

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received Sven Koopmans, the European Union’s (EU) Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process and his delegation. Koopmans expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman’s stance on regional and international issues and its active role in tackling those issues, notably the Middle East’s peace process.

DETAILS ON P5



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IPL GIANTS MUMBAI ON SHAKY GROUND IN PLAY-OFF RACE



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OMAN AMONG TOP LNG EXPORTERS IN THE WORLD



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TAKE A SUMMER DRIVE FROM SUR TO NIZWA



DELEGATED BY HM

Sayyid Asaad to lead Oman’s delegation at Arab Summit

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will leave on Thursday to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to lead the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation in the 32nd Arab Summit, due to be held in Jeddah on Friday.

HH Sayyid Asaad is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League, HH Sayyid Turki bin Faisal al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the two advisers at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — ONA

VISIT EXPLORES AREAS OF EXISTING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

HM BEGINS EGYPT VISIT ON SUNDAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt on Sunday, according to a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court on Wednesday.

The statement reads as follows: “In continuation of the historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Egypt with effect from Sunday, May 21, in response to an invitation from President Abdul Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt.

ENHANCE JOINT TIES

“The visit reflects the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships to enhance joint ties. The visit will explore areas of the existing cooperation between the two countries in various spheres that serve the joint interests.

“The two leaderships will hold a session of consultation and coordination on matters that serve the joint Arab action, in addition to discussing the latest developments at the regional and international

arenas.

“During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

“May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and guard him as a treasured source of pride and inspiration to his nation!” — ONA



SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES GCC OFFICIALS

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received the members of the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee who are taking part in the committee’s 119th meeting, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman. HH Sayyid Fahd expressed the Sultanate of Oman’s appreciation for all efforts exerted in economic, investment and business fields that contribute to the march of joint GCC economic action. He underscored the importance of topics addressed by the ministerial committee’s meeting and its role in enhancing joint GCC action to keep pace with developments of concern to the region during this period. **DETAILS ON P2** (PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI)

HM gets message from UAE President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. The message was handed over to Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received at his office on Wednesday Mohammed bin Nakhira al Dhaheeri, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the distinguished relations between Oman and the UAE. — ONA



Black Sea grain deal extended

ANKARA: The Ukraine Black Sea grain deal has been extended for two more months one day before Russia could have quit the pact over obstacles to its grain and fertiliser exports.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan announced the extension in a televised speech and it was confirmed by Russia and Ukraine. The flow of ships through the corridor had been grinding to a halt during the last few days with the deal apparently set to expire on Thursday.

“The Black Sea grain corridor deal has been extended by two months with the efforts of Türkiye,” said Erdogan, who also thanked the Russian and Ukrainian leaders and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for their help.

The UN and Turkey brokered the Black Sea deal for an initial 120 days in July last year to help tackle a global food crisis that has been aggravated by Ukraine war. — AFP

Pensions account for RO 48m a month

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Civil Service Employees Pension Fund’s (CSEPF) report states that there was a slight increase of 0.8 per cent in the number of retirements in 2023 compared to 2022, with a total of 620 employees retiring. Among the retirees, males account for 51

per cent, while females account for 49 per cent. On average, the retirees were 49 years old, had worked for 23 years, and received a retirement salary of RO 838.

As of 2023, the number of retirees stood at 78,557, with 73 per cent male and only 27 per cent female. On average, the retirees were 50 years old, had worked for 22 years, and received

an average salary of RO 609. The total amount of pension salaries paid out is RO 48 million.

The report includes information on the overall status of beneficiaries of the fund, indicating that as of March 2023, there were a total of 93,985 beneficiaries. Among them, 54,666 were still living, while 39,319 were eligible inheritors.



Sayyid Fahd receives members of GCC financial cooperation committee



PHOTOS BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received the members of the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee who are taking part in the committee's 119th meeting, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

Sayyid Fahd expressed the Sultanate of Oman's appreciation for all efforts exerted

in economic, investment and business fields that contribute to the march of joint GCC economic action. He underscored the importance of topics addressed by the ministerial committee's meeting and its role in enhancing joint GCC action to keep pace with developments of concern to the region during this period.

The meeting reviewed the agenda of the committee's meeting, including the process

of completing the requirements for the GCC Customs Union and activating the GCC Common Market. It also discussed tackling challenges hindering the achievement of GCC unity. Moreover, the meeting touched on aspects related to the programme of realising economic unity among GCC states by 2025.

The members of the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee

expressed their thanks for the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the current meeting and its sound preparation which resulted in reaching positive outcomes. They also lauded the constrictive role of Oman for the success of the GCC march.

The meeting was attended by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and Jassim bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC. — ONA

ROP takes part in 'Government Forum to Combat Human Trafficking'

DOHA: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) is taking part in the fourth session of the 'Governmental Forum to Combat Human Trafficking' —Middle East round, being held in Doha.

The ROP is represented at the two-day forum by the Directorate-General of Inquires and Criminal Investigations.

The forum, which concludes today, seeks to exchange expertise and review the participating countries' experiences in the field of combating human trafficking.

The forum also aims to build national capabilities and developing deterrence action mechanisms in accordance with international standards.

— ONA



Ominvest-led Consortium announces intention to make acquisition offer to Ahli Bank

Muscat: Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), the leading investment company in the Sultanate, announced that the major shareholders of Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) have formed a Consortium with a firm intention to make an offer for the entire issued share capital of Ahli Bank SAOG (Ahli Bank) under the Takeover and Acquisition Regulations issued by CMA.

Ominvest leads the Consortium, and the offer will be made by certain entities separately controlled by Ominvest and Arab Bank plc. Certain other investors have also expressed their intention to participate in the Consortium and offer at a later stage if required. As part of good governance and careful evaluation of material and price-sensitive information, Ominvest made appropriate disclosures on the Muscat Stock Exchange on 16 May 2023.

Commenting on the offer, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi, the Group CEO of Ominvest, said, "The Consortium sees Ahli Bank as one of the best-performing banks in the Sultanate of Oman, with a capable leadership team and leading operating and risk systems. The Consortium members will be strong and committed anchor shareholders of Ahli Bank, supporting its growth during the intervening period and preparing it for a potential merger with OAB in due course, under the guidance of the esteemed Board of Directors of both banks."

The Offer Price

The Consortium will put forward an attractive base offer price of 185 bz per share. This offer represents a premium of approximately 28% over Ahli Bank's average one-year market price, 20% over its net book value as of 31 March 2023, 13% over its average six-month market price, and an 8% premium compared to the closing stock exchange price as of 31 March 2023.

Commenting on the offer price, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi said, "We believe our offer price of 185 bz per share is fair and represents a strong return on investment for the



shareholders of Ahli Bank who wish to participate in the offer."

Moreover, strategic long-term investors holding more than 25% shareholding and who provide strategic direction and assistance in the bank's transformation will be offered an additional 15 bz per share. Significant financial investors, holding between 10% and 25% shareholding and with considerable influence over Ahli Bank and participating in policy-making decisions, will receive an additional 7 bz per share.

The proposal for the premium being paid to strategic long-term and significant financial investors was taken after a thorough analysis of the market and value of large blocks of shareholding in Ahli Bank. The premium over the base price is based on the concept of a control premium paid for a large block of shares and is aimed at compensating strategic long-term and significant financial investors for the loss of their significant influence over Ahli Bank due to selling their shares.

"We have devised an offer price structure which is fair and rewarding to large, as well as minority shareholders. Our proposed price mechanism will also encourage long-

term strategic investors to invest in the Sultanate, with the comfort of knowing they can exit at attractive valuations reflective of their large shareholding and contribution made to grow the business," stated the Group CEO.

Funding and FDI

The proposed offer will be funded in its entirety by Consortium members, meaning there is no constraint on Ahli Bank or OAB's capital or lending ability as a result of the offer.

Commenting on Arab Bank and its long-standing contributions to the Sultanate, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi, said, "Arab Bank plc will support funding the transaction, which will result in positive foreign direct investment in Oman. Arab Bank plc currently has an investment valued at around OMR 172 million in the Sultanate of Oman, including their recent investment of around OMR 46 million at the time of the merger of Alizz Islamic Bank with OAB in 2020. Arab Bank intends to further invest a substantial amount in the Sultanate of Oman depending on the final outcome of this takeover offer."

"Arab Bank has been contributing to the development of Oman's economy for more than 50 years and remains



committed to further driving the growth of the Omani banking sector and economy in accordance with Oman Vision 2040."

He added, "Ominvest has a strong track record of successfully executing large and complex transactions in excess of OMR 385 million in the recent past. We are thankful to the regulatory authorities for their continued support and guidance, without which these transactions would not have been possible."

"Given the combined track record and strength of Ominvest and Arab Bank, we are optimistic that this acquisition will be a success, and we look forward to working with all stakeholders of Ahli Bank and the concerned regulatory authorities to outline the next phase of the acquisition process."

The Proposed Merger

Members of the Consortium or their affiliates have a substantial stake in OAB and view the acquisition as a strategic opportunity to strengthen Ahli Bank and OAB in advance of a potential future merger. This merged entity is expected to be a large and robust financial institution. Moreover, the Consortium has the capability and willingness to provide

support to the merged entity as and when required.

Subject to regulatory approvals, the Consortium intends to merge OAB and Ahli Bank in due course by adopting a phased and structured approach. They will support the capable leadership teams of Ahli Bank and OAB during the intervening period to continue their transformation journey. This will be a merger of equals and stronger banks, resulting in a swap ratio to be derived based on the audited net book values post necessary due diligence.

"Following a successful merger, the new combined banking institution will gain size and scale as well as be better positioned to meaningfully contribute to the economic development of the Sultanate, supporting larger government projects of national interest," stated AbdulAziz Al-Balushi. "Furthermore, the Islamic window of Ahli Bank will be transferred to Alizz Islamic Bank, which is a fully owned subsidiary of OAB. This will provide additional scale and a significant boost to Alizz's operations."

The Group CEO added, "We look forward to the support of the regulatory bodies represented by the Central Bank of Oman and Capital Market Authority for the offer we have presented. Ominvest has a long history and extensive experience efficiently managing merger and acquisition operations. I am confident that the successful acquisition of Ahli Bank will mark another success story in our distinguished record spanning over 40 years."

Commenting on Bank Dhofar's offer, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi said, "We extend our well wishes to all parties involved. Our foremost commitment is to support the deal or initiative that serves the best interest of the country, the banking sector, and all stakeholders, not just ourselves. We firmly believe that Ahli Bank's shareholders should have the opportunity to make an informed decision about what is best for them."



‘Media is partner in consolidating awareness about vision 2040’



MUSCAT: Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit held a meeting with editors-in-chief and directors-general of national media organisations in Oman. The meeting was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, gave a visual presentation on Oman Vision 2040, follow-up and implementation mechanisms and the role of the departments concerned in achieving the vision according to its objectives and indicators.

The meeting stems from the deep conviction in the media as a partner

in consolidating public awareness about Oman Vision 2040 and phases of its accomplishment.

Oman Vision 2040 comprises four basic pillars, 12 national priorities, 12 strategic approaches, 75 strategic objectives, and 68 national and international performance indicators.

Oman Vision 2040 constitutes an opportunity to enhance partnership and cooperation between various parties with the prime aim of promoting innovation and development in various spheres. The realisation of its goals requires joint efforts from all government and private establishments and civil society institutions in the country.

— ONA



Public Policy and Strategic Planning Programme concludes

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Public Policy and Strategic Planning Programme concluded on Wednesday with groundbreaking initiatives aimed at equipping national leaders with the necessary skills to devise, formulate and implement effective public policies and strategic plans, thereby enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's competitiveness on the global stage.

The programme came to a successful close under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministries. The event consisted of two distinct pathways, catering to senior government officials in the managerial apparatus.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, Chairman of the Royal Academy of Management, shed light on the programme's objectives, emphasising its alignment with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The aim was to enable national leaders to develop robust public policies and strategic plans to bolster Oman's



economy, foster innovation and pave the way for a future-ready managerial apparatus.

Participants gained valuable insights into global trends and the latest strategic thinking and planning developments. By equipping themselves with the tools necessary for policy formulation and implementation, they now possess the skills to adopt a rigorous, scientific approach in the creation of public policies.

Additionally, the programme offered participants the opportunity to analyse and develop

strategies that align with public policy objectives and effectively translate national strategies into actionable plans.

One of the highlights of the programme was the inclusion of several field visits, enabling participants to observe and learn from the best international practices in formulating and implementing public policies and strategic planning. These visits also facilitated the design of projects and mechanisms to overcome various challenges.

The first pathway of the programme catered to 24

participants, including under-secretaries and their counterparts in the government sector. This pathway centred around exploring global and regional developments in strategic thinking and planning and formulating and developing public policies. Participants were exposed to best practices in policy review and engaged in a workshop on future thinking and foresight. Additionally, they delved into Oman's competitiveness and strategies to foster a culture of collaboration across ministries to achieve the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Oman participates in Arab foreign ministers meeting in Jeddah

JEDDAH: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Wednesday in the ministerial meeting, which precedes the 32nd Arab Summit.

Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy headed Oman's delegation in the meeting, which was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting discussed items listed on the agenda and decisions related to means of supporting march of the joint Arab action in various political, economic and social fields. The meeting also reviewed a number of issues and the latest developments at the regional

and international arenas, which will be raised to the 32nd Arab Summit, scheduled to kick off in Jeddah this Friday.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr held a number of sidelines meetings within the context of his participation in the Arab Foreign Ministers' meetings.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation comprised Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League, and a number of officials at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DAY

Trademark search service launched

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Sultanate of Oman celebrated World Intellectual Property Day on Wednesday. As part of the celebrations, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched a new service that allows users to search for registered trademarks in the Sultanate of Oman.

The new service is part of the ongoing cooperation between the Omani National Intellectual Property Office at the Ministry and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

Recently, all data of Omani national trademark applications were uploaded to the WIPO Global Brand Database, making Oman one of the first countries in the Arab region to provide all national trademark data on the international database on the WIPO website.

This initiative aims to enhance transparency in presenting trademark data in Oman, attracting international investments. Furthermore, it facilitates the process for all stakeholders and beneficiaries in the field of intellectual property to review the various activities that require protection in the Sultanate of Oman. They can extract



statistics and build strategies for interacting with the Omani economy through investment or guidance in similar economies or international intellectual property entities. The database helps distinguish the project by its trademark and allows the investor to verify that the trademark is not registered in Oman.

There are two ways to conduct the search: Using the trademark name and selecting the country name (Oman), or uploading the logo of the trademark to ensure it is not registered or identical to another trademark and then selecting the country name to find out if the trademark is registered or not. The Ministry also enables those interested in registering their trademarks to apply for the service easily through the Invest Portal electronically.

The launch of the new trademark search service is a

significant step in Oman's efforts to protect intellectual property rights and promote innovation. It is also a testament to the country's commitment to creating a business-friendly environment that attracts foreign investment.

It is worth mentioning that the number of intellectual property applications in various sectors submitted by women in the Sultanate of Oman reached 14,077 requests by the end of April of the current year. Furthermore, 33 female inventors have been registered in the field of patents until the end of 2022.

This shows that women are playing an increasingly important role in the innovation economy in Oman. The government is committed to supporting women's entrepreneurship and innovation, and the new trademark search service is one way that it is doing this.

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OMAN, EGYPT CONTINUE PROMOTING BILATERAL RELATIONS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt continue promoting their distinguished relations in various political, economic and cultural areas. They also back all matters that serve the joint interests of their peoples.

The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt on Sunday carries a great significance, as His Majesty's talks during the visit with President Abdul Fattah el Sisi will have a positive impact on the bilateral relations between the two countries.

It is worth mentioning that Oman and Egypt signed a number of MoUs and executive programmes during the visit of the Egyptian President to Oman in June 2022.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Egypt increased in 2022, amounting to approximately RO 393.628 million, compared to RO 217.742 million in 2021.

The value of Omani exports to Egypt increased from RO 157.515 million in 2021 to RO 298.077 million in 2022, while the value of Omani imports from Egypt amounted to RO 95.551 million in 2022, compared to RO 60.227 million in 2021. Statistics show that the balance of trade between the two countries in 2022 was in favour of Oman, amounting to RO 202.526 million.

Abdullah bin Nasssir al Rahbi,



The two countries share common principles, including non-interference in the affairs of others, paying attention for the regional security and stability and playing an important role in this aspect

ABDULLAH BIN NASSSIR AL RAHBI
Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League

Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League, said that the official of His Majesty the Sultan to Egypt comes after less than a year from the Egyptian President's visit to Oman, which reflects the attention that Oman's government attaches to Egypt.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Rahbi



pointed out that Oman and Egypt celebrated last November, the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them. This period, the ambassador explained, witnessed events that underlined the depth and strength of this relation, most importantly Oman's support for Egypt following the Arab boycott after it signed the Camp David Accords.

He affirmed that the two countries share common principles, including non-interference in the affairs of others, paying attention for the regional security and stability and playing an important role in this aspect.

Al Rahbi affirmed that investment indicators between Oman and Egypt began to improve over the past three years, stressing the need for cooperation in the economic field to meet the historical relations between the two countries.

The ambassador called upon Egyptian investors to utilise the investment opportunities available in Oman, particularly in the economic zones and ports.

He pointed out that a number of Egyptian investors have started to invest in various fields, such as the manufacture of fertilizers and plastics in the free zones, in addition to the tourism area. There are also talks with some investors in the areas of food security, he added.

The ambassador also spoke of the cultural cooperation between Oman and Egypt, pointing to the Egyptian teachers who contributed to the educational march in Oman since the dawn of the blessed renaissance. He also touched on the cooperation between Oman and Egypt in areas of media and higher education.

HISTORIC VISIT
On his turn, Khalid Mohammed Radi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman, said that the upcoming historic first visit of His 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.

The ambassador said in a statement to ONA that the visit will review various bilateral



The Sultan and the Egyptian President will discuss means of promoting relations on the political, economic, commercial, cultural and social levels. The meeting will also cater to Omani-Egyptian coordination on various regional and international issues

KHALID MOHAMMED RADI
Ambassador of Egypt to Oman

matters and international issues of common concern. The visit, he affirmed, represents a qualitative shift in the march of Omani-Egyptian relations.

The Egyptian ambassador added that His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President will discuss means of promoting relations on the political, economic, commercial, cultural and social levels. The meeting will also cater to Omani-Egyptian

coordination on various regional and international issues. He added that the region needs more coordination and cooperation to insure peace, security and stability.

He pointed out that the previous visit of the Egyptian President to Oman marked a turning point for the two countries' relations. The visit included the signing of several agreements covering various areas, such as maritime navigation, investment, trade, industry, combating monopoly, providing the means for free competition, industrial development, investment promotion, the environment, vocational and technical training and higher education.

MUTUAL COOPERATION
He also said that signing these agreements has set the foundation to enable extensive mutual cooperation. This, he said, is reflected on the increasing volume of trade exchange between the two countries as business and economic relations between Oman and Egypt saw a major



Egyptian investments in Oman is close to \$2 billion.

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.

FOREIGN INVESTORS
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.
Further, Ambassador Radi noted that the number of Egyptian companies in Oman is on a continuous rise, reaching near 1,900 companies. The number echoes the advance relations between the two countries.

The visit of His Majesty the Sultan, he further said, is a message which further increases motivation to enhance relations on various levels, especially in economic, commercial and cultural spheres.

The ambassador described the mutual cultural relations as immense and diverse. Those relations, he added, cover a spectrum of fields, such as arts, literature, translation, cinema and the theatre.

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 the international law.

The Egyptian ambassador lauded the Sultanate of Oman's distinguished diplomacy in dealing with various issues in the region. He pointed out that Oman spares no effort in supporting peace efforts in various parts of the region.

Khalid Mohammed Radi highlighted the care and attention received by the Egyptian community in Oman from the government and the people. He said that the Egyptian community is taking part in various development programmes in Oman and contributes positively to the country's development in various fields. — ONA



Best practices for health and hygiene for mobile cafes and street vendors

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlBalushia

A competition has been launched to promote the best health practices among mobile cafes and street vendors in the Wilayat of Salalah. The General Directorate of Health Affairs in Dhofar has announced this competition in conjunction with the Sixth Food Safety and Quality Week for the year 2023, targeting small and medium enterprises registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and those holding an Entrepreneurship Card. Licensed businesses that meet the eligibility criteria can participate in the competition by registering through the Dhofar Municipality's official Twitter account. The conditions for participation include being located in Salalah, registered with SMEDA, registering within the specified timeframe (May 14 to June 1), adhering to health requirements and controls outlined in the local order No (3/2010) for public health protection, and complying with the regulations specified in local order No (1/2010) for licensing mobile cafes and street vendors.



The municipality reserves the right to accept or reject applications without providing reasons. To encourage participation, the Dhofar Municipality has allocated cash prizes for the winners. The announcement of the winners will take place on Friday, June 16, at 5:30 pm in Salalah Grand Mall. Salah al Ajili, Director of Food and Laboratories Department in Dhofar Municipality, stated, "Mobile cafes offer a variety of healthy and nutritious food options supervised by Omanis. They also serve as a source of income for many citizens who excel in providing fresh and high-quality food while meeting health and technical requirements. The competition aims to motivate entrepreneurs to actively participate and showcase their efforts, with

three winners being rewarded." Participants must ensure a healthy environment for food preparation by providing necessary equipment, such as an electric generator and stainless steel preparation and heating tables. Other conditions include proper food storage and preparation facilities, as well as access to drinking water. A specialised team will evaluate compliance with the competition's terms for all eligible applicants who apply on FL.dept@dm.gov.om until June 1. This initiative by the municipality aims to encourage and support owners of mobile cafes and street vendors in complying with health requirements. It seeks to safeguard the health of consumers and ensure the well-being of the community by preventing any potential harm resulting from the use of materials that do not meet health standards and maintaining a clean and appealing environment. These healthy competitions for mobile cafes and street vendors demonstrate Dhofar Municipality's commitment to raising awareness about the importance of food hygiene, improving food quality and enhancing monitoring practices to benefit consumers.

SQU INKS COOPERATION AGREEMENT TO COMBAT CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Medical Research Centre, and leading international pharmaceutical company Novartis, on Wednesday signed an agreement of cooperation on combating cardiovascular diseases. Cardiovascular diseases are considered among the top health challenges on the global scale. The agreement aims to limit the spread of cardiovascular diseases and their associated risk factors in the Sultanate of Oman. Focus will be given on treating high blood cholesterol cases. The two sides target utilising advanced technologies and sharing best practices to develop innovative solutions related to improving the process of handling cardiovascular diseases.



The agreement was inked by Ghazi bin Ali al Rawas, Dean of Research, and Dr Mohammed Ezz Eldin, Regional Director of Novartis for the Gulf. — ONA

Eminent scientist to grace mega science fiesta

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The annual Science Fiesta to be held at the National University of Science and Technology, Al Hail Campus, on May 19 and 20 will see a large number of budding scientists interacting with renowned scientist Dr Mylswamy Annadurai. Organised by the Indian Science Forum of the Indian Social Club, the grand fest is the culmination of the year-long scientific events in which there are participants from more than 20 Indian schools competing in a range of competitions, including debate, symposium, on-the-spot science project, exhibition, and photography, according to the organisers. Dr Mylswamy Annadurai, former director of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), will grace the occasion as the chief guest, while Amit Narang,

Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, and Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology, will be the special guests of honour. The event is expected to draw around 4,000 attendees, including invited dignitaries, students, parents, teachers, and members of the Indian community over the two-day event. **SASTRA PRATIBHA CONTEST** Phani Sai Thaman from Indian School Al Maabala won in Grade 5, while Alok C Sukumaran from Indian School Darsait was the winner in Grade 6. Yuvraj Mukherjee from Indian School Al Ghubra was victorious in Grade 7, and Zaina Fathima from Indian School Salalah won in Grade 8. Aaryan Kishor Badgujar from Indian School Muscat was the champion in Grade 9, and Aman Tandon and Mohana Elango from Indian School Muscat both

won in Grade 10. These young achievers have showcased their exceptional skills and knowledge and have made their respective schools proud. **ISF IGNITER 2022 INTER-SCHOOL SCIENCE QUIZ** In the Junior category, Zaina Fathima and Aditya Verma from Indian School Salalah emerged as the champions. Saahil S M and Zoha S M from Indian School Darsait were the First Runners-Up, while Joshua Richard and Abel Sabu from Indian School Ibra were the Second Runners-Up. In the Senior category, Alwin K Jose and Sabyasachi Choudhary from Indian School Al Ghubra were declared champions. Shalomon Juby and Joanna Susan Alex from Indian School Salalah were the First Runners-Up, and Tanmay Shukla and Ojas Pandey from Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir were the Second Runners-Up.

Gen Al Numani receives EU representative for ME peace process



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Wednesday Sven Koopmans, the European Union's (EU) Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, and his accompanying delegation. Koopmans expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's stance on regional and international issues and its active role in tackling those issues, notably the Middle East's peace process. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the march of relations between Oman and the EU in different fields and means of enhancing them to serve mutual interests. They also discussed several matters of common concern. — ONA

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1796/2023/ MOH/ DGHSMU-3	Change the existing Fire Alarm system to Addressable Fire Alarm system at Khasab Polyclinic	31/May/2023	Before 10 am on Monday 26/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
1797/2023/ MOH/ DGHSMU-4	Updating and upgrading the internal communications and transfers system (exchange) Dibba Hospital	31/May/2023	Before 10 am on Monday 26/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted **online** on the given website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any inquiries in regard to the tender, please contact through the information below:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24402200

Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/ DGKH-3/ 539/2023- Recall - 1	Supply, Installation and End-user Training of Ortho Drill, Battery Operated for Main OT and Hand Surgery at Khoula Hospital	27/May/2023	07/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000
MOH/ DGKH-4/ 569/2023- Recall-1	Supply, Installation and End User Training of Total Body Cooling System and CFM Monitor for SCBU at Khoula Hospital.				
MOH/ DGKH-5/ 570/2023- Recall-1	Supply, Installation and End-user Training of Mini C-Arm for Extremities and Pediatric Application at Khoula Hospital				
MOH/ DGKH-10/ 1815/2023	Supply, Installation and End-user Training of High Speed Drill, Electrical for Spine and Neuro Surgery at Khoula Hospital	24/May/2023			

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Sudan aid needs surge as fighting rages

KHARTOUM/GENEVA: The United Nations said on Wednesday more than half Sudan's population now needed aid and protection, as civilians sought shelter from air strikes and sporadic clashes between rival military factions in the Khartoum area.

Residents said power had been cut, food was in short supply, and drinking water scarce due to the violent power struggle, now in its second month despite international mediation efforts.

In Geneva, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said 25 million people needed help - the highest number ever recorded in Sudan.

Before the conflict, the figure was around 15 million. It appealed for \$2.6 billion in aid.

Signalling no let-up in the conflict between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), anti-aircraft guns and drones could be heard on Wednesday in the capital, residents reported.

"We have been moving from one place to the other in past days," said 27-year-old Abbas al Sayyed, speaking from Bahri, epicentre of



Smoke billows in the distance in Khartoum amid ongoing fighting between the forces of two rival generals. – AFP

a conflict that has killed hundreds of people.

The army led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan has been using

air strikes and shelling in a bid to root out RSF fighters under the command of General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as

Hemedti, who are entrenched in residential areas of Khartoum.

Across Sudan, the fighting has uprooted around 1 million

people, 220,000 of whom have fled into neighbouring states. Talks mediated by the United States and Saudi Arabia in Jeddah have so far

failed to secure a ceasefire. The sides agreed last week to a statement of principles on protecting civilians and allowing aid supplies, but arrangements for humanitarian corridors and agreeing a truce are still being discussed.

Several previous ceasefires have failed to stop the fighting.

The conflict is likely to feature on the agenda of an Arab Summit hosted by Saudi Arabia on Friday.

Sudan is expected to be represented by special envoy Dafallah Alhaj while Burhan, the de facto head of state, will remain in Sudan.

Air strikes continued into the evening in Khartoum on Tuesday.

Early on Wednesday, the situation was relatively calm, with sporadic clashes in some neighbourhoods, witnesses said.

Ramesh Rajasingham, head of OCHA in Geneva, said the appeal for nearly \$2.6 billion for operations from May until October was the highest ever for Sudan.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said it was seeking \$472 million to assist more than 1 million people over the next six months. — Reuters

Iran and Russia ink deal to complete major transport network

TEHRAN: Iran and Russia agreed on Wednesday to collaborate on the construction of the final part of a commercial transport network linking to the Gulf and India while avoiding Western sea lanes.

Iranian Transport Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, who signed the agreement with his Russian counterpart in Tehran, said the 164-kilometre railway in Iran's north would be completed within three years. It is the only missing link in the International North-South Transport Corridor from northeast Russia via Azerbaijan to Iran's southern coastline and on to India by sea. The freight

network of ship, rail and road routes, which covers some 7,200 kilometres, avoids the Suez Canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea which would otherwise transport some Russian seaborne cargo.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who attended the signing ceremony, and Russia's Vladimir Putin, who spoke there via video conference, both hailed the economic opportunities the agreement presents.

The planned railroad would connect Rasht, a city in northern Iran, and the Astara crossing on the border with Azerbaijan. — AFP



Putin takes part in the ceremony of signing an agreement on the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway via a video link together with Raisi, at the Kremlin in Moscow. – AFP

China's Xi pledges deeper Kazakh ties in times of 'prosperity and adversity'

XIAN: China wants to further deepen relations with Kazakhstan in times of both "prosperity and adversity", President Xi Jinping told his visiting Kazakh counterpart on Wednesday.

This week, China will for the first time host an in-person summit of Central Asian leaders, building ties in Russia's backyard as Beijing's relations with the West sour.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are all seeking other sources of investment as Moscow channels its resources into the war in Ukraine.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan, a vast steppe nation with rich energy and agricultural resources, was the first of the five Central Asian leaders to arrive in the northwestern Chinese city of Xian for the summit.

China and Kazakhstan should "promote the construction of a China-Kazakhstan community with a shared future featuring friendship from generation to generation, a high degree of mutual trust, together in



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends a meeting with Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, ahead of the China-Central Asia Summit in Xian, China. – Reuters

prosperity and adversity," Xi said.

"Your state visit to China demonstrates the high level of relations between our two countries and once again confirms the indissoluble bond with China."

Kazakhstan will target \$40 billion in annual two-way trade with China by 2030, up from over \$31 billion in 2022, Tokayev told Xi. "Kazakhstan is interested in expanding the

export of agricultural products to China," he said, praising Xi for his ambitious Belt and Road infrastructure initiative that has boosted transport connectivity.

"Kazakhstan is ready to deliver legumes, high-quality and ecologically clean frozen beef and lamb," Tokayev added.

China's trade with the five Central Asia states has multiplied one hundred-fold since the establishment of diplomatic ties

three decades ago.

Investment between China and the five nations reached a record high of over \$70 billion in 2022.

The inaugural China-Central Asia leaders summit was held online last year due to Covid-19.

The choice of Xian as the venue for the first in-person summit is a symbolic nod to history as the city was pivotal in the ancient Silk Road trade route that once spanned Central Asia. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

39 missing after ship capsizes in Indian Ocean

A crew of 39 Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino sailors were missing at sea on Wednesday after a fishing vessel capsized in the Indian Ocean, officials said.

Multinational search efforts were underway after Chinese vessel Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 overturned in the early hours of Tuesday with 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos on board. Beijing has deployed two commercial vessels to the area to help with the operation. Philippine FM spokeswoman



Teresita Daza said Manila was "aware and is closely monitoring the situation".

Indonesia's FM also confirmed the incident and was coordinating the rescue efforts.

JAKARTA

Minister arrested in telecommunications graft case

Indonesian authorities arrested a senior minister on Wednesday for his alleged role in a corruption case stemming from a telecommunications project that has cost the country more than half a billion dollars in losses.

Communication and Information Technology Minister Johnny Gerard Plate was questioned for hours at the Attorney General's Office (AGO) before being bundled into a car and taken to a detention centre in Jakarta. "Based on today's



investigation, we concluded there has been sufficient evidence that he (Plate) was involved in a base transceiver stations corruption case," said the AGO's investigation director.

TUNIS

9 migrants found dead near borders

The bodies of nine migrants from sub-Saharan African countries have been found in western Tunisia, near the border with Algeria, in recent days, a judicial official said on Wednesday.

The bodies have been discovered in the mountains near Haidra, a town in Kasserine province, and authorities have launched an investigation that would include autopsies "to determine the cause of death", said Riadh Nwiwi, spokesman for the Kasserine court.



The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights said in a statement that "preliminary information" points to "cold, thirst and fatigue" as the causes of the migrants' deaths.



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In brief

■ PARIS



COURT UPHOLDS HOME DETENTION FOR SARKOZY

A French appeals court on Wednesday upheld a prison sentence of three years, including two suspended, against former president Nicolas Sarkozy for corruption and influence peddling.

The court ruled he should serve one year in detention at home with an electronic bracelet and banned him from public office for three years over his attempts to secure favours from a judge in return for the promise of a plum retirement job in a case uncovered by wiretapping.

Before Sarkozy received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011 for corruption over a fake jobs scandal relating to his time as Paris mayor. — AFP

■ HIROSHIMA



JAPAN RAMPS UP G7 SECURITY AFTER PM ATTACKS

Security is tight at every G7 summit, but this year's host Japan has more to prove than most, after an attack last month on the prime minister and the 2022 assassination of ex-premier Shinzo Abe.

Some 24,000 security personnel are reportedly being deployed to Hiroshima during the summit, most dispatched from other parts of the country.

Well ahead of the May 19-21 talks, patrolling police have been weaving between tour groups in the western city's famed Peace Park. The measures are likely to be closely scrutinised less than a year after a gunman assassinated former prime minister Abe as he campaigned in Nara. — AFP

■ BANGKOK



OPPOSITION PARTIES MEET FOR COALITION TALKS

Thailand's opposition parties, which defeated their military-allied rivals in this week's election, met for coalition talks on Wednesday as the liberal Move Forward Party, which won the most votes, looked to form a government.

Move Forward leader Pita Limjaroenrat was seen greeting senior officials from five other parties at a Bangkok restaurant before ushering them upstairs for closed-door talks. Sunday's vote saw Move Forward come in first ahead of another opposition party, the political heavyweight Pheu Thai. Pita earlier said his coalition will be able to control about 310 seats. — AFP

Council of Europe launches Register of Damage for Ukraine



Zelenskyy appears on screen to speak in the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, in Reykjavik, Iceland. — AFP

REYKJAVIK: The Council of Europe has launched a Register of Damage for the devastation caused by the war in Ukraine. In total, 40 of the Council of Europe's 46 states have agreed to join or will do so in the future.

The EU, Canada, Japan and the US are participating, the Council of Europe announced at its summit in Reykjavik on Wednesday.

This summit took place for the first time in 18 years and was intended to show solidarity with Ukraine and to send a signal of unity towards Russia.

The Register of Damage is intended to document the destruction in Ukraine, which was attacked by Russia, in order to be

able to hold Russia accountable for it.

The register is considered a first step on the way to possible compensation payments to Ukraine. The idea goes back to a United Nations resolution and is now to be implemented under the umbrella of the Council of Europe.

The intention is to collect information and evidence on all damage, losses and injuries inflicted on Ukraine since the Russian attack.

The Damage Registry is to be based in The Hague in the Netherlands, but will have a field office in Ukraine. All members and observers of the Council of Europe will be able to participate

in the register, as well as other countries that request and are admitted. They are then expected to pay contributions to finance the register.

The idea of using confiscated Russian assets abroad for this purpose has been brought up several times.

However, this is considered to be very difficult from a legal point of view.

The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejcinovic Buric, described the decision for the register as "historic".

It was one of the first legally binding instruments to hold Russia accountable for its actions.

For German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the register is an "essential contribution to international efforts to hold Russia accountable for the consequences of its brutal actions", as he said in Reykjavik on Wednesday.

Scholz also offered ?10 million in additional financial support for the Council of Europe.

The sum would come on top of the mandatory fees that Berlin already pay, Scholz said in Reykjavik.

"We will strengthen the Council of Europe as the guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe so that it can effectively meet current and future challenges," he said. — dpa

8 dead, thousands evacuated in northern Italy flooding

ROME: Dramatic flooding after two days of heavy rainfall across a broad swath of northern Italy has led to multiple deaths and widespread damage.

The bodies of eight people have been recovered so far, said Irene Priolo, the vice president of the hard-hit Emilia-Romagna region, on Wednesday.

Due to the exceptional rains since the beginning of the week, 21 of the 23 rivers in the region have burst their banks and impacted 37 municipalities, officials said.

The authorities also registered 250 landslides.

Emilia-Romagna Regional President Stefano Bonaccini spoke of "a large number of evacuees." In the province of Ravenna and around the regional capital



Flooded bungalows are pictured following heavy rains in Cesena in central Italy. — AFP

Bologna, among other places, several thousand people had to flee their homes and be taken to safety. In addition to Emilia-Romagna,

the neighbouring Marche was also affected.

The Civil Defence reported about 50,000 people without

electricity and 100,000 people without a mobile phone network.

Regional rail traffic in Emilia-Romagna has been completely shut down while countless roads have been flooded.

In 36 hours, it rained an average of 200 litres of water per square meter, and even 500 liters in some areas. Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci explained that it usually rains 1,000 litres of water in those regions in a whole year.

The Italian fire service says it has deployed 400 firefighters and responded to 600 calls since Tuesday morning.

The firefighters rescued people who were trapped in their homes by the water and drivers stranded in the floods. — dpa

Brexit to the fore again in Northern Ireland local elections

BELFAST: Northern Ireland holds elections to local councils on Thursday that the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is pitching as an opportunity to bolster its call for further concessions from Britain on a revised post-Brexit trade deal.

The DUP says it will not drop a 15-month boycott of Northern Ireland's power-sharing government unless London introduces laws to protect Northern Ireland's ability to trade freely with the rest of the UK and offers greater flexibility around a deal struck with the European Union in February to ease trade checks.

With polls suggesting the party may fall into second place behind Irish nationalists Sinn Fein - as it did in elections to the devolved assembly last year - the DUP wants to avoid losing too many votes to other unionist parties and the fast-growing cross-community Alliance Party.

"Unionists have a clear choice. They can strengthen our position as we seek to finish the job of restoring Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom or unionism can divide and splinter," DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson told supporters last week.

Counting begins on Friday and is likely to continue into Saturday.

The leaders of Britain, Ireland and most recently US President Joe Biden have all urged the DUP to restore power-sharing.

London has said it will introduce laws to protect unfettered Northern Ireland/British trade, but it is unclear what exactly is needed to satisfy the DUP and whether the legislation will be compatible with the revised EU/UK Northern Ireland trade deal.

The DUP will view a solid election outing as a "continuing mandate" for its boycott, said Jon Tonge, professor of politics at the University of Liverpool, while a splintering of the vote benefiting the small, more hardline Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) would only serve to harden the DUP's stance. — Reuters

S Korea, Canada agree to step up cooperation

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau agreed on Wednesday to enhance cooperation on critical minerals and continue joint efforts to fend off North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Trudeau arrived in Seoul on Tuesday in the first visit in nine years by a Canadian leader as the two countries explore ways to expand security ties.

After a summit, the leaders signed a memorandum of understanding on critical mineral supply chains, the clean energy transition and energy security,



Canada's PM Justin Trudeau talks with S. Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol during their meeting at the Presidential Office in Seoul. — Reuters

which they said would help position the countries as "globally competitive players in areas including batteries and zero-emission vehicles." "This will support the development of clean technologies that will power green and sustainable economic growth," they said in a joint statement issued after their meeting.

Canada has many of the critical minerals - like lithium, cobalt and nickel - that are now used to make batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), and the government is in the process of seeking to help producers and processors scale up production. — Reuters

Formula for change!



Ali Al Matani
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While the government is working hard to put Oman Vision 2040 into action, its marketing, and the great hopes this vision holds for the advancement of this country and its people for a better future, the biggest and most important change must be made by citizens in terms of adapting to global changes.

This can be accomplished by keeping up with global acceleration not only by states and governments, but also by individuals in all aspects of life and practice, so that citizens are not surprised one day when they are unable to keep up with what is going on around them and suffer from a variety of life difficulties.

The future is reliant not just on the Sultanate of Oman, but on the entire world. As a result, if these postulates affecting the lives of individuals and communities are

not thoroughly understood, the future will be no better than the present.

As a result, one must be conscious of and cohabit with the aforementioned in all facets of one's life, which makes it incumbent upon us to be well prepared for this stage from now, and exert all possible efforts so that we become an important part of the inevitable process of change, rather than obstructing it.

There is no doubt that efforts are being intensified across the country in all areas of development. These efforts are under continuous evaluation at all levels and are personally followed up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The most important of which is adapting to and keeping up with reality, rationing one's needs and requirements, rationalising one's

THE FUTURE IS RELIANT NOT JUST ON THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, BUT ON THE ENTIRE WORLD. AS A RESULT, IF THESE POSTULATES AFFECTING THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES ARE NOT THOROUGHLY UNDERSTOOD, THE FUTURE WILL BE NO BETTER THAN THE PRESENT

consumption, and continuously developing one's capabilities so that one can keep up with rapid development on the one hand, and increase one's financial income on the other. We cannot witness tangible advancement in

many areas without also seeing an improvement in the citizen.

One of the necessary changes that citizens must make nowadays is to be more effective and capable of making changes in one's personal life and family in response to the accelerating changes in contemporary life, such as the size of the family and the nature of current spending, and to reduce obligations to levels that meet decent life needs without exaggeration.

These key components require a comparable effort to raise awareness of these variables and their needs. It is also critical to educate citizens in order for them to grasp what is going on around them in reality and how to cope with it, as well as to bring about dramatic changes in citizens' thinking in the future by recognising their needs and

difficulties and how to deal with them.

Some individuals, of course, are aware of this stage and its future requirements, and they work accordingly. However, the majority of the people are still fantasising about the future, ignoring reality and what the future may hold for them. They are not even ready for the future requirements. This urgent matter must be addressed immediately.

We expect to see substantial changes in the citizen's mindset in the light of the improvements the world is witnessing, which affect his everyday existence and require a change in his life and diligent endeavours for tomorrow without seeking exaggerated or trivial demands. Thus, balance will be achieved in all these aspects, which is crucial at this stage of growth.

Colombia's climate migration draft law a 'life saver'

ANASTASIA MOLONEY

People in Colombia who are uprooted within the country due to the impacts of climate change could receive legal recognition under a landmark climate migrant bill that this week cleared the first hurdle in Congress.

From fishing communities having to abandon their coastal villages on Colombia's Pacific Coast as sea levels rise to families losing their homes to landslides triggered by heavy rains, the draft law covers climate change-fueled displacement.

If passed, it would be the first such law in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region where up to 17 million people could become climate migrants by 2050, the World Bank estimates.

As extreme weather events linked to climate change become more common and severe, the issue of how to protect people forced to move within their own country or across borders is becoming ever more urgent for governments around the world.

"The people most exposed to these climate change impacts and emergencies are the poorest and most vulnerable," said congressman Duvalier Sanchez, of the Green Alliance Party.

Sanchez is one of several lawmakers sponsoring the bill, which on Tuesday won approval in the first of four debates in Congress that are required for it to be signed into law.

"The majority of displacement during the previous century was due to war and conflict, but most of the displacement this century will be because of the climate emergency," he added.

Sanchez said he was optimistic the bill would be passed, noting it has widespread political support and aligns with the government's commitment to tackle climate change and its impacts.

By recognising climate migrants, the aim is to give them priority access to housing, health services and education, according to Sanchez.

The bill has a broad definition of climate-displaced people, from families fleeing hurricanes to farmers forced to move because of crop failure caused by drought and environmental degradation, including soil erosion.

Giovanni Rizzo, Colombia country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), said the draft law would save lives. "Nearly 800,000 Colombians are in need of humanitarian assistance as a consequence of disasters and climate change," Rizzo said.

"Additionally, some of these people were already displaced by the armed conflict. Many lost everything again as a result of this year's floods," he said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Globalisation is greener...



Olivia White

The writer is a senior partner in McKinsey & Company's San Francisco office, is a director of the McKinsey Global Institute



Mekala Krishnan

The writer is a partner at the McKinsey Global Institute

The debate about how to achieve climate goals — most notably, the transition to net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases — has fueled speculation that the world will deglobalise. Some argue that, since trade flows generate GHGs from production and transport, a sustainable economy, by definition, must be less global.

But research by the McKinsey Global Institute suggests the opposite is true. The materials, innovation and capital needed to reach net-zero emissions are not equally distributed and, as a result, must be shared around the world. Without cross-border flows of goods, services, financing and intangibles, limiting global warming will be very challenging, if not impossible. The World Trade Organization reaches a similar conclusion in its most recent annual report, which outlines how trade can play an essential role in helping countries reduce emissions and build climate resilience.

For starters, no economy is self-sufficient. Our research finds that every major world region imports more than 25 per cent (in value-added terms) of at least one important type of resource or manufactured good. At the country level, and for inputs needed to achieve the net-zero transition, that number can be much higher. Moreover, products that originate in only a few places are in every region and sector. For example, today, more than 75 per cent of the global supply of lithium, a key component of electric-vehicle batteries, is sourced from Australia and Chile.

Decarbonising the sectors that produce the majority of GHG emissions, including power, transportation and heavy industry, will require investing in low-emissions technologies and support infrastructure. Building and operating these assets will in turn depend on three vital inputs: new mineral resources, new fuels and complex manufacturing at scale. The international network of interconnected supply chains is crucial to producing all of them.

Consider minerals, including copper, lithium and rare earth metals. Given their importance for the production of electric vehicles, renewable power and broader



For starters, no economy is self-sufficient.

THE MATERIALS, INNOVATION AND CAPITAL NEEDED TO LIMIT GLOBAL WARMING ARE NOT EQUALLY DISTRIBUTED AROUND THE WORLD

electrification, all are critical to achieving net-zero emissions. Yet to reach that goal, supplies will need to be scaled up rapidly — by as much as eight times in some cases (though the use of recycled materials, or innovation to reduce or entirely replace the need for certain minerals, could change exactly how much new supply is needed).

In the case of entirely new supply, sourcing many of these minerals will require global flows, because extraction and refining are geographically dispersed. About 70 per cent of the world's cobalt is mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and nearly one-third of the world's nickel is extracted in Indonesia, which is home to the world's largest proven reserves. China processes many of the most critical minerals, including lithium, cobalt and graphite, but also relies on other countries for key steps or technologies. Japan and South Korea, for example, specialise in coating spherical purified graphite.

As for the new fuels needed for the net-zero transition, hydrogen, and its derivatives, offers many potential use cases, particularly for long-haul freight transport and steel making. Here, too,

a geographical mismatch between sources of supply and demand means that global trade is likely to be vital. The International Energy Agency estimates that about 12 million tonnes of low-emission hydrogen could be exported annually by 2030, if projects currently under development are completed as planned.

Finally, deploying manufactured goods such as solar panels and electric vehicles also relies on global supply chains. Broader participation of countries in trade flows can incentivise innovation, enhance efficiency and help drive down the costs of these technologies.

The imperative for globalisation extends beyond just goods flows. Ensuring a sustainable future will require massive investment, and developing countries will likely need to spend more on the net-zero transition as a share of GDP than developed countries. With constrained fiscal space to invest in climate solutions, many of these economies will need increased access to cross-border financial flows.

Innovation is equally important in developing and deploying novel climate technologies, and that, too, depends on cross-border flows, albeit of intangibles, such as intellectual property and data, and of skilled workers; both can foster invention, drive down costs and increase access. These flows linked to knowledge and know-how have replaced trade in manufactured goods as the driving force of global integration.

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To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

The ‘three plus one monkeys’ in journalism

The ancient proverb ‘Three Wise Monkeys’ still retains its basic moral essence of not looking at, listening to, or saying anything evil, but in modern times it has taken on various satirical interpretations, such as ignoring or turning a blind eye to something wrong.

Journalists ask questions, and public servants should respond as long as they are in the public interest. But that is not always the case. Representatives and elected or appointed leaders in both the public and private sectors are masters at evading accountability. That is when the fourth wise monkey comes into play. It is the most important monkey, yet it is hardly mentioned.

Journalists operate in a world that needs increased accountability. Facts and policies do not have only one side; they occur for several reasons. With rising geopolitical tensions, a volatile global financial system, and rapid, never-ending technological development, communication as a change agent have grown in importance.

Most people with good writing skills can string together polished words and sentences or produce eloquent speeches, but not all of them can grasp and understand societal nuances and how to address them journalistically and within the comprehension levels of the recipients.

Journalism is about engaging in discourse and having good debates within a communication sphere that is fast, multidisciplinary and insight-driven, but it is not everything. A journalist must also be an anthropologist and know history, sociology and psychology. These are important because journalists shape public opinion, provide a context for social issues and help raise awareness. But when those in positions of public trust have their eyes closed, well, they probably cross their arms and rub their tummies.

As in several areas of study, journalists are like detectives, anthropologists and financiers; they all need research skills for collecting and understanding information using multiple techniques to learn about an



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JOURNALISTS OPERATE IN A WORLD THAT NEEDS INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY. FACTS AND POLICIES DO NOT HAVE ONLY ONE SIDE; THEY OCCUR FOR SEVERAL REASONS

issue. They need to examine ‘behind-the-scenes’ aspects of topics to ask the appropriate questions and hopefully get meaningful answers.

The language of journalism is a mirror of society, where half-bits, half-truths and guessing games are commonplace. There are times when journalists are aware of incidents such as hazardous waste dumping or leakages but are unable to discuss them due to a long list of excuses from those who should address or clarify the concerns.

Journalism’s soft skills remain mostly the same: attention to detail, persistence, research skills, problem-solving skills, objectivity, logical reasoning, etc. The difference now is that it combines ever-improving technology with a diverse set of research techniques to extract information and patterns. Transparency in reporting, yes. Activism, no. It should not serve as a public relations exercise, either.

One advantage of social media is that it allows people to exchange ideas. Even though social network users congregate in bubbles because they share the same views; they hold dialogues. The danger arises when information that has not been publicly released or discussed is called a rumour, disinformation, or simply a lie. Who wants to get into a spat with large corporations, government officials, or industry lobbyists? The social-cultural concept of power and privilege allows for secrecy, which is a loss to journalism and the public.

A journalist’s work is influential. It works well to promote progress and highlight accomplishments; therefore, it would also work well to inform and get people engaged in matters of common interest. After all, it is communication skills that are required, not who screams louder or carries the stick — unfortunately, sticks and blind eyes are thriving.

Social issues have shifted the agenda; it is no longer what the powerhouses want but what the public wants and needs. As technology advances, so do public interests. There is a new dynamic in journalism. Let us not stigmatise journalists or, like the fourth monkey, look away and rub the tummy.

WORLD RECYCLING DAY



Women look at the Obelisk covered with plastic bags as part of an artistic intervention on the eve of World Recycling Day in Buenos Aires on Wednesday. – AFP

The only way to eliminate polio

When Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine was found to be safe and effective in 1955, following a successful trial involving nearly two million American children, it marked a turning point in the fight against a highly infectious disease causing incurable paralysis or even death. Prior to Salk’s discovery, between 25,000 and 50,000 cases were recorded each year in the United States alone, and little was known about how the virus spread.

Salk created his injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) by treating the virus with formalin. Around the same time, Albert Sabin was developing an oral polio vaccine (OPV), which uses attenuated (weakened) mutant strains that stimulate antibody production without causing the disease. Cheaper and easier to administer than Salk’s vaccine, Sabin’s live-virus version ultimately became more widespread in the global effort to eradicate polio, although it was introduced six years later.

The success of that effort cannot be overstated. Since 1988, when the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution to eliminate the disease worldwide and subsequently launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, wild polio cases have plummeted by more than 99 per cent, from an estimated 350,000 cases to six reported cases in 2021. Two of the three strains of wild poliovirus have been eradicated, while



Florence Gyembuzie Wongnaah

The writer is a public health, disease control, and prevention officer in the Ghana Health Service

DESPITE PLAYING A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE SUCCESS OF GLOBAL EFFORTS TO ERADICATE THE VIRUS, THE AFFORDABLE AND EASY-TO-ADMINISTER ORAL VACCINE HAS OUTLIVED ITS USEFULNESS

the third remains endemic in only Pakistan and Afghanistan. This breakthrough can be attributed largely to mass immunisation, but also to improved sanitation and hygiene. Yet there is growing evidence suggesting that the OPV has outlived its usefulness, given the increasing number of vaccine-associated polio cases resulting from the presence of the live virus.

While circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV), as it is officially known, is still relatively rare, its incidence is rising, with nearly 1,000 cases occurring globally in 2020. Such an increase suggests that cVDPV poses a significant barrier to eradicating polio.

To be sure, the OPV does have benefits. Unlike the IPV, for example, it immunises the digestive tract, where polio replicates.

Consequently, this version of the vaccine boosts immunity and prevents transmission, making it particularly useful in areas where the wild poliovirus continues to circulate (the IPV protects individuals from the disease but is less effective at averting its spread). Moreover, in areas with low-quality sanitation, the live-vaccine virus in human waste can spread among the community and help protect it. In areas with low immunisation rates, however,



The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the increase in both wild polio and cVDPV cases.

this community spread can prove dangerous. On rare occasions, after a long period of spreading unchecked between unvaccinated children, the virus mutates into a form that causes paralysis, leading to cVDPV infections.

The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the increase in both wild polio and cVDPV cases, because vaccination campaigns were paused as the health authorities’ focus shifted to stopping the coronavirus spread. As a result, in 2020, 56 cases of wild polio were reported in Afghanistan, compared to 29 cases in the preceding year. The

second half of 2020 was a period of intensified polio transmission in Pakistan as well, and the country’s surveillance system was severely affected. In Africa, Malawi recorded one case of wild polio in 2021, and Mozambique recorded eight cases in 2022; the latter were linked to a strain that circulated in Pakistan in 2019.

Yet cVDPV cases now outnumber those caused by wild polio, and outbreaks occur most commonly in Africa, even though the continent was declared free of wild poliovirus in 2020. They even occur in developed countries, including the US, the

United Kingdom and Israel, where immunisation rates are low. This does not bode well for developing countries with large numbers of zero-dose children, owing to the interruption in mass immunisation campaigns.

The pandemic also underscored the challenges of funding public-health programmes when facing multiple crises. In March 2020, the World Health Organization redirected 60-70 per cent of resources earmarked for polio eradication in Africa to fighting Covid-19.



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RED WARRIORS HIT 14 GOALS IN KYRGYZ NET

OMAN THRASH KYRGYZSTAN TO SECURE SPOT IN QUARTERS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Oman beach soccer team secured a slot in the quarterfinals of the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 after thrashing Kyrgyzstan 14-0 on Wednesday at the Al Hamra Beach Stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The triumph lifted Oman's tally to six points from two victories after they had registered a large win over

Palestine 7-1 in the opener while they suffered a 5-3 defeat against Egypt in the second match. Sami al Balushi and Abdullah al Souti scored four goals each in the match while Munthir al Oraimi and Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi netted two goals each. Nohu al Balushi and Khalid al Araimi struck one goal each. Oman players dominated the match and did not face any difficulty

to end the game on victory status. The national team players started their goal-scoring spree from the first half and continued the scoring in the second and third halves to complete the 14-0 mauling of the opponents. In a later match on Wednesday, Group B toppers Egypt meet Palestine. In Group A, Saudi Arabia defeated Morocco 4-3 to take

the group's lead. Mauritania beat Lebanon 5-3 on Wednesday. The quarterfinals will take place on Thursday while the semifinals are set for Friday and the final is scheduled on Saturday. Oman will meet the Group C toppers, and it is likely to be the UAE team as they are leading the group with six points while Libya are second with three points. Comoros are in third place with one point while Kuwait

are in fourth place with no points. The 12 teams taking part in the tournament have been distributed into three groups. Hosts Saudi Arabia led Group A alongside Mauritania, Morocco and Lebanon while Oman are grouped with Palestine, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt in Group B. Group C features the UAE, Libya, Kuwait and Comoros. In the other groups standings,

Saudi Arabia are leading Group A with six points while Morocco are in second position with five points. Lebanon and Mauritania are in third and fourth places respectively with three points. Oman team, coached by long-serving national coach Talib Hilal, will take part in the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup UAE 2023 which will be held in UAE during November 16 to 26.

Oman U23 coach picks players for AFC qualifiers preparation

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Oman under-23 national team coach, Akram Habrish, has unveiled the roster of 26 players who will participate in the second camp, scheduled to take place from May 20 to May 31. This camp is a vital part of the team's preparations for upcoming competitions, notably the West Asia tournament from June 10 to 22 and the qualifiers for the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024. Following a week-long camp focused on testing new talent and assessing their performance, the newly announced list consists mostly of players who took part in the Qatar International Friendly Championship in March.

Among the notable additions are Maitham bin Ali al Ajmi, Asaad bin Tariq al Balushi, Al Faraj bin Mubarak al Kiyoumi, Ayman bin Akram al Nabhani, Huthaifa bin Hamad al Maamari, Muti bin Juma al Saadi and Nasser bin Sultan al Rawahi. Mohammad bin Abdulhakim al Hatami, Abdullah bin Sabah al Habsi, Abdullah bin Mohammad al Filaiti, Salim bin Habib al Abdulsalam, Khalid bin Ali al Ghatrifi, Salim bin Juma al Dawdi, Abdullah bin Hadid al Mukhaini and Omar bin Nasser al Salti, as well as Mazin bin Saleh Zayed, Mulham bin Yousef al Sunaidy, Saeed bin Masoud al Salami, Nibras bin Saeed al Maashari and Ahed bin Al Habashi al Mashaikhi. Additionally, Abdulmajeed bin Hafez al Balushi,



Mohammad bin Abdulhakim Bait Subeea, Mohammad bin Mikhlif Bait Mustahel, and Mohammad bin Mousa al Hinai have been included in the list. In related news, the Asian Football Confederation has designated 11 countries to host the AFC Asian Cup Under-23 qualifiers, which will take place

from September 4 to 12 during the Fifa international match days. The host countries include Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea, China, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. These teams will be divided into groups during the draw ceremony. The teams will be categorised

into four levels based on their performance in the qualifiers and the previous edition of the championship held in Uzbekistan in 2022. In mid-April, the Asian Football Confederation reached out to national federations to express their interest in hosting the qualifiers. Seven teams from the host countries will be placed in the first level, including Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, South Korea, Vietnam, Jordan, Thailand, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Tajikistan. Indonesia will be placed in the third level, while China will be in the fourth level. The draw ceremony for the qualifiers will be held at the AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on May 25. The ceremony will involve the

participation of 44 teams, which will be divided into 11 groups. The first-place team from each group will secure qualification for the finals of Qatar 2024, and the four best second-placed teams will also advance, along with host nation Qatar. Notably, for the first time in the tournament's history, the East and West regions will be merged during the qualifiers. Oman national team will be placed in the third level before the draw due to their non-qualification in the previous tournament. The first three teams will earn a spot in the Paris Olympics in the summer of 2024, while the fourth-placed team will compete in a global play-off against the fourth-placed team from the African Championship.

IPL giants Mumbai on shaky ground in play-off race

NEW DELHI: The IPL is hotting up with seven teams still in the hunt for play-off spots after five-time champions Mumbai Indians suffered a shock loss to Lucknow.

Defending champions Gujarat Titans are the only franchise to have booked one of the four play-off places, with the Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad now out of contention.

Mumbai's five-run loss on Tuesday at the hands of Marcus Stoinis and Mohsin Khan left them needing to win their remaining group fixture against Hyderabad, and they still need other results to go their way.

"We didn't play well enough to win. There were moments we didn't win. Unfortunate but we need to keep our heads high," Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma said after the defeat.

Rohit, who led Mumbai to titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020, said: "We have to come out and win that game (against Hyderabad on Sunday)."

The top two teams will play the first qualifier, with the winner heading straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the "eliminator" between teams three



Lucknow Super Giants' Mohsin Khan (C) with teammates celebrates after his teams win in the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Lucknow Super Giants at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow. — AFP

and four in the second qualifier.

Lucknow, who made their IPL debut alongside Hardik Pandya's Gujarat last year, have had a hot-and-cold season but a better run rate than Mumbai has kept them in contention for the top four even if they lose their final group game.

Four-time winners Chennai Super Kings, led by M.S. Dhoni — who is believed to be playing his final season — looked like sailing into the next round but a shock defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders kept them waiting.

They need to win their final match against the Delhi Capitals

on Saturday to make the play-offs and possibly seal a top-two finish, but a loss will leave them at the mercy of other results.

Other teams in contention include Royal Challengers Bangalore, led by Faf du Plessis, as well as the Rajasthan Royals, the Punjab Kings and Kolkata. — AFP

Martinez deals knockout blow as Inter Milan reach Champions League final

MILAN: A second-half goal by forward Lautaro Martinez earned Inter Milan a 1-0 victory over rivals AC Milan in their Champions League semi-final second leg on Tuesday, sealing a 3-0 aggregate win to book their ticket to the showpiece in Istanbul.

Milan recovered some of the spark they lacked in the first leg but Inter's Martinez put the tie to bed when he struck powerfully from close range in the 74th minute at the San Siro.

Inter went into the game holding a 2-0 advantage after Edin Dzeko and Henrikh Mkhitaryan had struck early in a flying start to the first leg and never looked in serious danger of missing out on the final, where they will face Real Madrid or Manchester City on June 10.

Inter, who overcame Portuguese pair Porto and Benfica to reach the semis, will play in the final for the sixth time and first since lifting their third European Cup in 2009-10 under Jose Mourinho.

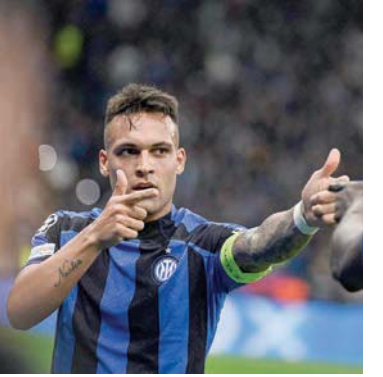
"There was a lot of history in this game. I felt it, we did a great job in both games," said Martinez, who won the World Cup with Argentina in December.

"The unity of the group (motivated us). I experienced it at the World Cup, that's important. If you have a united group, things are easier. We have shown that Inter deserve this moment.

"Playing in the Champions League final is a dream. We started this season with goals and today we achieved a very important one."

Inter coach Simone Inzaghi fielded an unchanged team from the first leg, with Martinez and Dzeko up front, having rested players in Serie A over the weekend.

Main forward Rafael Leao returned for Milan after an adductor problem sidelined him



Inter Milan's Argentinian forward Lautaro Martinez celebrates after opening the scoring during the UEFA Champions League semi-final second leg football match between Inter Milan and AC Milan. — AFP

in the first leg, with Junior Messias and Malick Thiaw starting in place of Alexis Saelemaekers and Simon Kjær.

A much more daring Milan side could have scored early but Inter keeper Andre Onana saved a low Brahim Diaz shot that was heading towards the bottom-right corner.

Leao had a great chance to halve the deficit late in the first half but struck inches wide, before Milan keeper Mike Maignan superbly denied Dzeko who leaped high to meet a free kick.

While Stefano Pioli's Milan kept probing for an opening to spark a comeback, Inter hinted in the first half that they would not be taking their foot of the gas.

Martinez eventually proved Milan's executioner, playing a one-two with substitute Romelu Lukaku before scoring his sixth goal in Inter's last six games.

It is the first time Inter have progressed from a knockout tie against their city rivals in the competition, with Milan coming out on top both in the 2002-03 semi-finals and the 2004-05 quarters.

It is also the first time in almost 50 years that Milan have lost to Inter four times in a single campaign, the only other time being in 1973-74. — Reuters

WOMEN'S SPORTS COMMITTEE TO HOLD 'A STEP FORWARD' FROM TODAY

MUSCAT: The first workshop of the Step Forward Programme organised by Oman Olympic Committee, represented by Oman Women Sports and Gender Equality Committee, will start on Thursday in cooperation with the Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company 'Ooredoo' from May 18 to July 28 at the Intercity Hotel Muscat.

The programme aims at self-development and empowering women's sports leaders administratively, leadership and technically by setting plans for career development and professional advancement, preparing participants, developing their skills, training and guiding them, and enhancing their teamwork culture by focusing on administrative and professional development, within the framework of integrating roles between Oman Women Sports and Gender Equality Committee to develop women's sports in Oman.

The programme is presented by Aisha bint Salem Al Shuaili, Head of the Social Responsibility Department for Branding Companies and



Communications at Ooredoo. It contains many theoretical and practical applications, as it is held in five workshops with the participation of 20 trainees of women's sports leaders from federations, committees, sports clubs, directorates and departments affiliated to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

During the workshops, work will be done on building and establishing projects and supporting

them, hosting a number of speakers related to the programme, and learning to support the environmental aspect. In addition to presenting and discussing a set of axes, including ambition and how to set goals, power and politics, self-interest, communication, and ways to develop basic skills which qualify leadership positions through self-development and approved training methods.

Fans look to see Kohli in top form in key match



With just six games to go in the league stage, the points table is in an extremely complex situation and as many as seven teams are sitting with the calculator in one hand and religious books in the other (pun intended). It's often said that, most people remember the Almighty in difficult situations and this is one for many teams.

It doesn't really matter what has happened through the season as of now, but what matters the most is what the teams and players do in this final phase of the league games. For some, things are in their hands and for others they are reliant and hopeful of results of other matches to be in their favour.

Midway through this tournament, Rajasthan Royals were considered to be one of the strongest teams and they would easily qualify, but that has not been the case. As a matter of fact, there is knife hanging on the

neck of Chennai Super Kings and Lucknow Super Giants, they are in a must win situation as well

SRH VS RCB AT HYDERABAD

● **TEAM INFO** – Despite being a hardcore RCB fan, I would admit that the biggest concern for RCB is Virat Kohli's conservative game play, which doesn't allow them to get over par on most occasions. Currently, RCB are dependent on Faf and Maxwell, which can't last for long and others need to stand up. Sunrisers have had the worst of their season with only four wins and in the last 8 games, they have only won 2 games. With that massive 112-run win, RCB had a good boost on the NRR.

● **QUALIFICATION CRITERIA** – Sunrisers Hyderabad are out of contention for the qualification, but their prime motive will be to play as spoilsport to all the desperate teams. SRH are to play against RCB and MI, both are dependent on the win for their way to qualification. On the other hand, it's RCB who need to win both their remaining matches against SRH and GT to make it through.



They play the last match of the league stage and if they win this one, they will have the exact calculations for the qualification.

● **Head-to-Head** — Played — 22; Won by SRH – 12; Won by RCB – 9, No Result — 1

● **SRH possible 12** – A Sharma, R Tripathi, A Markram, H Klaasen, A Samad, S Singh, M Markande, M Jansen, B Kumar, F Farooqi, T Natarajan, A Singh

● **RCB possible 12** – V Kohli, F Du Plessis, G Maxwell, M Lomror, D Karthik, M Bracewell, A Rawat, W Parnell, K Sharma, H Patel, M Siraj, S Ahmed

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch at the Rajiv Gandhi

International Stadium has been a complicated wicket that has produced both high scoring and low scoring games. SRH management has not been able to understand whether to have a pace friendly wicket or a batting friendly wicket at home. With this being the last game at home, they would like to showcase a high scoring encounter in a batter's paradise. With clear skies and with temperatures hovering between 31 to 36 degrees.

● **Match Prediction** – The biggest concern that SRH has faced throughout this season is their inability to pick wickets at regular intervals, which has

allowed opponents to build big partnerships and the run flow couldn't be restricted. RCB are the exact opposite and they have been known for their inconsistency. But this is the easiest challenge for RCB and they should be able to get through this one based on their superior bowling attack. The Bengaluru Kings would treat the SRH with some 'Gadbad' (a Banglorean specialist sweet dish).

FAN COMMENTS

● "I am predicting that whoever of Punjab and Bengaluru qualify for the play-offs will go on to win the championship of this massive tournament. Cricket is a game of momentum and they would have the most of it. I really feel for Chennai and Lucknow, they are so close and yet so far." – **Mohammed Osama, 39, HR Manager, Pakistani**

● "Being a cricketer, I feel that MSD should and will play one more season. As a player, he has achieved a lot and he hasn't been able to provide the best of himself to his fans due to his knee injury. Next season when he will be full fit, expect him to leave at his best. If he has been so patient in life, then for the benefit of his fans,

he would surely be patient for one more season." – **Muhammad Suhail Ibrahim, 31, Factory Foreman, Bangladesh**

● "How jinxed is RCB and wonder why is this happening? They have the two best batters of Indian cricket in Virat Kohli and Smriti Mandana, yet they are the best chokers of the Premier League. We are almost on the verge of making it 16-0 and yet we will have one of the biggest and most loyal fan bases of all franchises. Imagine if RCB were a team like Chennai or Mumbai, then the fan base would be uncontrollable." – **Thomas Peters, 42, IT Manager, Indian.**

● "Being a loyal fan of RCB, I am sure that they will win this one and then lose a close encounter against Gujarat Titans and after a lot of hate speech, their fans will go and sleep. Wake up after 8-9 months and then we will start once again with 'Ee Saala Cup Namde'. Virat Kohli needs to allow someone else to open the innings, who can take some serious advantage of the powerplay." – **Shruti Mahalingham, 24, Nature Photographer and Blogger, Indian**

Rune repeats Djokovic upset to storm into semi-finals

ROME: Holger Rune sent an off-colour Novak Djokovic tumbling out of the Italian Open on Wednesday as the young Dane prevailed 6-2 4-6 6-2 in an epic battle against the defending champion to secure his place in the semi-finals.

For the first time since 2004, neither Djokovic nor the injured Rafa Nadal will be in the Rome final.

Rune outlasted Djokovic in three sets in last year's Paris Masters final and the 20-year-old made the perfect start in search of another upset by breaking the world number one in the opening game of the match.

The seventh seed showcased his aggressive style and mixed up his game with delicate drops to race ahead 4-1 as Djokovic looked uncomfortable in between points having admitted a day earlier that he was dealing with a physical issue.

Rune squandered a late breakpoint opportunity but the fast-fading Djokovic could not prevent him from closing out the first set as sections of the

crowd appeared to be in disbelief over the six-times champion's struggles.

Djokovic took a painkiller midway through the second set and the 35-year-old roared back to life to go up 5-2 following a break and a hold, as Rune completely lost his cool over a line call by the chair umpire.

Rune, who launched an expletive-laden rant while receiving treatment for a leg problem, responded with a break of his own but surrendered the set following a lengthy break in play due to rain.

Ferocious hitting from both players marked the start of the decider but a dominant Rune pounced on Djokovic's serve en route to a 4-0 lead and completed a famous win in a rare spell of sunshine.

"It's really a big win for me," Rune said. "Obviously, I did it last year in Paris, but every match is a huge challenge when I play Novak.

"He's one of the greatest to ever play the game so I knew I had to be at my best. I'm super proud



of myself and I enjoyed every moment out there."

Rune said he hoped to stay humble after another statement win on the ATP Tour. "I have a lot to achieve... I think I'm humble and I hope people see me this way.

"I'm a huge fighter on court and I leave everything out there. Huge credit to Novak, he's an inspiration."



Djokovic will relinquish the top ranking to Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz before the May 28-June 11 French Open, where the Serbian will look to claim a men's record 23rd Grand Slam title having gone level with Nadal by winning the Australian Open.

French Open runner-up Casper Ruud takes on Francisco Cerundolo in the quarter-finals later. — Reuters



Rybakina, Swiatek set to renew rivalry at quarter-final

ROME: Elena Rybakina has comfortably won both her matches against Iga Swiatek this year but expects a tougher test against the world number one when the pair face off on clay at the Italian Open later on Wednesday.

Rybakina downed Swiatek in straight sets at the Australian Open in January and ended her title defence at Indian Wells with both matches played on hardcourts, where the Wimbledon champion used her booming serve and groundstrokes to good effect.

But the Kazakh said French Open champion Swiatek would be a completely different prospect in the Rome quarter-final.

"I think clay changes it a lot," Rybakina said. "It's more rallies, it's more physical, she has more time, I have more time. It's much different than the hardcourts for sure.

"I'm not expecting much. It's a practice. I'm taking it this way. Hopefully, it'll help me perform at the French Open."

Rybakina said she was not dwelling too much on the pair's budding rivalry. — Reuters

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بنك ذفار
Bank Dhofar

Bank Dhofar submits revised merger proposal to Ahli Bank

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Bank Dhofar has officially submitted a revised non-binding merger proposal to Ahli Bank. This comes after the response received from Ahli Bank's board of directors regarding Bank Dhofar's initial offer made on April 11, 2023.

"Bank Dhofar strongly believes that the merger of the two banks would establish a leading Omani bank with a strong domestic focus and a robust competitive position," the lender said in a regulatory filing.

"The combined entity would excel across all customer segments, encompassing retail, corporate, and Islamic banking. Moreover, the merger would unlock career development opportunities for employees from both institutions and create value for shareholders by improving the cost of funds and enhancing liquidity within the merged group," it stated.

The revised non-binding offer came just a day after Ominvest, a leading investment holding firm, announced that it is heading a consortium of firms that will be making a bid for Ahli Bank with the eventual goal to merge the lender with its subsidiary Oman Arab Bank (OAB).

"Bank Dhofar is fully committed to collaborating with (Ahli Bank) to achieve a mutually beneficial agreement for the merger. The board of directors of Bank Dhofar firmly believes that the amalgamation of the two banks would serve the best interests of all stakeholders involved," it further noted.



Highlighting the merits of the merger proposal, Bank Dhofar pointed out that the combined bank would possess assets exceeding \$19 billion, while also establishing a strong presence in all governorates of Oman.

Furthermore, the combined bank would offer an extensive range of banking products and services, catering to retail, corporate, and Islamic banking customers. The merger would present opportunities to generate value for shareholders by improving the cost of funds and enhancing liquidity within the merged group, Bank Dhofar further stated.

Ahli Bank ranks as the third-largest bank in Oman in terms of assets. The bank holds a prominent presence in the capital city of Muscat and provides a comprehensive range of banking products and services to retail, corporate, and Islamic banking customers. Ahli Bank is dedicated to delivering exceptional customer service and plays a significant role in contributing to the economic development of Oman.

Oman to issue RfQs for three wind power projects this year

Net-Zero drive: OPWP to initiate competitive process for Ibri III Solar IPP and Waste-to-Energy projects, as well as feasibility study of Concentrated Solar Power and energy storage

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Three new wind-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) will be initiated for procurement this year as part of the Omani government's drive to promote the use of renewables for the nation's energy requirements.

According to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole national buyer of electricity and water output, a Request for Qualifications (RfQ) as well as a Request for Proposals (RfP) will be issued this year for wind-based IPPs planned at Duqm (Al Wusta Governorate), Jalaan Bani Bu Ali (South Al Sharqiyah Governorate and Harweel (Dhofar Governorate).

The three wind farms are among a portfolio of power and water related initiatives, identified by OPWP – part of Nama Group – as "key priorities" for development in 2023. Included in the portfolio are commitments towards HSE and zero-harm, renewable energy projects, water desalination schemes,



THE THREE WIND FARMS ARE AMONG A PORTFOLIO OF POWER AND WATER RELATED INITIATIVES, IDENTIFIED BY OPWP - PART OF NAMA GROUP - AS "KEY PRIORITIES" FOR DEVELOPMENT IN 2023.

and tariff-related studies.

Wind Resource Assessment (WRA) studies have picked up pace following the launch of Oman's first wind farm – a 50 MW 13-turbine facility – at Harweel about three years ago.

The studies have helped identify a number of optimal locations for the establishment of wind powered IPPs.

"OPWP has completed a one-year ground wind data

gathering exercise at Ras Madrakah (Wusta) and Sadah (Dhofar) as part of its Wind Resource Assessment," the state-run utility said in its 2022 Annual Report.

"This data will serve as a foundation for the evaluation of the feasibility of wind projects at each site. The company has also initiated the development activities of three wind projects at Duqm, Jalaan Bani Bu Ali,

and Harweel."

At Jalaan Bani Ali, authorities are weighing a 100 MW capacity wind IPP, with procurement processes running almost concurrently for similar wind farms in Duqm (200 MW) and Harweel (100 MW).

Furthermore, in what is anticipated to be one of the most consequential years for Oman's renewable energy push, OPWP is also targeting the issuance of an RfQ and RfP for a new 500 MW solar IPP at Ibri. Dubbed Ibri III Solar IPP, the project is planned for development alongside the existing Ibri II Solar IPP.

Separately, an RfQ and RfP are expected to go out as part of the procurement of Oman's first-ever Waste-to-Energy project. OPWP plans to procure the roughly 150 MW-capacity project in coordination with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah).

Also during 2023, OPWP plans to initiate a study into the feasibility of establishing a Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) plant in the country.

A separate study will also explore options for energy storage and an optimised energy mix.

In the water sector, initiatives for priority attention include Barka V Independent Water Project (IWP) – a 100,000 m3 plant slated for commercial operation in Q2 2024, and the 300,000 m3 Al Ghubrah IWP, which has commenced construction.

Oman among top LNG exporters in the world

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as among the top ten liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporters in the world, driven by a surge in demand for clean energy sources. The country's LNG exports reached a record high of 1.16 million metric tonnes (MT) in April 2023, an increase of 0.08 million metric tonnes in the previous month.

According to the monthly gas report of GEFC (Gas Exporting Countries Forum), the top ten LNG exporters in the world include the US, Qatar, Australia, Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Algeria, Nigeria, Oman and Trinidad and Tobago.

The report said that in April 2023, global LNG exports increased sharply by 6 per cent (1.95 MT) y-o-y to 35.58 MT. Non-



GEFC countries were the largest LNG exporter in April 2023, with a market share of 50.2 per cent, representing an increase from 47.5 per cent in April 2022. Oman is not a member of GEFC.

Oman's rise as a major LNG exporter can be attributed to the country's strategic location,

abundant natural gas reserves and modern infrastructure.

The country has invested heavily in developing its LNG industry over the past few years, with the aim of capitalising on the growing demand for clean energy in Asia and Europe. One of the key factors that have contributed to Oman's

success as an LNG exporter is its proximity to major markets such as China, Japan and South Korea.

These countries are among the world's largest consumers of LNG, and Oman's location allows it to supply LNG to these markets at a competitive price. China remains the leading market of Oman crude

exports. China remains the top destination of Oman crude.

In recent years, Oman has also made significant investments in expanding its natural gas production capacity. The country has discovered several new gas fields, including the Mabrouk field, which is estimated to hold around 4 trillion cubic feet of gas.

In January, Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced the start of the gas and condensate production from the Mabrouk field in Concession 10, in which production is expected to reach more than 0.5 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) of gas by mid-2024.

New developments such as BP's Khazzan and Ghazeer tight gas projects have also boosted production by more than 1 billion cubic feet per day since the start of their operation in 2017 and 2020

respectively.

Oman has also undertaken several projects to enhance its LNG export infrastructure, including the planned construction of a new LNG terminal at Sohar Port.

The surge in LNG exports from Oman is also being driven by the growing demand for clean energy sources in Asia and Europe.

Several countries in these regions are looking to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and shift towards cleaner sources of energy, such as natural gas. As a result, demand for LNG has been increasing rapidly in recent years, and Oman is well-positioned to capitalise on this trend.

Amid record production, the Sultanate of Oman now exports liquefied natural gas to more than 20 countries globally, with Croatia's Krk LNG terminal set to receive its first LNG cargo later this month.

Muzn signs Term Wakala agreement with Oman Air

MUSCAT: NBO's Islamic banking window, Muzn, has signed a Term Wakala agreement with national carrier, Oman Air, providing long-term financing to secure assets with Shariah-compliant financial solutions.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, said, "We are proud to support the development of Oman's national carrier, Oman Air, and provide the flexible financial options required in this rapidly changing market."

This year Muzn marked its 10-year anniversary and we will continue unleashing new potential in Oman's corporate sector by proactively making connections.

We have made banking simple and easy, and built around the needs of our customers so that they can achieve their goals while ensuring the financial solutions adhere to our ethical practices."



As the first Islamic banking window in Oman, Muzn has been at the forefront of innovative solutions in Oman's Islamic Finance sector for more than a decade.

By remaining true to our roots, Muzn has delivered the best banking experience without compromise by introducing a growing range of Islamic banking services based around the needs of customers and providing intuitive banking with convenient, headache-free Shariah-compliant banking products that are accessible to all.

Oman Power and Energy Forum to attract over 500 industry experts

MUSCAT: Under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, IEEE PowerTalks — Oman Power and Energy Conference — is set to commence on May 22 in the Sultanate of Oman. Taking place at the Grand Millennium Hotel in Muscat, the three-day forum will feature both local and international participants from the power and energy sector. Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured), Minister of Energy and Minerals, will be the Chief Guest & Keynote Speaker at the forum.

The forum will explore the most recent advancements in the power and energy industry, as well as the progress made by the Sultanate of Oman in its energy transition initiatives, in alignment with the goals set forth in Oman Vision 2040.



Attendees can also expect to gain insights into the latest

technologies and innovations in the field, as well as engage in knowledge-sharing sessions with officials, experts, and specialists from both the Sultanate of Oman and other countries.

Sharing details on the upcoming event, Prof Abdullah al Badi, Chairman of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics

Engineers (IEEE) Oman Section, said, "Following the outstanding success of the inaugural edition in 2022, IEEE Power Talks – Oman's Power & Energy Forum returns for fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration among industry leaders and representatives from various organisations."

The forum's agenda aims to disseminate expertise and showcase cutting-edge technologies and innovations in the power and energy sector through a plenary session, panel discussions, expert presentations, workshops, and masterclasses.

These significant interactions will contribute greatly to Oman's potential as a prominent energy hub in the region and accelerate the energy transition process in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

OAB provides customers with financing opportunities for La Vie properties

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB), Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB) and Oman Real Estate Investment Services (ORIS) have signed a joint agreement allowing customers to access a full range of financing solutions and competitive rates when purchasing property at new project La Vie in Muscat Hills.

Customers can now finance off-plan units via an OAB housing loan, with full details and terms available from OAB's sales agents and branches. The agreement was signed by Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB; Ali al Mani, General Manager of AIB; and Engineer Nasser al Shibli, Chief Real Estate Officer of ORIS.

The La Vie project covers an area of around 640,000 square meters and features a natural golf course spanning 600,000 square meters, complete with 18 holes and a private club managed by the world-renowned golf management company "Troon."

The project also comprises of residential, commercial, and tourism buildings with a built-up area of 64,000 square meters. The centerpiece of the development is an 80-room boutique hotel managed by TIVOLI, with the largest rooftop swimming pool in Muscat to date, providing panoramic views of the golf course.

The Hotel will also provide a private health club, and spa operated by the world-leading brand 'Anantara.' TIVOLI will also manage 100 fully serviced branded apartments. The residential complex comprises of



8 independent luxury villas and 22 apartments, all offering spectacular views of the golf course and Al Hajar Mountains.

The project also includes approximately 2,800 square meters of retail space hosting a variety of international brands, some of which are new to the Omani market. Sulaiman al Harthy said: "This joint agreement will give prospective buyers increased financial flexibility when purchasing property at the outstanding new LA VIE development in Muscat Hills. We pride ourselves on the wide suite of financial products we offer to our customers, giving them an excellent range of options when making their most important purchases."

"I would like to extend my thanks to my colleagues at Alizz Islamic Bank and our counterparts at Oman Real Estate Investment Services (ORIS) for all their hard work to

make this agreement possible. I look forward to working with them on this project and, I hope, many more in the future."

Nasser al Shibli said "We are delighted to collaborate with Oman Arab Bank and Alizz Islamic Bank to offer customers a comprehensive range of financing options and competitive rates when purchasing properties at La Vie.

Located in the heart of Muscat, this exceptional development offers a unique lifestyle experience and a range of amenities to its residents. Through this joint agreement, we aim to provide buyers with the necessary financial flexibility and convenience to purchase their dream home at La Vie. We are confident that this partnership will contribute to the success of the project, and we look forward to exploring further opportunities for collaboration with both banks in the future."

OTE competition keeps service advisors' skills on cutting-edge

MUSCAT: Building on the success of the maiden edition of its skills competition held last year, OTE Group invited its cadre of service advisors to compete for awards in yet another contest designed to constantly raise the bar on customer service standards championed by the group's various automotive departments and its leasing arm VLC.

Launched for the first time in 2022, the skills competition is conducted in multiple stages over a period of four weeks. Vying for prizes, comprising trophies, gifts and certificates, are the majority of the group's service advisors.

Their role as 'Customer Service Champions' – liaising between customers and the technical teams – is pivotal to OTE's goal of sustaining and building enduring customer loyalty across its automotive brands.

During the phased competition, the contestants showed off their tried-and-tested skills as Service Advisors. Overseeing the competition was a panel comprised of veterans drawn from the automotive sector. In the first round, they were evaluated for their knowledge of the Six-Step Customer Care process – the essential toolkit of customer service



champions.

Candidates who cleared this round were then invited to role-play their responsibilities when receiving customers with their vehicles, and at the time of delivery of the vehicles.

The role-plays helped evaluate their Interpersonal skills, politeness, and overall approach towards the customers. In the ultimate round, the finalists were assessed for their aptitude, interpersonal and communication skills, attention to detail, and ability to handle a customer's queries, concerns and even distress over unmet expectations.

Emerging the winner in the 2023 Skills Competition was Usman Tufail Bajwa, who proudly received a trophy and a gift voucher for his outstanding performance.

First Runner-Up was Rahul Kumar, while Anish Mathew and Ahmed al Ghazali were named 2nd Runner-up winners. They too received individual trophies and gift vouchers.

Other finalists were presented with Certificates of Appreciation for their efforts.

"This annual contest is an opportunity for our growing contingent of Service Advisors to constantly hone their skills and outshine their colleagues in customer service delivery," said Dileep Kaul, Senior General Manager, OTE Group.

"In an increasingly competitive marketplace, it's our service standards that will give us an edge over the competition; hence the need to keep our Service Advisors performing at the top of their game."

Bank Muscat to participate in 32nd edition of COMEX

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to promote digitalisation, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its participation in the 32nd edition of COMEX, which will be held on May 22-25, 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

As the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation

show in the Sultanate of Oman, COMEX 2023 offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly-specialised platform for industry-leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings and the bank's participation and support are in line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy.

Organised by Oman International Trade and Exhibitions (OITE) Group in



partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and

Information Technology and the Implementation Follow-up Unit

of Oman Vision 2040, COMEX 2023 aims to boost the concept of digital investments in Oman.

It encourages Omani companies to adapt the latest technological breakthroughs and advances in a manner that is consistent with Oman Vision 2040's goals supportive to digital transformation.

This year's edition will be attended by more than 100 local and international organisations, government entities and

corporates.

Bank Muscat will be showcasing some of its cutting-edge, customer-centric services and features at the 4-day long exhibition.

This includes demonstrating its secure QR code e-payments solution, which is very helpful for small and micro businesses in accepting e-payments from customers, thereby meeting the regulations on providing e-payment options.



Oil steady as demand worries face tight supply outlook

TOKYO: Oil prices were steady on Wednesday after a surprise rise in US crude inventories stoked demand concerns as economic worries competed with a tighter supply outlook for later in the year.

Brent crude futures rose 19 cents, or 0.3%, to \$74.95 a barrel. West Texas Intermediate US crude was up 20 cents or 0.3% to \$70.86 at 1145 GMT.

The International Energy Agency on Tuesday predicted demand would outpace supply by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) in the second half of the year, with China making up 60% of oil demand growth in 2023.

“Crude prices remain heavy as energy traders just can’t shake off global demand concerns. It doesn’t matter how upbeat everyone is for China’s second half of the year, the current situation is too disappointing,” said Edward Moya, an analyst.

US crude stockpiles rose by about 3.6 million barrels in the week ended May 12, according to market sources citing American Petroleum Institute figures. Seven analysts had expected a 900,000 barrel drawdown.

The crude inventory build added to concerns about US growth after data showed retail sales rose 0.4% in April, short of estimates for an increase of 0.8%.

In China, April industrial output and retail sales growth undershot forecasts, suggesting the economy lost momentum at the beginning of the second quarter. — **Reuters**

Oman’s Tender Board to exempt bidders from submitting temporary bid security

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 17

As part of its efforts to embody the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and its ongoing measures to improve the business environment and address companies’ financial liquidity challenges, the Tender Board has determined criteria for exempting bidding companies from providing temporary bid security/guarantee as a condition for taking part in the tender.

The royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan had stipulated that companies should be exempted from providing the 1% temporary bid security when submitting their bid for a period of one year.

This exemption aims at facilitating bidding procedures for tenders, increasing the number



of companies taking part in the government tenders, and increasing the capabilities of the small and medium enterprises to compete for government tenders as well as encouraging competition in the tendering process in order to obtain the best bids.

To ensure the seriousness and the capabilities in implementing

the bids, the participating company in the tender must sign a document confirming its commitment to the submitted bid proposal for the determined period of the adopted bidding strategy. In accordance with Article 28 of the Tenders Law, the bid-offer that is less than 20% of the other submitted bids and then the estimated cost of the bid, will

be excluded as it proves that it does not meet the terms of the bid and is unable to implement it.

Companies that withdraw before the end of the specified validity period of the tender will be deprived of participating in government tenders for a period of one year.

Government entities must notify the General Secretariat of the Tender Board within 10 working days about companies that withdraw from tenders during the validity period of their bids.

The temporary bid security must also be provided in two cases, which are: tenders whose estimated cost exceeds RO 3 million, and its annual economic return exceeding above 10 per cent of the estimated cost of the tender.

And the international tenders

are submitted by international companies that do not have headquarters offices in the Sultanate of Oman, except the companies which are participating in tenders for the supply of medicines and medical supplies.

It is worth noting that the General-Secretariat of the Tender Board works to manage and implement government procurement in accordance with an advanced model in organising and managing tenders and providing services with transparency and professionalism in order to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction while ensuring the proper and efficient use of public money in accordance with best practices and principles of transparency, equal opportunities, equality and freedom of competition.

Forum discusses VAT impact on Oman’s real estate sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAY 17

Oman’s real estate sector is experiencing the effects of the recently introduced value-added tax (VAT), which came into effect on January 1, 2021. While the implementation of VAT has presented challenges, it also brings potential benefits to the industry.

The sector is grappling with complexities and a lack of awareness surrounding the new tax regime. However, increased transparency, reduced fraud, and the potential for heightened investment opportunities offer a glimmer of hope for Oman’s real estate market.

The forum began with a presentation by Jay Dusseja, Associate Director – Tax, MMJS Consulting.



Real estate businesses in Oman are confronted with the intricate nature of VAT legislation.

Complying with the detailed regulations can be daunting, particularly for those unfamiliar with VAT or lacking the necessary resources to navigate the complexities effectively.

Many players in the real estate sector are still unaware of the specific requirements of VAT or fail to fully comprehend the

implications.

This lack of awareness increases the risk of errors, potentially resulting in penalties imposed by the Oman Tax Authority and hampering the sector’s smooth operation.

Certain aspects of the VAT rules and regulations lack clarity, leading to divergent interpretations among businesses and the tax authority. This ambiguity can give rise to disputes, further complicating VAT compliance and potentially creating inefficiencies within the sector.

VAT mandates the disclosure of the VAT component in real estate prices, promoting a more transparent market environment.

This transparency empowers buyers and investors to make informed decisions, with a clear understanding of the tax implications, fostering trust and

confidence in the sector.

VAT requirements, such as issuing invoices for all real estate transactions, act as a deterrent against fraudulent practices.

By enforcing proper documentation and transparency in financial transactions, VAT safeguards the interests of both businesses and customers, ensuring a more secure marketplace.

The stability and predictability of the tax environment provided by VAT have the potential to attract increased investment to Oman’s real estate sector.

The Oman Tax Authority’s efforts to provide guidance and training will aid in overcoming the challenges associated with VAT compliance. As the sector adapts to the new tax regime, its ability to leverage these changes will shape its future trajectory.

GCC economic growth expected to slow to 2.5% in 2023

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 17

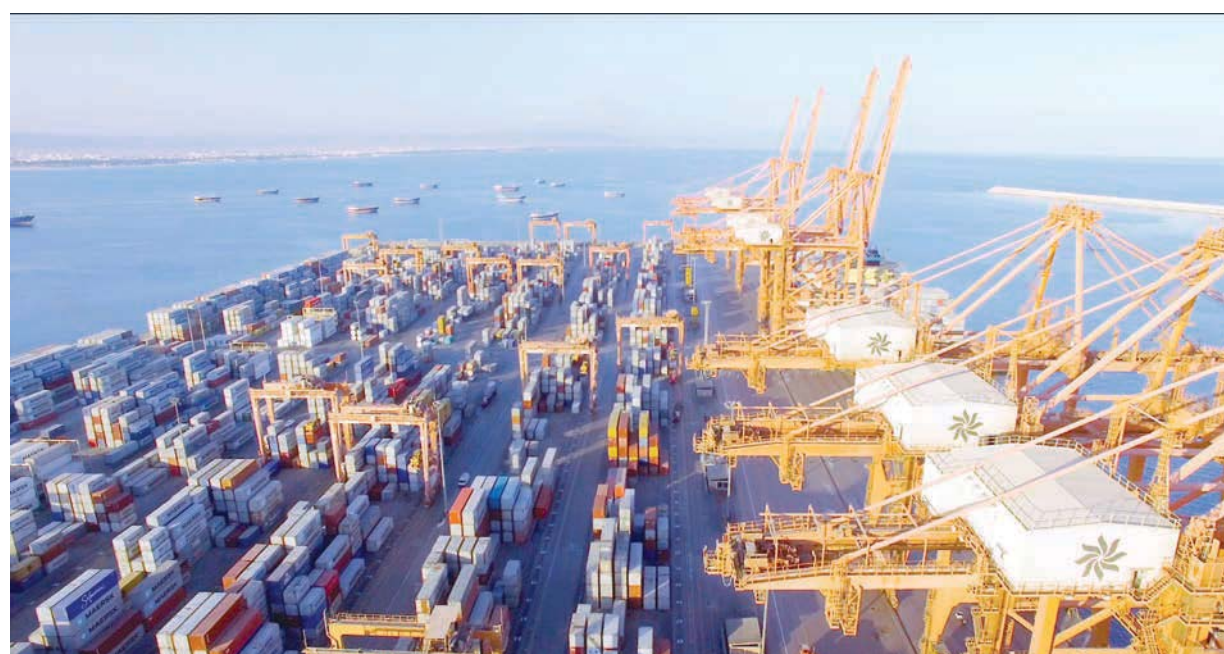
The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are projected to grow at a slower pace in 2023 compared to the previous year, in the face of lower oil and gas earnings and a global economic slowdown, according to the new World Bank Gulf Economic Update (GEU).

The GCC is expected to grow by 2.5% in 2023 and 3.2% in 2024. This compares to the region’s remarkable GDP growth of 7.3% in 2022, which was fuelled by a strong increase in oil production for most of that year.

The weaker performance is driven primarily by lower hydrocarbon GDP, which is expected to contract by 1.3% in 2023 after the Opec+ April 2023 production cut announcement and the global economic slowdown.

However, robust growth in the non-oil sectors, which is anticipated to reach 4.6% in 2023, will dampen the shortfall in hydrocarbon activities, driven primarily by private consumption, fixed investments, and looser fiscal policy in response to 2023’s relatively high oil revenues.

The latest issue of the World Bank’s GEU states that this



year’s more modest growth is nonetheless buoyed by the structural reforms undertaken in the past few years.

Improvement to the business climate and competitiveness, and the overall improvements in female labour force participation in the GCC countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, have all paid off, though further diversification efforts are still needed and is underway.

Oman: Oman’s economy is forecast to continue to grow, but at a slower pace, driven primarily by accelerated implementation of structural reforms under Oman

Vision 2040. Overall growth is projected to moderate to 1.5% in 2023 reflecting softening global demand.

Accordingly, the hydrocarbon sector is anticipated to contract by 3.3% reflecting Opec+ recent production cuts while the non-oil economy is projected to continue its recovery trajectory by growing 3.1% in 2023 supported by frontloading of infrastructure projects, increased industrial capacity from renewable energy, and the tourism sector.

Bahrain: Bahrain’s economic outlook hangs on oil market prospects and the results of the

accelerated implementation of its structural reforms’ agenda under the revised Fiscal Balance Program. Growth is projected to moderate to 2.7% in 2023 before averaging 3.2% during 2024-25 as fiscal adjustments continue.

Growth in the hydrocarbon sector is expected to contract by 0.5% in 2023 while the non-hydrocarbon sectors will continue expanding by 3.5% supported by the recovery in the tourism and service sectors and the continuation of infrastructure projects.

Kuwait: Economic growth is expected to slow to 1.3% in 2023

IMPROVEMENT TO THE BUSINESS CLIMATE AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND THE OVERALL IMPROVEMENTS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN THE GCC COUNTRIES HAVE ALL PAID OFF, THOUGH FURTHER DIVERSIFICATION EFFORTS ARE STILL NEEDED AND IS UNDERWAY.

in response to a more cautious Opec+ production approach and sluggish global economic activity. The Oil sector is anticipated to contract by 2.2% in 2023 despite the newly established Al Zour refinery.

Kuwait’s non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.4% in 2023 driven primarily by private consumption. Policy uncertainty caused by political deadlock is expected to undermine the implementation of new infrastructure projects.

Qatar: Real GDP is estimated to slow down to 3.3% in 2023 after the strong performance registered in 2022, with the hydrocarbon sector expanding by 0.8%.

The North Field expansion project is expected to boost the hydrocarbon sector in the medium term once the field enters commercial operation.

Meanwhile, robust growth is

anticipated during this year in the non-hydrocarbon sectors, reaching 4.3%, driven by private and public consumption.

Saudi Arabia: Following a stellar GDP expansion of 8.7% in 2022, economic growth is projected to decelerate to 2.2% in 2023. A fall in oil production — as Saudi Arabia abides by Opec+ agreed production cuts — will contract oil sector GDP by 2%.

However, with oil prices remaining at relatively high levels, loose fiscal policy and robust private credit growth are expected to cushion the contraction in the oil sector. As a result, non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.7% in 2023.

United Arab Emirates: Economic growth in 2023 is expected to slow compared to 2022 due to a decline in global economic activity, contraction in oil production, and tightening financial conditions.

Accordingly, real GDP is projected to grow by 2.8% in 2023 to reflect a decline in oil activity growth of 2.5% while a strong non-oil sector growth of 4.8% will soften the contraction in oil activities, driven by robust domestic demand, particularly in the tourism, real estate, construction, transportation, and manufacturing sectors.

Will Artificial Intelligence take away jobs?



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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

At a time when the number of job-seekers is increasing in various countries of the world, newspaper headlines warn us that artificial intelligence may eliminate more than 80 per cent of jobs in various specialisations in the future. Today artificial intelligence has become an alternative through electronic machines to do the work that is assigned to people in some professions. This was discussed at the “Web Summit” that was held recently in

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Very often, we see machines playing a certain role assigned to humans, as was the recent case of robotic nurse designed to take care of the elderly people. Such machines are expected to be used by thousands of the elderly in Japan and the Scandinavian countries, for example. As for most Arab countries, the human life expectancy does not exceed 60 to 70 years, on average, as a result of the lack and rudimentary nature of health services, not to mention the wars being witnessed in this region

from time to time. In addition, medical services in most Arab countries have not reached the levels of developed countries in the West, Japan and others, leading to a decline in the lifespan due to diseases and other perils. The robotic nurse which was created recently, has many capabilities in knowledge and technologies. These capabilities can be developed in the coming years to play the role assigned to it in other matters. With the advancement of human use of new systems in

vital fields, it is certain that many people will obtain work related to artificial intelligence fields within technologies and programmes related to those sectors. Therefore, there will be new areas for technical, administrative and technical work in the world. There is no doubt that this change in roles today represents a threat to humans who worry they will lose their jobs to machines that will perform them. But this should not be a source of worry and fear that people will lose their jobs. At best, machines operating on artificial intelligence

will increase the speed and quality of daily work. The world lives today with robots and automatic devices to replace some in the jobs assigned to them. This may result in some people made redundant. But humans work with spirit, body, intellect, emotional intelligence, and thinking outside the box. Today, there are concerns that artificial intelligence can be used to engage in fraud, forgery, and extortion. Still, there are thousands of occupations that machines cannot handle.

India’s airline turbulence will be felt abroad



A Go First airline, formerly known as GoAir, Airbus A320-271N passenger aircraft prepares to take off from Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Mumbai. – Reuters

SHRITAMA BOSE

Clouds are gathering over the world’s third largest aviation market. India’s Go First has gone into bankruptcy – the country’s second airline to do so since 2019. Its subsequent public and messy spat with engine suppliers and lessors will have ripple effects across the industry and abroad. A bonanza of cheap fuel between 2014 and 2018 helped Go, as well as competitors like \$11 billion InterGlobe Aviation’s IndiGo and SpiceJet, to expand aggressively. Daily passenger traffic is soaring but financial stress is rising because of cutthroat competition, high taxes and airport charges, and other issues. Rebounding crude prices is hurting too. In 2019, one-time giant Jet Airways shut up shop, following a price war. Aircraft emblazoned with both defunct companies’ logos are now grounded on Indian airstrips. Go, the country’s third largest airline with a 7 per cent market share, blames Raytheon Technologies-backed Pratt & Whitney’s “faulty” engines. But the ultra-low cost carrier has posted three consecutive years of heavy losses and delayed listing plans. It owes some 65 billion rupees (\$798 million) to financial creditors including the Central Bank of India and Deutsche Bank, and more to vendors and lessors. The sector’s debt including

lease costs stood at \$12 billion in the year to March 2023 – at par with overall revenue, per estimates by rating agency Ica. Unhappy lessors are fighting back. A New Delhi tribunal has barred them from repossessing planes parked with Go, triggering a legal battle between the carrier and companies including Summitomo-backed SMBC Aviation Capital. A global industry association, Aviation Working Group, has put India on a watchlist for violating global conventions on repossession of airplanes. That might raise lease premiums for other airlines to account for uncertainties around clawing back aircraft in the country. All this threatens to pinch Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ambitions to turn India into a global aviation hub. His administration is building 73 new airports and pushing homegrown carriers to grab share from Singapore Airlines and Gulf rivals like Emirates and Qatar Airways on long-haul flights. More Indians will choose flights over trains and buses: official estimates expect traffic through the country’s six largest airports to more than double in the next five years. Tata group-controlled Air India bought a record 470 new aircraft in March and IndiGo, which boasts a 57 per cent share of the domestic market, is in talks for a 500-jet purchase. The trouble at Go may not put them off but it promises some extra turbulence ahead. — Reuters

Ukraine rebuilding would be small wager for Europe



PIERRE BRIANÇON

The author is a Breakingviews columnist, writing on European business and economics.

In 1991, the year Ukraine became independent after years as a Soviet republic, its GDP per capita was 21% higher than that of Poland, which had just broken free from the defunct communist bloc. Thirty years later, Poland’s output per capita was 2.7 times that of its southern neighbour. When the war-torn country starts rebuilding, it will have the opportunity to make up for lost ground. Europe has both the financial capacity and the political interest to play the leading part in the rebirth of its wounded ally. Russia’s invasion of its neighbour in February last year interrupted a slow reform drive in Ukraine. The irony is that effort had started when Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea in 2014, thus ensuring that Ukraine would firmly aspire to belong to Europe. The war inflicted severe damage on Ukraine, with GDP down 30% last year according

to the International Monetary Fund. Despite this, the economy held together. Reforms, however, were far from completed, and as Kyiv’s allies discuss what is needed to rebuild the country, they will have to pay to heal both pre-war and post-war economic wounds. Rebuilding Ukraine will require help, expertise and guidance – and a lot of time and money. Yet the costs are within what Ukraine’s allies and multilateral organisations can afford. The divergence between Poland and Ukraine since the end of communism in Europe has a lot to do with the former joining the European Union in 2004. The latter, on the other hand, took the corrupt path of an oligarch-financed economy, along the lines of the Russian model. Ukraine’s Deputy Economy Minister Oleksandr Gryban, in a recent interview in Kyiv with Breakingviews, referred to those years as his country’s “three lost decades.” Ukraine now has a team of reform-minded ministers and in the last few years has embarked on a serious overhaul of its once-shady banking system. That helps explain its surprising performance since the war began – even with an unemployment rate at 20%, inflation running at 21% this year and the central bank’s key interest rate set at 25%. Private savings have doubled, in absolute terms and amounted to 36.5% of GDP last year,

according to the IMF. In another sign of confidence in the government of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the unofficial level of the national currency, the hryvnia, has remained within 5% of the official rate. And foreign currency reserves, now at \$36 billion, are at their highest level in a year. International aid was key to holding the Ukrainian economy together. Natalia Shapoval, chair of the Kyiv School of Economics Institute, notes that foreign money is helping finance roughly half the government’s budget deficit, expected to balloon to 28% of GDP this year from 4% in 2021, according to the IMF. Ukraine’s allies contributed some \$31 billion last year. According to the World Bank, the government still needs about \$3 billion a month in outside help to keep paying soldiers, teachers, and rising social transfers. In the first four months of 2023, the European Union overtook the US as top donor to Ukraine, according to finance ministry numbers, injecting some \$6.5 billion into the government budget. Were the aid to continue at that rate, it would total \$19.5 billion for the whole of 2023. That’s just 0.1% of the EU’s GDP – a small tax to pay to keep Putin at bay. Funding the country’s reconstruction once the war is finally over will cost more. In their most recent report, the World Bank and other international organisations estimated Ukraine’s future rebuild will require at least

some \$410 billion over 10 years – or 2.6 times its 2022 GDP. The number sounds impressive. Look closer, though, and it is largely affordable for Ukraine’s allies, even if Europe had to shoulder the whole burden. Even under extreme and unlikely assumptions that public money would fund half of the \$410 billion needed through non-repayable grants, and that non-Europeans would suddenly stop all aid to Ukraine, the EU could fund the entire reconstruction by spending \$20.5 billion a year for a decade – in line with its current 0.1%-of-GDP contribution to Ukraine’s budget. In practice, the EU’s outlay would be lower because most of the reconstruction money could come from private investors, and much of the public funding would be extended through loans or credit guarantees. And the United States, Japan and multilateral organisations such as the IMF will continue to flank Europe in its efforts to rebuild Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is in Europe’s interest to play a major part in Ukraine’s reconstruction before the country is accepted as a formal candidate member of the EU. The bloc’s governments might want to consider that spending 0.1% of GDP to bring a former Soviet republic into the fold would be a small and shrewd investment to help Ukraine embark at last on a Polish-style growth path. — Reuters



Ukrainian national flag flies near buildings destroyed by Russian military strike in Borodianska, in Kyiv region. – Reuters

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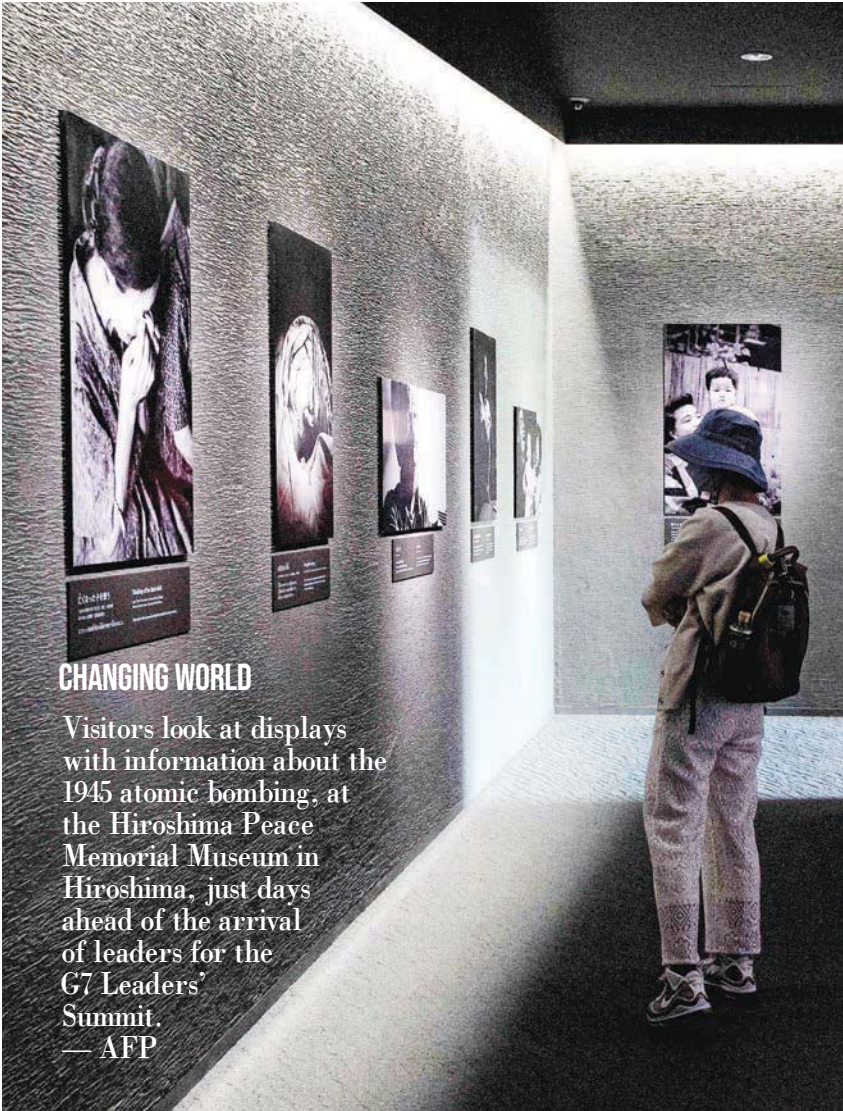
ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actors Sara Ali Khan (L) and Vicky Kaushal (R) pose for pictures during the trailer launch of their upcoming film ‘Zara Hatke Zara Bachke’ in Mumbai . — AFP



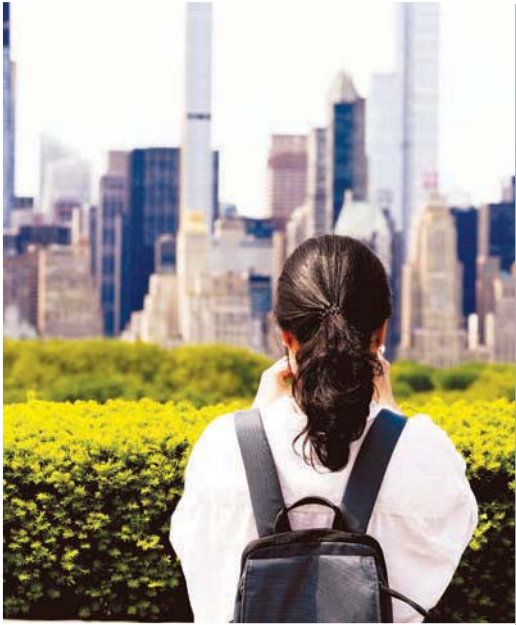
FASHION

A model presents a creation by Italian brand Gucci during the Gucci 2024 Cruise Collection Fashion Show at Gyeongbok-gung Palace in Seoul. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Visitors look at displays with information about the 1945 atomic bombing, at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, just days ahead of the arrival of leaders for the G7 Leaders' Summit. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

A visitor looks out at Midtown Manhattan from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. — AFP



ROYAL WATCH

Britain's Queen Camilla (L) and Britain's King Charles III react as they look at the stands displayed at the Covent Garden market, in central London during their first joint engagement since the coronation. — AFP

art & life

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Take a summer drive from Sur to Nizwa

The drive from Sur to Nizwa is a captivating odyssey through Oman's diverse landscapes and storied heritage. This summer, embark upon this remarkable journey, and let the road lead you to untamed beauty and memorable experiences

ENTERTAINMENT

At Cannes, independent film firms optimistic as streamers stumble

INDEPENDENT FILM companies facing a market upended by the entry of streaming services are showing some optimism heading into this year's Cannes Film Festival as the Netflix era has begun flattening out and audiences start trickling back into cinemas post-pandemic.

While buyers are being cautious about purchasing volumes amid a shaky global economy, they are showing up at festivals and being active — a trend that Todd Brown, head of international acquisitions at US-based XYZ Films, said he expects to continue.

Cannes may make headlines for

its glitz and glamour, but as the world's largest event for buying and selling movie rights, its importance to the industry is unparalleled.

Some 12,500 industry professionals involved in buying, selling or producing movies in some form show up at the market, where almost 4,000 films and projects are put on display and hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of deals are done.

Except for a handful of titles that will do well no matter what, the market is pretty competitive this year, said Laura Wilson, head of acquisitions at Britain-based Altitude Films.



"It doesn't feel like a buyers' or sellers' market," she said.

Both Brown and Wilson said they are betting on audiences returning to the cinema. "Ultimately, we are optimistic about theatrical," said Wilson.

AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc this month reported positive quarterly results boosted by "The Super

Mario Bros. Movie," and the world's largest cinema chain operator said it expected "The Little Mermaid", "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" and "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" to generate box-office sales for the rest of the year.

However, Brian O'Shea, CEO at The Exchange, based in Los Angeles, did not see as much cause for opti-

mism in the numbers.

"The box office that is beneficial to independent film is depressed" as it is primarily older viewers, who wanted to avoid getting sick during the coronavirus pandemic, and have become used to watching movies from the comfort of home, he said.

"It's a transitional time on the business side as the traditional business model that independent buyers use sees lessened value," said O'Shea.

Global film companies like the Walt Disney Co, Paramount and Warner Bros joined the streaming revolution to counter the threat posed by Netflix Inc to traditional TV but are now facing a crowded market where the competition to increase subscriber numbers is fierce.

"Everybody's been really focused on the shock impact of the streamer contraction ... but the other thing it does for traditional theatrical distribution is narrow the focus of

what the streamers are doing and what kind of film they want to do and how they want to do them, so for everything else there's ... space for counterprogramming," Brown said.

The similarity among much of the content offered on streaming platforms leaves theatre audiences wanting something different, an unmet appetite that independent companies could fulfil, he said.

Proof of that argument is how well last year's "Triangle of Sadness" and "Joyland" did in Europe, and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" in the United States and worldwide. "Those are movies that are radically not streamer movies," said Brown.

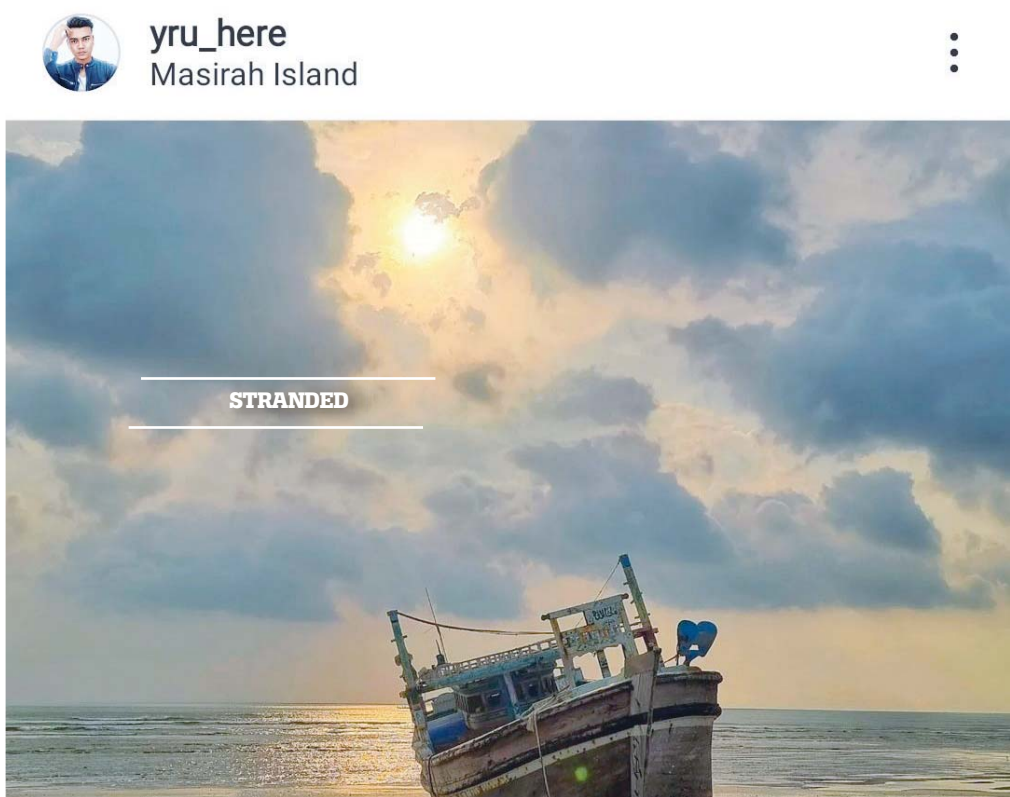
However, in one sign that streamers are focusing more on cinema in a bid to stand out from the crowd, Apple Inc will premiere Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" starring Leonardo DiCaprio at Cannes and has teamed up with Paramount to release the film in theatres before streaming it globally in October.

"Something good is happening, and I'm sure other streaming services will follow suit," Cannes Film Festival director Thierry Fremaux said in an interview with Le Film francais magazine in April. — Reuters



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



By Erin Coyle

Some may think driving from Sur to Nizwa for a day trip is a bit crazy, and while it might be, it was fun being a tourist for the day while revisiting some old places I had been to recently and seeing some new places, like the new museum.

Even though I visited Birkat Al Mouz a few months ago and have been to the Nizwa Souq several times, it's funny how there's always something new to discover. And while my friends and I left Sur around 6:45 in the morning, the trip was worth it, even in this heat!

Below are some of my highlights from the trip, including a visit to Birkat Al Mouz, Oman Across Ages Museum and the Nizwa Souq.

BIRKAT AL MOUZ

I can never get enough of visiting these ancient ruins. I like wandering around the narrow passages and looking inside some old rooms while admiring the large date tree farms from afar and capturing a few pictures of wooden doors.

The highlight was cooling off at Bait Al Sabah's cafe with friends and cold iced coffees. It was my first time here, and I immediately noticed the hanging clay water pitchers and a mini traditional wooden door hanging on the wall. When it's cooler, visitors can sit outside on the terrace, looking at the ruins and date tree farms. Before walking upstairs to the cafe, go towards the left near the reception desk to see the falaj inside a small entranceway.

OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM

About twenty minutes from the Nizwa Souq, one cannot help but notice the modern white building with a pond of water in front. Some may want to get out of the car to take a few photos because the design of this museum is not what you expect it to be. Large metal pillars lined up in three rows hang from the ceiling to the bottom of the floor to the left of the entrance.

Walking inside the massive lobby, guests will learn that there are two main sections, the history and renaissance galleries. Guided tours are also available.

The history gallery contains eight rooms containing information about the aflaj system, geology, maritime, Islam, etc. The Renaissance gallery features facts about Oman from 1970 onwards. One of my favourite sections in the Renaissance



gallery was the scrolling pictures on columns of people and places in Oman. I also enjoyed learning about the aflaj system.

The museum is also interactive and hands-on, so visitors can practice building a ship, sailing and learning about different materials for the aflaj. When wanting information about various rocks, put your hand above one, and the details will appear on the screen. My friends and I were impressed with the architecture, history, technology, and museum size. We did not expect to stay more than two

hours. There are also two cafes and a gift shop.

NIZWA SOUQ

Our main task was to enjoy a coffee at Anat Cafe inside the souq. This popular place is inside a refurbished traditional mud home. While walking towards the entrance, guests will notice a courtyard below with chairs and a small pool on the other side of the railing. In cooler weather, guests can go outside on the terrace. A trip to the souq would not be com-



plete without a visit to the date souq. The shop sells my favourite ginger and cumin-flavoured dates. I always sit on the couch for some Omani coffee and dates with tahini sauce.

I have been to this shop numerous times, but they showed us how they make the tahini sauce from sesame seeds this time. The bonus was sampling the warm sauce after mixing it with some date syrup. I had three small spoonfuls, but I could have eaten the rest of the mixture but stopped myself.

Our being a tourist for the day soon ended because it was time to grab some food before heading back to Sur. The three-hour and twenty-minute drive was worth the fun day we had. It also helped that we stopped along the way to break up the trip.

While this was not my first time acting like a tourist in Oman, this will also not be the last time I go out and discover new and old places. No matter how often you go to the same place, there will be something new to find.

MUSIC

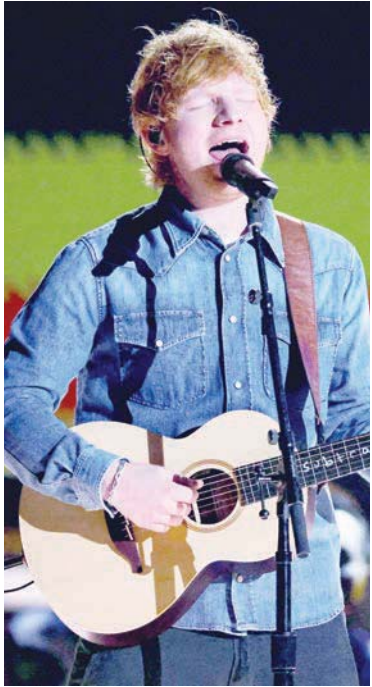
Ed Sheeran beats second copyright lawsuit over 'Thinking Out Loud'

BRITISH SINGER-SONGWRITER Ed Sheeran on Tuesday defeated a second copyright lawsuit in federal court in Manhattan over similarities between his hit "Thinking Out Loud" and Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On."

US District Judge Louis Stanton dismissed the case brought by Structured Asset Sales LLC, ruling that the parts of "Let's Get It On" Sheeran was accused of infringing were too common for copyright protection.

Sheeran won a separate jury trial over the songs in the same court earlier this month.

Stanton presided over both cases, which concerned co-writer



Ed Townsend's share of Gaye's 1973 classic. Townsend's heirs failed to convince jurors that Sheeran infringed their part of Townsend's copyright in the song.

Structured Asset Sales is owned by investment banker and

"Bowie Bonds" creator David Pullman, and it owns part of Townsend's interest in "Let's Get It On." It sued Sheeran, his label Warner Music Group and his music publisher Sony Music Publishing in 2018 after Townsend's heirs filed their lawsuit.

Stanton on Wednesday found that the combination of chord progression and harmonic rhythm in Gaye's song was a "basic musical building block" that was too common to merit copyright protection.

Sheeran's attorney Ilene Farkas called the decision "an important victory not only for Ed" and collaborator Amy Wadge, "but for all songwriters and consumers of music."

Structured Asset Sales has filed another lawsuit against Sheeran based on its rights to Gaye's recording, which is still pending.

Pullman said that the jury in that case will get to hear the recording of "Let's Get It On," as opposed to the computerised rendition of the song's sheet music from the Townsend trial.

"Their biggest fear, in terms of everything they've filed, has been to prevent the sound recording from coming in," Pullman said. — Reuters

DISCOVERY

Study: Bumblebees warm up when carrying pollen

CARRYING POLLEN is a workout that significantly increases the body temperature of bumblebees, researchers have found.

A new study suggests this new understanding of active bumblebee body temperatures raises questions about how they will be impacted by climate change.

The insects carry solid packets of pollen on their back legs, and while it might look like they move from flower to flower with ease, these packets can weigh up to a third of their body weight.

According to the new research, after accounting for environmental temperature and body size, the body temperature of bumblebees carrying pollen was significantly hotter than the temperature of bees that were empty-legged.

Specifically, the North Carolina



State University study found that bee body temperatures rose 0.07 degrees Celsius for every milligram of pollen they carried.

While fully laden bees were 2 degrees Celsius warmer than unladen bees.

Malia Naumchik, a former applied ecology minor undergraduate and lead author of the study, said: "Getting warmer from carrying pollen could put bumblebees in the range of those stressful, critically hot temperatures. "This has important implications for bumblebees and climate change.

As environmental temperatures increase, the bees' operational range of temperatures could shrink significantly."

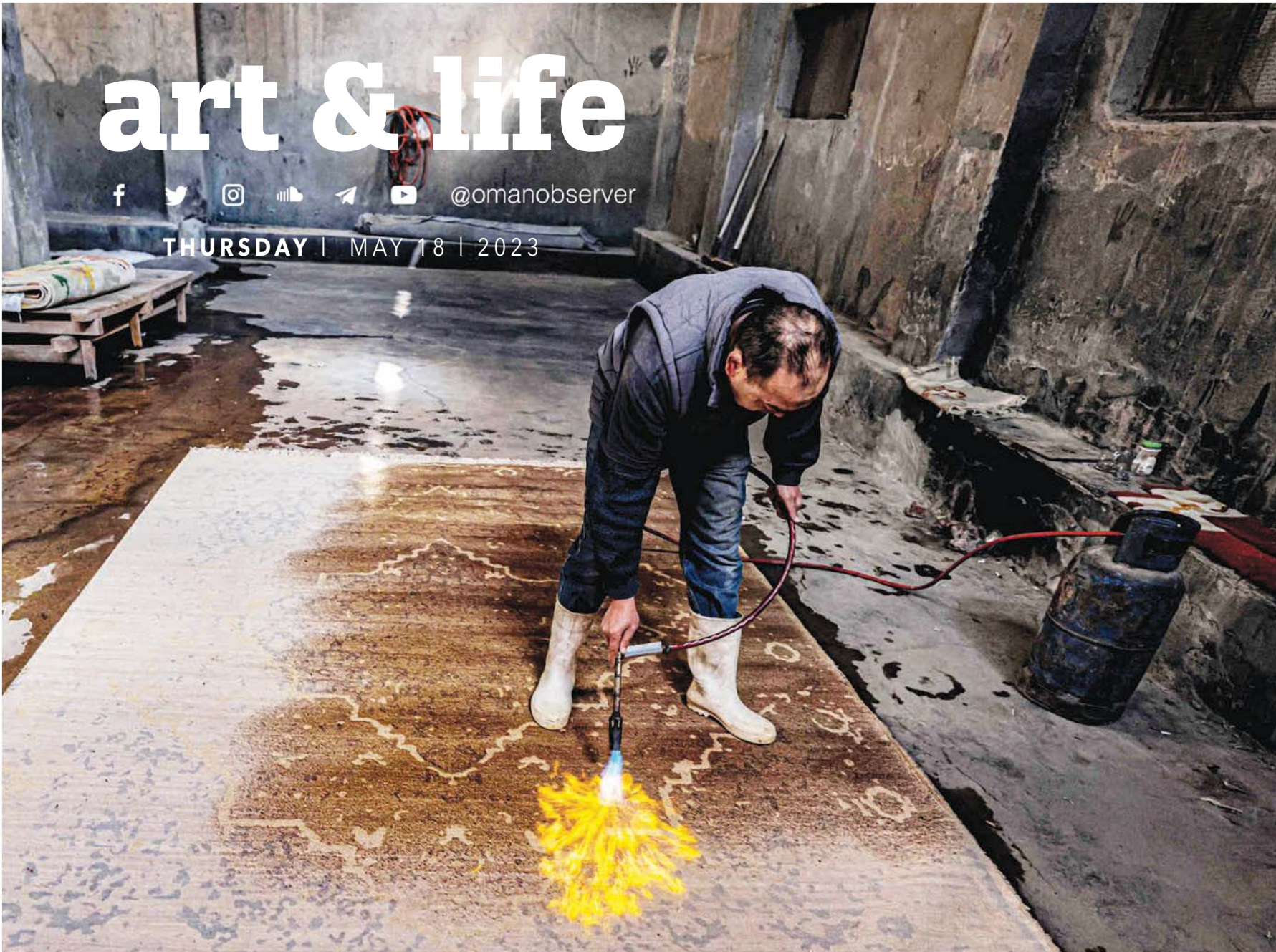
The body temperature of a bumblebee is mostly determined by the environment.

Among bees, bumblebees are exceptionally cold tolerant and will even shiver to warm up during cold days, but not much is known about how they tolerate heat.

Since pollen-laden bumblebees are hotter than unladen ones, this could mean carrying a full load of pollen on a hot day puts bees at greater risk of reaching the potentially lethal end of their temperature tolerance, the researchers suggest.

Pollen is crucial for every stage of a bumblebee's life history, and experts say that without pollen, or enough pollen, colonies will not thrive — risking future colonies and the species as a whole. This may also have implications for pollination in general, and could impact agriculture and ecosystems alike.

Elsa Youngsteadt, a professor in applied ecology and supervisor of the research, said: "We need to know how bumblebees may change their behaviour, to better understand how this could affect how much pollen they collect and how much pollination they perform during hot days." — PA Media/dpa



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THURSDAY | MAY 18 | 2023

LIFESTYLE

Egyptian artisans carve a path to world luxury markets

EGYPTIAN LUXURY BRANDS are harnessing traditional craftsmanship from jewellery design to carpet weaving to bring the country's ancient cultural riches to the world.

Experts in the sector say the global appeal of Arab and Islamic designs from other countries shows Egypt could do more to promote its rich, millennia-old artistic heritage.

One pioneer has been master jeweller Azza Fahmy, whose signature Islamic art-inspired pieces have graced the world's rich and famous including US pop star Rihanna and Jordan's Queen Rania.

Fahmy, who started off in an Old Cairo workshop about 50 years ago, said her focus has been designs that "resonate with Egyptian identity".

Artists and artisans in Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, draw from a history that spans ancient Pharaonic times, the Mamluk, Ottoman and modern eras.

"We are lucky to be able to draw on 6,000 years of history," said textile designer Goya Gallagher, founder of Cairo-based Malaika Linens, which makes high-end household pieces.

"The main challenge is making sure our pieces are timeless, that they're very well made and always hand-made," she said at the company workshop on the western outskirts of Cairo.

MYRIAD CHALLENGES

But while Egypt boasts some business success stories, many more luxury goods makers say they labour against myriad odds to eke out a market both locally and internationally.

In the era of global mass production, Egypt's once expansive pool of skilled artisans has shrunk, with many young people turning their backs on family skills passed down through the ages.

As businesses struggle to fill the talent gap, they also face the headwinds of a painful economic crisis that has tanked the local currency and restricted raw material imports.

The state's efforts to support the handicrafts sector, meanwhile, have been "limited and sporadic", says the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

Culture consultant Dina Hafez agreed that Egypt offers little in the way of formalised arts and crafts training.

"The training of artisans is still essentially based on informal education and networks of apprenticeship," said Hafez of Blue Beyond Consulting.



"The sector lacks any structure. We need a real ecosystem. But for the moment, it's all based on personal initiatives."

She said Egypt could learn from Türkiye and Morocco, "where the opportunities and obstacles look a lot like Egypt", but which had managed to launch "their designs onto the international scene".

SOFT POWER

Still, change is afoot.

Fahmy, the jewellery designer, said there is always space in the market for works made by skilled artisans and "good designers with creative minds and quality education".

Many designers hope to benefit from government initiatives to draw

in investment and tourism revenue from its ancient wonders.

At the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the Giza pyramids, Egyptian luxury stores enjoy pride of place.

Although its official opening has been long delayed, the museum offers limited tours and events, and the shops already "showcase the best of Egyptian crafts", said the owner of one, Mohamed al-Kahhal.

In Cairo's historic centre, linen company Malaika trains women from marginalised backgrounds in embroidery and sells the wares to its customers and to other fashion and textile brands.

Carpet maker Hend al-Kahhal works in the same spirit, of bringing Egyptian identity to global frontiers.

Standing on the factory roof, where wool and silk creations hung out to dry, Kahhal said the family business works with designers "to give a contemporary touch to Pharaonic and Mamluk motifs".

The Egyptian Handicrafts Export Council, under the trade and industry ministry, has long been working to showcase such Egyptian creations internationally.

But Hafez, the culture consultant, said she hopes for more progress in future, as often "budget constraints, red tape and customs regulations don't exactly make things easier".

The question, she said, is whether Egyptian "authorities are really aware of the soft power these creators can have". — AFP

THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI

The difficulty of not being a 'morning person'

'SAVING MY CREDIT CARD'

As a journalist, I have never been a 'morning person'.

Blame it on my profession, which requires my utmost attention only after 11 am.

Many times, I wish I could have the audacity to overcome my greatest weakness, which is waking up early in the morning. When you wake up early, you benefit from running your daily morning demands, as most offices are almost empty by the time I go to work.

I was supposed to be going over a very important official issue with the woman of the house. Actually, it has been a while since I promised myself to go, but you see, this 'anti-morning' problem is on my neck. It feels like a heavy load on my shoulders.

Previously, as the week began on Sunday, I promised her that I would be going on Monday, which I failed to do. I kept failing throughout the week until I gave in to my last promise for Thursday.

Unfortunately, I did not plan it this way, but again, she woke me up at 9 am reminding me that I had to go, and I accepted.

Not knowing she was watching over me, and the time, it was suddenly 11 am and she asked me what happened, as I had not yet left home. Without consideration, I murmured that I had chosen to spend my beautiful day with her instead of going out.

I thought I would impress her with this line, but instead it turned out to be as bitter as gall. She was so angry that I got a hundred negative comments from her. She spoke continuously, complaining of my anti-morning issues, which made me low, but alas! It came to my mind that I should try to erase it all from her, so I thought of a second excuse.

I demanded that instead of mumbling and uttering bitter words, why don't I take her shopping. Anything she wants under the house. At this exact moment, her bitter words turned to honey.

We went out peacefully, laughing, holding hands, and talking, and I adored the fact that instead of hitting her back with words and arguments, I hit her back with shopping, and we were both at peace back home.

Later, I learnt my lesson; I should have sacrificed my sleep for the morning errands rather than the big damage she caused to my credit card.

'THE SOUND OF SUNFLOWER SEEDS'

In another incident of how difficult it is to be 'morning person', last week I had several pending assignments to finish. I also had commitments for personal errands.

On top of that, I was late, I got stuck in traffic, and I am wearing the turban on my head because I have to go to the government offices for some story investigation. The turban has given me a headache on many occasions.

Anyway, after all that, the day rushes by in no time, and it is time for me to go to the gym. I have the urge, It has already become a part of me.

On my way back home, I parked at the general store to buy my wife her best snack. She loves the sunflower seeds. I do not like the sounds they make while being crushed, but I know she will be amused once I buy them.

To my shock, she immediately starts cracking the seeds and with the first bite, she looks at me and says, "These seeds are not of the brand that I like, but thank you." I look at her and just nod.

A few minutes later, as I was relaxing on my couch feeling dead tired, she comes to me and asks, "My husband, I need a favour. Please take me to the nearby store to buy sunflower seeds. These are a little hard to crack."

As a humble husband, I get angry from inside. The only way she notices my anger is when I bite my lips. "Are you angry, why are you biting your lips," she asks. I quickly said, "No, no. I am not." I reluctantly got up and took her with a smiling face but an angry heart.

Yes I am angry. And I blame myself for initiating the idea of buying the seeds. I should have bought something that is available only in one brand. Readers, what would you have done?

Shaddad al Musalmi is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

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