

MUSCAT

MOU INKED FOR FISH FARMING COMPANY

Musandam Global Investment Company and foreign investors signed a memorandum on binding commercial conditions and incorporation documents of Musandam Fish Farming Company. Inked at Invest Oman Lounge, the memorandum provides for establishing an integrated marine fish farming project in open waters in Musandam Governorate. The project, scheduled to begin this year, is aimed at producing an annual amount of more than 3,500 tonnes of various types of fish intended for export to regional and international markets. The project will include an open water farm, a fish breeding unit and a pre-growth stage.

DETAILS ON P3

MUSEUM ORGANISES RAMADHAN EVENTS

The recently-opened Oman Across Ages Museum is seeing social, health and cultural events designed for several age groups and aimed at creating a spiritual and entertaining atmosphere during the holy month of Ramadhan. Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthy, Director-General of Oman Across Ages Museum, said that the museum held many activities and programmes such as Al Aqba Night (the night of the 14th of Ramadhan, when children are feted for completing two weeks of fasting) in cooperation with the Omani Women's Association in Manah.

DETAILS ON P5



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CAA ISSUES HEAVY RAIN ALERT



The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued the second 24-hour weather alert starting from 11 am to 11 pm on Monday due to expected heavy thundershowers over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah and Al Hajar Mountains as well as adjoining areas. The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said flash floods are expected in some parts of Oman. **DETAILS ON P2**

PHOTO BY KHALFAN AL RUZAIQI

GDP at current prices increases by 30%

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy has affirmed that financial and economic indicators for 2022 and during the first quarter of 2023 reflect the potential of Oman's economy to overcome challenges and set the economy as a basis for thriving and competitiveness.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said that the current economic indicators are important gains for Oman's economy, which will reflect positively on the economic development process.

In a press statement, Dr Al Maawali that the gross domestic product (GDP) at

RO 1.5bn investment opportunities offered

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced 36 investment opportunities worth RO 1.5 billion and covering various industries, available in the Invest Oman lounge. Hisham bin Ahmed al Sheedi, Director General of Economic Diversification at OIA, said that these investment opportunities will potentially ensure better alignment and synergy between OIA and other government and private entities.

DETAILS ON P13

current prices for 2022 posted an increase of 30 per cent, to reach RO 44,089.5 million, thus achieving a growth rate at constant prices of 4.3 per cent during 2022, compared to a growth of 3.1 per cent in 2021.

STRENGTH OF RECOVERY

He added that the Omani economy has achieved an interim gain by reaching about RO 44 billion during 2022, which is an indication of the strength of recovery.

He explained that this boom was driven by the growth of oil and gas production at rates of 9.6 per cent and 3.7

per cent, respectively, in 2022, compared to 2021. This growth is also attributed to the government's initiatives that target activating sectors of production particularly those related to economic diversification sectors, he said.

He referred to the direct increase in added value, especially for non-oil activities, by 1.6 per cent, to reach RO 24.70 billion during 2022. He pointed out that there is a remarkable growth in the converting industries by about 17 per cent, the transport and storage activity by 16.3 per cent and the mining activity by 10.5 per cent.

TURN TO P3



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RAINS TO CONTINUE IN PARTS OF OMAN

RAIN CAUSES ROCKSLIDE, DAMAGES VEHICLES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

A rockslide in Muscat Governorate, due to rains on Sunday damaged some vehicles and hampered traffic on the Al Amerat-Qurayat road. In a statement, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said no injuries were recorded. ‘Oman has been hampered by heavy rainfall in many parts following an air depression,’ it stated.

On Sunday evening, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) issued a heavy rain alert advising the public to be cautious during rainfall and thunder showers and warning against crossing running wadis. ‘The public are advised to avoid low-lying areas and venturing into the sea due to heavy rains expected from morning to evening on Tuesday over Hajar Mountains and the surrounding areas,’ CAA statement said. Rainfall ranging from 10 mm to 40 is expected in the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Muscat, Al Wusta and Dhofar, it added. The impact of upper air trough is set to continue on Monday with an expected rainfall ranging between 10 mm to 45 mm.

The weather forecast for Monday stated that partly cloudy skies will prevail over most of the governorates with chance of isolated rain occasionally thundershower over Al Hajar Mountains and its adjoining area and parts of Dhofar, Al Wusta

and South Al Sharqiyah governorates. There are chances of low level clouds or fog patches at late night or early morning over parts of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates and parts of Oman Sea coasts. There is also a chance for dust rising over desert and open areas due to strong winds.

The weather on Sunday saw continued activity of cumulus clouds over parts of the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta, with rain of varying intensity, sometimes thundery, accompanied by active downward winds and hail. This led the Civil Aviation Authority to issue a weather alert from 11 am till 11 pm on Sunday. Cloud activity and rainfall of varying intensity resulting from upper air trough had been reported in parts of South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. There was also flow of clouds over the central desert.

Heavy thunder showers were reported over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah and Al Hajar Mountains. The rainfall ranged between 10 mm and 30 mm.

The civil aviation authority has also cautioned the public not to cross Wadis due to flash floods and to avoid low lying areas during the alert period.

Horizontal visibility could be less than 1,000 metres. The influence of upper air trough is expected until Tuesday.



PICTURES BY KHALFAN AL RUZAIKI



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MONDAY | APRIL 10 | 2023

3

New regulation on use of loudspeakers at mosques



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman has urged mosques in the country to limit the use of loudspeakers to call for prayers and not during the prayers. The directive will come into force from Monday.

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, announced the decision on Sunday through a Ministerial Decision (181/2023) amending some provisions of the regulations for mosques.

According to the amended Article 1 that stated that Article 39 shall be replaced by the following text, "The use of external loudspeakers in mosques and prayer halls shall be limited to raising the call for prayer."

Speaking to the Observer a highly placed source in the ministry said the decision was not new but it's an implementation of an existing rule that was passed some 10 years ago. "But there are exceptions," said the

source.

"External loudspeakers can be used for, first, call for prayers, second, for Friday (Juma Prayers), and third, two Eid prayers to make people know about them," he added.

Speaking to the Observer, Imam Ibrahim Faizi, who leads prayers at different mosques, welcomed the decision.

"The decision to limit the use of loudspeakers in public to call for prayers and within the prayer halls is a welcome move. Most of the people who want to pray are aware of the prayer timings and they will come to the mosques some five minutes after the call," Faizi said.

"We are fine with the prayer recitations within the four walls of the mosque and we welcome the decision," another believer added.

Article 56, which is newly added to the existing set of articles, further says that an administrative fine of not exceeding RO 1,000 will be imposed on whoever violates the provisions of the regulation.

World's largest floating book fair likely to visit Oman

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The world's largest floating book fair, MV Logos Hope, is likely to be stationed at the two main ports of the Sultanate of Oman between July 5 and August 3.

While the schedule is yet to be confirmed, the Logos Hope website says that the floating library will be stationed at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat between July 5 and July 24 and at Salalah Port between July 27 and August 3.

MV Logos Hope previously visited Oman in 2011 and 2013, and received a large number of book-lovers and ship enthusiasts. The company has confirmed its schedule for the two ports in the UAE — Dubai (from April 17-23), and Abu Dhabi (May 10-June 5), but most likely the GCC tour will begin in Ras al Khaimah (April 10-23).

The ship's schedule for Manama (Bahrain) is June 6-19, and Doha (Qatar) (June 20-July 3). Described as the world's largest floating book fair, Logos Hope



usually remains in each port for about two weeks and opens the gangways to thousands of visitors each day.

The company claims that on average, one million visitors are welcomed on board every year with over 5,000 titles on sale. The crew and staff are all non-salaried volunteers, including

many serving in their professional capacity, such as seafarers, engineers, electricians, nurses, teachers and cooks. Sponsorship from friends, family members and civic organisations enables crewmembers to serve on board.

Prior to the GCC tour, the ship visited Port Said in Egypt (January 4-23), Aqaba, Jordan

(January 25- February 16), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (February 21-23), Jizan, Saudi Arabia (March 1-4) and Basra, Iraq (March 26-April 7). So far, the ship has received over 9,000,000 visitors, sold over 10,000,000 books on board, called 214 ports, and visited over 140 ports in over 70 countries.

Memo on documents of 'Musandam Fish Farming Company' signed

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The project will include an open water farm, a fish breeding unit, a pre-growth stage, a fish packing and processing unit, a research and development laboratory, in addition to stores, logistic sections and support services. — ONA

GDP at current prices increases by 30%

FROM PAGE1

Despite the increase in inflation rates, which reached about 2.8 per cent during 2022 compared to about 1.5 per cent during 2021, Dr Al Maawali stressed, it is still within the internationally accepted rates.

With regard to the financial surplus achieved by the general budget, the under-secretary said that the state's general budget posted a financial surplus of RO 1.18 billion in 2022. He pointed out that the public debt went down to 43 per cent to the GDP by the end of 2022, thanks to the government's policies to channel surplus to cut down the debt and achieve financial sustainability.

He highlighted the importance of the increase in the trade balance surplus as a result of the growth of commodity

exports and the increase in the cumulative value of foreign direct investments, to reach about RO 18.14 billion until the end of the third quarter of 2022.

The under-secretary expected that the current indicators and outlook reflect a positive situation. Focus is laid on maintaining inflation at safe limits, specifically between 2 per cent during 2023, he added.

He said that with the stability of global oil prices at the limits of locally drawn expectations, it is hoped that financial conditions will continue to improve through increased revenues, especially oil ones, and thus increasing the surplus of the general budget.

The International Monetary Fund expected the Omani economy to grow by 4.1 per cent in 2023, Dr Al Maawali said.

— ONA

Wadi Bani Khalid — an ideal iftar destination

TEXT & PHOTOS BY:
YAHYA AL SALMANI

THE charming valleys of the Sultanate of Oman have always been a source of attraction to tourists. The majority of the valleys are located near the mountains or beside the vast agricultural oases. Wadi Bani Khalid is one such valley located approximately 250 km from the capital, Muscat. It is considered one of the important tourist sites in the country.

During the holy month of Ramadhan, several Omani families take advantage of the cool temperatures, spending their time, especially during the weekend, along the banks of this beautiful valley. The Omani families prefer to visit the site during the evening after four o'clock and the place gets crowded for the iftar meal.

"In the month of Ramadhan, this valley provides the most suitable place for families and friends to gather. Here we exchange our traditional meals, discuss, and remember our childhood. This is



the most suitable place for all of us, in which we move away from the pressures of daily life. We meet here every year," a citizen who was seen at the spot, said.

Several tourists go daily to this exceptional site to see the water body and its source that keep the mountain paths hydrated throughout the year. Many other natural features associated with the Wadi provide visitors with ample camping options.

Because of the abundance of water, tourists describe this site as

a natural swimming pool in the midst of a green agricultural oasis. On the banks of the mountain valley, there are places designated for sitting and relaxing. This distinguished site has a rescue team tasked with monitoring and supervising the site to ensure the safety of all tourists.

At the entrance to the site, indicative signs emphasise the need to wear modest clothing. These signs also warn against swimming and diving in deep waters.



Due to its location and atmosphere, tourists from various wilayats and different countries visit the place, where the temperatures are currently moderate and the water level is high.

Whoever visits Wadi Bani Khalid can also see many geological sites such as Maql Cave and approximately 12 water springs, including Ain Al Sarooj, Ain Al Lathb, Ain Kanara, Ain Al Muntajar, and Ain Ghalala in addition to the 56 'Falaj. Important



among the Aflaj are Al Haili, Al Fardh, Al Sarooj, and Al Jarbi.

The state has a wonderful selection of archaeological monuments that vary between forts and towers, the most famous of which is Al Mawalik Fort. Its construction dates back to the fourth century AH.

"Everyday, we meet tourists of different nationalities. Most of the tourists come from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand to enjoy the beautiful landscapes, and many

of them practice swimming and hiking while some tourists devote their time to exploring the archaeological sites that are located near the valley," a tourist guide confirmed.

The site, however, needs basic services required by many tourists, as the site is in dire need of clean toilets and private rooms for changing clothes, as well as the construction of special paths for tourists, and shops that sell requirements for practising sports, hiking and swimming.



MONDAY | APRIL 10 | 2023



WALKING GAINS PACE IN HOLY MONTH



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
[@shadadm](#)

NOW in the last days of the holy month of Ramadhan, walkers and joggers trying to stay fit can be seen even in soaring temperatures. Experts encourage exercise but caution about the effect of working out on their bodies having had no food and water during the day. Even though walking while fasting is a great experience, it requires courage. “I have come to notice that walking before iftar minimises appetite but we need to drink lots of water after a walk to make up for lost fluids,” said Samya al Nuumani, who was seen having a walk just before iftar. “Among the physical activities, walking is the easiest and most affordable. It requires some discipline and a little time which everyone should necessarily have to stay

healthy. I advise the youths to shun the habit of using cars for every small movement. Life can be more enjoyable if you stay healthy,” she said. Nutritionists say that having more food and sugars when exercising – physical activity in general – is minimal and leads to gaining weight by the end of the month. “Exercise can be in different forms and walking is ideal during Ramadhan. However, people shouldn’t stop exercising after Ramadhan,” a nutritionist cautioned. She was of the view that you can go for a walk before iftar or for more strenuous exercise after it. However, you need to be careful about the kind and time of exercise. “Exercising without having food or liquids for a long period of time is not ideal. We need to know our body before engaging in any form of exercise,” the nutritionist said. In order to encourage healthy living and walking in proper places, Muscat Municipality has intensified efforts to improve the quality

of its services by providing and expanding footpaths in residential neighbourhoods. **MAIN PRIORITY** Muscat Municipality official told Oman Observer that promoting walking and laying out paths for walkers and joggers in the city is the main priority for the civic body. “Parks and gardens also offer nice walking environments but due to the ongoing pandemic, these facilities are currently closed. However, there are walkways in several neighbourhoods across the city that can be used to exercise.” Many walking paths have been laid out. Parks which have good walking and exercising facilities include Qurm Park, Riyam Park, Amerat Park and Sarooj; these locations see an increasing number of visitors in the months of Ramadhan. “Physical activity means any utilisation of our skeletal muscles to spend energy and exercise means using the physical activity with

an intention of fitness. The benefits of physical activities are weight control, improvement in blood circulation, strengthening bones and muscles, stress reduction and fewer chances of cardiovascular diseases. Physical activity can be anything from walking, jogging, dancing, cycling, and 150 hours per week for adults and 60 minutes per day for children,” Huda Masoud, a private sector employee said. “Obese people are prone to many diseases. Thus I always put a thrust on the assimilation of some kind of physical activity into my daily routine. Walking among them is the best if it is done regularly,” she added. According to health experts, as simple as it may sound, a walk of 30 minutes a day five times a week, greatly reduces the risk of many health conditions. A combination of regular exercise, a balanced diet and maintaining normal body weight are effective in minimising health risks. So walking makes absolute sense to stay healthy.



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MONDAY | APRIL 10 | 2023

5



Oman Across Ages Museum organises Ramadhan events

MANAH: The recently-opened Oman Across Ages Museum is seeing social, health and cultural events designed for several age groups and aimed at creating a spiritual and entertaining atmosphere during the holy month of Ramadhan. Engineer Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthi, Director-General of Oman Across Ages Museum, said that the museum held many activities and programmes such as Al Aqba Night (the night of the 14th of Ramadhan, when children are feted for completing two weeks of fasting) in cooperation with the Omani Women's Association in Manah.

Speaking to Oman News Agency, Al Harthi said that the Ramadhan events also include Al Hakwati Programme, a cultural and awareness programme aimed

at introducing children to their cultural heritage and is held on Fridays during Ramadhan as well as the Ambassadors of Noble Values programme, an awareness and cultural programme aimed at highlighting the Islamic values and increase awareness of the rights and duties of individuals within the society and enhancing the values that would preserve social identity. The programme is held on Saturdays during the month of Ramadhan and targets children aged 7 to 10 years old.

The museum staged a musical in cooperation with the Amjad theatrical group. The museum also organised a workshop entitled 'The Islamic decorations in the Omani architecture' with the participation of children from 13 to 15 years old, the official said. — ONA

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

While the holy month of Ramadhan is also the month of charity across the world, it also sees a surge in activities related to begging.

While begging may be not as rampant in the Sultanate of Oman as in many developing countries, one can come across those begging, even involving women and children, in public such as near mosques, some supermarkets, and parking lots.

Over the past two weeks, the police in Dhofar Governorate arrested 84 beggars of different nationalities at various places and took legal procedures against them.

While figures for 2022 are not available yet, over 1,500 beggars were arrested in 2018 and 2019 with the number dropping sharply in 2022 due to Covid-related restrictions.

It is also argued that foreigners who indulge in begging travel from abroad due to the difficult conditions in their countries.

"I have never come across people directly begging at traffic signals, but have seen some expatriates indulging in activities such as selling bottled water or tissues boxes, which is an indirect way of begging in the Sultanate of Oman. We are not



sure whether they are just doing it out of desperation for livelihood or are part of the notorious begging industry. It is difficult to judge whether we are really helping someone to survive or encouraging an informal industry that could be related to human trafficking," said Dana Ahmed, an Arab expatriate.

"While begging per se is not uncommon and reasons can be understandable, it should never be arranged because some anti-social elements can take

advantage of the situation for their own interests. It also gives a wrong impression of our society, which is generally quite well-off," said Asma, who has seen people selling bottled water at a busy traffic intersection.

The Ministry of Social Development has urged citizens and residents to donate or help the needy via accredited charitable organisations or the donation portal.

"Support the fight against beggary," the ministry said.

Article 44 of the Child Law issued in 2014 says that it is prohibited to exploit a child or deliver him or her to a third party for purposes of begging. "Shall be considered as an act of begging any solicitation of alms or charity from others, any peddling, any performance or any other similar activities that are per se inadequate to serve as a livelihood." Article 297 of the Omani Penal Code imposes a prison term of not less than a month, not exceeding a year, and a fine of not less than RO50 and not more than RO100 on begging." Any begging activity can be reported on 1100.

The Ministry of Social Development's decision 21/2011 prohibits any person to engage in begging on public roads, or public places, begging for charity or charity from others, or offer a frivolous merchandise, showing games, or other business that does not make a serious resource to live by itself.

Teams shall be formed in the governorates and states to combat beggary in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), and the local municipality.

The teams shall carry out periodic and regular inspection campaigns to apprehend the beggars and take necessary measures.

MoL deports 641 labour law violators

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 9.

As many as 641 expatriate workers were deported for violating the provisions of the Labour Law, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) said.

In a statement, MoL said, "The office of the Joint Labour Inspection Team, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, organised an inspection campaign in March and deported 641 expatriate workers for violating the provisions of the Labour Law." Upon investigation, it was found that 108 of these individuals were found to be working with a different employer, 414 had left their employers and 119 were booked for violations.

The ministry also reported that a total of 310 expatriates were arrested in the Muscat Governorate in the month of March for various violations.

The ministry calls on all employers to adhere to the provisions of the Labour Law.



Bouchnak to perform Inshaad chanting at ROHM



MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced that it will be hosting a performance of Inshaad chanting by Lutfi Bouchnak and his Ensemble. Bouchnak is among the most prominent names in the Arab and Islamic world. The event, which will be held on Monday at 9.30pm, comes within the framework of the season's tradition. A programme of several evening events will be performed at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. Each concert is a unique expression of devotion, offering audiences a depth of connection to the season which can elevate the mind and soul. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT

Re-inviting Small and Medium Enterprises, Obtaining Entrepreneurs Card, to Register with Nama Group

Nama Group re-invites Small and Medium Enterprises that have the Entrepreneurs Card from the "Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development", interested to participate in tenders and carry out the Group works, based on the terms and conditions, each according to its competence, to register and update their data through the Group's website. The companies need to submit all supporting documents through the link below, based on the classification issued by the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development:

https://isupplier.nama.om:4443/OA_HTML/AppsLocalLogin.jsp

For more information, please contact Mr. Fahad Al Naabi by email:

fahad.alnaabi@holding.nama.om or directly with the Procurement Departments of the Group

Companies.

Thank you



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	61/2022/MHT/HQ-43 - Recall	Tender Name	RESTORATION OF JABREEN CASTLE - BAHLA, GOVERNORATE OF AL DAKHLIYAH
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	25/04/2023		
Last Date for Bid Submission	9/05/2023		
Grade	First		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local bank not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.
 - Any bid that does not meet the required tender bond will not be considered
 - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sofic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



Israeli army launches strikes in Syria after rocket fire



People check a damaged bridge following Israeli air strikes in Al Qulaylah, on the outskirts of Tyre, Lebanon. – AFP

TEL AVIV: Israel launched artillery strikes on Syria on Sunday morning, the Israeli army announced, after several rockets were fired from there and landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Israel’s retaliatory strike to rocket attacks from Syria — which no one has claimed — is the latest episode in escalating violence in the region.

“In response to the rockets fired from Syria at Israel earlier today, IDF Artillery is currently striking in Syrian territory,” the military said.

A drone was also “currently striking the launchers in Syria

from which rockets were launched into Israeli territory”.

Syrian state news agency SANA said the Israeli strikes took place around 5:00 am Sunday.

Citing an unnamed military source, SANA said Syria’s military had “intercepted the rockets... and brought down some of them”.

The surge in violence and unrest comes as the fasting month of Ramadhan, Jewish Passover, and Christian Easter coincide.

On Wednesday, Israeli police stormed the prayer hall of Al Aqsa mosque, Islam’s third-holiest site, in a pre-dawn raid aimed at dislodging youth they said had barricaded themselves inside.

The next day, more than 30 rockets were fired from Lebanese soil into Israel, which the Israeli army blamed on Palestinian groups. Israel then bombarded Gaza and southern Lebanon, targeting “infrastructures” that it said belonged to Hamas.

It was the biggest salvo fired from Lebanon since Israel fought a devastating 34-day war with Hizbullah in 2006 and the first time Israel has confirmed an attack on Lebanese territory since April 2022.

Israel and Lebanon are technically in a state of war, and the ceasefire line is patrolled by the United Nations Interim Force

in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed in the country’s south.

Meanwhile, the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas have met in Beirut to discuss “the readiness of the axis of resistance” against Israel, a Hezbollah statement said Sunday.

Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Palestinian movement Hamas, has been in the Lebanese capital since Wednesday.

During Haniyeh’s meeting with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, the pair discussed “the readiness of the axis of resistance” and cooperation between its members in the face of recent developments, the statement said. — **Agencies**

US teacher fired after having students write own obits

MIAMI: A high school teacher in the US state of Florida has been fired after he assigned students to write their own obituaries ahead of an active shooter drill.

The Orange County School District said in a statement seen by news media that “a teacher gave an inappropriate assignment about school violence... (and) has been terminated.” It provided no further detail.

Jeffrey Keene, a veteran teacher who was hired at Dr Phillips High School in Orlando in January, told a local Fox subsidiary that he was dismissed without explanation.

An apparent copy of the assignment posted by Keene on Facebook shows that he had asked his upper grade students to imagine, as part of a psychology lesson, that “today was your ‘last day’ alive” and write their own death notices.

He further asked students to think about “why the United States is having so many mass shootings,” and to consider “what kind of ‘positive actions’ can we... take to ‘decrease the number of mass shootings?’”

A disclaimer at the bottom of the assignment says it is in “no way” intended to upset

anyone, though Keene said some students apparently complained to school counsellors.

Keene, 63, told Fox that his challenge to students was to “get rid of all the fluff and show them what’s important in the world.”

“If you can’t talk real to (the students), then what’s happening in this environment?” Keene asked. “In my mind, I’ve done nothing wrong.”

He told Fox that he planned to appeal the decision, though as a probationary teacher not yet a member of the teachers’ union he has less leverage to do so. Orlando was the site of one of the country’s deadliest mass shootings — the June 2016 assault by a 29-year-old gunman at the Pulse nightclub that killed 49 people.

One of the worst US school shootings occurred a few hours’ drive south, in the Miami suburb of Parkland, when a 19-year-old shooter killed 17 people in 2018.

Gun violence — and what to do about it — is a deeply divisive issue in the United States. Two state legislators in Tennessee were recently expelled from the assembly after interrupting debate to demand gun control measures. — **AFP**

Ethiopia PM vows to dismantle regional military forces

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed vowed on Sunday to dismantle regional forces established by some states, warning that law enforcement measures would be taken against any “destructive” opposition.

The initiative first announced on Thursday aims to integrate such forces, which were set up unilaterally by some states, into the federal army, regional police or civilian life.

These forces have sparked controversy in the past, particularly during the brutal Tigray war, with security officials operating in

Amhara region accused of severe human rights abuses.

Ethiopia’s constitution allows its 11 states, drawn up along linguistic and cultural lines, to operate their own regional police forces.

But over the last 15 years, some states have gradually established separate forces, acting outside these constitutional constraints.

In a statement published on his Twitter account on Sunday, Abiy said “Ethiopia had encountered difficulties... in relation to regional special forces,” pointing out the existence of illegal checkpoints, smuggling and banditry.



Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed

Regional forces and local militias bolstered support for federal troops in their two-year war against Tigrayan rebels, until a peace deal was signed in November 2022, angering some Amhara residents who have a long history of border disputes with Tigray.

Reports of localised unrest have also emerged in Amhara where regional forces have begun to disarm, with Abiy saying the government would “try to convince and explain (the decision) to those who oppose without understanding.”

“Law enforcement measures

will be taken against those who play deliberate destructive roles,” he warned. “This decision will be implemented even (if we have to) pay a price, for the sake of Ethiopia’s... unity and for the people’s peace.”

Since war erupted in northern Ethiopia in November 2020, Amhara forces and local militias known as Fano have occupied western Tigray, an area claimed by Amhara and Tigray, which remains inaccessible to journalists.

All parties to the conflict have been accused of possible war crimes by UN investigators. — **AFP**

GOMA

20 killed in DR Congo attack

Around 20 people have been killed in an attack in eastern DR Congo, with sources blaming rebels.

“The enemy ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) ambushed farmers at around 4 pm on Friday near the village of Enebula,” local civil society leader Patrick Mukohe said.

Mukohe said he had counted 21 bodies of men and women at the site of the killing, some 30 kilometres west of the town of Oicha, in North Kivu province.



Jules Kambale, who works in the Oicha hospital morgue, said it had received 19 bodies.

Charles Ehuta Omeanga, the regional military administrator, confirmed the attack, which he attributed to “ADF terrorists”, but said he was not in a position to give a definitive toll. — **AFP**

MANILA

Seven dead in fire near capital

Seven people including two children died in a fire on Saturday evening near the Philippines capital, police said.

The fire destroyed 40 houses in the densely populated Taytay municipality southeast of Manila.

Several families, who lived in one house accessible only through a long, narrow alley, were caught in the flames. The victims included a two-year-old girl and a 12-year-old boy.

“They weren’t able to escape. They were trapped,” Taytay’s



acting police chief Joel Custodio said.

“They were found hugging each other.” It took around two hours to put out the fire, Custodio said, with investigators suspecting faulty wiring inside one of the houses as the possible cause. — **AFP**

DENPASAR

Third massive whale dies in a month

A 17-metre-long sperm whale died after washing up on a beach in Bali, a conservation official said on Sunday, making it the third whale that beached itself on the Indonesian island in just a little over a week.

The male sperm whale was found stranded on Yeh Leh beach in west Bali’s Jembrana district on Saturday afternoon.

“We are currently trying to pull the carcass to the shore to make it easier for the



necropsy test and we will bury it after the test is concluded,” Permana Yudianto, a local marine and fisheries official said. This is the third whale that has beached itself in Bali, a popular destination for holidaymakers, in April alone. — **AFP**



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MONDAY | APRIL 10 | 2023

7

In brief

■ MOSCOW



KAMCHATKA VOLCANO SPEWS ASH CLOUD

The Bezymianny volcano on Russia's Kamchatka peninsula has blown a column of ash about 10 kilometres high into the air.

Russian geologists also published photos of lava and fumes coming out of the volcano.

Bezymianny, with a height of 3 kilometres, is one of the most active volcanoes in the world.

The highest danger level, red, was declared for aviation.

According to the Russian Civil Defence Department, there was no danger to inhabited areas or tourist groups.

The peninsula is about 6,600 kilometres east of Moscow and is one of the areas with the highest concentration of geothermal activity in the world, with about 30 active volcanoes.

— dpa

■ TBILISI



THOUSANDS RALLY AGAINST GOVERNMENT

Thousands of opposition supporters rallied on Sunday in the Georgian capital Tbilisi as the Black Sea nation's government faces mounting accusations of backsliding on democracy.

Demonstrators gathered outside the Georgian parliament for a rally organised by the country's main opposition force, the United National Movement, founded by ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili. Protesters waved Georgian, Ukrainian and European Union flags and held a huge banner that read "For European future." — AFP

■ MILLBROOK



PLASTIC POLLUTION IS SCOURGE OF COASTAL REGION

On an early spring afternoon, Tregantle Beach is bathed in a dazzling light reminiscent of a painting by British landscape artist JMW Turner as sea, sky and sun merge.

"It's beautiful, right? But look at your feet," says Rob Arnold, 65, an environmental activist and artist, crouching down to pick tiny plastic balls, or "nurdles", sometimes nicknamed "mermaids' tears", out of the Cornwall sand.

The size of a lentil, the tiny bits of plastic are used by industry to manufacture plastic products. — AFP

Pope expresses 'deep concern' over Israel-Palestinian violence

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis noted his "deep concern" on Sunday over a flare-up in tensions between Israel and Palestinians, delivering an Easter Mass in which he denounced the barriers to peace in the world.

He said the renewed violence "threatens the desired climate of trust and mutual respect needed to resume dialogue", addressing a crowd of some 100,000 gathered in Saint Peter's Square.

The Argentine pontiff, a week after leaving hospital, also cited a string of "stumbling blocks" to peace in the world during his traditional Easter message, making special mention of the war in Ukraine.

"Help the beloved Ukrainian people on their journey towards peace, and shed the light of Easter upon the people of Russia," he said.

"Comfort the wounded and all those who have lost loved ones because of the war, and grant that prisoners may return safe and sound to their families."

He drew attention to conflicts around the world, from Syria to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and offered prayers for victims of the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.

This week has seen a surge in violence and unrest between Israel and Palestinians at the same time as the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan, Jewish Passover and Christian Easter have coincided.

The pope called for a resumption



Pope Francis waves from the popemobile car as he makes a tour of St. Peter's square following the Easter Sunday mass in The Vatican. — AFP

in dialogue to ensure peace "in the Holy City (of Jerusalem) and in the entire region".

On Friday, two separate attacks left an Italian tourist and two British-Israeli sisters dead, and several injured, in Tel Aviv and the West Bank.

The 86-year-old pope has returned to his duties after a recent stay in hospital following a bout of bronchitis.

On Saturday evening, he presided over the Vigil mass in Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, a two-and-a-half-hour ceremony

performed before 8,000 people.

On Friday evening however, he stayed away from the Good Friday "Way of the Cross" service as a precaution because of the intense cold, the Vatican said. It was the first time he had missed the ceremony during his papacy,

which began in 2013.

Francis was discharged from a Rome hospital on April 1 after a three-night stay for a bronchial infection. The pontiff has suffered several health issues in recent years, and it was his second stay in hospital since 2021. — AFP

Hamburg 'blackened out' with smoke after major fire at warehouses

HAMBURG: Clouds of smoke have covered downtown Hamburg following a fire in two warehouses east of the city centre on Sunday.

"Hamburg's city centre is completely blacked out," a spokesman for the Hamburg fire brigade said. Fire authorities have classified the fire and smoke as "extreme danger."

The fire is ongoing as crews seek to extinguish it, authorities said. It broke out in the district of Rothenburgsort, which is on the Elberiver and borders Hafencity, among other places.

The fire brigade could not initially give any information on how exactly the large fire could have occurred during the night or what exactly was in the burning warehouses.

Residents were being urged to keep windows and doors closed and protect themselves from the smoke in a wide area in Hamburg's north-east.



Heavy smoke rises during a major fire in Hamburg-Rothenburgsort, Germany. — Reuters

German rail operator Deutsche Bahn also announced that the tracks between Hamburg and Büchen had to be closed due to the fire.

Police and fire officials warned locals of possible toxins in the air after fires broke out early on Sunday at multiple storage facilities.

Some 140 people were evacuated, and it is not yet possible to say exactly how dangerous the situation is, a police spokesperson said.

A spokesperson with the fire department said they had reduced the threat level somewhat, even though the fire was still burning at midday, but that people should remain indoors with windows closed.

Authorities said the fire began in Rothenburgsort, just a few kilometres southeast of central Hamburg, and that the smoke cloud was moving in the direction of the city centre. — Agencies

Marseille building collapse injures five, fire hampers search

MARSEILLE: An apartment building collapsed in an apparent explosion on Sunday in the French Mediterranean city of Marseille, injuring five people, with authorities warning up to 10 victims could be under the burning rubble.

"Everything shook, you could see people running and there was smoke everywhere, the building fell onto the street," local grocer Aziz said asking that his family name not be used.

"We have to be prepared to have fatalities in this terrible tragedy," Marseille mayor Benoit Payan told journalists at the scene in the central La Plaine district, where over 100 firefighters were battling an hours-long blaze.

It is unclear how many people were inside the fallen block — believed to have one apartment on each floor — at the time of the collapse at around 12:40 am.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on the scene that there were between four and ten people trapped under the rubble.

"We don't know if they're alive or dead," he told reporters, adding that authorities were also yet to discover the cause of the "very large blast" that prompted the collapse.

Five people were injured in neighbouring buildings which were damaged by the collapse.

The intense heat as the building burns has kept search dogs from picking through the rubble, with Darmanin saying it would



Firefighter work on rubble at the 'rue Tivoli' after a building collapsed in the same street, in Marseille, southern France. — AFP

be "several hours... maybe even longer" before the fire was out.

"Time is of the essence" to discover possible survivors among the ruins, Marseille fire chief Lionel Mathieu said.

Rescuers' task has been complicated by the partial collapse of one of the adjoining buildings, where eight people had to be brought down by ladder after taking refuge on a roof terrace.

Other buildings on the street were evacuated and their residents put up in schools, while an aid centre for people looking for missing family members or loved ones has been opened in a neighbouring district.

"I am thinking of those affected and of their loved ones... thank you to the firefighters and emergency workers," President Emmanuel Macron said. — AFP

Get blessed not stressed in Ramadhan

People always seek moments that bring happiness, enjoyment and satisfaction; they chase thrills and chills. Such fun-making moments bring sympathy and emotions of delight between people. Usually, to guarantee a real happiness, one must be true to oneself, honest with those around and treat others fairly. Actually, getting a real source of happiness comes by having an inner peace. If one's mind is peaceful, he/she shall be happy all the time, regardless of all other external circumstances.

However, if the mind is disturbed or burdened in one way or the other, one shall never be happy, no matter how good the external conditions might be. Having a peaceful mind is what mostly makes people happy and this could be understood through experience of course! For instance, the moment you get angry, you lose your sense of happiness even if you live a beautiful surrounding, enjoying everything you need.

This usually happens because of anger, which destroys one's peace of mind. It has been attributed that the only way through which one can sustain inner peace is by training the mind and body through different spiritual practices. Hence Ramadhan marks an ideal season to develop and strengthen one's inner peace.

For Muslims, Ramadhan enables to work on recovering their inner peace. Fasting, ritual prayers, recitation of the Holy Quran and Remembrance of Allah throughout the month of fasting are just to name a few ways to recover one's peace. In fact, Ramadhan brings happiness, goodness, spiritual enlightenment, rewards, and physical and spiritual benefits to Muslims. That is why most of them become more self-controlled and compassionate during Ramadhan. Another way of building on inner peace is the different feelings of emotional excitement and religious enthusiasm that Ramadhan brings among Muslims of all ages. From the way of welcoming this month, Muslims look forward to the excitement of sighting the moon and start fasting. Also, they get stimulated to gather



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professional

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with their families and loved ones for breaking the fast. Moreover, they appreciate the opportunity to double their rewards from the Almighty Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins.

Further, Ramadhan renews enthusiasm for worship and devotion to Allah. While fasting, they become more serious and careful of their daily prayers and other rituals. Being the month of blessings and double rewards, Muslims, in this month, strengthen and deepen their religious attitude and relation with Allah. The first 10 days of Ramadhan are regarded of mercy, second 10 days are of forgiveness and the last 10 days are of being freed from hell. Ramadhan is a month in which mercy and blessings of Allah descend continuously upon Muslims.

Likewise, Ramadhan stands as the time of renewing direct contact with the holy Quran as both are linked from the beginning. In this month, the holy Quran was revealed as a guidance to Muslims. As stated in the verse, "The month of Ramadhan is the month in which the holy Quran was revealed as a guidance for humanity, as a clear proof of that guidance, and as a criterion for distinguishing between right and wrong".

Many regard Ramadhan as the time of character-building, where Muslims can find themselves again and bring themselves closer to Allah. Throughout the full month of fasting, Muslims have to change their physical and emotional characters. They tend to be more obedient worshippers, striving to change for a better person. Ramadhan is the spring season for goodness and virtues when righteousness blossoms throughout Muslim communities. It offers every Muslim an opportunity to strengthen personal belief, purify heart and soul and to remove the evil effects of the committed sins.

Most importantly, the rewards for good deeds are multiplied manifold during Ramadhan. Thus, it is the month that Muslims await with eagerness. Whenever the month of Ramadhan approaches, happiness and joy return to Muslims worldwide for it brings the greatest gifts of Allah.

CHINESE COSTUME FESTIVAL



A woman dressed in traditional Hanfu clothing, poses for photo during Chinese Costume Festival event at Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong, China, on Sunday. – Reuters

Will new trade policies leave the developing world behind?

Developing countries are increasingly worried that the United States will turn its back on the multilateral trade regime. Amid rising geopolitical tensions, policymakers in lower- and middle-income countries fear that a breakdown of that regime could make them hostages to great-power politics, undermining their economic prospects.

Their concerns are not groundless: US trade policies have changed significantly over the past few years. What seemed like a series of haphazard measures under former President Donald Trump — sanctions on Chinese firms, increased tariffs, and the fatal subversion of the World Trade Organization's dispute-settlement body — has become a broad, coherent strategy under President Joe Biden.

This strategy, which aims to reconstitute America's role in the global economy, embodies two imperatives. First, the US now regards China as its main geopolitical rival and views its technological ascendancy as a national-security threat. As the administration's sweeping restrictions on the sale of advanced chips and chip-making equipment to Chinese firms show, the US is willing to sacrifice international trade and investment to thwart China's ambitions. Moreover, it expects other countries to do the same.



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Ideas for a Sane World
Economy

Second, US policymakers aim to make up for decades of neglecting domestic economic, social, and environmental priorities by focusing on policies that promote resilience, dependable supply chains, good jobs, and a clean-energy transition. The US seems happy to pursue these objectives on its own, even if its actions could adversely affect other countries.

The best example of this is the Inflation Reduction Act, the Biden administration's landmark climate-transition legislation. Many governments in Europe and elsewhere have been outraged by the \$370 billion clean-energy subsidies included in the IRA, which favour US-based producers. Pascal Lamy, the former head of the WTO, recently called on developing countries to join the European Union in forming a "North-South" coalition without the US, to "create a disadvantage for (the Americans) that would make them change their position."

To be sure, Europe has its own brand of unilateralism, albeit a softer one than America's. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which aims to maintain high carbon prices within the bloc by imposing duties

on carbon-intensive imports such as steel and aluminium, is meant to placate European firms that would otherwise find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. But it also makes it harder for developing countries such as India, Egypt, and Mozambique to access European markets.

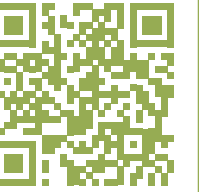
So, developing countries have plenty to worry about. As the US and Europe attempt to isolate China and craft policies in support of their new domestic agendas, they are unlikely to have poorer economies' interests in mind. For small lower-income countries, multilateralism remains the only safeguard against the solipsism of great powers.



US trade policies have changed significantly over the past few years.

But developing countries would do well to recognise that these unilateral policies are driven by legitimate concerns and are often aimed at meeting global needs. Climate change, for example, is clearly an existential threat to humanity. If US and European policies accelerate the green transition, poorer countries will benefit, too. Instead of condemning these policies, lower- and middle-income countries should seek transfers and financing that would enable them to follow suit. For example, they should demand that European countries channel CBAM revenues to developing-country exporters to support these firms' investment in

greener technologies. More broadly, developing countries must remember that their economic prospects are determined first and foremost by their own policies. Short of a 1930s-style worldwide plunge into protectionism, they will likely not lose access to Western markets. Moreover, export-oriented countries such as South Korea and Taiwan engineered their growth miracles during the 1960s and 1970s, when developed countries were far more protectionist than they are now or likely to be in the foreseeable future. It is also true that the export-oriented industrialisation model has run out of steam for reasons that have little to do with the Global North's protectionist policies. Because today's manufacturing technologies are so skill- and capital-intensive, it is difficult for latecomers to mimic the success of East Asian tigers (I call this phenomenon "premature de-industrialisation"). Future development models would have to rely on service industries and small and medium-size enterprises, rather than on industrial exports, to build a thriving middle class.



Al Namaa Real Estate show jumping on April 12

WALEED AL JAWHARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

The Al Namaa Real Estate Show Jumping Championship 2023 will be held on April 12, as part of the Ramadhan show-jumping championship in the Equestrian field at Al Rahba Farm in Barka.

The tournament is supervised by the Oman Equestrian Federation and organised by Al Hawqani Stables, and sponsored by Al Namaa Real Estate Group and Al Hawqani International Group.

The conclusion ceremony will be held under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Abdullah al Hawqani, CEO of Al Khaleej International Construction.

The championship will start at eight o'clock in the evening through five rounds, starting with the 'Mahajer Oman' round at a height of 95-100 cm, then 'Gulf International Construction' round with height of 100-105 cm, the third round 'Arena Home', allocated for the age of 14, at a height of 90-95 cm, the fourth round 'Al Hawqani International Group', at a height of 120-125 cm, and the fifth and final round 'Al Namaa Al Aqaria', at a height of 105-115 cm.

The organising committee of the championship set a number of conditions for participations, including each horse allowed to participate in two different rounds only, each knight is allowed to participate with two horses in each round.

Oman to host World Amateur Chess 2023

MUSCAT TO STAGE MEGA EVENT FROM NOV 1 TO 11

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

Oman's chess made a big leap as the International Chess Federation's (Fide) General Assembly members approved the Sultanate of Oman's bid to host the World Amateur Championship 2023 in Muscat from November 1 to 11, 2023 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The selection of Muscat city as the hosts for the world class event was during the AGM meeting which was held in Mexico city recently. Oman's bid got more votes than the Italian bid which was in the fray.

As many as 500 are expected representing different parts of the world to Muscat which will be set for a world chess destination in November to showcase the World Amateur Championship 2023.

Oman's bid was prepared and presented by the Oman Chess Committee (OCC) in coordination with some top stakeholders including Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Tourism and Heritage



Ahmed al Balushi, OCC chairman

and Oman Airports. Many officials from Fide visited Oman during the previous period to evaluate the bid and to inspect the logistics, accommodation and other arrangements which are required for the world class events. Oman's bid met all the technical and logistical requirements and it was accepted during the scrutineering of all the submitted applications by Fide officials.

Oman's strong infrastructure to



host mega sporting events was a positive factor. Besides that, Oman represented by OCC had delivered a successful edition of Asian Amateur Chess Championship which took place in Muscat from September 29 to October 6, 2022 with attendance of 167 players from 21 countries.

DREAM FULFILLED

Ahmed bin Darweesh al Balushi,
OCC chairman, affirmed that

hosting the World Amateur Championship 2023 in Muscat represented as a great step in Oman's chess development. "Muscat city will be the first city in the Middle East to host the World Amateur Championship 2023.

This mega event is not less than the other world chess championships which are held annually. The OCC had planned to host this event one day and we

managed to fulfill the dream," he said.

The OCC chief explained several advantages of hosting this event in Oman. He said: "This world-class event will advertise Oman as a hub of hosting mega sporting events.

Moreover, this championship will enhance the technical performances of the domestic players, referees and organisers. The huge expected media coverage of this event in channels will promote Oman as Fide have 181 members across the world and this will add a valuable factor for Oman," he added.

Ahmed al Balushi said that OCC is currently working to execute some other international events during the forthcoming period for the junior players. "We are looking forward to host top events for the junior categories in Oman and also to organise some school chess events. Moreover, our another target is to increase the number of local players with top ranking and enable more masters rankings," he concluded.

Oman placed in second pot for Asian Cup draw

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

The stage is set for the 2023 AFC Asian Cup draw in Qatar, which will be held on May 11 at the Opera House in Katara, Doha. The draw's features have been completed following the announcement of the new Fifa rankings.

The Qatar national team, the hosts and defending champions of the last edition, has been placed in the first pot to ensure that they play the opening match on January 12, 2024. The first pot also includes Japan, Iran, South Korea, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, ranked from second to sixth in the Fifa rankings.

The second pot includes Oman alongside Iraq, the 2007 champions, the United Arab Emirates, who hosted the previous edition in 2019, Uzbekistan, who reached the final in 2011, and China, who finished as runners-up twice. Bahrain, Syria, Palestine, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon are placed in the third pot. India, Tajikistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia are

placed in the fourth pot.

The tournament will feature 24 teams divided into six groups, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the round of 16, along with the four best third-placed teams. The final match will take place on February 10, 2024.

The AFC has announced that the championship matches will be held at eight stadiums, including six stadiums that staged the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which are Al Janoub Stadium, Al Bayt Stadium, Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium, Al Thumama Stadium, Education City Stadium, Khalifa International Stadium, as well as joined by Jassim bin Hamad Stadium and Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. The 2023 Asian Cup will span for 30 days, an increase of two days from the previous version held in 2019 in the UAE.

The draw ceremony will be attended by historical stars in the continent of Asia, along with the coaches of the 24 teams participating in the tournament. The 2023 Asian Cup aims to enhance the experience for passionate football fans in Asia and elevate the tournament's status.





Kolkata's Rinku hits five sixes in final over to stun Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, India: Indian batsman Rinku Singh blasted five sixes on the final five balls as Kolkata Knight Riders chased down 205 to stun champions Gujarat Titans in an IPL thriller on Sunday.

The left-hander turned the chase on its head with an unbeaten 21-ball 48, after Kolkata slipped to 155-7 following Rashid Khan's hat-trick at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

Kolkata needed 29 from the final over off Yash Dayal. Rinku took strike after Umesh Yadav's

single on the first ball to send five hits over the fence and silence a raucous home crowd.

The chase was set up by a 40-ball 83 by impact player Venkatesh Iyer, who put on a 100-run third-wicket stand with skipper Nitish Rana, who made 45.

"Tonight was another example that we will never give up as a team," Iyer said after the three-wicket win. "The wicket was quite good to bat and I was just trying to execute my plans." Iyer, who came on in place of Suyash Sharma under the new impact player rule,

fell to Alzarri Joseph and Rashid soon took over to claim his first Indian Premier League hat-trick.

Rashid, a champion leg-spinner who now has four hat-tricks in T20 cricket, went for a celebratory sprint after sending back Andre Russell, Sunil Narine and Shardul Thakur. But little did Rashid know Rinku and Kolkata would have the last laugh.

"A tough game for us, especially as a captain," said Rashid, standing in as skipper for the unwell Hardik Pandya. "That is what T20 is all about, it is about entertainment."

After two straight wins, two-time champions Kolkata took second spot in the 10-team table, behind leaders Rajasthan Royals.

It was a first defeat of the season for Gujarat, who won the league in their debut campaign last year.

Earlier, Gujarat's Vijay Shankar smashed five sixes in his 24-ball 63 as Gujarat took 45 runs from the final two overs to reach 204-4.

Shankar stood out for Gujarat with his blitz and key partnerships including an unbeaten 51-run fifth-wicket stand with David Miller, who made two. — AFP

Rahane blitz helps Chennai floor Mumbai

MUMBAI: Ajinkya Rahane hit the fastest fifty of the IPL season in 19 balls as Chennai Super Kings hammered Mumbai Indians by seven wickets on Saturday.

In another show of destructive batting, England's Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal powered Rajasthan Royals to the top of the table with a 57-run demolition of Delhi Capitals.

David Warner's Delhi slumped to their third loss of the season despite the captain top-scoring with 65 and becoming the first overseas player to go past 6,000 IPL runs. But Rahane stood out as the day's best performer with his 27-ball 61 on debut for Chennai, guiding them to their target of 158 with 11 balls to spare at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

"Me and Jinks (Ajinkya) spoke at the start of the season and I told him to play to his strengths, use your ability to manipulate the fields," said CSK captain MS Dhoni. "I told him to go and enjoy, don't take stress and we'll back you."

Coming in after the fall of Devon Conway for a duck, Rahane tore into the Mumbai attack, which was without Jofra Archer after the England pace bowler was rested due to discomfort in his elbow.

Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma said Archer, who returned to the team in the previous match after missing last season, not playing was "just a precaution".

Rohit said the five-time champions need to be more

"brave" in their upcoming matches.

Chennai's England stars Ben Stokes and Moeen Ali missed out due to injuries and South Africans Dwaine Pretorius and Sisanda Magala made the team.

JADEJA SHINES

Ravindra Jadeja made an impression with his left-arm spin as he took the key wickets of Ishan Kishan (32), Cameron Green, out for 12 after an excellent caught and bowled, and Tilak Varma (22) to keep Mumbai to 157-8.

Jadeja, who was named man of the match, was ably supported by New Zealand left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, who returned figures of 2-28.

Tim David's late cameo of 31 boosted Mumbai's total but was still not enough to challenge the Chennai batting.

Rahane, who was signed by Chennai for his base price of \$61,094 in the December auction, smashed seven fours and three sixes. Opener Ruturaj Gaikwad made an unbeaten 40 to move to the top of the batting charts with 189 runs this season as he jumped over Buttler (152) and Warner (158).

"We are a long way off right now," Delhi coach Ricky Ponting said. "I can't put my finger on why? We need to do a bit more soul searching as a group. We have to think about the players we are putting on the ground because what we have done so far hasn't worked." — AFP



Bangalore look for redemption against Lucknow



TEAM INFO: Royal Challengers Bangalore has had a mixed tournament so far, where they started by crushing the soul of Mumbai Indians and then with all the confidence and boost, they went and jumped off the cliff against KKR. On the other hand, its LSG, who despite have won 2 games out of 3, won't have confidence, since both DC and SRH have been too weak a team this season. Also, LSG have clashed with RCB on two occasions till now, and are yet to beat them on head-to-head and that's something that they would like to change.

Head-to-Head - Played — 2; Won by RCB — 2; Won by LSG — 0

RCB possible XI – Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis (c), Dinesh Karthik (wk), Glenn Maxwell, Michael Bracewell, Shabbaz

Ahmed, David Willey, Karn Sharma, Harshal Patel, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj

LSG possible XI – KL Rahul (c), Kyle Mayers/Quinton de Kock, Deepak Hooda, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Romario Shepherd/Mark Wood, Krunal Pandya, Amit Mishra/Ayush Badoni, Yash Thakur/Avesh Khan, Jaydev Unadkat, Ravi Bishnoi

Pitch & weather report – It should be a good track to bat on and with the smaller boundaries, the batters tend to dominate even more. A high scoring game is on the cards. The maximum temperature in Bengaluru on Monday would be 33°C while the humidity would be around 46 per cent. There is no chance of rain.

Match Prediction – RCB is that kind of a team that, it finds it's best against the table toppers. Despite that disappointing loss against KKR, RCB are generally a very good team this season and most importantly, they are hungry to win. Fans would just be hoping that this hunger doesn't make them desperate.

On the contrary, LSG have



been a good side, but they are yet to be tested in deep waters yet and KL Rahul's lack of form is hurting them a big way. Hence, hoping for a good match, where RCB comes out on top!

FAN COMMENTS

"RCB are the team with incredible fan base look very confident with Faf and Kohli on

their top form. However, they are missing a piece in their puzzle and will soon be filled with Hasaranga in the squad which will change the team's dynamics all together. Hoping them to play bold and lift the cup this year." – Nanda Kumar, 33, Fleet Manager US Embassy, Indian.

"Sad to note that my favourite team RCB are already looking as

one of the weakest team in the IPL. Again, heavy load on Kohli's brittle shoulders. Ineffective planning at the auctions again." – Abbas al Balushi, 42, Banker, Omani.

"I love RCB, they remind me of the older Pakistani team. Extremely unpredictable and non-trustworthy. They were capable of beating the number one ranked

Australian team and also losing to a non-Test playing nation as well." – Rana Zeeshan Ahmed, 38, Car Workshop Owner, Pakistani.

"IPL has been an inspiration to many upcoming youngsters and being a mother to an Oman U16 national team captain (Jeet Shah), who finds his love from the creativity of AB de Villers and aggression of Virat Kohli. Go RCB Go, let's bring the most awaited cup home!" – Maheshwari (Manisha) Vrajesh Shah, 44, housewife, Indian.

Send us your comment for the next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 92470544' and the best comments will be included. 30 words on the team that you support, full name, age, designation and nationality.

You could post us your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, TWITTER — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

Chukwueze helps Villarreal stun Madrid

BARCELONA: Real Madrid suffered a 3-2 defeat by Villarreal in La Liga on Saturday in a thrilling clash ahead of their Champions League showdown against Chelsea next week.

Real Sociedad beat Getafe 2-0 to tighten their grip on fourth place, while Villarreal rose to fifth after their impressive triumph at the Santiago Bernabeu.

The champions remain 12 points behind leaders Barcelona, who face Girona on Monday, with Villarreal winger Samuel Chukwueze scoring twice in a sensational individual display.

Pau Torres's own goal sent Madrid in front but Chukwueze levelled before the break.

Vinicius Junior netted a superb solo goal before Jose Luis Morales equalised again and Chukwueze curled home a superb winner, which reduced Madrid's hopes of retaining the title to virtually nothing.

"The truth is, it was hard for us to be 100 per cent motivated, that's quite normal," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar.

"If you aren't 100 per cent, you have to be better on the pitch, we weren't organised, they manage the ball well and it was hard for us to get it back."

However the coach said the defeat did not allow any doubts to creep in ahead of Chelsea's visit in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg.

"No, no doubts," added Ancelotti.

"We knew it could be complicated, and Wednesday is another story. Our level dipped a bit today, but on Wednesday it will



Villarreal's Nigerian midfielder Samuel Chukwueze (L) celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the Spanish league match between Real Madrid CF and Villarreal CF at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

be at the maximum."

The coach made six changes from the 4-0 Clasico thrashing of Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semifinal midweek, with Europe in mind.

However he maintained his attacking trio of Karim Benzema, Rodrygo and Vinicius, looking to put the game to bed early.

Marco Asensio and Vinicius combined for Madrid's opener, with Torres deflecting the latter's cross into his own net.

The visitors levelled late in the first half when Chukwueze's magical footwork left defender Nacho Fernandez for dead, and the Nigerian finished clinically past Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid came out flying in the second half and Vinicius scored a brilliant goal of his own, nutmegging defender Aissa Mandi to leave a crowd of perusers behind him, before slipping the ball home.

The Brazilian winger, on 21

goals across all competitions, should have matched his tally of 22 last season but fired into the side netting after being teed up by Benzema.

The French forward, who scored hat-tricks in both his previous two games, was withdrawn before the hour mark to rest him for the Chelsea clash.

STUNNING COMEBACK Villarreal pulled themselves level in the 70th minute when

Chukwueze's cross caused danger and substitute Morales finished well. With 10 minutes remaining, Chukwueze scored a brilliant second, curling into the top corner from outside the area.

It was his fifth goal in his last seven La Liga matches, with Chukwueze in the best form of his career to date.

Madrid were awarded a late penalty when the ball appeared to strike Mandi's arm as he slid along the floor, but VAR showed there

was no offence committed.

"The league is complicated, that's obvious, but we're alive in two other competitions that we will try to win," said Madrid defender Lucas Vazquez.

Villarreal rose to fifth, two points clear of Real Betis, who host Cadiz on Sunday.

Coach Quique Setien lavished praise on Chukwueze.

"For a few weeks he's been giving us a lot, he's a permanent threat," said the former Barcelona boss.

"Not just in goals, but in passes, chances, he's an extraordinary player who is giving us a lot."

SOCIEDAD IMPROVE Mikel Oyarzabal and Takefusa Kubo struck for Real Sociedad in their comfortable win over Getafe.

Amid a run of inconsistent form after a strong start to the season, La Real suffered Europa League elimination and in recent weeks allowed teams to close in behind them in the hunt for Champions League football.

Atletico Madrid, third, overtook Real Sociedad in March after they dropped points in a draw with lowly Cadiz.

With this solid victory, Real Sociedad are four points clear of Villarreal and six ahead of Betis.

Earlier, Athletic Bilbao bounced back from their Copa del Rey semifinal defeat by Osasuna this week with a 2-1 win over Espanyol.

Barcelona winger Ez Abde, on loan at Osasuna, shone and struck twice for the cup finalists in a 2-1 win over bottom of the table Elche. — AFP



Tiger Woods of the US shakes hands with Xander Schauffele of the US on the 18th green after completing their second round in the Masters tournament at the Augusta National Golf Club, Georgia, US. — Reuters

‘Disappointed’ Woods withdraws from Masters with injury

AUGUSTA, United States: Five-time winner Tiger Woods, who limped through an awful, bogey-strewn start to his rain-halted third round of the Masters, pulled out of the tournament with a foot injury organisers said on Sunday.

"I am disappointed to have to WD (withdraw) this morning due to re-aggravating my plantar fasciitis," he posted on Twitter shortly after organisers had announced his decision.

"Thank you to the fans and to @TheMasters who have shown me so much love and support. Good luck to the players today!"

It is the second time in the

past year that Woods has been forced to withdraw from a major championship citing injury.

The 15-times major winner, who now plays a very limited schedule on the PGA Tour focusing instead on being able to compete in majors, had speculated before the tournament that this may be one of his last Masters.

"I don't know how many more I have in me," Woods had said on Tuesday, "So just (have) to be able to appreciate the time I have here and cherish the memories."

The Masters is aiming to finish the rain-impacted third round on early on Sunday before

proceeding to the decisive final round at Augusta National.

Meanwhile, Jon Rahm pulled within two strokes of leader Brooks Koepka as the third round of the Masters resumed on Sunday.

Rahm began the morning by sinking a nine-foot birdie putt at the par-4 seventh hole while Koepka curled an 11-foot par putt beyond the hole, his first stumble after 29 holes in a row without a bogey.

Koepka kept at the top on 12-under with Rahm charging to 10-under, trimming half his overnight deficit. — AFP

Tottenham edge Brighton in fractious game

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, APRIL 9

A well-contested match came to an end with tempers boiling over but Tottenham were relieved to claim all three points with a 2-1 win which keeps them in the running for a top-four finish. Managers of both sides were shown the red card after a 20-man touchline melee brought on by several disputed decisions.

Brighton manager, Roberto de Zerbi said: "I don't like it when people don't respect me. Stellini (Christian Stellini, the Spurs manager) did not. It was a personal situation. I told him what was my idea. I did not use bad words. It was only my opinion, I respect everyone. I never said anything to the referee. I don't like it when the other bench puts pressure on the referee. I didn't deserve the red card but I have to accept the decision. I don't know if I will be on the bench for the semifinal (of FA Cup against Manchester United, as a result of the red card)."

He added: "We should be proud for the performance. We played a great game. We deserved to win. We are disappointed for the result, not for the quality of play."

Brighton could consider themselves unlucky not to even get a draw as they were more fluent. They could have taken the lead as early as the fifth minute following a corner but Kaoru Mitoma's volley



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

was cleared away in a scramble.

Five minutes later, Spurs went into the lead. Brighton were unable to clear a corner and Ivan Perisic passed to Heung-Min Son, who set himself up for a marvellous right-footed curling shot from 25 yards into the top far corner. With that the South Korean reached the milestone of 100 Premier League goals.

In the 18th minute, Mitoma appeared to chest the ball down before lashing a shot into the net but the referee decided the ball had come off the player's upper arm. However, the visitors were soon on level terms when, in the 34th minute, Lewis Dunk found himself unmarked for a comfortable header inside the far post from a corner.

Ten minutes after the break, Danny Welbeck thought he had given Brighton the lead but VAR

ruled that his shot was deflected off Alexis MacAllister's arm. Soon after that words were exchanged between De Zerbi and the Tottenham bench and a huge row and melee took place between the two benches at the touchline.

Then in the 71st minute, Brighton's appeal for a penalty was turned down when Mitoma was brought down in the box by Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. Finally, Tottenham's winning goal came with 11 minutes of normal time remaining. Hojbjerg, on the right, found Harry Kane with a fine pass and the Spurs striker fired in a right-footed shot to end a controversial match. Stellini said: "The red card came because I have to manage the bench and keep them calm but I was focused on the players. I give respect to every coach in the Premier League but we deserved to win."



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Bids invited for 3 new mining sites in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has invited bids for mining sites located within the Ayoun area in Dhofar Governorate. Omani companies with prior experience in mining sector projects are eligible to participate in the bidding process, the Ministry said in a post.

The bidding will cover three mining sites of areas 1.72 km², 1.41 km², and 1.87 km² respectively. The targeted resource in these sites is construction materials, such as aggregates. Companies interested in participating can register their interest and submit their bids by June 11, 2023.

“This announcement presents



a significant opportunity for Omani companies with mining sector experience to participate in a transparent

and fair bidding process for the construction materials mining sites, with equal opportunities for all,” the Ministry stated.

It added that the mineral sites hold abundant reserves of construction materials that will contribute to the growth of the construction

industry in Oman.

Further, commercialisation of these sites will also drive economic activities in Dhofar Governorate, it said.

Sunday’s public tender comes on the heels of a major tender for as seven mining concession areas, covering a total area of 12,726 square kilometres and distributed in the governorates of Dhofar, North Al Sharqiyah and Al Buraimi.

The new blocks, unveiled towards the end of last month, are home to industrial minerals such as gypsum, limestone, phosphate, dolomite and clay, as well as metallic minerals including gold, silver, copper, chromite and basalt.

Just earlier, the Ministry signed an agreement with the British

company Knights Bay granting it the concession to explore and develop mineral resources, including valuable nickel ore, in Block 21 in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

It was the first direct concession agreement with an international investor.

Knights Bay has committed to spending between \$25 – 30 million during the initial 3-year appraisal phase, covering the 1,444 square kilometre block. If successful in unearthing commercial quantities of minerals, chiefly nickel ore, Knights Bay will build, develop and process battery minerals (nickel and cobalt) in the Sultanate of Oman to meet the global demand for nickel through electric car manufacturers.

Crowdfunding platforms in Oman finance 21 startups

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

Based on the latest statistics of the CMA on the crowdfunding platforms, nine companies were licensed to carry out the activity of crowdfunding which are: Ethis Investment Platform LLC, Beehive Financial Technology, New Sphere LLC, Ithbar LLC, Alwadiaa for Commercial Operations LLC, Rawafid Finance, Smart Group for Finance LLC, Mamun Financial Technologies and Sharek Investment LLC.

In all, 21 companies received financing since their establishments, with the total financing volume reaching RO 1.804 million, provided primarily by Ethis Investment Platform and Beehive Financial Technology as of 2022-end.

Through launching crowdfunding platforms, the CMA aims to expanding the financing options in the market, facilitating access to financing and finding alternatives that cope with the technological revolution in the global capital markets.

The crowdfunding

platforms are considered as a breakthrough in the sector since they are dependent on one of the innovative financing types and they provide four financing options: donations, product, equity or investment note.

In 2022, the CMA launched the mechanism for financing initiatives and projects through crowdfunding platforms which, in their turn, enabled project owners to present their projects through such platforms to get the required financing.

This translates the CMA’s plan to enhance the role of the capital market as an instrument for financing projects in all their volumes and types.

Additionally, such platforms will enable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in particular and other projects in general to get their required financing from a wide base of national and foreign investors. Finally, crowdfunding platforms play a key role in driving the economic development and injecting liquidity in the market, in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

OIA offers RO 1.5bn investment opportunities

MUSCAT: The ‘Invest in Oman’ hall currently showcasing a total of 36 investment opportunities floated by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) distributed across a number of sectors, with a total value exceeding RO 1.5 billion.

Hisham bin Ahmed al Sheedi, Director General of Economic Diversification at OIA, said the

investment opportunities are distributed across the technology, services (electricity), tourism, logistics, fisheries and food, in addition to mining and the health sectors.

Al Sheedi said the opportunities offered are a preliminary list that officials in Invest in Oman will be able to share specifics on to

interested investors.

The list includes a number of technological projects centred on programming, engineering solutions and blockchain, in addition to tourism projects represented in the third phase of the Yiti Yenkit project, a multi-facilities entertainment destination in Barka, and a logistics

project in the Airport Freezone, in addition to projects related to enhancing food security and fisheries, including the cultivation of shrimp, fattening of tuna in floating cages, three factories for canning marine products, packing and wrapping fish, and the production of fish food.

— ONA

Oman’s power imports to hit 1600 MW with second interconnect

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

A new interconnect with the electricity grid of neighbouring Saudi Arabia has the potential to boost net energy imports into the Sultanate of Oman to around 1600 MW, up from 400 MW presently, according to the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole national buyer of power and desalinated water output.

When operational, the proposed interconnection with Saudi Arabia – only the second after Oman’s existing interconnection with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) via Abu Dhabi – will ensure stability of electricity supplies in the event of any contingency, among other benefits, says state-run OPWP, a member of Nama Group.

The GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), which facilitates grid linkages and energy trades between the six member states of the GCC, has already undertake a detailed study of an interconnection directly from Ibri on the Omani side to Salwa in



Saudi Arabia.

It envisions the potential for a 400 kV DC link spanning the roughly 700 km distance between the two locations.

“The study’s outcomes indicated that the net transfer capacity to Oman would increase from 400 MW to about 1,600 MW.

Accordingly, it is expected that the two interconnects would contribute more to the planning reserve requirements,” OPWP stated in a new report.

An existing 220 kV interconnection between the Main Interconnected System (MIS) – Oman’s principal grid covering the northern half of the country – and

the GCCIA power systems via Abu Dhabi, has been commercially operational since 2012.

As a member of the GCCIA, Oman has had access to the power systems of the other five member states since December 2014.

The linkage enables the two sides to respond to supply disruptions, as well as explore energy trades and coordinate planning reserves and operating reserves. Significantly, the interconnection’s double circuit link supports reliable transfers of up to 400 MW and can carry up to 800 MW in emergencies.

“The link has provided emergency reserves on a number

of occasions, preventing power failures in the MIS,” OPWP noted.

Within Oman, interconnections between existing standalone power grids are also paving the way for enhanced reliability in the supply of stable, cost-competitive and relatively environment-friendly electricity across the interconnected network.

For example, following progress in the completion of Phase 1 of the North-South Interconnect (Rabt), transfers between the MIS and PDO’s power systems have soared from a transfer capacity of 60 MW previously to around 1000 MW presently.

Further, with the construction of three new grid stations at Nahadha, Barik and Al Suweihat, supplies from the MIS can now be channelled onward to Mahout and Duqm, which are currently served by either diesel-power from Tanweer or gas-powered supply from PDO.

Phase 1 of the North-South Interconnect is scheduled for completion in June 2023, before Phase 2 commences with the goal of linking up the Dhofar System to create an integrated national grid.

Oman Arab Bank outlook risen to ‘positive’

MUSCAT: The outlook on Oman Arab Bank (OAB) Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating (LT FCR) and Bank Standalone Rating (BSR) was revised from ‘stable’ to ‘positive’ by Capital Intelligence Ratings (CI Ratings).”

The bank’s LT FCR and BSR are respectively ‘BB’ and ‘bb’, while its Short-Term Foreign Currency Rating (ST FCR) has been affirmed at ‘B’, its Core Financial Strength (CFS) at ‘bbb’ and its Extraordinary Support Level (ESL) at ‘moderate’. The move follows CI Ratings’ similar revision of Oman’s sovereign ratings outlook to ‘positive’ from ‘stable’.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO at OAB, said: “Reflecting the similarly positive momentum across Oman’s wider economy, we are extremely pleased to share the news of Capital Intelligence Ratings’ revisions for OAB. We see this move as strong backing for the bank that will inspire further confidence in everything we are striving to achieve.”

He added, “Over the coming year, I share CI Ratings’ views and believe that OAB will continue to go from strength to strength, supported by strong economic



growth. It’s a journey on which I am enthused to be steering us all.”

CI Ratings expects OAB’s ratings to be upgraded in the next 12 months, reflected by the ‘positive’ outlook, thanks to an improving operating environment, supported by stronger economic growth, with positive movement anticipated in terms of loan and deposit expansion prospects.

Post-pandemic recovery is also seen as likely to stabilise loan asset quality, while rising interest rates provide a boost to earnings. Other facets noted by CI Ratings included that OAB is well capitalised, with capital ratios fairly solid, and key metrics continued to be well above regulatory requirements.

OAB’s LT FCR and BSR could be upgraded by more than one notch dependent on several factors, including if similar action is taken on a national scale.

CCED advances 3D seismic acquisition in Blocks 3 & 4

MUSCAT: As it continues to step up its oil and gas exploration and exploitation efforts, CC Energy Development (CCED) recently announced that the acquisition of the first phase of a new high-quality three-dimensional (3D) seismic data has been completed.

Using the latest nodal technology, CCED is undertaking the world’s largest onshore 3D seismic node survey in cooperation with Africa Geophysical Services (AGS), its seismic acquisition contractor.

To date, the acquisition of around 5,200 square kilometres of high-resolution nodal 3D seismic data has been completed.

Meanwhile, the ongoing 3D seismic campaign will continue with the acquisition of an additional 6,000 square kilometres, within Block 4.

The use of a multiple-channel nodal acquisition (STRYDE) system has made it easier to acquire data in harsh terrain with minimised HSE exposure and operational efficiencies resulting in lower overall programme costs.



Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development, said, “This overall project involves state of the art acquisition, processing, reprocessing and evaluation of high-quality 3D data covering some 75% of Blocks 3 and 4. By expediently leveraging this dataset, CCED has a tremendous

opportunity to both support ongoing near field Exploration and Production activities, but also has the potential to unlock upside value in the asset.”

In parallel CC Energy Development has also completed more than half of an advanced Pre-Stack Time and Depth Migration ‘PSTM/PSDM’ reprocessing

project covering some 11,000 square kilometres of existing 3D surveys.

By using advanced imaging techniques, the aim is to further improve the quality and resolution of existing data, allowing for a more accurate understanding of the subsurface geology and its potential.

Birba signs pact with GCC, GORD to deliver MENA’s CCUS forum

MUSCAT: Birba, an Omani events, media and intelligence agency, has signed to a two-year strategic partnership with the Global Carbon Council (GCC) and the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (GORD) to deliver the MENA region’s first-ever Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage Forum.

Scheduled to be hosted at Le Royal Meridien Hotel in Qatar’s Lusail City on May 29-31, 2023, the forum will promote CCUS technologies and share how innovation is spearheading global efforts to decarbonise and reverse legacy emissions.

“Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) can play a critical role in addressing the environmental challenges faced by the MENA region, which is heavily reliant on fossil fuels. By capturing and storing carbon dioxide emissions from oil and gas production, CCUS can help minimise the impact of these carbon intensive industries on the environment and support the transition to a more sustainable energy system.



Our support in organising the region’s first CCUS Forum is motivated by our belief that the development and implementation of CCUS technologies will be instrumental and imperative in achieving a carbon-neutral future and ensuring a livable planet for generations to come.

By partnering with Birba, GCC and GORD are steadfast in their commitment to environmental sustainability which we hope to catalyse at the CCUS Forum in May,” said Dr Yousef Alhorri, Founding Chairman of GCC and GORD.

With a line-up of global speakers, masterclasses and a buzzing networking hub, the CCUS Forum will showcase groundbreaking technologies being developed to capture and remove CO2 from the atmosphere, create commercial markets for utilising the captured CO2, and advance its permanent storage via geological sequestration.

The global shift to energy efficiency and zero-carbon energy is one of the most important industry transformations driving sustainable development strategies around the world.

Ooredoo Group companies launch Ramadhan initiatives across the globe

MUSCAT: Ooredoo Group companies across global footprint have launched a wide range of activities and initiatives for the Holy Month of Ramadhan 2023, all aimed at supporting the communities in which the Group operates.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulla al Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, at Ooredoo Group said: “Our annual Ramadhan CSR campaigns are an integral element of our CSR strategy across our companies, and one of the key ways in which we seek opportunities to offer support.

As a leading techco with the capacity to upgrade our customers’ worlds, we take our responsibility to our communities very seriously, and are committed to supporting the communities we serve and making a positive impact in their lives through the many valuable initiatives successfully rolled out across our network.”

Ooredoo Qatar, the Group’s base country, is conducting its annual programme of initiatives under the theme ‘Connecting and Giving’. As part of this year’s campaign, Ooredoo has partnered with local NGOs and will be hosting a wide range of events in Msheireb Downtown, Lusail Shooting Range and Lusail Sports Club stadiums. The activities will include the Garangao Kids Fashion Show, the Classic Car Parade, tram activations, the weekly Msahar, Rafeeq Al Khair, Nishan Tournament, Ooredoo League for the Children of Al Freij and the Meshkat Holy Quran competition.

Ooredoo Palestine’s campaign is operating under the theme ‘Spreading Happiness in the Holy Month’ and features a number of initiatives aimed at



spreading prosperity, including providing support for three orphanages in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza; participation in Ramadhan exhibitions; and participation in community activities such as distribution of dates and water at iftar.

Ooredoo Oman has kicked off its 19th Goodwill Journey, one of the company’s most impactful and sustainable community-based initiatives, to make a difference during the Holy Month.

The initiative will see volunteers journey to various regions across Oman to support vulnerable communities. Ooredoo Oman has also launched a special package for customers planning to perform Umrah, as one of many Ramadhan offers to share the value of ‘Caring’.

Towell Auto Centre wins Majestic Mogul award for 2022

MUSCAT: Towell Auto Centre (TAC) is a leading business house in the automobile industry in Oman since 1972.

It has once again demonstrated its excellence and commitment to providing high-quality services to its customers.

The company has won the prestigious Majestic Mogul award from TotalEnergies for the fourth time, and two years in a row. The award was received by Krishna Iyer Subramani — AGM of Towell Auto Centre during the recent TotalEnergies Marketing Middle East (TEMME) Distributor Convention held in Barcelona, Spain on March 6-9, 2023.

The Majestic Mogul is an annual programme that is keenly contested by TEMME’s distributors across the Middle East and CIS regions. The contestants are judged on various quantitative and qualitative parameters in alignment with TEMME’s strategy.

TAC was crowned as the winner for their overall performance in the top-notch Heavy Weight category for the year 2022.

It’s important to note that this is the fourth time TAC has won this award and it is a proud achievement for the company.

Talking about the success, a senior spokesperson from TAC said: “It’s an



honour to receive such a prestigious award. This is the result of relentless effort by the Lubes and Battery Division Team of Towell Auto Centre.

This would have not been possible without the extended support of TotalEnergies Marketing Middle East team members.”

Towell Auto Centre has been the authorised distributor for TotalEnergies Automotive & Industrial Lubricants in Oman since 2001 providing high-quality lubricants to its customers. TotalEnergies has a wide range of lubricants that cater to the needs of different types of industries.

The company’s commitment to providing high-quality products has helped it earn the trust of its customers.

TAC’s success in winning the Majestic Mogul award for the fourth time in a row is a testament to the company’s commitment to providing high-quality services to its customers.

The company’s dedication to excellence has helped it maintain its position as a leading business in the automobile industry in Oman. TAC’s success is also a reflection of the strong partnership it has with TotalEnergies Marketing Middle East (TEMME).

SECURING THE FUTURE

The guide to funding for entrepreneurs and start-ups



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Securing funding is an essential part of growing and scaling any business, and it can be a challenging and complex process for entrepreneurs and start-ups.

In this article, we will explore the different types of funding available and the key steps you need to take to secure the funding you need to grow your business.

Step 1: Determine your funding needs

The first step in securing



funding is to determine exactly how much funding you need and what you will use it for. This will help you identify the most appropriate type of funding for your needs and set clear funding goals.

Step 2: Develop a business plan

Having a comprehensive business plan is critical when seeking funding, as it provides investors and lenders with a clear understanding of your business and your plans for growth. Your business plan should include an overview of your business, your target market, your competition,

and your financial projections.

Step 3: Explore different funding options

There are many different types of funding available for entrepreneurs and start-ups, including angel investment, venture capital, crowdfunding, and loans. You should explore all

of your options and choose the one that best suits your needs, taking into account factors such as the amount of funding you require, the repayment terms, and the level of equity you are willing to give up.

Step 4: Build a strong network

Building a strong network of industry professionals and investors can be a valuable asset when seeking funding.

You can attend networking events, join start-up communities, and participate in pitch competitions to meet potential investors and lenders.

Step 5: Perfect your pitch

When seeking funding, it's essential to have a compelling pitch that convinces investors and lenders that your business is worth investing in.

Your pitch should clearly communicate the value of your business, your plans for growth, and the potential for returns. You should also be prepared to answer any questions that investors may have and provide financial

projections and supporting documentation.

Step 6: Negotiate terms

Once you have received an offer for funding, it's essential to negotiate the terms and conditions to ensure that they are favourable for your business. This includes the amount of funding you will receive, the repayment terms, and the equity that you will give up. It's important to consult with a lawyer or financial advisor to ensure that the terms of the agreement are in your best interests.

In conclusion, securing funding is a crucial step in the growth and scaling of any business. By following these steps and best practices, you can ensure that you secure the funding you need to grow and succeed.

Are you ready to navigate the complex and challenging world of legal and regulatory compliance for entrepreneurs and start-ups? Stay tuned for our next article, Navigating legal and regulatory challenges: A guide to compliance for entrepreneurs and start-ups.

Post-Brexit questions for finance sector unanswered



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Finance leaders hoping that Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Spring Budget would answer some of the questions for financial services left lingering following Brexit, were left disappointed.

Hunt's speech last month did not reference issues ranging from the future of the government's rulebook and the bankers bonus cap to London's status as a listings venue and a regulatory deal with the EU, the leaders noted.

Hunt did not provide an update on the Financial Services and Markets Bill, the government's flagship legislation which was to work its way through parliament. It hopes the bill will unleash London's financial district (known as the 'City') in the wake of the UK's split from the EU.

As New York continues to poach prized listings from the City, Hunt said in the Budget he would bring forward measures to make the London Stock Exchange a more attractive place to list, but not until the Autumn Statement later this year.

CEO of real estate stock exchange IPSX, Roger Clarke said: "None of the measures put forward adequately address the evident issues in the market that have seen London lose ground to New York in attracting and retaining listed companies." Hunt also announced 12 new investment zones across the UK that would benefit from tax breaks and other benefits, but London was not one of them.

"To see London being ignored in the government's list of areas short-listed for investment zones to boost innovation is concerning," said Claire Harding, Centre for London research director.

"They should be making best use of the capital's expertise and resources to support growth in every region of the

UK, rather than level London down."

Hunt also did not provide an update on plans to scrap the cap on banker bonuses. The UK inherited the law from the EU's rulebook. Financial services were left out of the initial trade deal between the EU and the UK that followed Brexit.

The two sides have been scrambling to work out a framework for the industry ever since. A memorandum of understanding for how they would cooperate going forward was agreed in March 2021 but has not been signed yet.

The Lord Mayor of London and others have said the chances of a deal have increased since the breakthrough on the Northern Ireland Protocol with the so-called Windsor Framework deal.

However, no update was forthcoming in the Budget on the memorandum either. UK chief investment strategist, of BlackRock Investment Institute, Vivek Paul said: "The Windsor Framework agreement should set the table for a better future UK-EU relationship.

But the UK's standing in the eyes of international investors is not where it was a decade ago and rebuilding a reputation can be slow.

EU authorities have been firm that they expect banks to have appropriate resources in the bloc following the split, which removed their automatic right to operate in EU countries through the so-called passporting system.

The European Central Bank's recent desk-mapping review identified several "empty shells" being run by international banks on the continent. Various leaders were ordered to either transfer desk heads and risk heads or change their trading models as a result.

The European Commission is also looking to force a minimum amount of clearing into the bloc – a temporary equivalence deal allowing EU firms to clear through London is set to expire in 2025. TheCityUK boss Miles Celic said: "The chancellor's focus on embracing innovation, boosting business investment and driving growth right across the UK is promising. For the UK to realise its growth ambitions, remain a powerhouse for talent, innovation and investment, and to reaffirm its reputation as a world-leading international financial centre, there must be continued focus on ensuring economic stability and resilience."

Curbs on Russian oil products redraw global shipping map

MOHI NARAYAN AND JONATHAN SAUL

Global fuel suppliers are turning to longer and costlier routes that produce more carbon emissions to move their diesel and other products as Western restrictions on Russian cargoes have reshuffled global energy shipping patterns.

As a result of the European Union ban on Russian fuel that started on February 5, tankers carrying clean oil products such as gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and naphtha are travelling between 16 and 18 days to bring Russian supplies to Brazil or US cargoes to Europe, according to two shipping sources.

That is up from the four to six days a ship used to travel from Russia to Europe, said the two sources, a broker at a major shipbroking firm and a charterer involved in the Russian trade of naphtha, which is used to make plastics and petrochemicals.

The ban comes on top of a halt late last year on Russian crude sales into the bloc as well as Western price caps. Since the start of the ban, the Clean Tanker Index published by the Baltic Exchange, which measures average freight rates for shipping fuels like gasoline and diesel on some of the most common global routes, has more than doubled.

The redrawing of the shipping map underscores the knock-on effects of Western efforts to punish Russia over its invasion of Ukraine last year, adding to fuel supply insecurity and pushing up prices even as policymakers worry about inflation and the risk of a global economic downturn.

"Not only are voyages much longer, but vessel behaviour has also changed, keeping vessels from operating in other CPP (clean petroleum product) markets," Dylan Simpson, freight analyst at Vortexa, wrote in a note.

Russian cargoes of fuel are heading to far-flung buyers in Brazil, Turkey, Nigeria, and Morocco as Moscow compensates for the lost European business, while Europe is importing more fuels such as diesel from Asia and the Middle East, according to shipping

AS A RESULT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION BAN ON RUSSIAN FUEL THAT STARTED ON FEBRUARY 5, TANKERS CARRYING CLEAN OIL PRODUCTS SUCH AS GASOLINE, DIESEL, JET FUEL AND NAPHTHA ARE TRAVELLING BETWEEN 16 AND 18 DAYS TO BRING RUSSIAN SUPPLIES TO BRAZIL OR US CARGOES TO EUROPE

data from Refinitiv and Kpler.

Asian cargoes, in turn, are being displaced by Russian fuels in Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, and redirected to the blending hub of Singapore for temporary storage, two northeast Asian refinery sources said.

European importers whose naphtha cargoes travelled from Russian ports to Antwerp in four days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine now must wait 18 days for alternative supplies from the United States, the source said.

The US is also emerging as a top supplier of heavy naphtha to Europe amid the EU ban, while the Group of Seven Nations, EU and Australia have capped Russian naphtha prices at \$45 a barrel and diesel and gasoline at \$100 a barrel for trades that use Western ships and insurance.

Meanwhile, Brazil, traditionally a US naphtha importer, is boosting purchases from Russia at more attractive prices.

However, the journey from Russia to Brazil can take 18 days or longer and, at up to \$7 million per voyage, the costs are nearly double that of a US shipment, the ship charterer involved in the Russian market said.

Brazil received around 240,000 tonnes of Russian diesel and gasoil in the first three weeks of March, accounting for a quarter of Brazilian imports, up from Russia's 12 per cent share in February and less than 1 per cent last year, said Benedict George, head of diesel pricing with energy and commodity data provider Argus.

"Until February, Europe had remained Russia's primary market for refined product exports; however, in the space of a month, a major pivot has been observed," tanker broker E A Gibson said in a recent report.

Measured in terms of cargo miles,

which multiplies the cargo quantity in metric tonnes by the distance travelled in nautical miles, the amount of Russian oil product shipments to Brazil in March rose to 3.07 billion metric tonne-nautical miles (MT-NM) from 941 million MT-NM in November, according to data from valuation company VesselsValue.

Shipments from Russia to Nigeria rose to 1.88 billion MT-NM in March from zero in November.

Clean product cargoes to Saudi Arabia in March jumped to 1.75 billion MT-NM from 31 million MT-NM in November, while shipments to the United Arab Emirates were 4.43 billion MT-NM in March, up from 2.85 billion MT-NM in November, the data showed.

Also in March, Russian clean products shipped to Togo reached 973 million MT-NM, up from zero in November. In volume terms, Brazilian imports of oil products from Russia were about 284,000 metric tonnes in February, up from 73,300 tonnes in September, VesselsValue data showed. Conversely, Russian exports to the Netherlands dropped to 238,200 tonnes in February from 1.15 million tonnes in September.

Those longer distances are being done at higher costs for Russian products than for typical shipments from Europe. According to market estimates, freight rates for the UK/European continent to West Africa are quoted at \$55.77 per tonne for a product tanker with a standard 37,000-tonne load. This compares with an indicative rate of \$174.24 per tonne for shipments from Russia's Baltic ports to Nigeria, \$103.84 for Morocco and around \$150 to Egypt.

With ships travelling further, that is also likely translating into greater emissions from smokestacks.

Based on pre-pandemic data, a 10 per cent increase in mileage for all tankers travelling to and from the European economic area would increase their emissions by around 1.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, equal to the emissions of around 750,000 cars per year in Europe, said Valentin Simon, data analyst with the Transport & Environment think tank in Brussels.

— Reuters

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Five frequently asked questions about Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's rose harvest season

Each year, from mid-March to mid-May, the rose fields of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar come alive with a sea of pink and red blooms. This is the time when the Damask Rose harvest takes place. The Damask Roses of Oman are a true wonder of the world, and a visit to the rose fields is an experience that visitors will never forget.... P20



QUR'AN

VERSE OF THE DAY

[More precisely], is He [not best] who created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you rain from the sky, causing to grow thereby gardens of joyful beauty which you could not [otherwise] have grown the trees thereof? Is there a deity with Allah ? [No], but they are a people who ascribe equals [to Him].

(Surah An-Naml)

HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Hurayra heard that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, "Anyone who wants to have his provision expanded and his term of life lengthened should maintain ties of kinship."

HEALTH TIPS

People who suffer from headache or dizziness due to low blood sugar levels during the fasting period should break the fast at Iftar time by starting with 2-3 dates, which will help replenish blood sugar levels.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN

The Story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY SAYS :{ And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe - or is he among the absent? I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him unless he brings me clear authorization." But the hoopoe stayed not long and said, "I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne. Found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] way, so they are not guided, [And] so they do not prostrate to Allah, who brings forth what is hidden within the heavens and the earth and knows what you conceal and what you declare - Allah - there is no deity except Him, Lord of the Great Throne."

[Solomon] said, "We will see whether you were

truthful or were of the liars.Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them. Then leave them and see what [answer] they will return." She said, "O eminent ones, indeed, to me has been delivered a noble letter.

Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it reads: 'In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, Be not haughty with me but come to me in submission [as Muslims]!' She said, "O eminent ones, advise me in my affair. I would not decide a matter until you witness [for] me."

They said, "We are men of strength and of great military might, but the command is yours, so see what you will command." She said, "Indeed kings - when they enter a city, they ruin it and render the honoured of its people humbled. And thus do they do. But indeed, I will send to them a gift and see with what [reply] the messengers will return." So when they came to Solomon, he said, "Do you provide me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Rather, it is you who rejoice in your gift. Return to them, for we will surely come to them with soldiers that they will be powerless to encounter, and we will surely expel them therefrom in humiliation, and they will be debased."

[Solomon] said, "O assembly [of jinn], which of you will bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?" A powerful one from among the jinn said, "I will bring it to you before you rise from your place, and indeed, I am for this [task] strong and trustworthy." Said one who had knowledge from the Scripture, "I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you."

And when [Solomon] saw it placed before him,

he said, "This is from the favour of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful. And whoever is grateful - his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever is ungrateful - then indeed, my Lord is Free of need and Generous!"He said, "Disguise for her throne; we will see whether she will be guided [to truth] or will be of those who is not guided." So when she arrived, it was said [to her], "Is your throne like this?" She said, "[It is] as though it was it." [Solomon said], "And we were given knowledge before her, and we have been Muslims [in submission to Allah.]And that which she was worshipping other than Allah had averted her [from submission to Him]. Indeed, she was from a disbelieving people." She was told, "Enter the palace." But when she saw it, she thought it was a body of water and uncovered her shins [to wade through]. He said, "Indeed, it is a palace [whose floor is] made smooth with glass." She said, "My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, Lord of the worlds."20-44 Surah An-Naml

SOLOMON HAD A VERY LARGE army of men, jinn, and birds. One day, he was reviewing this army when he noted that the hoopoe bird was absent without permission. It was the job of the hoopoe to look for water when the army needed it. The bird had been travelling in the country of Saba (Sheba), which is in modern-day Yemen, and it returned and declared to Solomon { I come to you from Sheba with sure news. I found a woman ruling over the people, she has been given many blessings and has a mighty throne! I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah} (27:22-4)

Solomon was deeply distressed that a whole people should be lost in worshipping the sun, rather than the One God who created it. He decided to send a message to the Queen, inviting her and her people to worship God { Allah! - There is no god but He! - Lord of the Throne supreme! (Solomon) said: "Soon shall we see whether thou hast told the truth or lied! Go thou, with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them) (27:26-7)

The queen was a wise ruler and when she received the letter, she was suspicious that Solomon really wanted to control her territory. She decided to send him gifts and to see what his reaction to her splendid gifts would be. In this way, she would know if Solomon was only interested in wealth. She was impressed by Solomon's reaction. Not only was he not interested in her gifts of gold and jewels, but he was actually quite offended to receive them. The belief in God was better to him than precious jewels: (Will ye give me abundance in wealth? But that which Allah has given me is better than that which He has given you!}(27:36)

The Queen of Sheba decided to travel to Solomon to see with her own eyes the one who had sent a message to her. Travelling a long distance with her courtiers, she eventually arrived at the court of Solomon. She was known to have a magnificent throne, and one of the jinn offered to Solomon to bring this throne before he could have time to stand up. Another wise man at the court offered to bring the throne to him within the blinking of an eye, and sure enough, the throne of Sheba was transported to him, so that it was waiting for her, in disguise, when she arrived{

So when she arrived, she was asked, "Is this thy throne?" She said, "It seems the same. And knowledge was bestowed on us in advance of this, and we have submitted to Allah [in Islam]."(27:42)

Having recognised her throne and recognised the Wisdom of Solomon, the queen entered the magnificent palace. Its floor was made of shimmering glass, which shined like water, and the queen, thinking it to be real water, lifted her skirts so that she would not get wet, which must have been very undignified for a queen, especially when Solomon told her: {...This is but a palace paved smooth with slabs of glass.. }(27:44)

The story of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon has a very beautiful ending. The queen declares:

[O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul: I do (now) submit (in Islam), with Solomon, to the Lord of the Worlds.} (27:44)

MORAL LESSONS FROM THE SURA

This Sura no.27, titled Sura Naml (The Ant), is a clear indication for human beings on fulfilling any lawful need, to overcome any difficulty and to settle matrimonial disputes.

One should pay attention to fulfilling any debts, keep it written and take measures to avoid poverty and financial issues by being active.

Other areas that the Sura touched upon are, how one needs to find good job or employment, to win a court's case, release from imprisonment, how to get better offspring, how to overcome famine and drought, prayers for rain, necessity to defeat and overpower enemies and tyrant leaders, and to treat deadly incurable disease and sickness.

IN PHOTOS



Muslim devotees gather after offering prayers during the holy fasting month of Ramadhan at Jama Masjid Khairuddin in Amritsar. — AFP



Men cook a traditional curry for a communal Iftar, the breaking of fast, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan in Banda Aceh. — AFP



Muslims perform the evening prayers at Meskel Square in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia ahead of an open Iftar event held during the holy Islamic month of Ramadhan. — AFP



6 Picasso Shows to See This Year

PABLO PICASSO DIED 50 years ago this month, on April 8, 1973. This year, the cultural wings of the French and Spanish governments will observe the anniversary by collaborating on "Celebration Picasso 1973-2023," a collection of exhibitions across Europe and the United States that play off one another like the colours and textures of a cubist painting. These are six shows to seek out.

NEW YORK

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
'YOUNG PICASSO IN PARIS'

The Guggenheim will focus on one year of Picasso's life, exhibiting 10 paintings and works on paper that the artist created after arriving in Paris in the fall of 1900. The show puts particular emphasis on "Le Moulin de la Galette," an oil painting that offers a good way to compare and contrast Picasso's style with those of other artists: The famous dance hall that the work depicts was something of a blank canvas for avant-garde brushes, having also been painted by Vincent van Gogh, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Ramon Casas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. May 12

through Aug. 6; guggenheim.org.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
'T'S PABLO-MATIC ACCORDING TO HANNAH GADSBY'

Here's a novel way to land a gig curating a high-profile Picasso show: publicly take the man to task. At least that's how Hannah Gadsby, an Australian stand-up comic whose 2018 special, "Nanette," included a piercing bit about the artist's misogyny, found herself with an invitation to work on this Brooklyn Museum exhibition. The show, put together by Gadsby and curators Lisa Small and Catherine Morris, will look at Picasso's work with a feminist eye and address, among other issues, the perils of mythologising the masters. It will also include works from the museum's collection of feminist art. June 2 through Aug. 24; brooklynmuseum.org.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
'PICASSO IN FONTAINEBLEAU'

In the summer of 1921, long before garages became the settings of folkloric Silicon Valley origin stories, Picasso shackled up in one in Fontainebleau, southeast of Paris, to take on his own creative pursuits. Paintings he created

there included the neoclassical "Three Women at the Spring" and the cubist "Three Musicians," both of which will be presented at MoMA alongside other works and archival materials from the period. Oct. 1 through Feb. 10; moma.org.

EUROPE

MUSÉE DE L'HOMME (PARIS)
'PICASSO AND PREHISTORY'

Anniversary celebrations are inherently backward-looking. Why not go all the way? That's the attitude that the Musée de l'Homme in Paris seems to have taken for its Picasso show, which centres on the influence that prehistoric art — ceramics, engravings, early paintings and drawings — had on Picasso's work. Roughly 40 Picasso pieces, including "Woman Throwing a Stone," a 1931 oil painting, are compared with artworks by prehistoric humans — the Picassos of the Stone Age. Through June 12; museedelhomme.fr.

MUSÉE PICASSO (PARIS)
'PICASSO CELEBRATION: THE COLLECTION IN A NEW LIGHT'

British fashion designer Paul

Smith is the artistic director of this show, which emphasises Picasso's continued influence. Smith, with curators Cécile Debray and Joanne Snrech, selected art from across Picasso's career (including his early Blue Period "Self-Portrait" from 1901 and his 1942 found-object piece "Bull's Head") interspersed with works by contemporary artists Guillermo Kuitca, Obi Okigbo, Mickalene Thomas and Chéri Samba. Through Aug. 27; museepicassoparis.fr.

MUSEO REINA SOFÍA (MADRID)
'PICASSO 1906: THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION'

Like the Guggenheim, the Museo Reina Sofía (the permanent home of "Guernica") in Madrid will zoom in on a single year in Picasso's life. With a focus on drawings and sketchbooks, this show makes a case for 1906 as a transformational period in the artist's career and, by extension, in the development of contemporary art. The year is considered the end of Picasso's Rose Period, and included a chunk of time when Picasso took a break from Paris and made a formative trip to Gósol, a Catalan village. Nov. 14 through March 4; museoreinasofia.es.

Milan Kundera: the unbearable lightness of decluttering

MILAN KUNDERA HAS had a bit of a clear-out after his wife had a dream.

The author of "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" has gone full Marie Kondo, emptying the shelves of his Paris apartment of 3,000 of his own books.

The legendary Czech novelist has given his massive collection of author copies in scores of languages to a new library in his home town of Brno.

The epic decluttering was inspired by the writer's wife Vera Kunderova, who said the late American author Philip Roth came to her in a dream and whispered the idea into her ear.

"The decision was clear: There was no doubt," Kunderova told Czech radio. "There was no choosing."

"I prepared the whole thing and Tomas Kubicek (from Brno's Moravian Library) simply... boxed up all the books and took them away," she added.

Although she did have her doubts when movers left. "Sadness came when

the shelves were empty so I put out some chestnuts and other small things I used to buy at the Picasso Museum (in Paris)."

"I couldn't stand the emptiness so I started to put silly things on the shelves."

The new Milan Kundera library opened in Brno last week on Kundera's 94th birthday. Fittingly for a literary joker, he was born on April 1.

A KIND OF HOMECOMING

"Milan was born in Brno, this is a symbolic act, he's returning to Brno," his wife said.

Kundera left communist Czechoslovakia for France in 1975, having falling out of favour with the authorities after the Prague Spring reform movement was crushed by Soviet-led armies in 1968.

The ageing novelist — who rarely speaks in public — has had an often complicated relationship with his

homeland.

His wife, a literary agent, said the new library will help bridge that gap. "He may depart, but he will live on in Brno. People will go and meet him. The house where he was born is 10 minutes from the library."

"It will serve above all students and researchers, but also anyone who wants to reflect on Kundera's work," Kubicek, head of the Moravian Library, said.

The new library houses Kundera's

drawings, newspaper articles on his work, but also the 17th-century original of an essay by the French philosopher Montaigne, signed by the author and bound in calf skin, which Kundera received as a prize.

"There's so much material and we can't display everything. He received an awful lot of prizes and they are also a part of the library. We'd need a hall for that," said Kubicek.

The library will also organise lectures and expert debates with the help

of an advisory team that includes French playwright Yasmina Reza and Frankfurt Book Fair head Juergen Boos.

Kundera's critics say he turned his back on fellow Czechs and dissidents following his exile in France. He only regained his Czech nationality in 2019.

In 2008, a Czech magazine accused him of being a police informer under communist rule, which he denied as "pure lies".

Kundera stopped books he wrote in

French from being translated into his native language.

But Kubicek said that Kundera's supposed trip with his homeland was "a big Czech myth".

"When people in France speak critically about Kundera, they are talking about his novels, while here all the criticism is down to balcony gossip," he said.

"People here don't talk about his texts or ideas. It would be nice if the library changed that." — AFP





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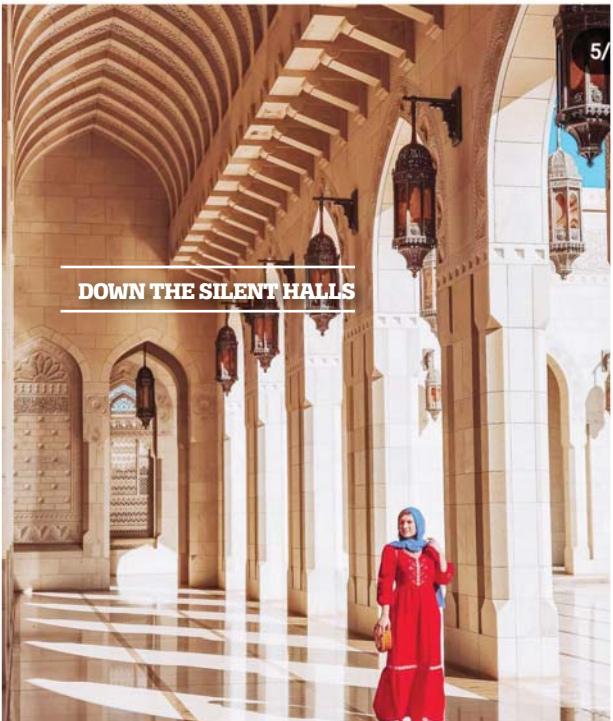
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AROUND THE WORLD

ANIMAL PLANET

Scientists Breed Sea Dragons, but Not by the Seashore



FOR MORE THAN a decade, researchers at the New England Aquarium in Boston have been trying to breed some of the most elusive and enchanting fish under the sea. Lacy and delicate, sea dragons live only in the waters along Australia's southern coast, and their small habitat and limited range make them an ideal candidate for in-captivity breeding.

Since 2008, the aquarists have tried to replicate the sea dragons' natural habitat. They have changed the temperature of the sea dragon tank to match the seasons of the southern hemisphere. They have adjusted the amount of light in the exhibition. They got a taller tank. None of it worked.

"I had kind of given up and thought it's never going to happen," said Jeremy Brodt, an aquarist and galleries manager at the New England Aquarium.

And then, "out of the blue," Brodt said, "it happened."

Last May, aquarium staff members discovered that a male weedy sea dragon was successfully carrying his mate's eggs. The aquarium announced last month that the eggs had hatched in mid-July, and that aquarists have been raising 18 baby dragons since then.

It is the first time the New England Aquarium has successfully bred and hatched the weedy variety of the species, making it one of about 15 scientific institutions that have bred sea dragons in the 30 years since they first appeared in aquarium displays, Brodt said. The Birch Aquarium at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego celebrated the arrival of more than 70 weedy sea dragon babies several weeks ago.

Aquarists hope that breeding these fickle creatures in captivity will lead to fewer sea dragons being collected from their native sea grass habitat, which is under increasing stress from climate change and run-off from storms. Sea dragons, which are primarily of the leafy or weedy varieties, are not currently threatened, but the Australian government has strict regulations that allow only a limited number to be collected for public display in aquariums. Still, scientists are worried that the animals' already limited habitat may be contracting.

"They're a great, phenomenal animal, they get people's attention," Brodt said. "It's a way to get that message across and talk about these unique animals and the issues that they're facing."

That is easier said than done, in large part because of the mysteries surrounding their optimal — and very complicated — mating habits.

Like their sea horse cousins, male sea dragons are responsible for carrying the species' eggs to term and can have more than 150 eggs attached to their tails. Their elaborate mating ritual involves male and female sea dragons mirroring each other, moving together as they spin upward through the water. During their dance, the female sea dragon transfers her eggs to a patch on the underside of her partner's tail, where he fertilises and carries them. If the transfer is interrupted somehow — by competing love interests, for example, or even clumsiness — the eggs may drop or end up unfertilised. — **NYT**

FASHION

The Man Behind the Internet's Favourite Outfits

DUY TRAN HAS never been to the United States, but his dresses have. His clothes have been worn by young female celebrities like Bella Hadid, Olivia Rodrigo and Doja Cat, often going viral for blending so-called Y2K aesthetics with tight silhouettes and ultra-sheer fabrics.

But the man behind these popular outfits has remained largely invisible outside of Vietnam, where he lives.



Tran, 24, who is from Long An province in southern Vietnam, started Fanci Club as an e-commerce label in 2018, after dropping out of fashion school. He was bored with his studies, he said.

The brand was conceived as an online secondhand clothing

seller before it began upcycling some of its clothing into new creations. In 2021, Tran pushed the brand into its current iteration, releasing his first collection of original designs.

"I want to empower anyone who wears my clothes to feel feminine and self-confident," Tran said in Vietnamese. "Fanci girls are the ones who can dare to dress as they please."

Fanci Club's organza dresses, — the most expensive items, ranging from \$80 to \$500 — are often accented with details such as dainty bows, flowing ruffles and elegant flowers, and the effect can be whimsical and coquettish.

Tran said he often imbued his designs with the ideas of power and femininity. And he noted that his materials were elastic and tight but still comfortable.

Brett Alan Nelson, a stylist for Doja Cat, contacted the brand for samples in June 2021, Tran said. At the time, Vietnam was in the midst of a wave of new Covid-19 infections after containing the coronavirus in the beginning of the pandemic. Tran said his company was understaffed, and he had to pull all-nighters to make his deadline for Doja Cat.

It didn't stop there. Weeks later, after Doja Cat posted a photo of herself wearing Fanci Club's designs, Tran received an Instagram message directly from Hadid: "You are just amazing." "I was so surprised and blown away," said Tran, who then sent her a few custom pieces. Hadid posted several photos of herself wearing the brand's looks, including one featuring its signature ruffled mesh-spandex top and matching pants.

That moment was a turning point. Soon, Tran said, he received requests from Addison Rae, Hailey Bieber, Dua Lipa and K-pop group Blackpink.

"Fanci Club embodies femininity — it's sexy, it's nightlife with a princess personality," said Beverly Nguyen, a Vietnamese American stylist in New York. "It also pairs well with vintage trends that we have been seeing for quite a few seasons now: the oversized Dior glasses, the Fendi baguette bag, the Manolo sparkly sandal."

Nguyen said she felt especially nostalgic, and proud, to see her culture reflected in Fanci Club's outfits. "The silhouettes and colours remind me of my mom's style in the early '90s," she said. "I love that the designs are rooted in nightlife culture that stays true to the city girl of Vietnam."

On April 15, Fanci Club will drop its latest collection, "Colour of Unadulterated Insanity," which leans more into a different feminine persona: the dark, rebellious and scorned woman. Bows and ruffles remain, though this time with corset strings and metal spikes.

"In previous collections, we imagined a woman who looks at life with rose-coloured glasses and dreams of love," Tran said. "However, there are moments in life where she will encounter the darkness of jealousy or betrayal, and bloom dazzlingly."

Tran hopes to open a store in the United States. But he does not want to lose sight of his original customers, Vietnamese women. "I want them to know there is someone here making clothes for them," he said. — **NYT**

CHANGING WORLD

Senegal harvests first experimental homegrown wheat



WITH THE WHIR of a mower, under a clear blue sky, Senegalese researchers have begun harvesting a crop of experimental homegrown wheat, the latest step in a years-long effort to reduce reliance on imports.

The second most consumed cereal after rice, wheat is an important staple in the bread-loving West African nation.

But Senegal, like many of its neighbours, depends entirely on foreign supplies.

It imports 800,000 tonnes of the grain per year. Its tropical climate is not naturally suited to wheat but domestic trials have been under way for years.

Supply chain problems, rising grain prices and inflation caused by the war in Ukraine have added urgency to the country's efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

Since late last week, researchers from the Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research (ISRA), a public research institute, have been harvesting four varieties of wheat on a demonstration plot in Sangalkam, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from the capital Dakar.

Three of the varieties are Egyptian and the fourth was developed by the institute.

It operates five demonstration plots in total — two near Dakar and three in the Senegal River Valley — and has tested hundreds of wheat varieties, Amadou Tidiane Sall, one of the researchers, told AFP.

Many have proved unsuitable.

The Sangalkam crop, one of several successful experiments by the institute, was sown in early January and matured in three months during Senegal's cold season.

Agriculture Minister Aly Ngouille Ndiaye visited the plot earlier this month.

He said he had requested Egyptian seeds on a visit to the North African country for the United Nations' COP27 climate conference in November.

"We have significant potential," the minister said during his visit, promising the government would work with the private sector to expand trial plots.

He acknowledged that a lack of adequate water for irrigation posed a significant challenge.

Not everyone is convinced that wheat can be grown at scale in Senegal.

Amadou Gaye — the president of the National Federation of Bakers of Senegal, who represents some 2,500 bakeries across the country — told AFP he would prefer to see resources dedicated to producing local cereals such as millet, maize and sorghum. — **AFP**

Photos by Yeru Ebuen

In the rugged and sun-baked terrain of Oman, where towering mountains meet the sea, lies a hidden treasure that has been cherished for centuries: the Damask Roses of Oman.

Each year, from mid-March to mid-May, the rose fields of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar come alive with a sea of pink and red blooms. This is the time when the Damask Rose harvest takes place, and visitors from around the world flock to Oman to witness the beauty and fragrance of this enchanting flower.

The Damask Rose is not just any flower; it is the key ingredient in one of the most prized and valuable essential oils in the world: Rose Oil. Oman is one of the few places in the world where the Damask Rose is grown, and its unique climatic conditions and fertile soil make it the perfect place to cultivate this delicate flower.

To experience the Damask Roses of Oman at their best, visitors should plan their trip between mid-March and mid-May. During this time, the fields are alive with the heady scent of roses, and local farmers are busy harvesting the flowers to extract the precious oil.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR FOR THE ROSE SEASON?

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's Rose Season is a highly anticipated event that takes place in Oman's Al Hajar Mountains range. The rose season typically runs from late March to early May each year, but the exact dates can vary depending on weather conditions and other factors.

The best time to visit Al Jabal Al Akhdhar for the rose season is generally in mid-April, when the roses are in full bloom and the air is filled with their sweet fragrance. During this time, visitors can witness the picturesque rose fields in their full glory and participate in various cultural events and activities that celebrate the rose harvest.

This year, according to some rose farmers, the season started late, so they are anticipating that the rose harvest season can last until the third week of April, although by that time, there will be fewer roses to see as the rest of the blossoms would already have been harvested earlier in the month.

CAN I DO A DAY TOUR, OR SHOULD I REALLY STAY OVERNIGHT?

From Muscat to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the trip can take around two hours. It is important to understand that if your purpose is to visit the gardens, you can definitely see them all throughout the day, so a day tour will suffice.

If you're hoping to participate in the actual harvest time, the farmers only do this a few hours after sunrise, usually ending by nine am or an hour before sunset. The timing of the day is important in order to preserve the blossoms and prevent the roses from wilting.

If you don't want a rushed trip and want to spend quality time going through the gardens and watching the different activities, including the distillation process, and hiking to several rose villages, then staying overnight in the mountain will allow you to do more meaningful activities.

WHAT ARE MY LODGING OPTIONS IF I'M STAYING OVERNIGHT?

For those who want to stay in the heart of the rose fields, there are several options for accommodation. The most popular choice is to stay in a traditional Omani mountain house, also known as a "jabal" or "qasr." These houses are built from local stone and offer stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

While The Suwgra is a few minutes away from the garden, we highly recommend this traditional inn owned by the Al Shraiqi family as it gives you a more interactive look as to how the Omanis live in the mountains.

There are also numerous other inns and smaller hotels spread across the different areas of the mountain.

Visitors can also stay in one of the luxury hotels located on the mountain, such as the Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort or the Alila Jabal Akhdar. Both of these hotels offer world-class amenities and are also a few minutes away from the rose fields.

It's worth noting that the rose season is a popular time to visit Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and therefore, accommodations can fill up quickly. So it's recommended that you book your stay well in advance.

OTHER THAN THE ROSE HARVEST, WHAT ELSE CAN I DO WHEN I'M IN THE MOUNTAINS?

We highly recommend including a visit to the distillation factories in your itinerary, as this completes the whole rose season experience. It's also more intimate if you visit the smaller Omani family distillation rooms as they will give you insight into the traditional way that the rose water is distilled. Many of the farmers also sell their own version of the rose water and rose oil and it will be a shame not to take home a couple of bottles.

Beyond the roses, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is home to some interesting hiking points and ruins. A side trip to the abandoned village of Wadi Bani Habib will definitely add a different adventure to your visit.

You can also stop by Anantara and visit the famed Diana's Point, where the popular British princess is said to have spent a good afternoon admiring the view. If you want something for your kids, a stop over at the Dusit D2 Hotel will allow you to try their Adventure Park, which includes some of the finest and most entertaining rope and wall climbing activities.

CAN I COME ON MY OWN WITHOUT NEEDING A GUIDE?

If you've been to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar before and know the best spots for the roses, they can definitely visit the rose gardens on your own without needing for a guide.

However, if you want a more memorable experience, we would highly recommend getting a guide for the day especially if it's your first time as they will be able to provide you with context about the different activities as well as take you to some of the best spots for rose harvest. While there are several guides you can find and more organised tours can be booked even in Muscat, we usually visit the mountains with the aid of Mohammed (Instagram: @5_hawk) and Malik (Instagram: @cadytours). Remember, the guides usually have their favourite places to take you, and while all of them create a different experience, it's important that they know where the best places are to visit, especially at the end of the season.

WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD I CONSIDER DURING MY VISIT?

Temperatures can be quite high during the day, so it's important to bring sun protection and stay hydrated. It is also important to note that the farmers are also doing their fasting for Ramadhan so make sure to be sensitive and pay attention to some of the cultural practices of the locals and avoid eating and drinking in public.

Most of the beautiful gardens require several minutes of hiking. Wear good walking or running shoes, and avoid wearing clothing with exposed shoulders and knees. Also, avoid being too disruptive and loud.

The Damask Roses of Oman are a true wonder of the world, and a visit to the rose fields is an experience that visitors will never forget.

