revealed that two-thirds of the country already has humanitarian needs in 2023. Less than half of the 80 million Swiss Francs asked in aid have been granted, according to the report.

— ANI



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TENDER NOTICE

REF: ISM/ADMIN/TENDER/2023-24/001

Sealed tenders are invited from potential service providers / contractors for the following requirements of the school:

1. Painting of the school building (External areas of blocks A, B, C, D and E).
2. Renovation of the senior library.
3. Renovation of middle section science lab in A block.
4. Renovation of the middle section staff room.
5. Renovation of the restrooms in A block.
6. Renovation of old MPH roof and ceiling.
7. Renovation of outdoor basketball court flooring.
8. Supply of student furniture (Table & Chair).
9. Supply & installation of tabs and kindle devices for the IT lab and library.
10. Website designing, development, maintenance & support for the school.

Interested parties shall collect the tender documents from the school cash counter against the payment of **RO.10/-** as a non-refundable tender fee from **22nd May 2023 to 28th May 2023** during the working days (Sunday to Thursday) of the school between **7.30 am and 2.00 pm**.

The completed tender shall be dropped in the Tender Box kept in the school office before the due date. The tender should be in a sealed envelope, addressed to The Chairman, Purchase Sub Committee, Indian School Muscat, P.O. Box: 2470, PC: 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

Note: Respective tenders shall clearly mention the “name of service quoted for” by the bidding party. Any tender without the name of service/supply will be considered disqualified.

Last date of tender submission: Refer to the tender document



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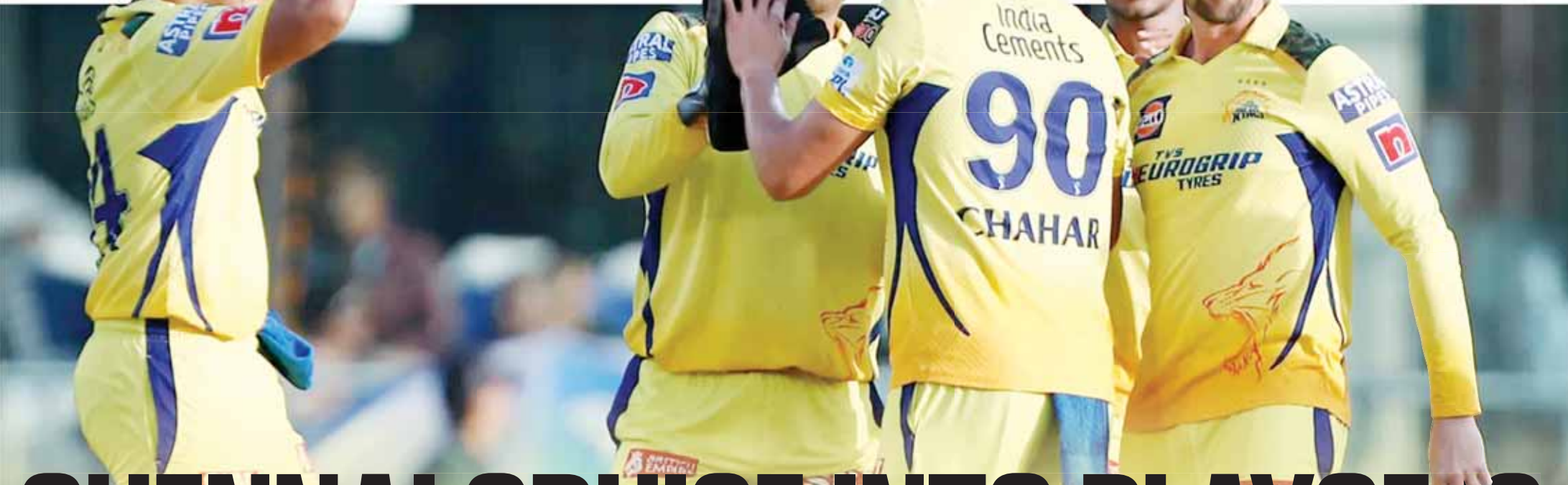


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CHENNAI CRUISE INTO PLAYOFFS

Ruturaj Gaikwad, Devon Conway script CSK's big win, boost chances of top-two spot

NEW DELHI: Devon Conway and Ruturaj Gaikwad slammed half-centuries as Chennai Super Kings (CSK) dominated from start to finish in a 77-run win against Delhi Capitals (DC) and cruised into 2023 IPL playoffs with 17 points.

The large margin of CSK victory also boosted their net run rate (NRR) and gave their top two aspirations a massive leg-up unless, Lucknow Super Giants win by 97 runs or more against Kolkata Knight Riders to surge their net run rate over CSK.

For Capitals, the end was as

tame as the start of the season. Skipper David Warner was the only top-order batter to show any semblance of form and consistency throughout. His 86 off 58 had its thrilling moments, particularly against Ravindra Jadeja.

CSK's Conway broke free early as he launched Lalit Yadav's off-break for his first six, the season's 1000th, in the second over to begin the sixathon. CSK's fifty was up in just the fifth over, with Gaikwad and Conway going almost neck and neck. Overs six to nine produced just one boundary, but Gaikwad broke the shackles when



he pulled Axar Patel's short balls for two consecutive sixes in the 10th over. Off the next delivery, he raised a 37-ball half-century.

Two overs later, Kuleep Yadav found himself under the pump. Gaikwad went 6, 6, 6, to turn the innings into overdrive. Soon, Gaikwad and Conway raised 1,000 runs as an opening pair

in just their 20th innings.

Gaikwad's fury ended when he was caught on the ropes trying to muscle a short ball out of the ground, but the two overs following his dismissal went for three fours and two sixes. Conway pressed the pedal after his 33-ball half-century.

Skipper MS Dhoni promoted

himself to No. 4 ahead of Jadeja, but when Shivam Dube fell with 12 balls left, it brought Jadeja out anyway. And he smashed three fours and a six off the seven balls he faced as CSK finished with 223/3. The last six overs went for 83 runs.

Delhi Capitals' chase stuttered as Tushar Deshpande removed Prithvi Shaw early to an outstanding catch from Ambati Rayudu at mid-off. Deepak Chahar made further incursions in the powerplay when he removed Phil Salt and Rilee Rossouw to slow Capitals down.

Warner found his hitting gear after a slow powerplay as he got stuck into Jadeja by muscling him down the ground.

He brought up his fifty off just 32 balls and then upped the tempo even more in Jadeja's last over that went for 23 and made him finish with 4-0-50-1.

Warner, who kept hitting him

with the spin into the short leg-side boundary, outfoxed him with a switch hit for six as Jadeja tried to fire it away from his hitting arc.

As wickets continued to fall, Warner kept counter-punching, but the bowling meltdown and their own top-order collapse meant the asking rate had spiralled beyond reach early. Warner was finally out, dragging a cutter off Matheesha Pathirana down to long-on.

Maheesh Theekshana delivered a thrilling final over in which he picked up two wickets in two balls and was heartbreakingly denied a hat-trick in the wicket maiden.

Brief scores: Chennai Super Kings 223/3 (Devon Conway 87, Ruturaj Gaikwad 79) beat Delhi Capitals 146/9 (David Warner 86; Deepak Chahar 3-22, Matheesha Pathirana 2-22, Maheesh Theekshana 2-23) by 77 runs. - Agencies

POINTS TABLE							
TEAM	P	W	L	NR	NRR	PTS	
GT	13	9	4	0	+0.835	18	
CSK	14	8	5	1	+0.652	17	
LSG	13	7	5	1	+0.304	15	
RCB	13	7	6	0	+0.180	14	
RR	14	7	7	0	+0.148	14	
MI	13	7	6	0	-0.128	14	
KKR	13	6	7	0	-0.256	12	
PBKS	14	6	8	0	-0.304	12	
DC	14	5	9	0	-0.808	10	
SRH	13	4	9	0	-0.558	8	

CSK: Chennai Super Kings. DC: Delhi Capitals. GT: Gujarat Titans. KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders. LSG: Lucknow Super Giants. MI: Mumbai Indians. PBKS: Punjab Kings. RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore. RR: Rajasthan Royals. SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

RAJASTHAN ROYALS VS PUNJAB KINGS

Jaiswal creates history, Royals keep hopes alive

DHARAMSALA: Rajasthan Royals (RR) batter Yashasvi Jaiswal made history on Friday by becoming an uncapped player with the most runs in a single season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) history. The 21-year-old reached this milestone during his side's four-wicket win against Punjab Kings at Dharamsala.

Jaiswal continued his red-hot form with a knock of 50 runs in just 36 balls, consisting of eight boundaries. His runs came at a strike rate of 138.69.

Following the half-century, Jaiswal has scored a total of 625 runs in 14 matches at an average of 48.07. He has scored one century and five half-centuries this



season, with the best score of 124. His runs have come at a strike rate of 163.61. The young batter has broken a 15-year-old record of most runs by an uncapped player

in IPL history, which was earlier held by Australian batter Shaun Marsh. In the IPL 2008, when Marsh was uncapped and yet to represent Australia, he had scored 616 runs in 11 matches at an average of 68.44.

After being put to bat first by Rajasthan Royals, Punjab Kings scored 187/5 in their 20 overs. They struggled against RR bowlers initially, losing their four wickets for just 50 runs in 6.3 overs. Then Jitesh Sharma (44) and Sam Curran (49 n.o.) stitched a 64-run stand for the fifth wicket to bring PBKS back into the game. Curran and Shahruxh Khan (41 n.o. in 23 balls), scored 46 runs in the final two overs.

In the chase of 188, RR lost Jos Buttler early for a duck, his fifth this season. Jaiswal and Devdutt Padikkal (51 in 30 balls) stitched a 73-run stand for the second wicket, helping RR fight back.

Later on, cameos from Shimron Hetmyer (46 in 28 balls), Riyan Parag (20 in 12 balls) and Dhruv Jurel (10 n.o. in four balls) helped RR clinch a last-over thriller win by four wickets.

Kagiso Rabada (2/40) was the pick of the bowlers for PBKS.

RR climbed to fifth spot in the points table with seven wins and seven losses to keep their hopes for a place in the playoffs alive while Punjab Kings were eliminated. - ANI

TODAY'S MATCHES

INDIANS

VS

SUNRISERS

Mumbai Indians

Sunrisers Hyderabad

2pm, Mumbai

ROYALS

VS

TITANS

Royal Challengers Bangalore

Gujarat Titans

6pm, Bengaluru

SUZUKI

ALL-NEW

GRAND VITARA

2WD/4WD - SHVS MILD HYBRID

LEAVE A GRAND TRAIL

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

DAVID WARNER

“Our execution in the middle was good. We lost wickets in clumps, though. When we are on with the bat, like we were in Dharamsala, we were very good. It is about going back to the drawing board, regrouping and coming back stronger next year. You got to adapt, got to have your gameplan. Here you have to hit straight and the way CSK played today, that is how you have to play in these conditions.”

David Warner

Delhi Capitals captain

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INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Sohar Port and Free Zone highlighted views about investment opportunities available to business owners in North Al Batinah Governorate. The discussion took place during a visit made to Sohar Port and Free Zone by personnel of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in North Al Batinah.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



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MSX RECOVERS

The Omani stock market recorded some volatility during the week and was able to recover to a certain extent from the decline that started in March, according to an industry expert.

BankDhofar outlines terms of revised non-binding merger offer to Ahlibank

The offer proposes the issuance of 1.2910 shares of BankDhofar ordinary shares for each share of Ahlibank

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Subsequent to submission of revised non-binding merger proposal to the Board of Ahli Bank SAOG on 26 April 2023; BankDhofar SAOG announced further details of its revised non-binding offer of its merger proposal with Ahli Bank SAOG.

The offer proposes issuance of 1.2910 shares of BankDhofar ordinary shares for each share of Ahli Bank. The proposed share swap ratio implies an attractive valuation of 0.200 baisa per share for Ahli Bank based on BankDhofar's unaffected share price of 155 baisa prior to the initial offer of merger proposal as at 9 th April 2023. The offer also entails an option for shareholders to opt for cash consideration for up to 25% of their holding in Ahli Bank at the offer price (200 baisa per share).

The revised offer is a highly value accretive proposition for all Ahli Bank shareholders.

The offer price implies a 15% premium to Ahli Bank's unaffected share price, prior to submission and announcement of initial merger proposal to Ahli Bank Board.

The offer price values the Ahli Bank shares at 1.30x book value. Moreover, based on latest share price of BankDhofar, the proposed offer and share swap ratio implies further increase in the effective value for each Ahli Bank share to 227 baisa per share, 1.48x book value and 30.6% premium to Ahli Bank's unaffected share price (ap-

plicable to the 75% share component as per the offered share swap ratio). Notably, the offer price reflects a substantial premium to the valuation multiples of the Omani banking sector.

Sharia-compliant

For entities which are Sharia-compliant, (Sharia-compliant juristic shareholders and their subsidiaries), the proposed merger offer include 100% cash payout at offer price of 200 baisa per share, taking into account inability to hold shares in a conventional bank.

BankDhofar intends to fund the cash component of the offer from its existing liquidity and capital resources as well as contribution from BankDhofar's existing shareholders.

The terms of the revised offer for merger with Ahli Bank clearly demonstrate strong commitment by BankDhofar SAOG, its board members and shareholders towards further strengthening of Omani banking sector offering improved value proposition to all the stakeholders. The proposed merger offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalised bank on day 1. The transaction is subject to obtaining necessary approvals from relevant regulators as well as Boards and shareholders of BankDhofar and Ahli Bank.



CBO REPORT

Credit granted by Omani banks to private sector reaches OMR19.9bn



MUSCAT: An analysis of the activities of traditional commercial banks indicated the continued growth of credit in Oman.

The total credit granted by commercial banks increased by 5.6 percent, while credit extended to the private sector increased by 4.8 percent to reach OMR19.9 billion at the end of March 2023.

The report issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that the total investment of commercial banks in securities decreased by 14.6 percent to reach about OMR4.5 billion at the end of March 2023, while investment in government development bonds increased by 2.7 percent to reach OMR2.2 billion.

Regarding the investments of conventional banks in foreign securities, the CBO bulletin said that it increased by 23.7 percent to reach OMR900 million at the end of March 2023.

On the liabilities side, total deposits with conventional commercial banks increased by 3.4 percent to reach OMR22.2 billion, while government deposits with commercial banks increased by 9.4 percent to about OMR5.3 billion, and deposits of public sector institutions increased by 24.8 percent.

Private sector deposits decreased by 0.2 percent to reach OMR14.6 billion at the end of March 2023, constituting 65.9 percent of total deposits with conventional commercial banks. - ONA

Oman's Islamic banking assets rise 10% to OMR6.6bn



MUSCAT: The total assets of Oman's Islamic banks and windows combined increased by 10 percent to about OMR6.6 billion at the end of March 2023 compared to the same period last year.

In terms of market share, Islamic banking assets now make up 16.4 per cent of total banking sector assets as of the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman,

The total balance of financing granted by the Sharia-compliant banking entities in Oman engaged in this activity increased by 13.4 percent to reach about OMR5.6 billion.

Deposits with Islamic banks and windows also recorded an increase of 10.3 percent, to reach about OMR4.9 billion at the end of March 2023. - ONA

CAPITAL MARKET AUTHORITY



CMA approves merger of Omani Qatari Insurance and Vision Insurance

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a decision cancelling the license of Vision Insurance Services SAOG for carrying out general and life insurance and savings in Oman.

CMA's decision was based on the approval of the extraordinary general meeting of Vision Insurance held on December 26, 2002, to dissolve the company and merge with Omani Qatari Insurance Company SAOG.

CMA emphasises that the merger of an insurance company is a healthy phenomenon that contributes to enhancing the robust financial position of the merging companies in a single economic entity, which reflects positively on the quality of the insurance service and maintains appropriate insurance prices as well as being one of the available solutions for overcoming market fluctuation and ensures the sus-

CMA stated that the merger of the two companies would raise the capital of the company , as the extraordinary general meeting of Omani Qatari Insurance Company resolved to increase the authorised capital from OMR20 million to OMR30 million

tainability of the insurance sector to be able to meet the obligations toward policyholders and enhance competition in the local and global markets.

CMA stated that the merger of the two companies would raise the capital of the company, as the extraordinary general meeting of Omani Qatari Insurance resolved to increase the authorised capital

from OMR20 million to OMR30 million and the issued capital will be increased to OMR22 million.

CMA continuously monitor the financial positions of the regulated companies and encourage solutions that assist the companies to grow and prosper to achieve financial stability of such companies and contribute to the economic development process in Oman.

MARKET

Despite volatility, Omani stock market recovers in weekly trading

The main index started the week with a strong rebound but corrected during the following days after encountering some resistance near this month's peak

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market recorded some volatility during the week and was able to recover to a certain extent from the decline that started in March, according to an industry expert.

"The main index started the week with a strong rebound but corrected during the following days after encountering some resistance near this month's peak. The market could remain exposed to new losses if conditions deteriorate," said Denys Peleshok Head of



Asia at CPT Markets.

The market was supported to a certain extent by the banking sector which mostly saw positive performances. Banks could benefit from the relative stabilisation in interest rate expectations in the US and its impact on the local economy. "The receding concerns around the US banking sector have also relieved the pressure on banks worldwide and in Oman as well," Denys Peleshok said.

At the same time, the race to-



ward consolidation in the financial sector in Oman could accelerate as competition seems to be increasing. BankDhofar has renewed its interest in Ahli Bank while other players have entered the game. "Successful bank mergers could increase competition and level the playing field with larger institutions," Denys Peleshok said.

Mitigated company earnings have contributed to the volatility of the market. While some companies like BankDhofar have been

able to post strong or better-than-expected revenues and earnings, helping the market rebound at the beginning of the week, others like Oman Telecom recorded profits that were below expectations although they remained on a healthy trend, pushing the market down in the process.

The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) closed at the end of Thursday's trading at 4,696 points recording a weekly increase of about 30 points. The

financial sector index recorded an increase of 56 points, the industry sector index increased by 47 points, the services sector index recorded a decline of 9 points, and the Sharia index fell to 470 points, recording a weekly decline of 8 points.

The market as a whole was also affected by the developments in energy markets. Oil prices have been rising slightly but failed to show a clear direction while uncertainty dominated expectations. The weaker-than-expected

Chinese rebound compounded the concerns that the debt ceiling issue in the US could pressure demand. "While prices could rise over the long term with increasing demand forecasts, they could be more volatile over the short term, impacting the Omani stock market's performance as a result," Denys Peleshok said.

Natural gas prices followed a more consistent uptrend over the last few days and could recover from multi-month lows if demand picks up during the summer months. Demand could peak during this period as energy consumption could be fuelled by cooling needs with temperatures increasing. Higher prices could start having a positive effect on local sentiment and Omani stock performances.

Overall, the market continues to benefit from the positive and improving credit rating the country has been able to develop.

The improving rating conditions could help attract international investors at a time when global sentiment veers toward safety and attention are turning toward safer assets and markets.

The rapidly changing market conditions on a global scale have effectively promoted a more cautious investment approach.

CC ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

CCED joins Tejarah talks on Oman's journey towards net zero greenhouse gas emissions

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development (CCED), the value-driven company delivering long-term growth to Oman's hydrocarbon sector, recently took part in a panel discussion entitled 'Oman's Journey towards Net Zero: An Environment for Enterprise'.

The event was part of the Tejarah Talks platform, a series of discussions organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Oman Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Tejarah Talks brings together experts and thought leaders from across different industries in Oman, and enables them to share ideas in areas related to Oman's economy. The recent session focused on the transition of Oman to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050 and its implications for corporations, including small and medium enterprises.



The panel discussion was moderated by His Highness Sayyed Dr Adham Al Said who is the Co-Founder of The Firm for Business and Economic Consulting in Oman.

Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development said, "Our industry is committed to contributing to Oman's journey towards a low carbon future and

its transition to a net-zero economy by 2050. Through our gas-to-power project, CC Energy Development will be making a major step towards reaching zero emissions from gas flaring by 2027."

He added, "We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, using modern technologies and optimising operations to achieve this important objective for Oman."

CCED operates in Blocks 3 and 4 of Oman, exploring and producing oil and gas as a part of its commitment to the nation's economic development and prosperity.

Through its gas-to-power project, the company started using its associated gas effectively by generating electricity to power its field production assets, such as wells and pumps. This will allow it to replace most of the diesel that is currently used for those purposes, positively impacting not only its operating efficiency and carbon footprint but also cost optimisation.

FOR BUSINESS OWNERS



Sohar Port reviews investment opportunities

MUSCAT: Sohar Port and Free Zone highlighted views about investment opportunities available to business owners in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The discussion took place during a visit made to Sohar Port and Free Zone by personnel of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in the North Al Batinah Governorate.

The visit comes within the plans of the Investment Committee to identify investment opportunities in North Al Batinah and promote them through the assistance of the

OCCI branch in the North Al Batinah. The visit also comes within the context of OCCI's schedule to operate tours for trade delegations and attract the interest of local and foreign investors.

The visit included a visual presentation by Sohar Port to familiarise business owners. The presentation showcased the most important commercial and industrial facilities of the port, investment incentives and operations that are planned by the port to bolster the growth of industries soon. -OMA

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TRADING BENCHMARK



Germany's DAX stock index hits record high

BRUSSELS: The DAX stock market index — Germany's leading trading benchmark — hit a record high on Friday afternoon, eclipsing a previous peak set in November 2021.

The rally has been driven, at least in part, by guarded optimism after progress in a Washington dispute about raising the US debt limit.

How do the figures tally?

The DAX index rose 0.8 per cent on Friday to reach 16,331 points by late afternoon but receded somewhat again before the close of trade. It had hovered below 16,000 points for much of the week, before breaking through that barrier on Thursday. The last record high, of about 16,290 points, was reached before the economic fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove up inflation and interest rates, causing global stock prices to drop somewhat.

Since a price slide to almost 12,000 in September, the DAX — which is now made up of Germany's top 40 leading blue-chip firms — has been faring better.

Despite a highly turbulent few years economically with COVID and then the war in Ukraine, the DAX has gained more than 50% in value since late in 2018, though some of this can be ascribed to its expansion from 30 companies to 40 in 2021.

The recent recovery of the German index, among others, has been bolstered in part by Beijing's decision in late 2022 to finally drop draconian COVID-19 restrictions in China.

As an important driver of global trade, China's economy has continued to falter, especially in industry. However, there are also positive signs.

European manufacturers of cars, luxury and sporting goods

are confirming a healthy recovery.

Friday's spike, in particular, came amid high hopes in the United States that Congress would reach a deal to avoid a potentially disastrous default on the nation's debt.

US President Joe Biden, in Hiroshima for the G7 summit, has expressed confidence about striking a deal with Republicans to allow the US government to raise its credit limit and borrow more.

Germany wasn't alone in seeing stocks on the increase on Friday. By midday, France's CAC 40 benchmark added 0.8 per cent and Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.4 per cent.

Japan's Nikkei index 225 rose 0.8 per cent to finish at 30,808.35 — the highest close for the index in about 33 years.

Wall Street also opened higher, heading towards its best week since March. -IWW

INDUSTRY BODY

India most successful in curbing inflation among top 10 economies

NEW DELHI: Industry body PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Friday said India is most successful in curbing inflation among the top 10 economies.

Saket Dalmia, President, PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, congratulated the government and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for effective and calibrated approach to curb inflation and maintaining the growth rate of Indian economy.

The effectiveness of the monetary policy has proven strong as the country reduced the inflation by 310 bps from the peak of 7.8 per cent in April 2022 to 4.7 per cent in April 2023, according to a statement from the industry body.

The ratio of increase in repo rate and decrease in inflation is 1.24, which means with an increase of 1 basis point in repo rate, the country was able to reduce inflation by 1.24 basis points, according to PHDCCI.

According to PHDCCI, India is ranked second in the effectiveness ratio of policy rates (ERPR) at 1.24 as compared with Brazil ERPR at 4. The analysis has been undertaken for the period of March 1, 2022, to May 15, 2023. -ANI



With our large study, not only did we find that female participants who exercise the most have a lower rate of developing Parkinson’s disease, we also showed that early symptoms of Parkinson’s disease were unlikely to explain these findings, and instead that exercise is beneficial and may help delay or prevent this disease.

CAN EXERCISE REDUCE RISK OF DEVELOPING PARKINSON’S DISEASE?

According to new research published in the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, frequent exercise such as cycling, walking, gardening, cleaning, and playing sports may lower the chance of getting Parkinson’s disease. The study found female participants who exercised the most had a 25% lower rate of Parkinson’s disease when compared to those who exercised the least. The study does not prove that exercise lowers the risk of developing Parkinson’s disease. It only shows an association. “Exercise is a low-cost way to improve health overall, so our study sought to determine if it may be linked to a lower risk of developing Parkinson’s disease, a debilitating disease that has no cure,” said study author Alexis Elbaz, MD, PhD, of the Inserm Research Center in

Paris, France. “Our results provide evidence for planning interventions to prevent Parkinson’s disease.” The study included 95,354 female participants, mostly teachers, with an average age of 49 who did not have Parkinson’s disease at the start of the study. Researchers followed participants for three decades during which 1,074 participants developed Parkinson’s disease. Over the course of the study, participants completed up to six questionnaires about the types and amounts of physical activity they were getting. They were asked how far they walked and how many flights of stairs they climbed daily, how many hours they spent on household activities as well as how much time they spent doing moderate recreational activities such as gardening and more vigorous activities such as sports. Researchers assigned

each activity a score based on the metabolic equivalent of a task (METs), a way to quantify energy expenditure. For each activity, METs were multiplied by their frequency and duration to obtain a physical activity score of METs-hours per week. For example, a more intense form of exercise like cycling was six METs, while less intense forms of exercise such as walking and cleaning were three METs. The average physical activity level for participants was 45 METs-hours per week at the start of the study. Participants were divided into four equal groups of just over 24,000 people each. At the start of the study, those in the highest group had an average physical activity score of 71 METs-hours per week. Those in the lowest group had an average score of 27 METs-hours per week. Among the participants in the highest exercise group, there were 246 cases of Par-

kinson’s disease or 0.55 cases per 1,000 person-years compared to 286 cases or 0.73 per 1,000 person-years among participants in the lowest exercise group. Person-years represent both the number of people in the study and the amount of time each person spends in the study. After adjusting for factors such as place of residence, age of first period and menopausal status, and smoking, researchers found those in the highest exercise group had a 25% lower rate of developing Parkinson’s disease than those in the lowest exercise group when physical activity was assessed up to 10 years before diagnosis; the association remained when physical activity was assessed up to 15 or 20 years before diagnosis. Results were similar after adjusting for diet or medical conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Researchers also found

that 10 years before diagnosis, physical activity declined at a faster rate in those with Parkinson’s disease than in those without, likely due to early symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. “With our large study, not only did we find that female participants who exercise the most have a lower rate of developing Parkinson’s disease, we also showed that early symptoms of Parkinson’s disease were unlikely to explain these findings, and instead that exercise is beneficial and may help delay or prevent this disease,” said Elbaz. “Our results support the creation of exercise programs to help lower the risk of Parkinson’s disease.” A limitation of the study was that participants were mostly health-conscious educators who volunteered to participate in a long-term study, so results may be different for the general population. -ANI

SPORTS

Double delight for Al Nahda

Buraimi club claim Omantel League title to complete a successful season after earlier winning the His Majesty's Cup crown

MUSCAT: His Majesty's Cup football champions Al Nahda completed a grand domestic double on Friday when they claimed the 2022-23 Omantel League title. On Friday, playing in their penultimate league round, Al Nahda outplayed Al Musannah 3-0 at the Buraimi Sports Complex to send the home crowd into raptures with their fourth league title. With just a round to go, Al Nahda took an unassailable lead with 55 points, six points more than their nearest rival, Al Suwaiq which drew with Bahla in an eight-goal thriller. Last season's double-title holder Seeb are closely following Suwaiq with their back-to-back wins to reach 48 points and a match to go. Seeb take on Rustaq in the final round game on May 23, the same day when Suwaiq will play Sohar. A win for Seeb and Suwaiq will keep them in the present standings of second and third respectively. Champions Al Nahda will visit Sur and would hope to sign off in style. The prize-distribution will be held after the match. Earlier in March, Hamad al Azani's side had edged past Seeb to claim their maiden HM's Cup title and Friday's Omantel League crown is the fourth time they have won the league honours. The last time Al Nahda had won the league title was in 2013-14 season. All the four league crowns of the club have come in the 21st cen-



tury with the maiden league crown in 2006-07 season followed by the second in 2008-09. With four titles, Al Nahda have joined a club comprising Al Arou-



ba, Al Suwaiq of having the honour of four league titles each. Salalah giants Dhofar lead the list with 11 titles followed by Fanja with nine and Al Nasr with five. The current season has been extraordinary for Al Azani's side as they recorded a total of 16 victories in the 25 rounds and played seven draws. On Friday, club pa-

tron Sheikh Ahmed al Nuaimi was present to watch the title win and congratulated coach Al Azani and the team. With just two defeats, one of which came last week against Seeb, the club garnered 55 points and scored the maximum goals (34). They conceded just eight goals throughout the season. This is the second time in a row that a club has achieved a domestic double, with Seeb doing the same in the previous season and going on to also win the coveted AFC Cup title, the first time an Omani club had won a continental crown. Earlier last week, three teams - Al Arouba, Al Ittihad and Al Bashayer were relegated to the first division. **Penultimate round standings:** 1. Al Nahda (55 points, winner), 2. Al Suwaiq (49), 3. Seeb (48), 4. Al Rustaq (43), 5. Dhofar (42), 6. Sohar (37), 7. Bahla (37), 8. Oman (36), 9. Al Musannah (30), 10. Al Nasr (30), 11. Sur (27), Relegated: 12. Al Ittihad (17), 13. Al Arouba (16), 14. Al Bashayer (12).

WTC FINAL

Aussies hold slight advantage against India, says Ponting

NEW DELHI: Former Australian skipper and Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting believes that the conditions of the Oval will be similar to Australia and this will give the Aussies a slight edge against India in the World Test Championship 2023 final, which begins on June 7. "I think it will be a bit more similar to an Australian wicket than it will be to an Indian wicket, therefore I am giving a slight advantage to Australia. If this game was being played in India, I would have said it is really going to be hard for Australia to win. If this game was played in Australia, I'd say Australia are the heavy favourites. The fact that this final is being played in England probably brings both teams a little closer together," Ponting said at an event in New Delhi. The Indian team has started to dominate in overseas conditions in recent times. They dominated Australia in the 2020/21 Border Gavaskar Trophy. Along with this, the Pataudi Trophy 2021-2022 against England ended on level terms (2-2). The Indian team will certainly back themselves to lift the trophy even though the conditions may not play up to their advantage. "The one thing India has been able to change through that period



from the late 1990s until now or even the early 2000s until now is their ability to compete outside of India," Ponting said. "Yes, their batting skills have gotten better but the fact that they have been able to produce some very good fast bowlers over the 10-15-year period that they've been able to have success away," Ponting added. One player who has played a crucial role in uplifting India's chances in overseas conditions is Cheteshwar Pujara. The veteran Indian batter has put Division Two in England on fire with his incredible run-scoring and resilience in the Test format. He is currently the highest run-scorer in Division Two, having scored 545 runs

in seven innings at an average of 77.85, with three centuries and a fifty. His best score is 151 across five matches. Even Ponting addressed the threat Pujara carries and he called out his wicket as the most prized wicket out of all the Indian batters that the Australian team will try to claim with all their might. "He will be the prized wicket all the Australians will be looking forward to. Last few series they've played, [Cheteshwar] Pujara has been really hard to dismiss. He's over there [in England] playing now [for Sussex]. Steve Smith is also there playing along with Marnus Labuschagne, trying to get a bit of a feel for the conditions before this big Test match comes around. So, look, I think it'll be India India's top order against Australia's fast bowling. I think it is a bit of a mouthwatering sort of thought going forward." Ponting said though star pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah will be a huge loss for the Indian team in the WTC final, there is a bowler who has the potential to bowl well in English conditions. "Obviously they will miss [Jasprit] Bumrah, he's going to be a huge loss for them, but they still have the likes of [Mohammed] Shami, who will actually bowl well in English conditions," Ponting said. Along with this, he reckons that Virat Kohli will be another name that could turn out to be a game-changer for the Indian team. On Thursday Kohli struck his sixth century in the Indian Premier League which reflects that the Indian batter is back to his level best. "When it comes to the big match-ups, Virat [Kohli] against anyone is going to be a big match-up. I caught up with him when we were there in Bangalore, and I had a good chat with him about his batting and where he's at in his career and he said to be that he's back to his absolute best and I think we saw that last night [Kohli made his sixth IPL century on Thursday night], he's had a very good IPL," Ponting said.

EMILIA-ROMAGNA FLOODING



F1 to donate \$1.08mn to relief fund in Italy

LONDON: Formula 1 on Friday said that it will donate US \$1.08m (1m euros) to a relief fund for the Emilia-Romagna flooding disaster. This weekend's grand prix at Imola in north-eastern Italy was cancelled after heavy rain caused fatalities and displaced thousands from their homes. The money will be used by the Emilia-Romagna region's Agency for Territorial Safety and Civil Protection. F1 has also arranged for food that would have been used in hospitality to be distributed to those in need. It has been donated to a group organising food banks and distribution for those affected by the floods. F1's move comes a day after Ferrari, whose Maranello factory is in Emilia-Romagna, was donating the same amount to disaster relief. F1 president and chief executive Stefano Domenicali, who is from Imola, described the events in the region as a "tragedy". Domenicali added: "I was born and grew up in the marvellous lands of Emilia-Romagna, a place that is living through some of the saddest moments in its history. "The situation facing the communities in the region is terrible, but I know that the resilience and passion of the people in the region, like so many across Italy, will prevail through this crisis. "We must do everything we can to support them at this difficult time and that is why we are donating to help support the relief efforts on the ground. "My thoughts, on behalf of the entire Formula 1 community, are with everyone affected and we want to thank the emergency services for their incredible work."

REPRESENTED AUSTRALIA IN HOCKEY



Former Australia Test captain and Olympian Booth dies

MELBOURNE: Brian Booth, the former Australia Test captain, has died at the age of 89 on Friday. A middle-order batter and a part-time off-spinner, Booth played a total of 29 Tests, scoring 1773 runs and taking three wickets. He also represented Australia in hockey at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics before he earned his Test cap on the 1961 Ashes tour as a 27-year-old.

He waited for 16 months to play a Test at home, and when the time arrived, he notched up 112 and 19 not out against England in Brisbane in December, 1962. He followed it up with a second hundred in the next Test in Melbourne. He is best remembered for his two hundreds against South Africa - 169 in the first Test in Brisbane and 102 not out in the fifth Test in Sydney. In 1965, on the tour of the Caribbean, Booth scored a century against high-quality pacers such as Charlie Griffith and Wes Hall, and shared a 220-run stand with Bob Cowper (143) for the third wicket in a drawn match in Trinidad. "Brian was immensely respected and admired throughout the cricketing community and beyond and we extend our deepest condolences to his wife Judy and their

family and friends," Nick Hockley, CA CEO, said. "Less than 50 players have captained the Australian men's Test team and Brian's name is included on a list that features many of the game's greats. He has had an extraordinary life and will be sadly missed. His contribution to cricket continues to be an inspiration and will always be remembered." Representing New South Wales at the domestic level, he scored a total of 5577 runs in 93 first-class matches, including 11 hundreds. Lee Germon, Cricket NSW CEO, said: "Brian's record on the playing field and as a leader are well documented and the fact he was able to captain Australia and NSW in cricket, as well as play hockey for Australia at a home Olympics, shows just how special he was as an athlete. Booth is survived by his wife Judy and four daughters. - Agencies

A visit to Camp Greaves, once an army base for American soldiers in South Korea, today epitomises peace as reflected in the stunning collection of artworks that wows tourists from across the world. The *Times of Oman* reports from this historic facility, located in the DMZ on the border between the two Koreas



The itinerary for nearly 55 journalists from 50 countries at the World Journalists Congress in South Korea recently included a visit to the Demilitarised Military Zone (DMZ), the place where North Korea and South Korea peace talks can take place.

While the itinerary included tours of Samsung headquarters in Suwon and Busan, the candidate city for 2030 World Expo, I, somehow, was intrigued by the visit to DMZ, a first for me, despite visiting South Korea couple of times in the past.

An early morning bus took us from Hotel President in Seoul to Imjingak where the DMZ is located along with its main attractions - Camp Greaves and Dora Observatory.

A strange feeling arose as we approached Imjingak as armed guards manned the checkpoints and armoured vehicles stationed with alert soldiers keeping a close eye on anything in motion.

We were advised by our local guide to avoid clicking photos from the bus but were promised that photographs could be shot at Camp Greaves and Dora Observatory.

Access to the DMZ, which stands witness to war and has so much meaning for separated families and people that fought there, opens with an amusement park in Imjingak.

While we were provided a tour by the organisers, Journalists Association of Korea, there are today regular shuttle bus tours from Seoul to DMZ and is arguably the top must-visit attraction for tourists in South Korea.

Located north of Seoul, Camp Greaves is tucked away in the Paju Civilian Control Zone in Gyeonggi Province.

Visitors must take authorised transport from the Imjingak Resort area, although our bus had prior permission to visit.

At Imjingak, which was developed in 1972, we can see the historical 'Bridge to Freedom' on Imjin River where Koreans seeking the south crossed after the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

Flags, relics and banners decorate the entrance to the bridge that is now closed. The Freedom Bridge, formerly a railroad bridge, remains a symbol of the Korean War.

It's a sombre space and yet just behind on the other side of the parking lot is an amusement park. Another part of Imjingak is the Nuri Peace Park, also in stark contrast to the historical bridge side. Families from the area and



tourists come to the park to picnic and enjoy the space.

Our driver took us to the parking area of the Nuri Park from where we were escorted to the main checkpoint on the way to Camp Greaves.

The whole area is deserted, and farms dot either side of the road.

While accessing the civilian control line, our passports were checked by military police and once again we were advised not to take any photos of the personnel and the surroundings.

Camp Greaves

Sitting along the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea is Camp Greaves, a former US Army base which is now a large interactive gallery for local artists. One could see army installations while travelling towards Camp Greaves.

Once the largest base for Americans, it contains various structures with a variety of American architectural styles from 1950's to the 1990's.

Camp Greaves housed the 506th U.S. Second Infantry Division from 1953 to 2004. After their withdrawal, Greaves was returned to Korea in 2007, becoming the only U.S. army base given back within the Civilian Control Line.

A guide took us in couple of groups around from building to building and ensured that we don't wander to places off-limits to visitors.

Between the bunkers and buildings that held artistic works that brought both hope and sadness to mind are buildings that offer more explanations on the Korean War.

One hall is a room of numbers or key statistics for the Korean war

and is a reminder of the significance of that war on the peninsula.

There are spaces that hold memorabilia, films, and photographs from Camp Greaves when it was in use between 1953 and 2004. These spaces were interesting to me and definitely more along the lines of how I appreciate learning about such history.

Camp Greaves is not far from a massive and deadly array of firepower currently directly by the two Koreas at each other across the frontier.

One of the most arresting images at Camp Greaves that made an impression on me was the work of renowned South Korean artist Kim Myeong-boom.

Behind a heavy metal door is the interior of a powder magazine ammunition storage area. Staring straight at you is a model of a deer with huge antlers that extend and

interlace to become a tree.

We were told that the skin is from a real deer brought in from the United States. This is a reference to the home of the US personnel who served here and alludes to how the site has been returned to nature.

Artist Kim Myeong-beom listens to «the whispers of objects and their intimate conversations», a plaque explains, looking to juxtapose both man-made and natural objects and representations of life and death.

Another work was of an artist who collected clothes from the area and stuffed them into the front of one of the many overgrown huts of the 506th Infantry Regiment.

On the floor of one of these huts you can still see webbing, belts, pouches and packs that once belonged to US soldiers and have been left strewn across the floor.

Entering the old bowling alley, you cross a beam triggering light and sound. At first you are clearly seeing and hearing fireworks but slowly the sound all round you becomes more and more like gunfire. Eventually you realise you are watching the night vision of an actual firefight; it is work of artist Park Seong-jun.

The names of 154 American soldiers killed in skirmishes along the demilitarised zone even after the end of Korean War hostilities are beamed on a wall. The years 1967 and 1968 were particularly deadly. In the background, recordings of soldiers can be heard chanting their way through drills.

Walking through the installations, one can imagine the devastation that was caused during the war, but this deserted Cold War facility is the real thing. We were informed that at times up to 700 military personnel were stationed at Camp Greaves.

While Camp Greaves is now a symbol of peace and an arts centre and a tourist attraction, it is still in an area that neighbours an active base for the South Korean army.

American forces moved out of Camp Greaves in 2004, in one of the first steps of a wide-ranging plan to relocate many of the US units stationed in South Korea to Camp Humphreys, south of the capital Seoul.

While the armouries-turned-art spaces are just one of its attractions - the former officers' mess has been converted into a Youth Hostel.

The hugely popular 2016 South Korean television drama *Descendants of the Sun* was partly filmed at the site, and it offers fans the chance to take selfies in front of key backdrops. The hit drama TV-series is about the ups and downs of a love affair between a South Korean Special Forces captain and a doctor, starring the handsome Song Joong-ki and the beautiful Song Hye-kyo.

We were also informed that the former officers' mess turned Youth Hostel allows visitors to experience the surroundings by staying in the rooms against a fee. After the full visit of Camp Greaves, we were handed a memento by Gyeonggi Tourism Organization.

It was indeed heartening to see the transformation of an army base breathe new life, courtesy a group of talented artists.

The hope of the local tourism officials is to brand Camp Greaves as the centre of art and culture in the DMZ and neutralise the military characteristics of the venue through art.

ROUND-UP

All-new Toyota Urban Cruiser SUV launched in the Sultanate of Oman

The 2023 Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor

MUSCAT: Under the patronage of Sayyid Ahmed Hilal Al Busaidi, Wali of Baushar, the all-new Toyota Urban Cruiser SUV was unveiled at an exclusive event. Gracing the occasion was Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to Oman.

The guest of honour was Masaru Shimada, General Manager, Middle East and Central Asia Division, Toyota Motor Corporation. He was accompanied by other officials from Toyota Motor Corporation.

In the opening remarks, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, said, “For decades, Toyota has been winning hearts in Oman with its high quality products that have not only found a special place in the lives of customers. But have also been inspirations in the automotive world. In



Sayyid Ahmed Hilal Al Busaidi, Jota Yamamoto, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan and Masaru Shimada with the All-New Urban Cruiser

Oman, Toyota commands a major market share and that is all due to the trust and confidence that customers have in the brand.”

Expressing his gratitude to Toyota Motor Corporation he said, “We would like to thank Toyota Motor Corporation, for their constant support and encouragement extended to us at all times. We also take this opportunity to thank our valued customers for their continued patronage.”

Later in the evening sharing his thoughts on Toyota’s presence in Oman, Masaru Shimada said, “Toyota Motor Corporation has a very long relationship with Saud Bahwan Group, for almost 50 years. They are one of the most important partners among all the distributors in the world. That’s why, the late honorary chairman of Toyota Motor Corporation, Dr Shoichiro Toyoda, and his son and current Chairman Akio Toyoda



have visited Oman and deepened their personal relationship.

“Toyota’s mission is to produce ‘Happiness for All’ and therefore here in Oman, we will work very closely with our respectful partner, Saud Bahwan Automotive, to make sure all our customers are happy in Oman.”

Sharing his thoughts on Toyota’s future plans and the all-new Urban Cruiser, he said, “Toyota’s approach is “Multi-pathway”, by offering

wide variety of choices, meaning not only Battery EV but also Hybrid, Plug-in Hybrid, Fuel Cell EV, Hydrogen engine and so on.”

The 2023 Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor. Combined with a compact Lithium-Ion battery, the powertrain delivers 102 hp and 135 Nm of torque,



with an average fuel consumption of 19.8 km/l and is paired with six-speed automatic transmission.

The new Urban Cruiser’s spacious cabin is designed for greater comfort and convenience. The vehicle’s head-up display, 4.2-inch colour Thin Film Transistor (TFT) multi-information display. Other impressive features include a dual-sliding panoramic roof, 17” wheels, a 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia screen with seamless Apple CarPlay® and Android Auto integration, and a wireless smartphone charging system. Additionally, the interior offers three

USB ports, a six-speaker sound system, a powerful automatic air conditioning system with rear AC vents, and 60/40 split reclining rear seats.

As with any Toyota model, the new Urban Cruiser comes complete with a comprehensive array of safety features. A choice of seven exciting exterior hues adds to the new Urban Cruiser’s striking visual appeal. The vehicle’s interior features an equally stylish colour scheme, with options.

The all-new Urban Cruiser is now on display at all Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms.

PERFECT FOR INTRA CITY USE

Foton Aumark: Light duty truck delivers strong value proposition for all kind of businesses

MUSCAT: Foton Aumark, the popular light duty truck is a preferred choice for the customers in Oman and has a strong value proposition. Aumark is designed to meet the Oman users’ pursuit for an efficient and worry-free logistics. The truck which is powered by legendary Cummins 3.8L turbo diesel engine, ZF Transmission and DANA Axles is known for its excellent fuel economy, safety, and top-quality performance in the logistics and cargo industry.

The Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck coupled with Cummins Engine and ZF (6-speed) manual transmission. Available in three wheelbase 3360mm, 3800 mm, 5100mm, the Light Duty Truck has competitive edge and has many comfortable features including cruise control, reversing sensor, remote control central door-locking, ABS+EBD, Air with exhaust brakes, power windows among others.

The Light Duty Truck, which is perfect for intra city use and city-to-city movements of goods, offers industry leading technology that augments the truck’s driving experience while providing supreme safety and provides customers with the best experience for their customized transportation needs, Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck is an ideal choice for its superior loading, fuel efficiency and less frequent service requirements features (Service can be done at every 20,000 kms). With its outstanding features, Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck is great value for money too.

Owner of three Foton Aumark Ali Ghasi Mabrook Saleem is cap-



tivated by the light duty truck’s high-class engine Turbo engine with good power and excellent fuel economy, outstanding braking system, Exceptional loading capabilities and excellent stability during long distance.

He calls it a highly capable light truck that delivers superior performance; Aumark signifies Foton’s dedication to developing innovative driving technologies that deliver an incredible personalised experience to customers. Thanks for Gulf Great Sands team for proving the outstanding service, I am very much impressed with Foton Aumark Light Duty Truck he adds.

The Light Duty Truck embodies a lot the brand Foton stands for – amazing design, advanced technology and empowering performance. Foton strives to provide global automotive markets with high quality, affordable vehicles powered by sourcing the best of current as well as emerging technologies. Formi-

dable joint ventures with globally-reputed manufacturers and major component brands have enabled Foton to include sustainable engineering, advanced systems and state-of-the-art technology into every Foton vehicle.

A spokesperson for GGS said, “Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck has grown to be a popular choice in Oman. Its attributes and fundamental fortes have garnered great response from customers in the Sultanate. Aumark is designed to meet the Oman users’ pursuit for an efficient and worry-free logistics, which leads the world-class product. The Light Duty Truck with different wheelbase based on the business application. It can be modified into a cargo truck, refrigerator truck, light dump truck and open cargo body truck.”

Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck’s dependable features like Cummins ISF 3.8L turbo diesel engine, Bosch electronics and ZF transmission make it a depend-

able logistic solution for city needs as well as short haul transportation needs of the industry such as fishing, poultry, furniture, grocery, recovery, water tanker and FMCG.

The Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck is fully customisable with versatile body options to make it a productive work tool for everyday use. Aumark is what a truck should be – solid, reliable and good value. The Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck is built on a new platform and positioned as a mid-to high-end professional logistics vehicle used to transport between cities in Oman. With Foton Cummins efficient power, the product will be greatly improved in power, fuel, noise reduction, and weight.

The Foton Aumark – Light Duty Truck has experienced 1.6 million km road test, and diverse working conditions tests, including durability testing, reliability testing, stability test, high-low temperature testing, highland testing among others.

ISLAMIC BANKING



Financing products from Meethaq continue to gain popularity among customers

MUSCAT: The exclusive financing offer launched by Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has gained tremendous popularity among customers. Customers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, as the special profit rates will only be available until July 31, 2023.

Both new and existing customers can apply for any of Meethaq’s financing solutions and benefit from swift processing as well as minimal documentation. Financing options are available based on each customer’s unique needs, with up to 80 percent financing available for Home or Auto financing. 100% financing is available for Travel, Marriage, Education, and Personal Goods Finance. Customers can submit their applications at any of Meethaq’s 26 state-of-the-art branches across the Sultanate.

cater to the needs of customers across all segments of the society. To take advantage of this highly advantageous offer, customers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, as the special profit rates will only be available until July 31, 2023.

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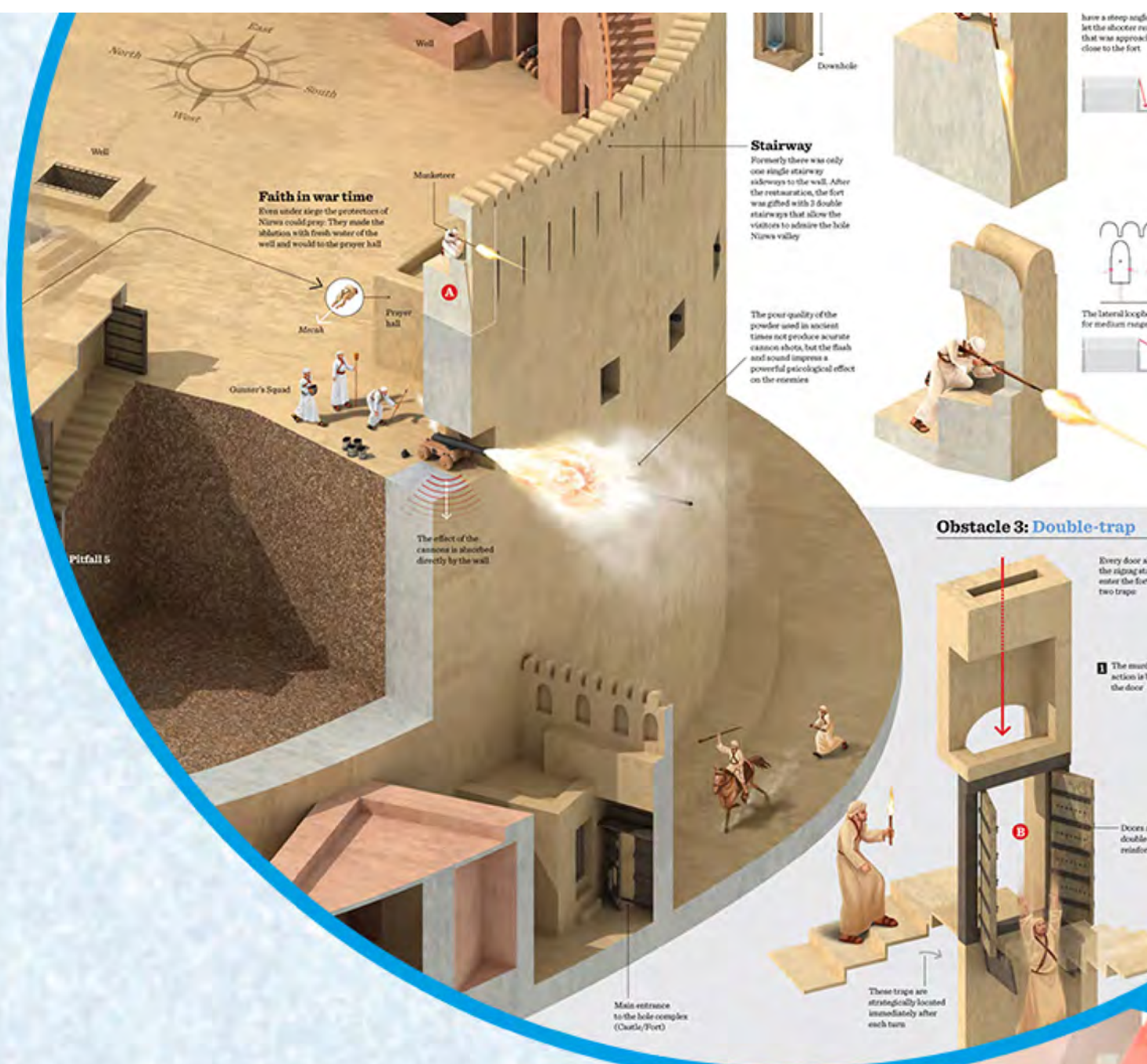
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