

31st edition of Comex on May 23

In its 31st edition, Comex will be presenting the Banking and Fintech zone in coordination with the Central Bank of Oman for the first time. Another first event will be the start-ups' conference on AI (Artificial Intelligence), while yet another first in this year's Comex is the Awards for Excellence in Technology in 20 categories. The organisers of Comex announced the participation of about 150 exhibitors in the annual event. **DETAILS ON P5**



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OMAN CLINCH SIX MEDALS AS GCC GAMES BEGIN



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PORT OF SALALAH COMMISSIONS NEW EQUIPMENT TO BOOST EFFICIENCY



P20

WHERE EVE WITH APPLE LIVES WITH WELL-DRESSED WOMEN OF YESTERYEARS



MUSCAT

OMAN, IRAN SEEK TO BOOST COOPERATION

Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received Alireza Peyman-Pak, Deputy Minister for Industry, Mining and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at his office on Tuesday. The two sides reviewed areas of cooperation in the fields of transport, communications and IT and ways of enhancing them to serve the interests of the two countries.

DETAILS ON P3

SHRIMP PROJECT YIELDS HARVEST

The Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) announced on Tuesday the first commercial harvest of the Shrimp Aquaculture Project commissioned at Qurun, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate. The project production capacity is estimated to reach 400 tonnes monthly as per the following size ranges. The farm is growing Pacific White Shrimp (*Litopenaeus vannamei*), using Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) brood stocks imported from the United States.

DETAILS ON P13

SHABAB OMAN II ATTRACTS VISITORS IN ITALY



The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel Shabab Oman II anchored at the Port of Catania in Italy. The ship received a lot of visitors who toured the ship's facilities and were briefed about the Sultanate of Oman and its tourism potentials.

Crude prices at \$111.03 a barrel

MUSCAT: Oman oil price for July delivery on Tuesday reached \$111.03, comprising a rise by \$4.03 from the price of Monday, which was \$106.52.

The average price of Oman oil for May delivery has stabilised at \$110.96, thus \$19 per barrel higher than April delivery.

Meanwhile, global stock markets rallied on Tuesday on hopes that China will ease its weeks-long Covid lockdown and gradually reopen businesses.

European exchanges closed higher and Wall Street's main indices also rose in mid-day trading, spurred by a nearly one-percent rise in April retail sales.

— Agencies

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P6



FUNDING THE POLIO ERADICATION ENDGAME

P9

Oman among top countries with lowest risk of money laundering

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The Sultanate of Oman is among the countries with the lowest risk of money laundering in the world, according to the Financial Secrecy Index 2022 (FSI-2022). Although all countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) figure in the list, Oman is ranked 47th among the 141 countries in the world.

The Financial Secrecy Index is the world's most comprehensive assessment of the secrecy of financial centres and the impact of that secrecy on global financial flows. The United States of America has climbed from the second rank held by it two years ago to top the list of countries in the FSI-2022, which was released on Tuesday.

The Financial Secrecy Index ranks countries every two years

based on the degree of tightness of the country's legal and financial system and its position on the wealthy and criminals, who hide their assets and launder their money around the world.

In the Sultanate of Oman, money laundering refers to the exchange or transfer of funds to disguise or conceal the nature and source of the proceeds or disguise or conceal the real nature, ...

TURN TO P2

Need for joint international efforts to conserve sharks

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The permits for shark species for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) are on the rise. Issued by the Environment Authority, there were 60 permits in 2021 against 47 in 2020, according to Suleiman bin Nasser al Akhزمi, Director-General of Nature Conservation.

Several facts regarding the conservation of sharks were revealed during a workshop organised by the Environment



Photo for illustrative purpose only

Authority and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (FAW) and is meant for preparing studies to protect two types of sharks — the silky shark and the

bigeye thresher, also known as fox shark. The event was held on Tuesday at Avani Muscat hotel under the auspices of Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The workshop will continue until Thursday.

The workshop aims to shed light on the importance of preserving sharks and highlighting obligations related to the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

TURN TO P3

Mandatory e-payment services come into effect

VINOD NAIR
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The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's decision No 386/2022 on mandatory provision of electronic payment services to consumers came into effect on Tuesday.

The ministry on April 17 announced that commercial institutions and companies which did not commit to providing electronic payment services operating in the some activities will be penalised. The ministry has issued a decision No 386/2022 on providing electronic payment services for consumers.

The decision stipulates that establishments and commercial companies operating in the activities of selling foodstuff, gold and silver, restaurants and cafes, selling vegetables and fruits, electronics, building materials, and tobacco products, as well as all activities in industrial zones, complexes, malls, and gift markets are mandated to provide electronic payment

The move stipulates that establishments and commercial outlets operating in various activities are mandated to provide e-payment services for all consumers

MINISTRY'S DECISION

services for all consumers.

The move seeks to achieve comprehensive digital transformation through cooperation and integration between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.



Shura panel discusses desertification

MUSCAT: The Food and Water Security Committee of Majlis Ash'shura on Tuesday hosted Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and a number of the Authority's specialists to discuss the phenomenon of desertification.

At the outset of the meeting, Abdullah bin Ahmed al Malik, Chairman of the Food and Water Security Committee, affirmed that the committee considered the necessity of studying the phenomenon of desertification due to its direct adverse impact on the vegetation cover and agricultural and animal production. He added that the committee seeks to review the national plan for combating desertification and evaluate its outputs and the level of progress achieved so far as well as discuss appropriate solutions to the challenges faced by authorities in this regard.

The Environment Authority



presented a visual display on the efforts being made to combat desertification and curb drought and land degradation. The visual display indicated that the Sultanate of Oman joined the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 1996, which enabled it to attend the meetings of the parties, review countries' experiences and take part in training programmes aimed at building qualified national capacities in this field.

Regarding the national plan to combat desertification, the

Authority's specialists indicated that work is underway to update the plan by seeking assistance of an expert in the field of combating desertification. This is in addition to working on proposing national objectives and indicators in coordination and cooperation with the relevant authorities within the framework of unifying national efforts to mitigate the phenomenon of desertification and reduce drought and land degradation.

The meeting also dealt with the national initiative aimed at

planting 10 million trees, one of the national efforts to curb the phenomenon of desertification, especially for wild trees. The specialists confirmed that the Authority encourages afforestation and grants free seedlings to be planted and irrigated by members of the community. They spoke about the rehabilitation project in the areas affected by desertification using fog harvesting techniques in Dhofar Governorate and its importance in mitigating desertification.

The members of the committee stressed that overgrazing is one of the most important causes of desertification in Oman due to the community's lack of response to the afforestation projects carried out by the Authority. They stressed the importance of raising community awareness to join hands with the authorities to mitigate the phenomenon of desertification.



Qatari Emiri Land Forces Commander received

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Maj Gen Said Hussain al Khayarin, Commander of the Qatari Emiri Land Forces.

The two sides reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries. They also exchanged views on matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO),

several senior SAF officers and the Military Attaché at the Qatari Embassy in Muscat.

Maj Gen Said Hussain al Khayarin visited the SAF Museum at Bait Al Falaj Fort.

Separately, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Maj Gen Said Hussain al Khayarin.

The two sides reviewed several military matters of common concern.

The Qatari Commander also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). — ONA

Ministry of Health launches fresh campaign against dengue

KABEER YOUSUF

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The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday launched yet another campaign against Aedes Aegypti in Bausher and Al Seeb with the support of volunteers from different corners of society to visit houses and commercial establishments in Al Seeb, Al Ansab and other parts of Bausher.

The campaign, which is carried out in cooperation with the Muscat Municipality and other local bodies, has nearly 200 volunteers.

Speaking to the Observer, a spokesperson from the MoH said that this campaign to eradicate the breeding of dengue-fever carrying mosquito by the ministry in collaboration with Muscat Municipality and the relevant stakeholders is in pursuance of the other campaigns launched earlier.

"Various male and female volunteers would visit households, construction sites and other areas susceptible to mosquito breeding and take immediate steps to clear them off besides educating the local people around," she said.

The launching ceremony was



ERADICATING AEDES AEGYPTI

- Tighten water tank caps properly
- Get rid of all discarded tyres
- Change the water in pots and fountains constantly every five days
- Dispose of all waste in closed bins
- Backfill ponds and wet bins

held in the presence of Dr Tamra al Ghafri, Director General of Health Services, Muscat Governorate, and the Wali of Bausher and a number of members from Majlis Ash'shura and Municipal Councils, in

addition to officials from Muscat Municipality, and community members at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque area.

The MoH began the campaigns in January and called upon all citizens and residents to activate

the community role to eradicate breeding sites of Aedes Aegypti and to cooperate with the field teams involved in the campaign for the same.

Moreover, the Ministry of Health and the Municipality called on everyone to seek information from reliable sources and ignore rumours. Citizens and residents can communicate with the Ministry of Health's Contact Centre and the Muscat Municipality Contact Centre for any queries.

Meanwhile, several households and nearly 25,000 facilities that included commercial outlets have been successfully disinfected as part of the Muscat Campaign for Elimination of Aedes Aegypti Mosquito in the wake of the cases of dengue reported in some parts of the governorate last year, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

A fine of RO 300 will be imposed on owners of buildings for failing to comply with general cleaning, pest control and disposal of waste properly, while given three days to correct the violation. The fine is doubled if the violation is repeated.

Royal Saudi Naval Forces delegation visits MSC



MUSCAT: A delegation from the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) visited on Tuesday the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the MSC by Commodore Mohammed bin Hamoud al Zedjali, Head of the MSC.

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

Dhofar Municipality chairman inspects waterfront development project

SALALAH: Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, on Tuesday held a field visit to inspect the construction work at the waterfront development project in the Wilayat of Salalah implemented by Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS).

The chairman of Dhofar Municipality reviewed development at the project and watched a visual display showcasing the components of the project and the stages of implementation. He discussed the timeframe of the first phase



scheduled to be completed in autumn of this year.

The first phase of the project involves the opening of the sea road and waterfront restaurants

which include a number of international brand restaurants, the partial operation of the market with some sites already handed over to the operating

restaurants during this month while the rest will be handed over during the upcoming period. The second phase of the waterfront development project in Al Hafa area includes full operation of the popular market by the end of this year.

In its early stages, the project aims to develop the market area on an area of more than 60,000 square metres which is envisioned to be a hub for many small and medium enterprises, attracting leading brands, in addition to a sea promenade serving the area and its visitors.

— ONA



Winners of short promotional films contest announced

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has announced the winners of a competition for short promotional films in the categories of nature tourism, adventure and maritime tourism and cultural and heritage tourism. Photographers Sultan bin Nasser al Ruqaishi, Omar bin Ahmed al Busaidy and Nadir bin Khadabaksh al Balushi won the prizes in the categories of adventure and nature tourism.

Photographers Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi and Ahmed bin Nabeel al Lawati won the awards in the maritime tourism category while the prize for heritage and

cultural tourism went to Salim bin Hamdan al Hajri.

The competition aims to promote tourism and heritage fields that are peculiar to the Sultanate of Oman and highlight the natural components that contribute to attracting local and international tourists, supporting young talents and encouraging them to participate with their innovative works in the production of high quality short promotional films that highlight the beauty of Oman and introduce tourist and heritage attractions in various governorates and wilayats.

— ONA

Plea to study impact of Covid on consumers

MUSCAT: The 20th Arab Consumer Federation's forum, which concluded here on Tuesday, called for conducting an objective scholarly study about Covid-19 consumer-related impacts on Arab families.

The forum encouraged Consumer Interest Research (CIR) to encourage the holding of in-depth workshops specialised in Arab consumer issues.

The forum recommended initiatives to engender consumer culture in students of schools and institutes. It proposed adding study subjects on consumer rights and duties, encouraging digital financial services, organising courses on marketing laws and mechanisms and



enacting e-marketing laws and regulations.

The forum also recommended urging enterprises to establish comprehensive information systems that enable policy makers to draft strategies, executive summaries and monitoring programmes for all sectors in each establishment. — ONA

OMAN AND IRAN EXPLORE AREAS OF COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received in his office on Tuesday Alireza Peyman-Pak, Deputy Minister for Industry, Mining and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides reviewed areas of cooperation in the fields of transport, communications and information technology and ways of enhancing them to serve the interests of the two countries. The meeting was attended by Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary for Transport.

ECONOMIC TIES

Dr Saleh bin Said Masn, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry, also received Alireza Peyman-Pak.

The two sides reviewed the march of relations between the two countries. They explored areas of joint cooperation in the fields of economic diversification and means of boosting trade and investment opportunities between the two countries.

The meeting covered exchanging expertise and enhancing cooperation in organising joint events to introduce the available investment



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali with Alireza Peyman-Pak.



OCCI received a business delegation from Iran.

opportunities.

It also touched on conducting B2B meetings between business people from Oman and Iran. The meeting was attended by Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman.

TRADE EXCHANGE

Also on Tuesday, Oman

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) received a business delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran, headed by Alireza Peyman-Pak.

Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of OCCI's Board of Directors, said that the visit reflects the keenness of Oman and Iran to enhance relations and trade exchange.

— ONA

Two Omani youths reach Mount Everest camp

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 17

Omani adventurer Khamis bin Mohammad Ambusaidi, along with his colleague Muslim bin Salim al Kalbani, arrived at the main base camp of Mount Everest, which is 5,364 metres above sea level.

The adventurers travelled 130 km on the Himalayas -- a walk for 11 days -- even as the temperatures dropped below zero. They were on their way back on Monday through the same route that they had taken to climb.

Talking about the objective of their adventure, Khamis Ambusaidi said: "Our goal is to raise the flag of Oman among



other major countries' flags there, besides making the nation's presence felt at various levels and highlight its tourism value. We also wanted to prove that Omanis are

capable of achieving such tasks." It is a hard journey carrying all personal belongings throughout the onward and return trips. The length of the track is more than

130 km on the Himalayas.

Khamis Ambusaidi said that the path is so hostile and progress so arduous that the climb requires high fitness, patience, endurance, determination and strong will. The ability to adapt and withstand extreme cold, which reaches below zero most of the time, is another requirement. Adapting to the lack of oxygen is the biggest challenge for anyone who embarks on such an adventure.

"I want to tell all young people, go before it's too late, and don't let the train of life pass without achievements. Enjoy your youth before it's too late, explore your hidden abilities, and make yourself a glory of which you can be proud," says the adventurer.

Need for joint international efforts to conserve sharks

FROM P1

It also aims to prepare Non-Determinal Findings (NDFS) and apply them to the two types of sharks registered in the waters of the Sultanate of Oman.

Suleiman al Akhzmī delivered a speech in which he talked about the importance of preserving the marine life and fisheries in the Sultanate of Oman as one of the pillars of its national priorities and the most important economic food sources that contribute mainly to food and economic security.

"The Sultanate of Oman has adopted many policies, plans and programmes to develop this sector and achieve sustainable development, in addition to implementing oversight operations that focus on implementing laws and legislation issued in this regard including monitoring fishing fleets,

border crossings and companies," he said, adding that the country has realised the importance of activating the areas of relations and cooperation among the countries of the world in the field of preserving marine life and fisheries and supporting negotiations and related agreements.

The Sultanate of Oman joined the CITES on March 19, 2008, pursuant to Royal Decree No 117/2007. It is one of the strongest agreements concerned with the preservation of wildlife and marine life in the world, which works to reduce smuggling and combating illegal trade, especially cross-border trade.

"The Environment Authority, as the body responsible for protecting wildlife and biodiversity and the national focal point in the Sultanate of Oman and concerned with the implementation of CITES,

is making unremitting efforts in the field of cooperation and coordination at all local, regional and international levels with the aim of controlling and ensuring that international trade in endangered species does not pose a threat to the chances of their survival in nature, among which are sharks included in the lists of CITES," Al Akhzmī explained.

He called for the need to unite national, regional and international efforts to conserve sharks and regulate their fishing and movement between the borders of countries, describing it as a matter of great importance and an urgent global priority given what these species face at present from excessive and continuous exploitation as a result of the increasing demand for them, in addition to other reasons, such as the deterioration of their natural

environments, unguided human activities and other challenges.

"We all have a responsibility to ensure that terrestrial and marine biological resources are used sustainably for the benefit of present and future generations," he asserted.

Dr Akram Issa Darwish, Programme Director at the International Fund for Animal Welfare, in his speech spoke of the threats facing marine creatures, including sharks. He said, "Marine life, including sharks, is under increasing fishing pressure worldwide, and the main goal is to trade in their fins. This has led to the depletion of groups of these organisms, which represent an important natural wealth for many countries of the world and local communities. Fishing of more than 100 million sharks annually in the world is obvious, and everyone

knows the most important fishing areas, the reasons behind the intensive fishing, and the most important areas of consumption in the world."

Dr Akram added that sharks have biological characteristics that do not help to protect them and their survival in the face of this increase. "Among these characteristics is that many types of sharks need many years to reach the stage of maturity, and when they reach it, they produce a limited number of young compared to other types of fish, which makes overfishing of significant negative impact on the survival chances of this species."

He continued, "During the last decade, the world's countries agreed, through the conferences of the CITES, with remarkable unanimity on the importance of protecting sharks from the danger

they are exposed to. The number of species listed in the CITES appendices reached 44 species of sharks and manta sharks in the second appendix of the convention; during the last three conferences, the parties to this convention to be granted a degree of protection by regulating their international fishing and trade, which is an unusual precedent in this field. Most of these species are also included in the lists of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) with the aim of protecting them as migratory species."

He indicated that many types of sharks are migratory fish, which makes the issue of preserving them subject to international cooperation and the development of the necessary mechanisms to protect them on their migration paths from the danger of extinction.



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WORLD Hypertension Day, that falls on May 17, is a reminder for everyone that the disease, which is mostly a lifestyle problem, is silent yet fatal.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has warned that one-third of the population of the Sultanate of Oman is affected by hypertension, and steps must be taken seriously to avoid any dire consequences.

The MoH said World Hypertension Day is observed on May 17 to create awareness of high blood pressure as a disease, including its risks and the ways to prevent this extremely fatal illness.

Hypertension affects more than 1 billion people globally, and it accounts for about half of all heart disease- and stroke-related deaths worldwide. Hypertension does not cause any symptoms on its own, which is why it's referred to as the silent killer.

“The World Hypertension Association estimates that nearly eight million people die annually because of this disease and more than half of those infected with it do not know the reality of their disease.”

It added that two out of every five adults in the Eastern Mediterranean Region are also affected by high blood pressure and one of the reasons includes the high consumption of sodium and little consumption of potassium.

According to the MoH, on average, the more sodium you consume, the higher is the blood pressure, which can lead to the possibility of having heart disease or a stroke.

HEART ATTACKS

MoH said primary high blood pressure or hypertension are associated with other health conditions that cause high blood pressure while secondary hypertension can happen over the years if left uncontrolled leading to heart attacks.

The ministry statement urged people to eat vegetables and fruits regularly and stop using tobacco products and alcohol abuse. High blood pressure can also lead to kidney failure, damage to the retina and loss of vision.

According to official statistics, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are responsible for most illnesses and deaths recorded in the last decade.

Over 4,000 citizens die each year from one of the four main NCDs representing 67 of all deaths; nearly one in five citizen adults die before the age of 70 from NCDs.

A quarter of the Omani population over 18 years (23.1 per cent) has high blood pressure and two-thirds (66.6 per cent) are overweight or obese (12).

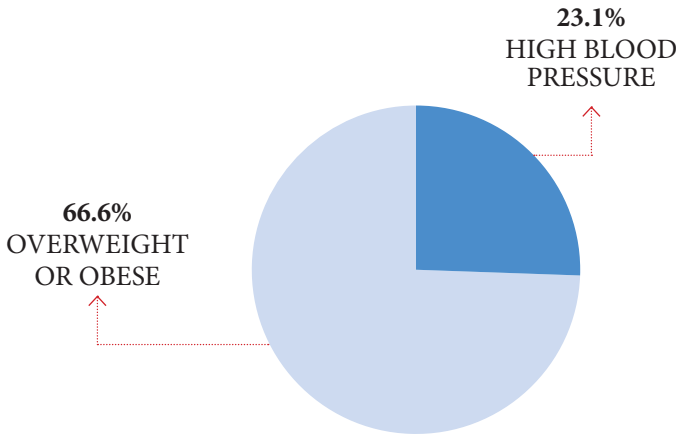
Unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use are of increasing concern, particularly among younger populations.

The government has taken efforts by establishing the National Multi-sectoral Non-communicable Disease Committee in 2012, developing an NCD policy and action plan, including a national screening programme to detect NCDs in those of 40 years and above.

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

The government has also integrated the most common NCDs (diabetes, hypertension and asthma) into primary healthcare (PHC) and ensured the availability of all essential medications, the introduction of standards for salt in bread, and most recently, the introduction of taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages, energy drinks, tobacco products and soft drinks.

MoH has campaigned for effective salt reduction initiatives and scaling up tobacco control on a priority basis. Speaking to the Observer, health experts said that while medication and diet controls need to be observed on a priority basis, it is also important to walk daily for at least 30 minutes, have control over psychological stress and anger, and drink water regularly and reduce salt consumption.



According to the MoH, on average, the more sodium you consume, the higher is the blood pressure, which can lead to the possibility of having heart disease or a stroke

Hypertension

S I L E N T B U T F A T A L

The Ministry of Health said World Hypertension Day is observed on May 17 to create awareness about high blood pressure as a disease, including its risks and the ways to prevent this extremely fatal illness



Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion



Tender 21/2022 Announcement for

The Internal Tenders Committee at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announces the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Company rate	Tender document price in OMR Non-refundable)	Tender Document collection Deadline	Offers Submission Deadline
21/2022	Maintenance works, supply & installation of furniture for the directorate general of CIIP & standards metrology department buildings in AlBatinah north	Specialized	25/- OMR	Wednesday 25/5/2022	Sunday 12/6/2022 Before 10:00 am

Terms and conditions documents can be obtained through the ESNAD service via <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> in which they will be available until the date mentioned in the table above, provided that the document's price is paid through the website's payment gateway.

All companies shall submit their offers with a temporary insurance in the form of Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank in the Sultanate of Oman values not less than (1%) of the offer, Addressed to H.E Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and valid for (90) days from the date of offer submission. Any offer that does not meet the required temporary insurance shall not be considered. A copy of the Bank Guarantee or Certified Check must be attached with the offer submitted by the company on the website (ESNAD service) and the original Bank Guarantee or Certified Check must be kept until it is requested by MOCIP. Offers shall be submitted through the ESNAD service on the above-mentioned website before 10 o'clock on the morning of the day mentioned for offers submission. Offers submitted after this date will not be considered, regardless of the reasons of the delay.

The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other submitted offer.

Note: Priority shall be given to companies and institutions whose bid has the highest Omanisation Rate .

Correspondences:

- Tender inquiries; All correspondence pertaining to TENDER Inquiries shall be online through E-Tendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System inquiries : All correspondences pertaining to the technical support of E-Tendering System shall be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number.

Tel.: +968 24402200
E-mail: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

www.tejarah.gov.om

[Tejarah_om](#)

[80 00 00 70](tel:80000070)

WORLD
Hypertension
DAY MAY 17



Comex to be held from May 23 to 27

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In its 31st edition, Comex will be presenting the Banking and Fin-tech zone in coordination with the Central Bank of Oman for the first time. Another first event will be the start-ups' conference on AI (Artificial Intelligence), while yet another first in this year's Comex is the Awards for Excellence in Technology in 20 categories.

The organisers of Comex announced at a press conference held on Monday evening at Crowne Plaza the participation of about 150 exhibitors in the annual event. Comex is making a comeback with face-to-face event after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dr Khamis bin Saif Al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow Up Unit, will inaugurate the Comex.

"There will be workshops and



seminars conducted for free at the Comex; MoUs are going to be signed, but important is what happens after the Comex," said Amr Abdullah Baabood, CEO, OITE.

Comex series is to be launched in specific areas, he pointed out.

Dr Salim al Ruzaqi, Chairman of the IT Society of Oman, said the

IT Society would be present at the technology show. The aim is also to organise activities and not just a stereotyped annual event.

Another new feature this year is the awards for elders who use technology. Present at the Comex will be start-ups from Oman, other Arab and non-Arab countries.

"We are proud that this

edition of Comex is coinciding with the declaration of Muscat as the Arab Digital Capital of 2022, in addition the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology's five-year governmental digital transformation programme," said Sadiq Khan, COO of OITE.

He added there would be face-to-face activities from May 23 to 27 and '3D AI METAVERSE' during the same period.

The exhibition details can be accessed by downloading Comex TechClub App, which is to have activities for nine months.

Some of the planned activities are for school and college students who would be given the opportunity to speak about their ideas through the sessions - School's X & Stem and College and Universities X & Stem at Future Tech, and individuals & Societies X Stem.



MENATox seeks poison control programmes

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The 12th Middle East and North Africa Clinical Toxicology Association Congress (MENATox2022) has come up with various recommendations, foremost of which being the inclusion of the poison control programmes within the relevant national strategies.

The congress was organised by the Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Diseases Surveillance and Control (DGDSC), Department of Environmental and Occupational Health.

The congress, which concluded the other day, brought together 350 participants from the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, India, South Africa, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon along with 75 lecturers from different countries of the world.

The congress came up with various recommendations, foremost of which was the inclusion of the poison control programmes within the relevant national strategies, promoting the basic principles and importance of toxicology in the region, activating the role of the poison



control centres in line with the latest development of health services, diagnosis and treatment in toxicology field.

The congress recommended the importance of promoting the surveillance and statistic system for the various poisoning cases in Oman in order to enable assess the situation and improve the service in the call centre, establish poisoning treatment units in the referral hospitals, providing the needful support for the toxicology researches, conducting training workshops frequently in dealing with poisoning cases and exposing to chemicals. In addition, the congress urged the development of postgraduate and fellowships programmes in toxicology in the region, as well as strengthening the linkage channels between the different poisoning control centres in the region.

Melhem Zein concert at ROHM on May 19-20



MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has announced that the upcoming concert, which will be held on May 19-20, will star the famous Arab singer Melhem Zein, known throughout the Arabic speaking world for a voice which resounds with an epic 'mountainous' quality, earning him popular attention from around the world.

The audience will enjoy a concert dedicated to Zein's repertoire, paying homage to the greats of Arabic music heritage. During his 24-year career, Melhem Zein has explored the music of the artists Wadiah El Safi, Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Nazem Al Ghazali among others.

Blending their style and inspired by a golden era of music, Zein has developed a unique sound and a huge and loyal fan base. All visits to the opera house are conducted in accordance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Social distancing is maintained throughout the building and the wearing of face masks is mandatory.

— ONA



المها
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Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Non-refundable)	Tender Purchase Deadline	Clarification Deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/2022/05/ENG/002	TENDER - FABRICATION AND SUPPLY OF FUEL STORAGE TANKS FOR 3 YEARS	100.000	24.05.2022	29.05.2022	02.06.2022

Bank Name & Account Number
Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om. The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling 24610289/24610287/24610355

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. (SAOG)
PO Box No: 57, PC: 116, Mina Al Fahal, Sultanate of Oman



MINISTRY OF HEALTH ROYAL HOSPITAL

ANNOUCEMENT FOR TENDER

THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF ROYAL HOSPITAL INVITE SPECIALIZED COMPANIES TO SUBMIT TENDER

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENT	CLOSING TIME/ DAY/DATE	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE (NON-REFUNDABLE)
949/2022/ MOH/ DGRHPP-61	SUPPLY OF SURGICAL ITEMS FOR ROYAL HOSPITAL	26/MAY/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 14/JUNE/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS

All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above 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.

Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.

The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Finance-Royal Hospital one day before the submission date for all Tenders.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

[\(https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om\)](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (12/2022)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Last Date for Inquires Submission	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Last Date for Submission
9/2022/ MM/PA-1- Recall-1	Supply of Spare Parts for Chain Saw Machines	25/- OMR	01/06/2022	05/06/2022	07/06/2022
10/2022/ MM/PA-2- Recall-1	Supply of Spare Parts for Pest Control Machines	25/- OMR	01/06/2022	05/06/2022	07/06/2022
27/2022/ MM/PA-4	Supply of Gas	25/- OMR	06/06/2022	23/06/2022	26/06/2022
28/2022/ MM/PA-5	Supply of Food Stuff (Specified for SMEs)	25/- OMR	06/06/2022	23/06/2022	26/06/2022
29/2022/ MM/PA-6	Supply of Furniture for Labour Accommodation	25/- OMR	06/06/2022	23/06/2022	26/06/2022

- Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.
- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.
- Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.**
- Clarifications and support:**
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
 - For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Tripoli rocked by battles as rival PM vies for power

TRIPOLI: Libya’s capital was rocked early on Tuesday by gunfights between backers of two rival administrations, threatening another escalation in the war-torn North African country.

Supporters of a government endorsed by Libya’s parliament and by an eastern-based military strongman had tried to move into the western city of Tripoli by force.

That sparked pre-dawn clashes with armed groups supporting interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

Hours later they pulled out, citing the “security and safety of citizens”, as the United Nations, European Union and United States appealed for calm. There were no immediate reports of casualties from the fighting, but correspondents saw burned-out cars and military convoys on a major thoroughfare later on Tuesday morning.

Dbeibah was appointed under a troubled UN-led peace process early last year to lead a transition to elections set for December, but the vote was indefinitely postponed. In February this year, the eastern-



A view of vehicles destroyed during fighting between forces loyal to the Tripoli-based Prime Minister Dbeibah and rival forces of the Tobruk-based government in Tripoli. – AFP

based parliament appointed rival premier and former interior ministry Fathi Bashagha to take his place, arguing that Dbeibah’s mandate had ended. Dbeibah has refused to hand over power except

to an elected administration. Both men are from the western city of Misrata and are backed by different armed groups in the capital. Bashagha’s press service had announced overnight “the arrival of the prime minister of the Libyan government, Fathi Bashagha, accompanied by several ministers, in the capital Tripoli to begin his work there”. But his arrival sparked a battle that raised fears of a return to the chaos that followed a 2011 revolt that toppled dictator Moamer Kadhafi — and to the all-out conflict that gripped the capital when pro-Haftar forces attacked in 2019-20.

Several hours later, Bashagha’s camp announced that he and his ministers had “left Tripoli to preserve the security and safety of citizens”. Dbeibah’s defence ministry said it would respond “with an iron fist” to anyone “attacking security and the safety of citizens”. Local media later broadcast footage of Dbeibah meeting members of the public in the streets of the capital. The education ministry announced that schools would be closed

Dbeibah refused to hand over power except to an elected administration

for the time being. Libya expert Emadeddin Badi said Bashagha’s move had been “a failed attempt at a fait accompli”. Badi said Bashagha had “lost a large proportion of his constituency in his hometown of Misrata, tarnished his anti-crime brand and now tanked his popular support.” “It’ll be difficult to pick up the pieces after this,” he tweeted. The UN’s top in-country official, Stephanie Williams, in a tweet urged all sides to maintain calm, including avoiding “inflammatory rhetoric”. Bashagha, in video footage broadcast by Libyan television stations, said he would deliver a “unity speech to the Libyan people” on Tuesday evening. His interior minister Issam Abu Zariba pledged that their administration would assume its duties “peacefully” and “in compliance with the law.”

— AFP

Solar parks boom amid rising renewable energy demand in India

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Renewable energy is empowering many new projects in India and leading among solar energy producing states in the country are the Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

According to latest data released in March this year by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Rajasthan stood first in renewable energy with the production of 17040.62 MW, followed by Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

With its renewable power production, Rajasthan improved its position from fourth to first, while Gujarat remained second with 16587.90 MW capacity followed by Tamil Nadu (16099 MW) and Maharashtra (10657.08 MW). Renewable energy sources are emerging as right solution for huge energy demand in India and the states are vying for positions - a good sign for the country’s energy generation and supply that witnessed huge demand during the peak summer in many states.

The trend of energy generation

through renewable sources is picking up and by all means western state of Rajasthan has emerged as the first state to surpass 10 GW of installed large-scale solar power generation capacity.

Currently the largest producer of solar power among Indian states, 26 per cent of Rajasthan’s installed power capacity comes from solar (at the end of 2021, India had an installed capacity of 55 GW of solar power), according India World View report.

“Western Rajasthan is the epicentre of this solar revolution. Till recently, this area was known for the great sand dunes of the Thar desert spread far and wide in Barmer and Jaisalmer and the adjoining districts.

Today when you travel in this area, solar panels and windmills are some of the very first things that catch your attention.

There is almost nothing here except for sand dunes and occasional thorny bushes. Summer temperature climbs often up to 47-48 degrees Celsius. Human life here is difficult and there is shortage of almost everything but not sunshine,” the report said. Citing reasons for Rajasthan’s top position in



solar energy production, Sanjay P Pati, who deals in solar energy equipment, said,

“The state has vast land to engage for the new energy. Western parts like Barmer, Ratkuriya, Pokhran, Fatehgarh and Bhaniyana have exposure to clearer and long hours of

sunshine.” Luck would have been for the people of Barmer that first oil discovered there, and then it became a hub of solar energy.

Several new solar projects have been approved for Barmer, Jaisalmer and Jalore with big energy companies coming with new projects in the area.

Reformists surge in Lebanon polls

BEIRUT: The Hizbullah movement and its allies lost their majority in the Lebanese parliament in weekend legislative elections, as opposition groups and rival political factions scored gains, according to official results on Tuesday.

The elections, which came while the country is suffering from its worst economic crisis, dealt a blow to Hizbullah and its allies, who only grabbed 62 seats out of the 128-member parliament. Hizbullah and its allies would have needed 65 seats to hold on to their majority in parliament. In the 2018 elections, the group and its allies, among them the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, won a majority of 71 seats in parliament.

Representatives of the 2019 protest movements, on the other hand, won an unexpected number of seats, while other Hizbullah opponents also made gains. The opposition, who call themselves the “Force of Change,” won 13 seats - significantly more than expected.

Many of the opposition candidates emerged from mass, anti-government protests that erupted in 2019. Those were directed, among other things, against widespread corruption in Lebanon. Many people blame



Lebanon’s Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi speaks at a press conference as he announces final results in Lebanon’s parliamentary elections at the Interior Ministry in Beirut. – AFP

the established parties, which have been in power for decades, for the country’s severe crisis and the political stalemate in the country.

The Free Patriotic Movement, a key Hizbullah ally, won only 18 seats in Sunday’s elections, compared to 20 seats grabbed by their rivals, the Lebanese Forces, staunch critics of Hizbullah. Sami Nader, an analyst with the Levant Institute for Strategic Affairs, said the result was a “setback” for Hizbullah, but cast doubts about whether it will bring change.

“I do not expect a drastic change to happen inside the parliament as long as the groups inside it still have power, despite their loss,” Nader said. — dpa

RIYADH

Sandstorm blankets Saudi capital in grey haze

A sandstorm engulfed Saudi Arabia’s capital and other regions of the desert kingdom, hampering visibility and slowing road traffic. A thick grey haze made iconic Riyadh buildings such as Kingdom Centre nearly impossible to see from more than a few hundred metres away, though there were no announced flight delays or cancellations.

The kingdom’s meteorology centre forecast “surface dusty winds” in the country’s east and in Riyadh, ‘reducing horizontal



sight’, according to the official Saudi Press Agency. Dusty conditions were also expected farther west in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, according to the forecast. — AFP

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka’s president escapes censure motion

Sri Lanka’s beleaguered president side-stepped a censure motion after his fractured coalition rallied to delay a resolution blaming him for the country’s worst economic crisis. Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s shaky coalition voted against taking up the unprecedented “displeasure of parliament” motion.

The non-binding motion was proposed by the main opposition Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance, saying it echoed the demands of thousands of anti-



government demonstrators.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to Sri Lankans. — AFP

SANAA

First commercial flight in 6 years leaves Sanaa

The first commercial flight in nearly six years took off from Yemen’s capital, a major step forward in a peace process that has provided rare relief from conflict.

The Yemenia plane carrying 126 passengers, including hospital patients needing treatment abroad and their relatives, took off from Sanaa to the Jordanian capital Amman just after 9 am on Monday. Before take-off, the plane livery taxied through an honour guard.



Sanaa’s airport has been closed to commercial traffic since August 2016 because of air strikes by the military coalition, who are fighting Ansar Allah fighters.

—AFP



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In brief

■ MADRID



EXILED CARLOS TO VISIT SPAIN AFTER NEARLY 2 YEARS

Former Spanish king Juan Carlos is to visit his home country for the first time in two years, authorities have confirmed. “The king will be here this weekend,” the mayor of the port city of Sanxenxo in Galicia, Telmo Martín told journalists. The 84-year-old former monarch has been living in exile in Abu Dhabi since August 2020. He will attend an international regatta event in the city. “I do not know if as a spectator or as a participant, but he will be here,” Martín said.

This information has not yet been confirmed by the royal family or the Spanish government. — dpa

■ LONDON



QUEEN ELIZABETH II VISITS NEW ELIZABETH RAILWAY LINE

Queen Elizabeth II made a surprise appearance at a new railway line named in her honour, after health issues prevented her attending recent events. The 96-year-old monarch smiled as she visited Paddington Station in London to see the new Elizabeth line, a major new railway that is set to speed up transport links within the city and beyond. Dressed in a yellow wool coat and hat trimmed with flowers, she took a lift down to the platform, holding a walking stick, joining her son, Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, who had been announced as attending the event without her. — AFP

■ WASHINGTON



BIDEN VISITS SITE OF MASS SHOOTING

President Joe Biden flew on Tuesday to mourn at the site of America's latest deadly mass shooting, warning that the white supremacist ideology motivating the alleged gunman is tearing the country's “soul” apart. In the hastily organised trip to Buffalo, New York, Biden, accompanied by his wife Jill Biden, reprised the wearily familiar role for presidents of consoler-in-chief.

He was to begin by meeting families of the 10 African Americans murdered allegedly by a white gunman in a neighbourhood supermarket on Saturday. — AFP

Hundreds of Ukrainians surrender at Azovstal

KYIV: Russia said on Tuesday that 265 Ukrainian soldiers had surrendered after staging a last stand at the besieged Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, prompting Kyiv to call for a prisoner exchange.

Moscow claimed control of the strategic port city of Mariupol last month after a weeks-long siege, but hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers remained holed up in underground tunnels beneath the huge Azovstal industrial zone.

“Over the past 24 hours, 265 militants laid down their arms and surrendered, including 51 heavily wounded,” the Russian defence ministry said.

It added that those needing medical help were taken to a hospital in a part of the eastern Donetsk region controlled by pro-Kremlin rebels. The ministry published images showing wounded soldiers being carried on stretchers, some being searched and others being boarded onto buses. Elsewhere, lawmakers in Finland — which shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia — voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the Nato military alliance.

It paves the way for a joint application with Sweden to be submitted in the coming days, amid fears they could be next after Russia's attack on Ukraine, which has killed thousands and sent millions fleeing.

Ukraine earlier said 264 fighters from Azovstal were evacuated to Russia-controlled territory, including 53 wounded.

On Tuesday, the defence ministry expressed hope of an “exchange procedure... to repatriate these Ukrainian heroes as quickly as possible”. For those still in Azovstal, it said it was doing “everything necessary for their rescue”, although it said a military intervention was not possible. The fate of the soldiers remains unclear and is likely to cause concern in Ukraine, which



Yarvoslava who believes her husband is under the debris, digs with a shovel as soldiers and members of a rescue team clear the scene after an abandoned school was shelled the night before, in eastern Ukraine. - AFP

ICC sends ‘largest-ever’ investigative team

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court on Tuesday sent a 42-member team to Ukraine to probe alleged war crimes since the Russian attack in what it called the largest such deployment in its history.

The squad comprises investigators, forensic experts and support staff and will work with Ukrainian authorities, said Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of The Hague-based ICC.

“This represents the largest-ever single field deployment by my office since its establishment,” Khan said in a statement.

The team will “advance our investigations into crimes falling into the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and provide support to Ukrainian national authorities,” he added.

Khan thanked the Netherlands, where the court is based, for sending a “significant number of Dutch national experts” to help the mission.

The ICC prosecutor announced an investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity just four days after the February 24 Russian

attack. Khan then said that ‘Ukraine is a crime scene’ as he later visited the town of Bucha near Kyiv, where reporters saw at least 20 bodies lying in the streets after Russian forces withdrew in late March.

The ICC investigators would chase up leads and collect witness testimony “relevant to military attacks”, said Khan in his statement.

They would also work with Ukrainian authorities to “strengthen chain of custody with respect to hard evidence,” he said. — AFP

Ukraine said 264 fighters from Azovstal were evacuated to Russia-controlled territory, including 53 wounded

“guaranteed that they would be treated according to the relevant international laws,” he said.

Separately, the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament, Vyacheslav Volodin, said that “Nazi criminals should not be subject to a prisoner exchange”.

He did not mention Azovstal in particular, but Moscow has on numerous occasions said that members of the Azov Battalion — considered “Nazi” by Russian authorities — are among those trapped at the steelworks. — AFP

has accused Moscow of war crimes during the conflict.

The International Criminal Court said on Tuesday it was deploying its largest-ever field

team to Ukraine, comprising 42 investigators, forensic experts and support staff.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov did

not answer questions about whether the Azovstal soldiers would be treated as war criminals or prisoners of war.

President Vladimir Putin

Finland, Sweden to submit Nato membership bid

STOCKHOLM: Finland and Sweden will submit their bids to join Nato together on Wednesday at the military alliance's headquarters in Brussels, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said. “I'm happy we have taken the same path and we can do it together,” Andersson said on Tuesday during a joint press conference with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

Finland's legislature voted 188-8 on Tuesday to approve a bid for Nato membership, the same day as Sweden's foreign minister signed her country's application.

The two nations have accelerated moves to join the Western defence alliance following Russia's attack on Ukraine. Finland borders Russia, while traditionally neutral Sweden has seen a groundswell of public support for joining the US-led alliance.

The Finnish vote, which came after a two-day debate, clears the way for an application for membership.

President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin had already declared on Sunday that they wanted to submit an application.



Finland's President Sauli Niinistö and Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson address a news conference in Stockholm. — AFP

“Our Nato application is now formally signed. This feels big, it feels serious, it feels like we have landed on what we believe is best for Sweden after all

ANN LINDE

Swedish Foreign Minister

Niinistö now has to sign the application before it can be handed in together with Sweden's document at Nato's headquarters in Brussels.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde put pen to paper on Tuesday, a day after the government announced it wanted to become a Nato member.

“Our Nato application is now formally signed,” Linde wrote on her Twitter account. “This feels big, it feels serious, it feels like we have landed on what we believe is best for Sweden after all.” — dpa

Kremlin critic Navalny appeals jail sentence

MOSCOW: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Tuesday opened an appeal process for a nine-year prison sentence he was handed in March on charges that he and his allies say are politically motivated.

After a brief start to the hearing on Tuesday morning, the court said it would resume the process on May 24 following a request to postpone from Navalny.

His hearing comes as Russian authorities seek to silence remaining government critics and Moscow pushes on with its military campaign in neighbouring Ukraine, with thousands killed and some 10 million displaced.

A vocal critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Navalny in late March had his jail time extended to nine years after he was found guilty of embezzlement and contempt of court.

He is already serving two-and-a-half years in a prison some 100 kilometres east of Moscow for violating parole on old fraud charges.

On Tuesday, Navalny joined a hearing at a Moscow court via video-link from behind bars at his prison colony to



Opposition leader Alexei Navalny appears on a screen set up at a court room of the Moscow City Court via a video link from his prison colony during a hearing in Moscow. — AFP

appeal the extension of his jail term. Wearing a black prisoner uniform, Navalny asked the judge to postpone the hearing by a week so he can have a family meeting before being moved to a different colony, a journalist reported.

“If you confirm the sentence, I will be moved to a regime colony and transferred out of here. In that case my visit will be cancelled,” he said.

He also requested extra time to listen to the audio recording of his verdict.

If his new sentence comes into force, the 45-year-old opposition politician will be transferred to a strict-regime penal colony, which will place him in much harsher conditions, including allowing fewer family visits. — AFP

Flexible spaces and creativity are intertwined



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

There has been much talk of late in the Sultanate of Oman about the benefits of flexibility in the work place. This is on the back of the recent announcement about implementing flexible office hours in the government.

While issues like easing of traffic and wider availability of staff will be the immediate benefits of such a move, other, more long term gains are of equal importance.

Management gurus have touted flexibility in the work place as leading to efficiency, work life balance and productivity, but the larger gain that needs to be focused on is how this links to cognitive flexibility. According to behaviour scientists, cognitive flexibility is the ability of humans to switch between thinking of two different concepts

or “to think about multiple concepts simultaneously”.

It is harder than it sounds, and it is not multitasking either. It can also be the ability to adjust behaviour and thought to one’s immediate surroundings and context.

Research suggests that while animals plan and innovate for survival, humans learn to approach challenges and solve problems using a variety of strategies based on their past learning.

The ability to arrive at creative solutions is often the result of flexible thinking which “allows us to come up with ways to tackle problems,” according to educationist Peg Rosen. While time bound and outcome based projects focus on tangible and countable dividends, important

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE MORE FREEDOM A PERSON HAS IN THE WORKPLACE, THE MORE CREATIVE THE OUTPUT CAN BE

concepts like empathy, curiosity and imagination are essential for any meaningful outcomes, and even their implementation.

Flexible thinking lends to creativity – not in the sense that it makes us novelists, but in that it gives us the capacity to shift from lateral thinking to creative strategies

and imaginative solutions. It allows us to make unusual connections, even arrive at solutions not previously thought about.

Choosing alternative paths based on changed circumstances leads to optimal decision making. It is well known that the more freedom a person has in the workplace, the more creative the output can be.

Entrepreneurs are known to have cognitive flexibility, because, if one path does not work, another one has be created. At a personal level, being flexible also means that one is aware of their own limitations, open to others’ ideas, and willing to experiment.

In fact, cognitive rigidity is often linked to behavioural issues like obsessive-compulsive disorder or other forms of personality issues.

The good news is that cognitive flexibility can be learnt with training and practice.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), for example, helps autistic children develop better communication and empathy.

Our world today is rife with problems which are waiting for creative solutions. The time tested templates have all run out of steam. Issues of climate change, food security, and economic crises all need alternate solutions for success.

Conventional answers are inadequate in today’s world. The challenges today require thinking right outside the box, not only to find different answers to age-old questions, but even ask the questions differently. Flexible work hours may be a good place to start.

Rattled by Russia, Finns flock to military training

ELIAS HUUHTANEN

On a windy military island off Helsinki, people from all walks of life are spending their weekend doing military training, as volunteer numbers soar and Finland readies to join Nato to protect itself from Russia.

Finland’s defence forces only have around 13,000 employed personnel but the country of 5.5 million boasts an impressive 900,000 reservists with a wartime strength of 280,000 troops. Finland shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia.

For many of the participants attending this weekend’s training course on Santahamina Island, Moscow’s February 24 attack of another neighbour, Ukraine, was the deciding factor that got them to sign up. “These recent events in Ukraine were the final sign that it is necessary to be prepared in one’s own life, so that if something ever happens, one is better equipped for a crisis,” said 30-year-old engineer Ville Mukka after learning how to fight off a knife attack.

He and the other volunteers donned camouflage uniforms, some wearing helmets with branches tucked in them, as they trained in hand-to-hand combat, detecting explosives, and squad movement in the forest.

In the week after the war in Ukraine started, enrolment for the voluntary defence courses soared.

“Interest in voluntary training was about 10 times higher than in normal years,” said Ossi Hietala, 28, a representative of course organiser MPK, the National Defence Training Association of Finland. While around 600 people usually register during a normal week, the number enrolling in MPK courses in the last week of February jumped to 6,000.

To meet the increased demand, MPK received additional funding of nearly \$3.1 million from the state in April. Finland fought two bloody wars against the Soviet Union during World War II, with the Nordic country ultimately ceding vast areas of land to its powerful eastern neighbour.

“You don’t have to go too far back in history to find points of convergence (with what is happening today), which is quite worrying,” said Tuomas Vare, 43, one of the participants on the course. “Perhaps that’s part of the reason why I have become more active in training.” Less than three months after Russia launched its attack on Ukraine, the Finnish government announced its official intention to apply for Nato membership, ditching its decades-old policy of military non-alignment as public and political support for membership soared. — AFP

How the long recovery from bush fires could decide Australia’s election

KIERAN PENDER & MATTHEW ABBOTT

WITH AUSTRALIA ACUTELY VULNERABLE TO THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, EFFECTIVE DISASTER RECOVERY IS GOING TO BECOME ONLY MORE CRITICAL IN THE YEARS AHEAD

On a recent sunny day in the hills behind Cobargo, a village in southeastern Australia, local volunteers were hard at work installing a bathroom for the Jee family, which had waited more than two years for a proper one.

Tammie and Brett Jee and their five sons lost their home on New Year’s Eve 2019 when a ferocious fire swept through the area. It was one of the most damaging of the record-setting “black summer” bush fires in Australia that killed 34 people, destroyed 3,500 homes and burned more than 60 million acres over two months.

For the Jees and many others, the recovery from their devastating loss has been painfully slow. Barely 1 in 10 families in the affected region have finished rebuilding, local government data shows. Most have not even started. Planning delays, skilled labour shortages, supply chain problems brought on by the pandemic and a lack of government support are among the causes of delay.

The suffering has left its mark not just on the families living in sheds or battling bureaucracy. It has also shifted the political firmament: If the opposition Labor Party wins the Australian election on Saturday, it could be in part because these once-conservative rural towns south of Sydney have shifted their allegiance out of frustration and anger. “It’s

a perfect storm of factors,” said Kristy McBain, the area’s member of Parliament. Among them is a recovery effort complicated by overlapping involvement from national, state and local governments.

“It seems that every time we have a disaster, we have a government that wants to try to reinvent the wheel for how recovery should work,” added McBain, who was mayor of the local council during the fires. “And we’ve never settled on a model, which is pretty crazy.”

Other communities were also devastated by the summer blazes. Other towns have also struggled to rebuild and recover, hampered by a pandemic; by flooding and storms; and by a glacial approval process from government agencies. But Cobargo, where Prime Minister Scott Morrison was loudly heckled while visiting the town in the fires’ immediate aftermath, has come to stand as an emblem for the devastation and the politically divisive aftermath.

Just inland from Australia’s southeast coast, 240 miles from Sydney, Cobargo is in the electorate of Eden-Monaro, a bellwether seat that, until 2016, had been won by the party forming the government in Australia’s parliamentary system for four decades. It is currently held by McBain, for the opposition Labor Party, who won a by-election in July 2020 with a margin of less than 1 percentage point. The electorate to the north, Gilmore, also

hard hit by the fires, is held by another Labor representative, Fiona Phillips. It was previously in conservative hands for two decades.

With the ruling conservative Liberal-National coalition expected to lose urban seats in other states, the conventional wisdom is that the current government’s route to re-election goes through the country — in this case, bush-fire-ravaged country.

Morrison governs with a one-seat majority in Parliament. A failure to win back those seats could cost his coalition re-election.

The Jee family has more immediate concerns. They initially lived in a rental property before returning to their fire-scarred rural acreage in Wandella, near Cobargo, where they built a small shed and supplemented it with a disaster accommodation “pod” — a self-contained shipping container 23 feet long and 8 feet wide — provided by an Australian charity.

When the Jees set about rebuilding, they hit a wall of planning paperwork. Legacy planning issues with their previous home, and changes to development law, meant that at one stage it looked as if they might never be permitted to rebuild.

While those roadblocks have been largely overcome, the Jees are still awaiting final approval to start construction. They are unlikely to have a new home built by the fourth anniversary of the bush fires. “It’s been a nightmare,” TammieJee said. Nearby in Cobargo, Vic Grantham has been trying to get answers about the latest delays in his own planning process. When Grantham and his partner, Janice Holdsworth, moved to a 26-acre property in the area in 2005, they found community and contentment.

Early in the morning on New Year’s Day in 2020, their house was destroyed by fire. They sold their property and bought a block in the Cobargo township, intending to live in an existing shed on that site while they built their new dream home. But because they had moved, they subsequently learned, they no longer qualified as bush fire survivors for planning prioritisation by the local government. — New York Times



Independent candidate Monique Ryan greets voters at a pre-polling centre in Melbourne. — AFP

Every war is a war against children



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Every war is a war waged against children. From the decades-old conflicts in Iraq to Syria, South Sudan to Yemen, Afghanistan to the current war in Ukraine, children are caught up in violence, which is not of their making.

Around the world, millions of childhoods have been torn apart in the wars. Children are killed and wounded, abused and recruited, uprooted and denied their rights to live.

In several cases they are directly exposed to war. Their schools are destroyed and essentials for their survival and well-being blocked, critical infrastructure including hospitals and water and sanitation systems devastated by the fighting in those countries.

According to a report by Unicef, during the period between 2005 and 2020, more than 266,000 grave violations were verified against children, committed by parties to conflict in more than 30 conflict situations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

As much as 47 per cent of all child casualties in 2020, according to a UN report, were caused by explosive weapons and explosive remnants of war. Between 2005 and 2020, more than 104,100 children were verified as killed or maimed in situations of armed conflict. Between 2005 and 2020, more than 93,000 children were verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict, although the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher. A UN body confirmed the recruitment and use of at least 1,000 children in 15 different countries over this period. During the same period, the UN body verified more than 13,900 incidents of attacks, including direct attacks where there has not been adequate distinction between civilian and military objectives. The warring parties never spare educational and medical facilities and protected persons, including pupils.

Equally pathetic is that parties to conflict abuse, forcibly marry, sexually exploit and commit other grave forms of violence. At least 14,200 children were victims to such atrocities during the period.

When it comes to abduction, as many as 25,700 children were verified as abducted by parties to conflict. Boys account for three quarters of verified instances of abducted children. However, girls remain at risk of being abducted, including for the purpose of sexual violence and exploitation.

Children living in conflict-affected settings suffer indirect consequences without access to basic needs including food, clean water, sanitation and education. They are more likely to die in childhood due to under-nutrition and a lack of medical care, including vaccinations.

As a report by WHO points out, having lost their childhood, war children may grow up wanting to compensate actively for that loss. The material and psychological deprivation that these children feel is expected to have a profound effect on their personality formation.

Recent studies have shown high levels of lethal stress in children who have lived in or fled from war zones, which can have a lifelong impact on their mental health and development. Some develop a resentment and anger leading to a chronic suspicion of others, while others develop an altruistic self-sacrificing attitude.

As a consequence, the insecurity these children feel is intensive; they become anxious and over-dependent. They often display a diminished capacity to trust in themselves or others, and harbour intense feelings of vulnerability.

Finally, a lingering war situation leaves children unclear about their future. Many convey a pessimistic view of what life has in store for them. Children are resilient but they shouldn't have to be.

“Ultimately, children need an end to the wars as their futures hang in the balance”, as Unicef Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi remarked.



A SUBMERGED TRAIN

A train carriages are seen toppled over following a landslide caused by a heavy rainfall at New Haflong railway station on the Lumding-Silchar route at Dima Hasao district, some 100 km from Silchar in Assam state, India, on Tuesday. – AFP

Funding the polio eradication endgame in the world



Minda Dentler

The writer is a 2017 Aspen Institute New Voices Fellow, is a polio survivor, a global health advocate, and the first female wheelchair athlete to complete the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii

Growing up in India, I did not have access to the polio vaccine, and the disease paralysed my legs when I was an infant. As a result, I have undergone many surgeries and cannot walk without leg braces and crutches. My story is not unique. When the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) was established in 1988 (I was 10 at the time), the disease paralysed an estimated 350,000 children worldwide each year. Thirty-four years later, immunisation campaigns have almost eliminated polio. But unless we fund a new vaccination push today, we risk a resurgence of the disease.

The GPEI — which coordinates the efforts of frontline workers, communities, national governments and global partners to help vaccinate children — has played a major role in reducing polio cases and is now leading the drive to eliminate the disease for good. Since 1988, the GPEI has helped to immunize three billion children against polio, and more than 20 million people who otherwise would have been paralysed are able to walk.

But the fight is not over. Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two countries where polio remains endemic, have reported only five cases of wild poliovirus in 2021 and three cases so far in 2022. That may sound encouraging, but the presence of polio anywhere is a threat to children everywhere, and the Covid-19 pandemic has shown how quickly an infectious disease can spread around the world.

The problem is acute, because GPEI-funded polio eradication efforts were

THE US CENTRES FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION WARNS THAT CUTTING BACK ON ERADICATION EFFORTS COULD CAUSE A GLOBAL RESURGENCE OF POLIO THAT 10 YEARS FROM NOW COULD PARALYSE UP TO 200,000 CHILDREN A YEAR. THE FINAL FIVE-YEAR PUSH TO ERADICATE POLIO — AT AN ESTIMATED COST OF LESS THAN \$1 BILLION A YEAR — MUST BE FULLY FUNDED

halted during the pandemic in order to shift resources to help countries respond to Covid-19. The suspension of polio vaccination campaigns and disruption of routine immunization led to millions of children missing out. As a result, about 2,000 children in the past two years have been paralysed by circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV2) — a variant that can emerge in under-immunised communities — in parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe. So, while we are close to 99 per cent polio eradication, this final stretch to achieve zero cases may be difficult. That is why the GPEI launched an ambitious \$4.8 billion plan during the recent World Immunisation Week to help rid the world of polio by 2026.

The strategy focuses on vaccinating 370 million children annually against

polio for the next five years. It envisages increasing the integration of polio immunisation with general health-related services in communities; working with community leaders, clerics and influencers to earn trust, boost vaccine acceptance, and tackle misinformation; and improving disease surveillance and response.

Investing in polio eradication also delivers broader benefits, not least by strengthening healthcare infrastructure and providing routine immunisations and other integrated health services in underserved communities. The polio programme has kept the world safe from many emerging disease threats by detecting and responding to outbreaks of measles, yellow fever and Ebola.

The GPEI and its partners helped to develop and implement a next-generation oral polio vaccine — nOPV2 — to help stop outbreaks of type-2 vaccine-derived polio. Most remarkably, the GPEI's strong surveillance network helped to coordinate a public-health response to Covid-19 in 50 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. This included delivering vaccines, detecting and monitoring cases, tracing contacts, and raising awareness about the virus.

This final five-year push to eradicate polio — at an estimated cost of less than \$1 billion a year — must be fully funded and executed. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that cutting back on eradication efforts could cause a global resurgence of polio that ten years from now could paralyse up to 200,000 children a year, thus greatly increasing the cost of controlling the disease and treating survivors. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the World Health Organization's Director-General, notes that polio eradication is highly cost-effective and could generate more than \$33 billion in economic savings.

The world cannot afford to give up the fight to eliminate polio and squander more than three decades of progress. “It is so crucial that all stakeholders now commit to ensuring that the new eradication strategy can be implemented in full,” said Niels Annen, parliamentary state secretary to Svenja Schulze, the German minister for economic cooperation and development. “We can only succeed if we make polio eradication our shared priority.”

The world has an opportunity to end polio in the next five years so that no child will have to suffer as I do from a disease that is entirely preventable. But this will not happen without a fully funded endgame strategy.

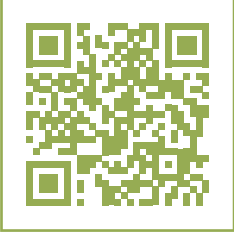
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The world cannot afford to give up the fight to eliminate polio.

sport

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Oman clinch six medals as GCC Games begin

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT MAY 17

The Oman athletics team won six medals on the opening day of the third GCC Games in Kuwait City on Monday.

At the Ahmed Al Rashdan Athletic Arena, Oman's Hiba al Asmi won the gold medal in javelin throw by clearing a distance of 36.40 metres. Oman's Mazoon al Alawi became the sprint queen by winning the women's 100 metres in 11.47 seconds ahead of Mudhawi al Shammari of Kuwait (11.52 seconds) and Hajar al Khaldi of Bahrain (11.56 secs).

Mazoon claimed a silver in 100 metres hurdles in 13.87 seconds.

In the men's section, star sprinter Barakat al Harthy had to satisfy with a bronze in the 100 metres clocking a time of 10.30 seconds. Tosin Ogunode of Qatar emerged

the fastest with 10.05 seconds and Abdullah Akbar of Saudi Arabia bagged the silver in 10.21 seconds.

In men's 110 metres hurdles, Oman's Khalfan al Jabri won the bronze in 15.04 seconds.

The third gold for Oman came through Salim al Yarabi who powered to a distance of 7.58 metres.

More than 1,700 men and women athletes are participating in the third edition of the Games attended by six Gulf states, Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and the hosts Kuwait.

The Games will include 16 individual and group games: handball, volleyball, basketball, futsal, swimming, athletics, karate, judo, fencing, archery, tennis, cycling, ice hockey, table tennis, electronic games and padel sports.

Women are also part of the

Mazoon claims gold and silver

Hiba clinches women's javelin gold

Salim bags men's long jump gold



Games for the first time in its history.

Women are taking part in futsal, cycling, athletics, table tennis, tri-basketball, electronic games and

padel. Oman runner Ali al Balushi had also qualified for the finals of 100 metres race with a timing of 10.58 seconds.

In the 400 metres, Oman's

Othman al Busaidi entered the finals after recording a time of 48.17 seconds, while team-mate Ahmed al Saadi also made the mark in 48.89 seconds.

Meanwhile, the Oman volleyball team will participate in its first training session after arriving in Kuwait to participate in the Games. Oman team is coming after a 10-day camp in Bulgaria.

Rashid bin Salem Beit Maghrab, board member of Oman Volleyball Association and Chairman of Referees Committee, said the team's participation in the tournament will not be easy as top Gulf teams Qatar and Bahrain are front-runners for the title.

"The team's previous training and camps were more than good, as the team had enough opportunity to prepare according to the plan that was developed by the team's technical staff through the internal and external camps."

About his expectations for the team in the tournament, Rashid Beit Maghrab said: "If the team manages to overcome the Bahraini team, I think Oman can earn a silver. Top international team Qatar are favourites for the gold medal."

On the other hand, the swimming competitions began on Tuesday at the Shaikh Nasser al Mohammed Aquarium Complex.

The first day's competitions include the 200-metres freestyle, the 200-metres butterfly, 400-metres medley, the 1,500-metres freestyle, and the 4x100 metres medley relay.

The Oman swimming team includes Ayman bin Talib al Qasimi, Nidal bin Suleiman al Harrasi, Nayef bin Munir al Qasimi, Abdul Rahman bin Yahya al Kulaibi, Issa bin Samir al Adawi and Muhannad bin Younis.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade in Tender Board Registration
Re-tender 5/2022	SERVICES	BOOK PRINTING BAYYAN ALMOSHKEL	25/-	EXCELLENT & FIRST GRADE

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 23/05/2022.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 30/05/2022

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Pavlyuchenkova, Monfils pull out of French Open with injuries

PARIS: Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova has ended her 2022 season early due to a knee injury and will miss the upcoming French Open, last year's Roland Garros runner-up announced on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old has only played three tournaments so far this year and lost her opening match at last week's Italian Open while struggling physically. "I'm very sad to say that I'm forced to withdraw from Roland Garros and the rest of the tournaments this year," Pavlyuchenkova wrote in a statement on Twitter.

Pavlyuchenkova reached her maiden Grand Slam final 12 months ago in Paris but lost a tight three-set match to Czech Barbora Krejickova.

"I have been playing this in my head for the last week and it has been a really tough decision to make, as Roland Garros was always very special to me, especially after a dream run last year," she added.

The injury has seen Pavlyuchenkova slip



to 21st in the WTA rankings, down from a career-high of world No 11 last November.

HEEL INJURY PUTS MONFILS OUT

French hopes of a first men's singles title at Roland Garros since 1983 suffered a blow on Monday with Gael Monfils announcing he was pulling out of the draw to have surgery on his right heel.

"Hi all, I regret to inform you that I am forced to withdraw from Open Parc de

Lyon and the French Open next week," the French number one tweeted.

"I have been bothered by a calcaneal spur since Monte-Carlo at my right heel which prevents me from moving properly on court. I have decided to undergo a small procedure this week to treat the issue before returning to competitive play."

The 35-year-old, a semifinalist at the French Open in 2008 and currently ranked 22 in the world, is one of the great entertainers on court and a big favourite on the red clay of Roland Garros.

He started the season well by winning in Adelaide and reaching the quarter-finals of the Australian Open. But he struggled on the clay and, already bothered by his heel, pulled out in Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

His announcement comes a day after he and his wife, the Ukrainian player Elina Svitolina, former number three in the world, revealed that they are expecting their first child, a girl, in October. — AFP

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das struck fifties after Tamim Iqbal made a hundred to put Bangladesh in pole position in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong on Tuesday.

Liton hit 54 not out and Mushfiqur made 53 not out as the pair added 98 runs in an unbroken stand to guide Bangladesh to 318-3 at stumps on the third day, in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings 397.

Tamim retired on 133 after reaching his 10th Test hundred with a four and single off Asitha Fernando off successive balls before tea.

But he is expected to resume his 217-ball innings — including 15 fours — on the fourth day when Bangladesh will aim to accelerate their scoring rate in pursuit of a first-innings lead.

Liton joined Mushfiqur when Tamim did not return after the break and helped Bangladesh continue their dominance without facing serious trouble.

Liton pulled Lasith Embuldeniya for four to bring up his 12th Test fifty off 96 balls before Mushfiqur reached his own fifty, his 26th in Tests, in the next over with a single off Kasun Rajitha.

Liton led the charge with eight fours while Mushfiqur played the anchor role as he took 124 balls to bring up his fifty, with just two fours so far.

Sri Lanka's bowlers briefly halted Bangladesh's run flow after Fernando broke Tamim's 162-run opening stand with Mahmudul Hasan, who made 58 off 142 balls before edging a leg-side delivery behind

the stumps.

Concussion substitute Rajitha then removed Najmul Hossain

TAMIM TON GIVES BANGLADESH UPPER HAND



Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal plays a shot during the third day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong. — AFP

for one and Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque for two to restore some parity in the game.

Replacing Vishwa Fernando, who took a blow on the helmet on Monday and could bowl only eight overs in the innings, Rajitha struck with his fourth ball as Najmul gave a regulation catch to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella.

Five overs later Rajitha swung a ball in to break Mominul's off-stump.

Tamim was earlier given out caught behind on 102 off Ramesh Mendis but the decision was reversed on review.

Resuming on 76-0, Bangladesh started the day's play confidently as Tamim dispatched left-arm quick Fernando for two fours in the second over of the day, before bringing up his 32nd Test fifty off 73 balls with a boundary.

Sri Lanka dropped the only chance that came their way in the morning as Embuldeniya dropped Mahmudul at fine-leg off Asitha on 51.

The 21-year-old, playing only his fifth

Test, soon completed his second Test half-century in 110 balls when he flicked Asitha towards mid-wicket for a double.

Angelo Mathews had held the Sri Lankan innings together before agonisingly falling on 199. Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan claimed 6-105 for Bangladesh. — AFP

SCOREBOARD	
BANGLADESH FIRST INNINGS	
Mahmudul c Dickwella b Fernando	58
Tamim retired hurt	133
Najmul c Dickwella b Rajitha	1
Mominul b Rajitha	2
Mushfiqur not out	53
Liton Das not out	54
Extras (b 4, lb 8, nb 5)	17
Total (three wickets; 107 overs) —	318
Fall of wickets: 1-162, 2-172, 3-184	
Bowling: Vishwa Fernando 8-0-42-0, Asitha Fernando 16-2-55-1, Ramesh Mendis 31-8-83-0, Lasith Embuldeniya 27-6-62-0, Dhananjaya de Silva 13-2-39-0, Kasun Rajitha 11-4-17-2, Kusal Mendis 1-0-8-0	



Salvi plays central role in Oman's strive to success

MUSCAT: The contributions of Avishkar Salvi, fast bowling coach of the Oman men's national team, have been a central component of the team's recent successes.

In September 2019, head coach Duleep Mendis asked him to conduct a 10-day camp for the fast bowlers. Avishkar obliged and has since become an indispensable part of Oman Cricket's set-up.

Speaking of his initial impressions upon arrival, he said: "The first two days after I came here were a Friday and Saturday and Premier Division matches were going on at the time so I made it a point to watch them. As soon as I saw those games, I realised that there is a lot of talent and potential over here. There are some who have established themselves in the national team and there are some who can come into the squad by sharpening their skills. It was just about building discipline within them and enhancing a few attributes that are needed to be successful at the international level."

Avishkar is known to pay careful attention to detail and prepare his bowlers accordingly.

He said: "If we are planning to tour somewhere we prepare for the conditions. If we go to the UAE during winter, we know that there will be fair assistance for fast bowlers so we prepare accordingly. Similarly, if we go during summer, we will have to use a lot more slower balls which will give the bowlers a chance to pick up wickets. Then we simulate those conditions during our practice sessions. I'm grateful to our coach Duleep because he gives us a free hand in

terms of practising what we want to practise. Our fast bowlers have the potential in them. As a bowling coach for me, it is just about channelling those energies into achieving the team goal."

Speaking of devising plans for Bilal Khan, Kaleemullah and Fayyaz Butt to adopt, he stated, "We always want them (fast bowlers) to bowl to a particular plan."

"Accordingly in the nets, I'll give them a new ball and I'll mark up a surface area where they have to consistently bowl. If they manage to do that, there is a chance that they will get wickets. By bowling in that area, the others within the team and the support staff will also know what the bowler is going to do. When the boys go out and execute these plans in the match, it becomes more of a routine for the bowlers and for the fielders around."

Oman's next set of fixtures in the ICC Men's CWC League 2 takes them to the USA for a double round-robin tri-series against Nepal and the hosts.

Looking ahead to it, Avishkar said, "After the last successful UAE tour, the boys had a break. Now they are coming back into cricket mode and have been training regularly. The mindset remains the same for this tour."

"The bowlers need to be disciplined and because it is a 50-over game with each one getting 10 overs, even if one spell doesn't go well, they still have a chance to make a comeback later. We tell the boys that one bad ball doesn't make you a bad bowler. We are looking at the tour in a positive way. We have had success against both the opponents in the past and right now are just thinking about polishing our strengths."

‘Good sign’ says Marsh as Delhi win two in a row

MUMBAI: Australia's Mitchell Marsh on Monday said it's about "peaking at the right time" after he helped Delhi Capitals win their second straight IPL match to stay in race for the play-offs.

Marsh's 63 off 48 balls guided Delhi to 159-7 against a disciplined Punjab Kings attack led by England's Liam Livingstone who returned figures of 3-27 with his off and leg-spin in Mumbai.

Delhi defended the total with fast bowler Shardul Thakur returning figures of 4-36 from his four overs to restrict the opposition to 142-9 and win by 17 runs. The Rishabh Pant-led Delhi are making a late dash to enter the play-offs as they jump to fourth in the 10-team table led by Gujarat Titans who have already booked a



top-two finish.

"It's been one of those seasons where we've been stop start. In long tournaments like this, it's about peaking at the right time," Marsh said on his team's first

back-to-back win this season.

"I think over the last week or 10 days, we've played some really good cricket and that's a really good sign. We've got one more to go. "We know if we win that, we'll be in the finals (play-offs) and we can give it a real good shake. I've got great belief in this team."

Punjab are on seventh spot with one game remaining and have a slim chance of making the final four. Delhi, searching for their maiden Indian Premier League title, got off to a horror start after being put into bat first when David Warner fell first ball to Livingstone's off spin, giving away catch to backward point.

Fellow opener Sarfaraz Khan hit back with a 32-ball 16 before falling to left-arm medium-pace

bowler Arshdeep Singh who ended with three wickets.

Marsh, who made a match-winning 89 in Delhi's previous match, stood firm as Livingstone rattled the middle order with key wickets of skipper Rishabh Pant (7) and Rovman Powell (2).

In reply, Jonny Baristow hit a 15-ball 28 but his departure and twin strikes in the sixth over by Thakur to send back Bhanuka Rajapaksa and Shikhar Dhawan hurt Punjab chase. "I always like to perform in the crunch times," Thakur said after being named man of the match. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES: Delhi Capitals 159-7 (Mitchell Marsh 63, Sarfaraz 32; Livingstone 3-27) beat Punjab Kings 142-9 (Jitesh Sharma 44, Bairstow 28; Shardul Thakur 4-36) by 17 runs.

OC's tennex ball tourney first phase concludes

MUSCAT: The first 19 fixtures of Oman Cricket's 10-over tennex ball tournament were successfully conducted at the Municipality Grounds on May 13.

Muscat Super Kings registered Week 1's highest total in their game against WCC. Batting first after winning the toss, they finished on a colossal 121-6. Vishal Parshomttambhai Desai led the scoring with 36 runs off

just 15 deliveries. The Kings were excellent in the second innings too. They restricted WCC to 70 runs and wrapped up a dominant 51-run victory.

The clash between Deccan Challengers and Muscat Panthers was the most one sided of the competition thus far. In the first phase of play, none of the Challengers were able to reach double figures and posted a

modest tally of 59-4. Powered by an explosive 47-run knock from Tenarangam Yeduru, the Panthers made light work of that target and chased it down in just 4 overs with all 10 wickets intact.

The game between Max XI and the Bombay Blues was on the opposite end of that spectrum. Put to bat first, Max XI lost wickets at regular intervals but a late 32 run blitz from Sultan Ali propelled



them to a first innings score of 95. The run chase went down to the wire and by collecting 2 runs off the game's final ball, the Blues reached the finish line but did not cross it. The match ended in a tie.

Aksaar Aslam Sardar of Tuluvers XI recorded the highest individual total of Week 1 with 59 runs. Mohammad Mazharul Islam, Mohammed Ahmad Rashid Ahmad and Suhas Gowda were

the others to reach half-centuries.

With the ball, Haja Hameed of Proline Knight Riders was the pick of the week. His 2 overs produced 4 wickets at the cost of just 7 runs. Sai Kiran, Ketan Kumar Patel, Muhamad Rafeek Jayafar Kunju, Ramjaan Boota, Afzal Ali Mir and Lilo Varghese claimed 3 scalps apiece. The next set of fixtures of the tennex tournament get underway on May 20.

CHIellini SAYS GOODBYE TO JUVE FANS

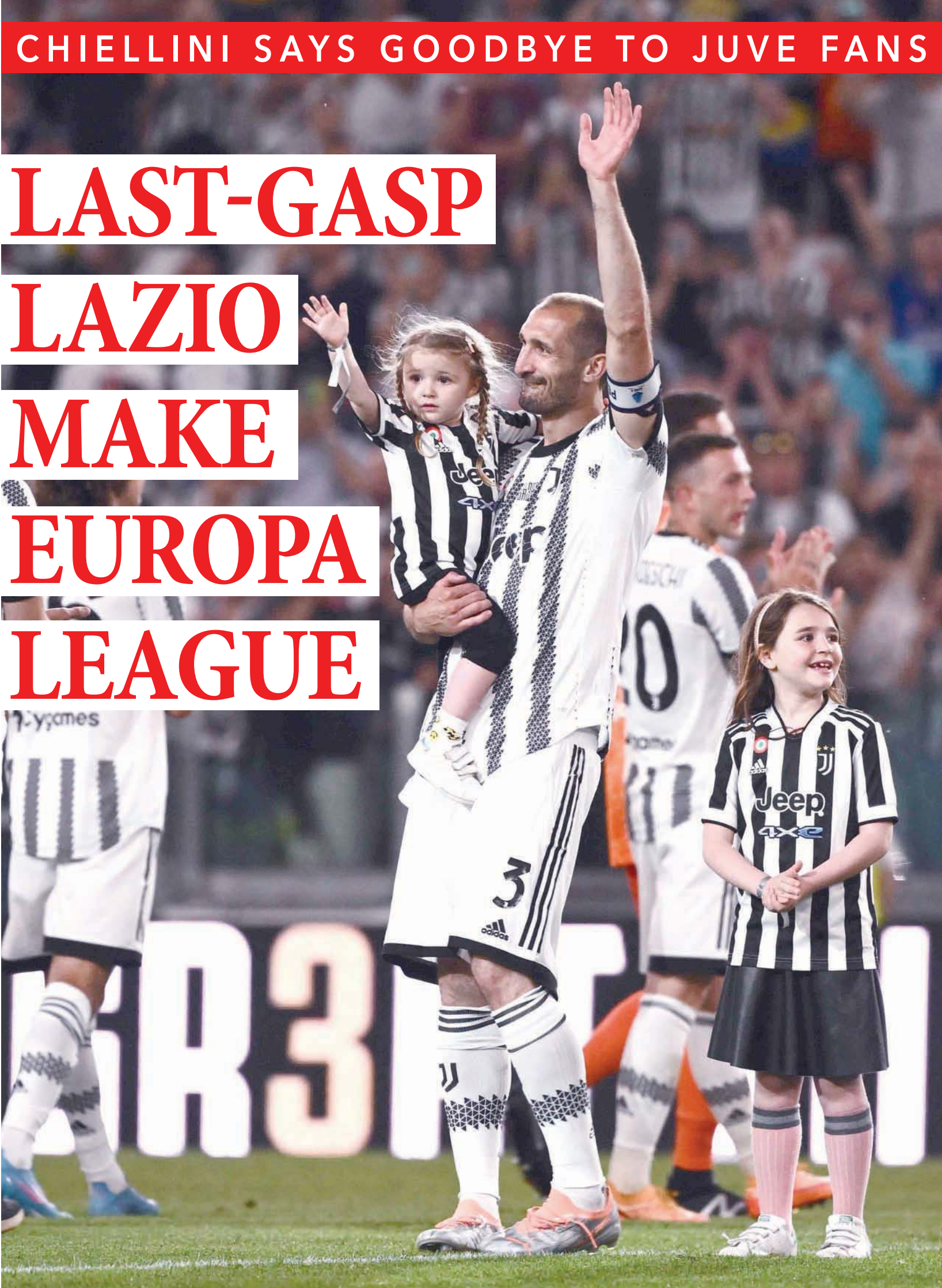
LAST-GASP

LAZIO

MAKE

EUROPA

LEAGUE



TURIN, Italy: Giorgio Chiellini bid farewell to Juventus fans on Monday in his last home match for the Turin giants, a disappointing 2-2 draw which earned Lazio a place in the Europa League after Sergej Milinkovic-Savic levelled with the last kick of the game.

Fans chanted “there’s only one captain” as a giant choreography depicting his shirt number ‘3’ was displayed in the stands ahead of the match and they then gave Chiellini a huge round of applause after he was substituted in the 18th minute. The 37-year-old had played the full 120 minutes of Juve’s Italian Cup final defeat to arch rivals Inter Milan on Wednesday, after which he announced that he would be leaving Juve after 18 years at a club where he has won nine league titles and a clutch of other trophies.

“It’s been an emotional day,” said Chiellini to DAZN, adding that he believes he can “still play at a high level of football”.

Following the announcement of his departure from Juve, he said he would think about whether to hang up his boots after having already decided to retire from international football. “I don’t know right now,” he said.

“I need to think about things. It’s a decision that can’t be made in a day.”

TEARFUL DYBALA

When he left the field he

ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE							
(PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):							
AC Milan	37	25	8	4	66	31	83
Inter Milan	37	24	9	4	81	32	81
Napoli	37	23	7	7	71	31	76
Juventus	37	20	10	7	57	35	70
Lazio	37	18	9	10	74	55	63
Roma	37	17	9	11	56	43	60
Fiorentina	37	18	5	14	57	51	59
Atalanta	37	16	11	10	65	47	59
Verona	37	14	10	13	62	56	52
Torino	37	13	11	13	46	38	50
Sassuolo	37	13	11	13	64	63	50
Udinese	37	10	14	13	57	58	44
Bologna	37	11	10	16	44	55	43
Empoli	37	9	11	17	49	70	38
Sampdoria	37	10	6	21	46	60	36
Spezia	37	10	6	21	41	68	36
Salernitana	37	7	10	20	33	74	31
Cagliari	37	6	11	20	34	68	29
Genoa	37	4	16	17	27	59	28
Venezia	37	6	8	23	34	69	26

ON MONDAY:		Bologna 1 (Orsolini 90+2-pen)
Juventus 2 (Vlahovic 10, Morata 36)		Sassuolo 3 (Scamacca 35, 80, Berardi 75)
Lazio 2 (Alex Sandro 51-og, Milinkovic-Savic 90+5)		Napoli 3 (Osimhen 32, Insigne 65-pen, Lobotka 81)
Sampdoria 4 (Ferrari 16, Quagliarella 30, Thorsby 71, Sabiri 84)		AC Milan 2 (Leao 56, Hernandez 75)
Fiorentina 1 (Gonzalez 89)		Atalanta 0
ON SUNDAY:		Cagliari 1 (Lykogiannis 54)
		Inter Milan 3 (Darmian 25, Martinez 51, 84)

handed his captain’s armband to another player on the way out -- Paulo Dybala. Argentina international Dybala, who has been at Juve since 2015, will leave at the end of the season after the club decided not to renew his contract after a verbal agreement

with the 28-year-old struck in the autumn was publicly rejected by the club earlier this year.

Dusan Vlahovic did the Argentine’s ‘mask’ celebration when he headed in the opener in the 10th minute, and when Dybala was substituted with 12

minutes remaining, with the hosts leading 2-1, he did a tour of the stands and was embraced by fans while he tried to hold back the tears.

Juve looked to be cruising to a routine home win to honour their two departing heroes when Alvaro Morata doubled the hosts lead in the 36th minute.

However, Alex Sandro poked into his own net five minutes after the break and Maurizio Sarri’s Lazio pushed for a leveller which came in the 95th minute, Milinkovic-Savic rifling past Mattia Perin from a tight angle to give Lazio a spot in Europe’s second-tier competition.

“For next year we will need a few players in order to aim towards the Champions league,” said Milinkovic-Savic, who has been linked with a move away from the Roman club in the summer. They sit fifth in one of two Europa League places, four points away from seventh-placed Fiorentina, who were hammered 4-1 at a Sampdoria side in party mood.

Samp were guaranteed their top flight status on Sunday after Cagliari were beaten 3-1 by title-chasing Inter Milan, leaving Marco Giampaolo’s side four points above the drop zone before they kicked off in their penultimate fixture of the season.

— AFP



Seeb, Dhofar eye winning starts in AFC Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

HM Cup and Omantel League champions Seeb will commence their AFC Cup campaign on Wednesday as they will take on Jableh SC of Syria at Seeb Stadium in the opening fixture of Group A. The match will kick off at 7 pm.

In the same group, three-time champions Kuwait SC will face Lebanon’s Al Ansar at the same venue later on Wednesday.

After a successful domestic 2021-22 season, Oman’s representative Seeb at AFC Cup will eye another triumph at the Asian level this time.

Seen head coach Boris Bunjak said AFC Cup will be contest among the teams with high technical levels. “This is another chapter of competition for Seeb. We are fully aware of the challenges of the campaign. I have much idea about Kuwait SC and Lebanon’s Al Ansar teams while have less knowledge about opening match opponents,” he said.

The Muscat-based team equipped with professional players and many of them represented the national football team.

The Serbian coach has many key players to depend during this Asian tourney including the top scorer of Omantel League Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohsin

al Ghassani, Mohammed al Mussalami, Marwan Taeeb, Ali al Busaidi, Eid al Farsi and many other professional players.

The Seeb head coach is aware that Wednesday’s victory will strengthen Seeb’s chances to advance into next stage of the competition ahead of the forthcoming encounters against Kuwait SC and Al Ansar clubs.

Coach Bunjak said during the pre-match press conference that Seeb will miss services of Mohammed al Amri and Amjad al Harthi in the defence due to injury.

“Despite some injuries, Seeb are all set for the AFC challenge. It is a great opportunity for Seeb to play against three teams who had already won the AFC Cup titles in the previous seasons. The technical levels are similar for all the teams. The Asian matches level will definitely differ compared to the domestic games. We will not play with a defensive approach but will focus to present ourselves strong against Jableh SC in the opener.”

On the other hand, Oman’s other representative Dhofar will face Shabab Al Khalil of Palestine in Group B. The Group B hosts Kuwait’s Arabi SC will play against Bahrain’s Al Riffa at the Kuwait Sports Club Stadium at 7 pm (Oman time) while Dhofar match will be at the same venue at 11 pm (Oman time).

Newcastle blow up Arsenal’s Champions League dream

NEWCASTLE, United Kingdom: Mikel Arteta castigated his Arsenal side for throwing away a season’s work in a limp 2-0 defeat at Newcastle that looks set to see the Gunners miss out on Champions League football for a sixth successive season.

Tottenham remain two points above their north London rivals in fourth place in the Premier League.

Spurs now realistically only need a draw away to already-relegated Norwich on Sunday to secure a top-four finish thanks to their superior goal difference.

Arsenal’s defeat also guaranteed third-place Chelsea’s place in the Champions League next season.

Ben White’s own goal and Bruno Guimaraes’ late strike was the difference between the sides.

But the manner of the Newcastle performance was even more impressive as Eddie Howe’s men sent a message they could be challenging for a top-four finish themselves next season.

“A really difficult night to swallow,” said Arteta. “Newcastle deserved to win comfortably.



They were much better from the first minute, we had nothing in the game.

“They were much better than us in everything that a football match requires. We could not cope tonight with the game we had to play here.”

Arteta’s men were in the driving seat with three games to go as they lead Spurs by four points.

But Tottenham’s 3-0 derby win on Thursday cranked up the pressure on the young Gunners who failed to respond.

“Newcastle were 10 times better than us and the performance was nowhere near what we need to play in the Champions League,” added Arteta. “We weren’t at the races,” he said. — AFP



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High-level team reviews Dhamani health insurance scheme



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Vice-President for Insurance Sector at the Capital Market Authority and Chairman of health insurance team, said the health insurance scheme for private sector employees and visitors (Dhamani) is currently in an advanced stage of development. Significant headway has been made in the finalisation of the legal frameworks, digital systems and medical coding aspects of the project.

He made the comments soon after meeting with representatives of various stakeholder bodies overseeing the development and implementation of the Dhamani scheme. They include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Public Authority for Social Security, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Omani Insurance Association.

Al Maamari said the compulsory insurance for the employees of the private sector will contribute to creating great changes at the level of the health and insurance economy with regard to the types of practices and attracting new specialisations and investments into the country.

FDO’s RO 20m shrimp aquaculture project yields maiden harvest

Production capacity of Pacific White Shrimp farm at Qurun (South Al Sharqiyah Governorate) to reach 4,600 tonnes per annum

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) announced on Tuesday, May 17, 2022, the first commercial harvest of the Shrimp Aquaculture Project commissioned at Qurun, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The project production capacity is estimated to reach 400 tonnes monthly as per the following size ranges and percentage quantities: 31-40g at 45 per cent, 41-50g at 50 per cent, and 51-60g at 5 per cent.

The farm is growing Pacific White Shrimp (*Litopenaeus vannamei*), using Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) brood stocks imported from the United States. Entire production operations are carried in a highly bio-secure and hygienic environment without the use of drugs, antibiotics or any chemicals of public health concern.



THE PROJECT IS DESIGNED FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE AQUACULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION WITHOUT INFLECTING ANY HARMFUL EFFECTS TO THE PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT

The shrimps on attaining market size are harvested mechanically, chilled to maintain the highest freshness and delivered to the Pre-Processing plant within 30 minutes. On arrival at the preprocessing plant, shrimps are washed in chilled in potable water, sorted and size graded mechanically.

Graded chilled shrimps are packed with flake ice for delivery to the distributors and/or processing factories as per the order. Construction works of the project started in November 2018 and the project was commissioned in November 2021.

The project has been developed along the coast of the Arabian Sea, at Qurun, in an area of 500 ha at a cost of RO 20 million. Production capacity of the project is 4600 tonnes of shrimps per annum and the full

production capacity is expected to be reached by the year 2023. Shrimp harvests by end year 2022 are expected to be at 2100 tonnes.

This is the first investment of the Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), a subsidiary Oman Investment Authority (OIA), in shrimp farming projects.

The Natural Shrimp Aquaculture company project's design and development were executed by Oceanic Shrimp Aquaculture, a wholly owned subsidiary of FDO.

The project is designed following principles of responsible aquaculture for

sustainable production without inflicting any harmful effects to the pristine environment.

The project site is located away from highly inhabited areas or areas of any industrial and agriculture activities.

Project facilities include a maturation and breeding centre, post larval production unit, nursery ponds and grow out ponds. Other infrastructure of the project includes warehouses, workshops, offices, housing facilities, pre-processing plant, ice plant and RO plant.

Qurun Shrimp farm is a flagship project of FDO, designed to function as an industry leader spearheading developments in the Shrimp Aquaculture sector of the country.

The project is built with highest international standards and is positioned to provide training to aquaculture professionals in the country and to guide and support other entrepreneurs and investors interested in the sector. It will contribute to diversifying sources of income from the non-oil sectors and create direct and indirect job opportunities for Omani youth in line with the objectives of the Oman 2040 vision.

Port of Salalah commissions new equipment to boost efficiency

Optimised operations: Total investment in Port of Salalah infrastructure climbs to around \$800 million

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 17

The Port of Salalah has announced the successful installation and operationalisation of 16 new eco-efficient, rubber-tyred gantry cranes (RTGs) from ZPMC and three new mobile harbour cranes from Liebherr. This has enabled the port to expand operations, enhance container and general cargo handling and reduce the terminal's environmental impact.

The contract with ZPMC and Liebherr is a part of a wider investment in expanding the Port's future capacity to ensuring the terminal is equipped with the latest technology and equipment to support local and international business customers, Port of Salalah said in a press statement.

This agreement aligns with Oman's Vision 2040, to elevate



infrastructure as a key economic instrument to further grow the transportation and logistics sector, it further added.

Reducing fuel burn by 20 per cent, the new RTGs are an important step in the terminal's long-term plan to have zero-carbon emissions. They are fitted with the latest Siemens technology and are capable of lifting 41-tonnes, with six wide stacking

plus truck lanes.

They can be fully monitored remotely and are integrated with the asset digitisation system currently being installed in the terminal to monitor production and efficiency.

In addition, they have laser anti-collision systems to provide protection to machinery and pedestrians.

"Innovation and improvement

are at the heart of our port-centric solutions. Our investment in the latest RTG's and mobile harbour cranes demonstrates our long-term commitment to optimise operational efficiencies and cargo handling services while accommodating existing and new trade," said Mark Hardiman, CEO of the Port of Salalah.

In the latest Container Port Performance Index (CPPI 2020)

Innovation and improvement are at the heart of our port-centric solutions. Our investment in the latest RTG's and mobile harbour cranes demonstrates our long-term commitment to optimise operational efficiencies and cargo handling services while accommodating existing and new trade

MARK HARDIMAN
CEO, Port of Salalah

produced by the Transport Global Practice of the World Bank, the Port of Salalah achieved world class efficiency, ranking 6th amongst 351 ports globally. "The new equipment will help us to continue expanding our capabilities, capacity, efficiencies

and support increased demand," concludes Mark Hardiman.

The Port of Salalah Container Terminal has a 2.4 km container berth quay and seven berths of up to 18m draft. Its infrastructure can handle the world's largest container vessels, as well as bulk cargo, bunkering and warehousing. The terminal has an annual capacity of 5 million TEU and is viewed as the region's best located port for access the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and East Africa. APM Terminals signed a 30-year concession agreement with the government of Oman to build and manage this world-class container facility until 2028.

APM Terminals holds a 30 per cent stake in the port-operating company Salalah Port Services. Other shareholders include the government (20 per cent), government pension funds (23 per cent), and others (27 per cent). Since then, the port has made significant strides towards achieving world-class operational standards.

Around \$800 million has been invested in infrastructure.

Ahlibank records robust growth in Q1

MUSCAT: Ahlibank exhibited robust performance in the first quarter of 2022. The achievement comes as a result of its endeavour of being customer centric through strategic branch network expansion and product diversification plans and implementation.

Ahlibank's total assets recorded a 12.2 per cent growth, reaching RO 3,166.6 million as of the end of March 2022. Customer deposits increased by 11.9 per cent, reaching RO 2,180.1 million, compared with the same period in 2021. Loans, advances and financing grew by 7.1 per cent, reaching RO 2,435.9 million.

The bank's operating income rose by 13.7 per cent, achieving RO 22.3 million as of the end of March 2022, and its operating

expenses increased by 19.6 per cent. Profits during the period, grew by 18.4 per cent to reach RO 7.52 million.

Highlighting the performance and the Bank's roadmap for the coming months, Said Abdullah al Hatmi (pictured), CEO of ahlibank said, "The first three months of 2022 have been significant for ahlibank growth in terms of assets and deposits, as it continues its prudent growth strategy focusing on high quality assets and well managed liquidity.

We have experienced a considerable increase in consumer engagements and usage of services offered on our online digital channels and platforms, owing to favourable developments triggered by the steady global



economic recovery and the essential shift and adoption of digitalisation.

Our investment in digital technologies has helped deepen our market differentiation and has built and reinforced customer relationships across our business."

Ahlibank's persistent efforts to speed up the pace of banking

transactions for corporate customers saw the enhancement of its e-channels, ahliNET which includes ahliB2B for business-to-business platform and ahliRDC service for remote deposit capture.

In line with its efforts to continuously improve the quality of its customer service, ahlibank launched its 'Outstanding Customer Service' program in March, aimed at enhancing the Bank's customer service and deepening its customer relationships through appropriate communication tools and techniques in order to effectively and efficiently fulfil their requirements. As testimony to its commitment to continuously serve its customers, ahlibank was recognised as the 'Best Omani Brand' in the banking category at

the recently concluded Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards. It has also earned deserving recognition for its youth-oriented initiatives, winning the prestigious 'Leadership in Youth Empowerment' award for its initiatives directed at youth development.

Ahlibank's inclusive development is reflected in its operating performance, its increased competitiveness and strengthened position in the market alongside the expansion of its branch network across the Sultanate of Oman. As it continues to move forward with its growth objectives, ahlibank is committed to play a greater role in the advancement of the banking sector and in the economic and social development of Oman as a whole.

Enjoy finer things in life with Ooredoo's new lifestyle discount partners



MUSCAT: Enjoy more of the finer things in life with Ooredoo's new lifestyle discount partners. Nojoom members can now enjoy up to 20 per cent off at Casa Bella, Dukan Al Asal Al Omani, Bluzion Oman, Bella Luna Productions and many more, exclusively through the popular rewards programme.

Whether stylish homeware or chic events, holders of the Silver, Gold, and Platinum membership tiers can look out for an ever-growing number of deals and discounts at their favourite stores and vendors across Oman.

Plus, the higher the tier, the greater the reward! With over two million members and counting, Nojoom is just one way that Ooredoo is pioneering an outstanding customer experience.

The reward system offers unmatched value, premium recognition and exclusive rewards for prepaid, postpaid or fixed customers.

Members can earn points simply by making calls, sending SMS, paying or recharging Ooredoo bills, or using any of the company's services. Start earning points right away by signing up for Nojoom through the Ooredoo Oman app, available on iOS and Android, and as a web app for all other smartphones.

Vodafone signs agreement with Mzadcom Smart Auction Solutions

MUSCAT: Vodafone recently signed an agreement with Mzadcom Smart Auction Solutions LLC, an online auction platform on May 11, 2022. The agreement was signed between Sayyed Fahad al Busaidi, Chief Support Services Officer at Vodafone and Ibrahim al Junaibi, Chief Executive Officer of Mzadcom. This partnership is aimed at allowing individuals to bid and purchase distinctive Diamond and Gold numbers of their preference, in line with TRA rules and regulations.

Highlighting the importance of the signing, Fahad Al Busaidi stated, "Vodafone is committed to ensuring the highest levels of service extended to its customers, by giving them the option to choose and own exclusive Diamond and Gold numbers.

This step is aligned with the procedures set by the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) as per the Telecommunications Regulatory Act Decision (No. 1/2018), which sees the allocation of Diamond and



Gold numbers to be carried out through auctions to allow for greater transparency in the allocation process of telecommunications numbers to beneficiaries.

The signing with Mzadcom further reinforces our vision of being a completely technology-driven company, since the bids will be conducted via an e-auction platform as well as entering into key partnerships with companies that have already built a strong foundation in Oman.

Ibrahim Al Junaibi, added, "We are proud to be a part of Vodafone's efforts to transform the face of the local telecommunications sector.

Vodafone, as a brand, operates on a global scale and brings with it a world-class experience that augments our already existing facilities. We would like to thank them for their collaboration and anticipate the positive impact that our partnership might bring, not only with regard to digitalisation in Oman but also when it comes to enriching customer experience."

Mzadcom is an electronic platform for e-auctions, with a host website that provides users to sell or bid for products online. Item previews take place through exhibitions of the respective institutions, either governmental or private.

NBO's insurance plans ensure customers' peace of mind

MUSCAT: Ensuring peace of mind for now and the future, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) range of insurance plans ensure that its customers, their families, and their most valuable belongings, are protected no matter the circumstance.

Easy to set up and with no need for any medical tests or extensive questionnaires, customers can have their family, assets, and health completely covered in a few steps, along with convenient payment options and unique benefits. Designed to help its customers enjoy the life they've dreamed of, NBO's insurance plans provide them with the security to focus on what matters.

Tariq Atiq, General Manager – Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer, said, "NBO has a proven track record for ensuring timely processing of claims and providing all the protection required for everything our customers care about. Being covered for unseen events is essential. Insurance makes sure the continuation of customers lifestyle and his financial burden



reduces, whether one is hit by one or multiple perils. With our hassle-free plans, we continue to find ways to provide smarter benefits that bring greater value to our customers."

NBO offers insurance plans through its partners, catering to all ages, genders, individuals and businesses. The Takaful Elite Life Plan offers life cover upto RO 250,000 without any medical examination and also provides free annual family multi-trip travel cover and gadget takaful.

The Himayati plans for Life, Home, Motor and Health, offer comprehensive protection, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, starting at just RO 5 per month. Customers can walk in to any of the conveniently located NBO branches or use NBO's doorstep banking to avail any of the NBO's insurance offerings.

Own the popular Lexus ES with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own a Lexus ES and benefit with free service 5 years / 50,000 kms and free registration (Conditions apply. Please visit your nearest Lexus showroom for details). The 2022 Lexus ES is crafted to offer the finest driving and ownership experiences with its inspiring design, detailed luxury and fuel-efficient performance.

Complementing the Lexus ES emotional design, elevated by a new design front grille, is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque.

While the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-

speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The class-leading hybrid electric model's batteries comes with 8 years /160,000 Kms warranty and is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord. Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The ES300h offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage.

Lexus ES350 F SPORT model, further enhances the driving excitement so that drivers can enjoy a sense of oneness with the car, born of its ability to respond immediately to driving enthusiasts' intentions in various situations. In addition to a thrilling exterior that highlights its bold and aggressive personality, the Lexus ES350



FSPORT features numerous such as a retuned suspension, 19-inch wheels and tyres, and unique aluminium interior trim that gives the machine a more dynamic look and feel.

Completing the Lexus ES' distinct personality is its exquisite interior that invites the driver and passengers to enjoy a range of advanced features offering a refined cabin experience. They

include Dual Zone Auto Air-conditioning, Voice Recognition, Power Rear sunshade, Premium Touchscreen Audio System, Android Auto & Apple CarPlay and much more.

Highlighting Lexus' unrelenting focus on safety, the vehicle ensures complete peace of mind with an advanced safety technology package that includes Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS) / Traction Control (TRC) / Brake Assist System (BAS) / Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) / Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) among many others.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or www.instagram.com/oman.lexus/. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Lexus Showroom.

Malaysia a popular destination for Omani tourists

FAMILY HOLIDAYS: Tourism Malaysia begins roadshows to attract tourists amid revival of global tourism

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Malaysia is positioning itself as a welcoming, cost-competitive family holiday destination for Omanis this summer as the southeast Asian nation competes with other international destination for tourist traffic amid a strong revival of global tourism.

The Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, also known as Tourism Malaysia, is ramping up its marketing efforts with roadshows targeting key markets in the Middle East in conjunction with Malaysia's border reopening.

The weeklong roadshows, which will end on May 21, 2022, cover Qatar and Iran, besides the



Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Periasamy said Malaysia is preparing to receive growing numbers of visitors during the

summer. National carrier Oman Air operates four weekly flights, with Tourism Malaysia also encouraging other airlines to launch services between Muscat

and Kuala Lumpur.

"The hotels in Malaysia are offering very good prices compared with other destinations. In summer (March to September)

they will many activities and festivals which are very attractive opportunity for the tourist to get more information about our culture. Besides, from Malaysia, you also get very easy access to many other next-door countries," he stated.

Leading the roadshows is Dato' Zainuddin Abdul Wahab, Director-General of Tourism Malaysia. The events bring together Malaysia's tourism fraternity which consists of travel agents, hoteliers, product owners, state tourism bodies and medical tourism industry players, to the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar and Iran.

Dato' Zainuddin said: "As we welcome more West Asia travellers back to Malaysia, it is a timely occasion to strengthen our partnership with international airlines such as Qatar Airways, Oman Air and Mahan Air, which offer direct flights to Kuala Lumpur.

"With an exciting line-up of

new attractions to be explored, including the newly opened Genting Skyworlds Theme Park, the world's second tallest skyscraper Merdeka 118, and the Sunway Resort in Kuala Lumpur that just reopened after a once-in-a-generation transformation, we are thrilled to welcome international travellers worldwide to experience our country again."

Starting from May 1, 2022, fully-vaccinated inbound travellers are no longer required to undergo pre-departure and on-arrival Covid-19 tests, including children aged 12 and below as well as for those who have been infected with Covid-19 within six to 60 days before departure to Malaysia.

Travel insurance is also not a prerequisite for foreigners entering the country. The wearing of masks outdoors is optional but still mandatory indoors, including in shopping malls, offices, public transportation and e-hailing rides.



Mangalam Ramasubramanian Kumar (C), chairman of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) poses with the bronze statue of a bull at the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) in Mumbai, on Tuesday. — AFP

Indian insurance giant slumps after country's biggest-ever IPO

MUMBAI: Indian state-owned insurance giant LIC slumped on its market debut on Tuesday following the country's biggest-ever initial public offering, closing nearly eight per cent below the IPO price.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government raised \$2.7 billion by selling 3.5 per cent of Life Insurance Corporation of India as his administration seeks to sell off state assets to bolster tattered public finances.

But it was forced to cut back the offer from a planned five per cent after markets turned volatile following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's Covid lockdowns.

The offer price of 949 rupees (\$12.22) had valued LIC at \$77 billion, but the stock traded under pressure all day, closing 7.75 per cent lower at 875.45 rupees a share.

The muted debut could test market appetite as Modi seeks to privatise more shares in nationalised companies to plug an estimated 16.6 trillion rupee (\$214 billion) fiscal deficit.

Market analyst Arun Kejriwal said the slump on LIC's first day of trading was a "learning" experience, adding that the government will have to do more to convince investors if it wants to sell more of its stake.

But the IPO saw enthusiastic participation from small investors — including many first-

GLOBAL EQUITIES HAVE BEEN TUMULTUOUS FOR MOST OF 2022. FOREIGN INVESTORS HAVE WITHDRAWN A NET 1.71 TRILLION RUPEES (\$22 BILLION) FROM INDIAN MARKETS SO FAR THIS YEAR, AS US MONETARY POLICY TIGHTENING FURTHER ROILED SENTIMENT

timers — and was oversubscribed nearly three times.

"I knew it won't be a great listing but it doesn't matter to me," said 30-year-old Ayush, a recent market entrant, who was unbowed by the decrease in share price. "I bought the shares for the long-term."

Global equities have been tumultuous for most of 2022. Foreign investors have withdrawn a net 1.71 trillion rupees (\$22 billion) from Indian markets so far this year, stock exchange data showed, as US monetary policy tightening further roiled sentiment.

India was heavily regulated for decades after independence, and the state still retains an outsized role in the economy.

Hundreds of companies are owned by national or lower-level governments, operating in fields ranging from mining and resources to electricity and construction. — AFP

TRANSFORMATION VISION:
Huawei Middle East President speaks to journalists from the Sultanate of Oman and 9 Middle Eastern countries

HAMMAM AL BADI
DUBAI, MAY 17

Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East, highlighted Huawei's commitment to support governments across the region achieve their digital transformation visions with 5G networks and other advanced technologies as an enabler.

This took place during an exclusive media roundtable from 10 Middle East countries held on the sidelines of the SAMENA Leaders' Summit 2022, the top telecom industry event hosted by Huawei for the 9th consecutive year and attended by industry leaders, experts and decision makers from telecom companies, regulatory bodies, industry organizations and related stakeholders from SAMENA Region (South Asia, Middle East North Africa).

"I am pleased to see that in countries like Oman and others in the Middle East, the governments have set visions on ICT and have attached great importance to the development and prosperity of the digital economy. As such, we're working closely with stakeholders from governments, telecom operators, and industry partners in Oman to accelerate the development of ICT in order to support the digital economy," said Yi.

"In terms of 5G, Huawei has supported telecom operators build a good network that provide good user experience. For example, Huawei has collaborated with Omantel to build 5G powered smart port. We hope to see many more use cases of 5G in vertical industries and are committed to openly collaborate with our customers and partners and extend our innovations and global expertise



for achieving more value in 5G deployment, in-line with the country's socio-economic growth," Yi added.

Yi also stressed the importance of the telecom sector as an enabler for other industries' sustainable development and growth in light of the evolving 5G landscape and the immense opportunities for enterprises in the 5G era.

Yi also noted that Huawei, together with carriers and partners, has signed 3,000 5G commercial contracts, and that 5G saw large-scale commercial deployment in many industries, including manufacturing, mining, steel, port, chemical, cement, power grid, and healthcare.

"Middle East countries are leading globally in 5G deployment. As an end-to-end leader in 5G, cloud, AI, devices and chips, Huawei will continue its commitment to help countries in the Middle East achieve their visions with digitisation and sustainable development as key drivers.

Huawei has made sustainability as a priority to achieve a low-carbon society through continuous technological innovation.

"In the Middle East, Huawei

Digital Energy is working with industry partners to develop the digital energy industry, building a low-carbon telecom sector, homes, factors, parks and smart cities, and moving from a low-carbon society to a zero-carbon one."

At the moment, over 100 operators from across the world have deployed Huawei's low-carbon solutions, reducing carbon emissions by 40 million tons.

Speaking about talent development, Yi talked about Huawei's long-term strategy in the MEA region is aimed at developing ICT knowledge for various markets by leveraging their strengths in advanced technologies. "In the digital economy era, digital talent will be the key to digital transformation and economic growth."

Huawei has committed to develop over 100,000 ICT talents in the Middle East in the next 5 years. In the Middle East, we have set up 154 Huawei ICT academies, and over 3,000 students have participated in the flagship program Seeds for the Future, and more than 17,000 students have obtained a Huawei certification.

Additionally, during the Summit, leading regional

operators and Huawei launched IntelligentRAN, an advanced telecom network solution, which comes in line with Huawei's objective to empower the telecommunication sector with more advanced innovations and value for its own business and other sectors and industries businesses by means of injecting intelligent to wireless networks and achieve autonomous driving network in the wireless domain in the future.

"The intelligentRAN architecture is constructed to develop a mobile network with intelligent service operation, intelligent network optimization, and simplified O&M. This feature helps customers and partners quickly provision services and guarantee user experience, maximise user experience, reduce energy consumption, and simplify O&M in multi-frequency and multi-mode scenarios."

In 2021, Huawei invested over 22 per cent of annual revenue in R&D targeted at supporting the long-term sustainable development of the ICT industry. Yi emphasised the company will continue to invest significantly in intelligent solutions and services such as ICT infrastructure and cloud services.

WTO talks aim to net fisheries deal

World Trade Organization members kicked off a week of “intensive discussions” aimed at securing a long-elusive agreement to end subsidies that reward overfishing, in time for next month’s ministerial meeting.

“The negotiations are at a very critical juncture,” WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala stressed in a statement, after nearly 200 environmental groups handed her a letter on Monday demanding rapid global action towards eliminating overfishing.

For the past two decades, WTO member states have been discussing the need for a deal banning subsidies that contribute to illegal and unregulated fishing, as well as to overfishing that threatens the sustainability of fish stocks.

While fishing should in theory be held in check by the environment, with low fish stocks pushing up costs, subsidies can keep unprofitable fleets at sea.

Global fisheries subsidies are estimated at between \$14 billion and \$54 billion a year, according to the WTO.

It is widely agreed that action is needed to protect a crucial resource that millions of people depend on for their livelihoods.

But more than 20 years of negotiations have stumbled over a range of issues, and members failed to meet the latest UN deadline to reach an agreement by December 2020.

Momentum had seemed to be building towards a deal in time for the 12th WTO ministerial conference (MC12), which had been due to be held last November, before the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 forced its postponement.

The meeting is now due to kick off in Geneva on June 12.

“Now is the time to end decades of discussions and conclude the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, so that the results can be adopted by ministers,” Colombian ambassador Santiago Wills, who chairs the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, said last week.

He said this entire week had been set aside for “intensive discussions aimed at closing the remaining issues in the draft agreement that was sent to ministers in November last year.” — AFP

Now is the time to end decades of discussions and conclude the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, so that the results can be adopted by ministers.

SANTIAGO WILLS
Chair, WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation



A GOLDEN GIRL

A girl harvests wheat crop in a field on the outskirts of Faridabad. Wheat prices surged to a new record high on Monday after India decided to ban exports as a heatwave hit production. The price jumped to 435 euros (\$453) per tonne as the European market opened. — AFP

Russia sanctions could be an 'expensive decision'



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our correspondent based in the UK

COUNTRIES IN EUROPE HAVE ALSO VOWED TO SCALE BACK THEIR PURCHASE OF RUSSIAN OIL AND GAS, WHILE SEVERAL RUSSIAN BANKS HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED FROM SWIFT.

One of London’s financial district’s longest-serving fund management chief executive, Hendrik du Toit, has warned that ‘weaponising finance’ to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine could prove an “expensive decision” — one that could eventually give rise to a more fragmented financial system.

Du Toit, who is CEO of Ninety One — a global investment firm offering active strategies across equities, fixed income, multi-asset and alternatives to institutions, advisors and individual investors around the world — said while it was right that the Kremlin was feeling pressure from the west to stop its brutal war in Ukraine, measures designed to cripple Russia financially could have far reaching economic consequences in the longer term.

“The fact that everything to do with Russia is bad is just wrong. I grew up in a country under sanctions and I understand the negative consequence of that, the South-Africa born fund management boss said. We need to squeeze the regime to stop the war, but we shouldn’t cut off everything.”

He added: “This may be a very expensive decision to isolate a large and powerful nation forever. We need to differentiate between our long-term interests in the

world and our near-term interests.”

The West has imposed — and continues to look for opportunities to further impose where possible — severe economic sanctions on Russia since it began its invasion of Ukraine in February, including freezing the assets of its central bank, which holds a significant proportion of its reserves in US dollars.

Countries in Europe have also vowed to scale back their purchase of Russian oil and gas, while several Russian banks have been excluded from SWIFT, the main messaging system that underpins financial transactions globally.

Separately, some of the world’s largest investment banks including Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan, as well as law firms and several trading companies, have begun unwinding their operations in Russia. Asset managers with investment funds exposed to Russian companies have also declared they will sell down their holdings when Moscow allows foreign investors to trade Russian equities and debt.

Du Toit said some of the financial sanctions could prove costly over the longer term, including a weakening of the US dollar’s dominance as the currency of choice for global trade.

“The US may have cost itself decades in terms of dollar dominance by weaponising

it now. No one is going to be relying on the US dollar alone outside the US orbit.” He added: “It has worked now, it will squeeze Putin, but we will have alt-fi (alternative finance), which will make things more complex and more expensive in time. We’ll have very fragmented economies.”

The comments from du Toit echo recent remarks made by Gita Gopinath, one of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) top officials.

The IMF’s first deputy managing director told the *Financial Times* in March that sanctions imposed on Russia by the West could gradually dilute the dominance of the US dollars, as well as encourage the emergence of small currency blocs based on trade between separate groups of countries.

“The dollar would remain the major global currency even in that landscape, but fragmentation at a smaller level is certainly quite possible,” Gopinath told the *Financial Times*. Du Toit added finance should not be turned into “judgementalism”.

“We in the West make many mistakes. You should have judgement when you use your money, but it shouldn’t be a constant weaponisation of finance,” he said.

“If we are going to be judgemental and weaponise money, the world is so imperfect we will have nowhere to invest,” du Toit added.

Fiscal capture at the European Central Bank



WILLEM H BUTTER
The author is adjunct professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University

Since the second quarter of 2021, inflation in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the eurozone has far exceeded their central banks’ 2 per cent target. This surge could well be explained by the unexpected severity and duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, the fallout from Russia’s war in Ukraine, and repeated errors of judgment by the Bank of England, the US Federal Reserve, and the European Central Bank.

But another possible explanation is that monetary policy has been subject to fiscal dominance or fiscal capture. In this interpretation, major central banks have engaged in aggressive low-interest-rate and asset-purchase policies to support

their governments’ expansionary fiscal policies, even though they knew such policies were likely to run counter to their price-stability mandates and were not necessary to preserve financial stability.

The “fiscal capture” interpretation is particularly convincing for the ECB, which must deal with several sovereigns that are facing debt-sustainability issues. Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain are all fiscally fragile. And France, Belgium, and Cyprus could also face sovereign-funding problems when the next cyclical downturn hits, or when risk-free interest rates normalise from the past decade’s extraordinarily low levels, or when sovereign risk is priced more realistically.

In April 2022, headline inflation

for the eurozone was 7.5 per cent, and core inflation (excluding food and energy) was 3.5 per cent. Yet the ECB remains very concerned with financing sovereign deficits.

This was apparent in its March 24, 2022, announcement that it would continue to accept Greek government bonds as collateral until at least the end of 2024. Greek sovereign debt does not meet the ECB’s investment-grade credit requirement, but it has been purchased and held by the Eurosystem (the ECB and member states’ central banks) under the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP) since March 2020.

Now, the ECB is said to be working on a “new instrument” to support eurozone member states

confronting higher borrowing costs stemming from the ECB’s own expected future policy-rate increases.

Sovereign yield spreads on risky eurozone sovereign debt are rising again — with the Italy-Germany ten-year yield spread reaching 2 per cent on May 10, 2022 — at a time when many vulnerable sovereigns are still planning additional large net debt issuances.

I expect that either the PSPP eligibility rules will be changed to allow the purchase of sub-investment grade debt, or that a new PEPP-like facility will be created for the purpose. Either way, the ECB is the only institution with the resources and the necessary reaction speed to engage in fiscal-rescue operations. The entity

specifically created to address eurozone sovereign debt issues, the European Stability Mechanism, has neither the deep pockets nor the flexibility to respond promptly and decisively to a looming sovereign funding crisis.

Indeed, as of April 2022, the total amount of loans disbursed by the ESM (and its predecessor) since 2010 was just €295 billion, or 2.4 per cent of GDP. And Germany has just rejected a proposal by the ESM to create a new permanent aid fund worth €250 billion (about 2 per cent of eurozone GDP).

Whenever the ECB starts raising its policy rates (which should be soon, though it will be too little, too late), I expect that it will continue its bond purchases.

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BREAKING NEWS



Inside the sanctum of Alia al Farsi: Where Eve with apple for a head lives with well-dressed Omani women of yesteryears

From Qurum, the Alia Gallery is around 30-minutes drive away towards the industrial area of Rusayl. Amidst the giant factories, it is a sanctuary — an escape into a contemporary, abstract world where the artist's works take you on a journey of years of evolution and adaptation that led to the creation of a world that is not only unique but a safe space for her to be just who she is, an artist through and through... **P20**

Scientists unveil image of 'gentle giant' black hole at Milky Way's centre

SCIENTISTS ON THURSDAY provided the first look at the "gentle giant" lurking at the centre of our Milky Way galaxy - an image of a supermassive black hole that devours any matter within its huge gravitational pull but is currently on a bit of a diet.

The black hole — called Sagittarius A*, or Sgr A* — is the second one ever to be imaged. The feat was accomplished by the same Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) international collaboration that in 2019 unveiled the first photo of a black hole — that one residing at the heart of a different galaxy.

University of Arizona astronomer Feryal Özel, at a news conference in Washington, hailed "the first direct image of the gentle giant in the centre of our galaxy," showing a

glowing ring of red, yellow and white surrounding a darker centre.

Sagittarius A* (pronounced Sagittarius "A" star) possesses 4 million times the mass of our sun and is located about 26,000 light-years - the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km) - from Earth.

Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics astrophysicist Michael Johnson called Sagittarius A* "ravenous but inefficient," currently eating relatively little matter.

"If Sgr A* were a person, it would consume a single grain of rice every million years," Johnson said. It is putting out only a few hundred times the energy of the sun

despite being much more massive.

Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects with gravity so strong that not even light can escape, making viewing them extremely challenging. A black hole's event horizon is the point of no return beyond which anything — stars, planets, gas, dust and all forms of electromagnetic radiation — gets dragged into oblivion.

The Milky Way is a spiral galaxy that contains at least 100 billion stars. Viewed from above or below it resembles a spinning pinwheel, with our sun situated on one of the spiral arms and Sagittarius A* located at the centre.

'JUST TRICKLING IN'

Scientists are trying to better understand how supermassive black holes form early in a galaxy's history and evolve over time.

"They go through periods where there is a lot of material around them," Özel said. "... And then they go through these quiescent phases like the one at the centre of our galaxy where matter is just trickling in."

The image released in 2019 showed the supermassive black hole in a galaxy called Messier 87, or M87. That one was far more distant and massive than Sagittarius A*, situated about 54 million light-years from Earth with a mass 6.5 billion times that of our sun.

Sagittarius A*, despite being much closer to our solar system than M87, was hard-

er to image. The diameter of Sagittarius A* is about 17 times that of the sun, meaning it would sit within the innermost planet Mercury's solar orbit. In contrast, M87's diameter would encompass the entirety of our solar system.

Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics radio astronomer Lindy Blackburn said that "the smaller physical size of Sgr A* also means that everything changes about a thousand times faster for Sgr A* than M87. We must also peer through the messy disk of our own galaxy to view Sgr A*, which blurs and distorts the image." Johnson said both black hole images appear blurry because obtaining them pushed the capability of the telescopes "to the breaking point." MIT Haystack Observatory astronomer Vincent Fish said the researchers hope to obtain M87 black hole video in the future.



Thursday's announcement was made in news conferences at seven sites worldwide. EHT Project Director Huib Jan van Langevelde in Germany voiced excitement over finally unmasking the enigma that had been Sagittarius A*.

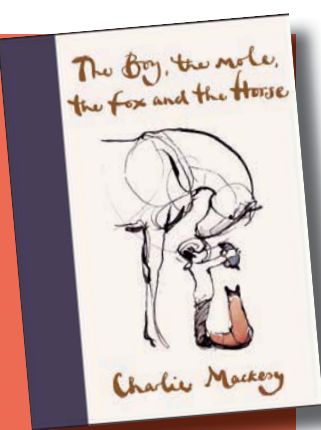
"I think it's just super exciting," said Caltech computer scientist Katie Bouman. "What's more cool than seeing the black hole at the centre of our own Milky Way?" — **Reuters**

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BY CHARLIE MACKESY

It is a children's graphic novel by Charlie Mackesy. As a graphic novel, the pictures and text work together to tell a story about friendship and acceptance. Four unusual friends — a boy, a mole, a fox, and a horse — share truths about life as they search for home.



FASHION TRENDS

A model is helped to get dressed with an outfit chosen by fashion designer Paul Costelloe (2nd R) for The world first Platinum Jubilee Sustainable Sari and designed by London based Nutkhut and Arts University Bournemouth fashion students, as she poses during a photo call in west London. The design of the sari embodies the spirit of the Platinum Jubilee and the Commonwealth, and is made from sustainable recycled plastics. —**AFP**



HOT TOPIC

An Arabian horse and her foal are kept in a stable, during an auction held in the city of Misurata, some 200 km east of the Libyan capital Tripoli. — **AFP**





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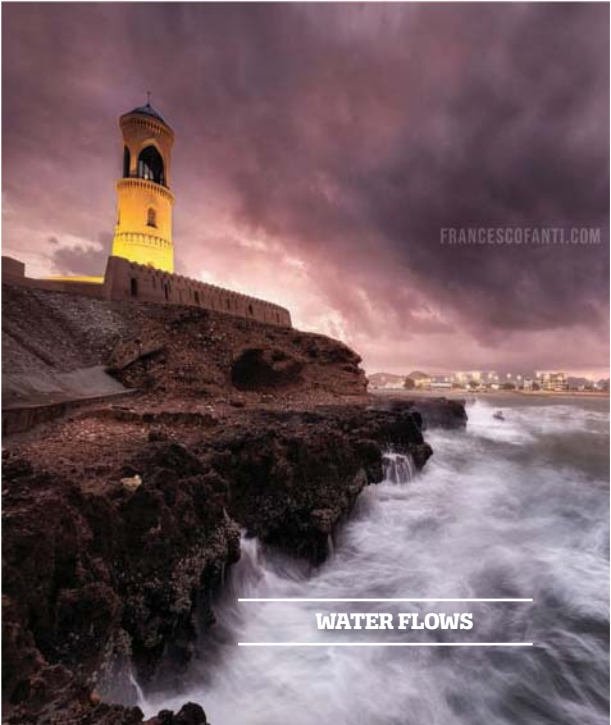


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AROUND THE WORLD

MOVIE

'Downton Abbey' returns with a silent movie and a trip to France



TWELVE YEARS since it first premiered, television hit "Downton Abbey" is back with a second stand-alone film about the fictitious Crawley family and their servants running a sprawling English country estate in the early 20th century.

Set in 1928, "Downton Abbey: A New Era", released in US cinemas on Friday, sees a film crew arrive at Downton as well as some family members travel to the French Riviera.

"We wouldn't be coming back... if we didn't actually get on and enjoy the company of each other's characters and indeed playing the characters," actor Hugh Bonneville, who plays patriarch Robert Crawley, said.

The film, directed by Simon Curtis, begins with Crawley's mother, Lady Violet, played by veteran Maggie Smith, surprising her family with news she has inherited a villa in the south of France from a man she met decades earlier.

Led by Crawley, the family heads off to visit the property. At the same time, a film crew sets up at Downton Abbey, delighting the staff.

Having a film set within a film set was fun - and a little confusing sometimes, said Michelle Dockery, who plays Lady Mary.

"I remember a couple of times when I was confused as to who was saying 'cut,'" she said. "Simon was like 'we were still rolling, actually there. It was Hugh that said 'cut!'"

Newcomer Hugh Dancy plays Jack Barber, director of silent movie "The Gambler".

"It was a little daunting because you don't know what the culture of a show is going to be and... it's obviously defined by the people involved," Dancy said on joining "Downton Abbey".

"And it was exciting because I was just thrilled to be part of it."

"Downton Abbey" first aired in 2010, going on for six seasons and picking up numerous awards. It gained a huge following in Britain and the United States.

"We've had a very good run. I think we've been very lucky. We've kicked off a lot of careers of young players," writer Julian Fellowes said when asked if another film might follow.

"It's dangerous to say this, but I think most people who've worked on it have had a pretty good time and that feels like enough to me. But we'll see. I don't think you can ever tell really." — Reuters

OPERA

Patriots and arias: Italian opera seeks Unesco recognition



OPERA ORIGINATED in Italy, it was sung by Italian patriots and some of the world's greatest arias came from the peninsula. Now Rome wants credit where credit is due.

Home to Scarlatti and Verdi, Italy has put in a bid for Unesco — the UN's cultural agency — to recognise the art of Italian opera singing on its list of intangible global heritage. A decision is due at the end of the year.

"Opera was born in Italy," said Stephane Lissner, the French director of the San Carlo theatre in Naples, which opened in 1737 and claims to be the oldest opera house in the world.

After various experiments with musical theatre in the 16th century, opera came into being around 1600 in Florence, with the founding of an academy promoting an innovative combination of sung text and music.

The first great composer of opera is considered to be Italy's Claudio Monteverdi, who lived from 1567 to 1643 — and that was just the start.

"If you look at the history of opera in the 18th century, there were 400 new compositions during that century" in Naples alone, Lissner said. The southern city was, at the time, the capital of a kingdom run by the Bourbons.

But why should Italian opera be a more legitimate entrant into Unesco's hall of fame than its French or German counterparts?

For Lissner, who also led the Scala in Milan and the

Paris opera before taking the helm in Naples in 2020, there is no debate.

"Singing in Italian... inspires the greatest emotion in opera lovers," he said in an interview in the heady confines of the San Carlo, all red velvet chairs, shimmering lights and gilding.

In his dressing room backstage, Italian baritone Gabriele Viviani practices his vocal exercises before taking to the stage in Puccini's Tosca.

"Without taking away anything from my colleagues, or from the French or German composers ... I think Italian song has something extra, which is the ability to express emotions like no one else can."

A few minutes later, the audience spills into the foyer, chatting before taking their seats for the start of the performance.

VERDI IN ODESSA

Sumiko, a Japanese woman from New York cutting a dash in the crowd in a kimono, came to Naples especially for this performance — and is enthusiastic about Italy's Unesco bid.

"The emotions which these composers give us is universal. It's beyond the history. It's beyond borders," she said.

For Culture Minister Dario Franceschini, opera is one of Italy's "most authentic and original cultural expressions", one that has spread worldwide.

He noted the moving

scenes from the Ukrainian city of Odessa in March when locals took to the street to sing "Va, pensiero", the stirring Hebrew Slaves' Chorus from Verdi's Nabucco.

He described this as "yet more proof of how Italian opera singing is an integral part of the world's cultural patrimony, which provides light, strength and beauty in the darkest hours".

"Va, pensiero", which was also the hymn of Italian patriots battling the Austrian occupation in the 19th century, also illustrates popular support for opera.

"In the 19th century, when you arrived in any Italian town, the entire population sang opera arias. It was normal," Lissner noted.

"Italy is different, Italian theatres are different... and if you go into the villages — they're not even towns — you find small theatres."

Even today, there are around 60 opera houses across Italy — a global record — while opera singers such as 20th-century tenor Luciano Pavarotti have been venerated as major stars.

In Italy, lyrical music "is not just reserved for the elite", said Lissner, although he said "the majority of the public cannot pay certain ticket prices and has been abandoned", which was a "huge error".

This is a trend the San Carlo is trying to counter, by reserving reduced price tickets for young people. — AFP

DISCOVERY

Fossils of giant marine reptiles found high in the Swiss Alps



FOSSILS FROM some of the largest creatures ever to swim Earth's oceans — whale-sized marine reptiles called ichthyosaurs — have been found in a counterintuitive place: atop three mountains in the Swiss Alps up to 8,990 feet (2,740 meters) above sea level.

Scientists on Thursday described rib and vertebrae fossils from two ichthyosaur individuals: one about 69 feet (21 metres) long and the other about 49 feet (15 metres). They described from a third individual the largest-known tooth from any ichthyosaur with a base 2.4 inches (6 cm) wide and an estimated length of 6 inches (15 cm), suggestive of a fearsome predator.

The fossils, dating to around 205 million years ago near the end of the Triassic Period, make these three individuals among the largest of the giant ichthyosaurs that inhabited the oceans at a time when dinosaurs were beginning to dominate the land.

"The tooth is particularly interesting because it could possibly — but unlikely — represent the largest animal to ever inhabit Earth," said palaeontologist Martin Sander of the University of Bonn, lead author of the study published in the Journal of Vertebrate Palaeontology.

It was found atop the Chrachenhorn mountain near Davos. Based on the fact that a 59-foot-long (18-metres-long) ichthyosaur described last year had a tooth with a base eight-tenths of an inch (2 cm) wide, Sander said, "then a tooth 6 centimetres wide could possibly have come from an animal 54 metres (177 feet) in length."

The animal likely was not that big but still formidable, perhaps akin to a sperm whale, hunting giant squid, large fish and smaller ichthyosaurs. Some other giant ichthyosaurs apparently lacked teeth and ate small fish and squid, sucking them up or engulfing them in their mouths.

The giant ichthyosaurs — the largest-ever marine reptiles — had elongated bodies, with relatively small skulls.

The fossils were found in the 1970s and 1980s at three sites in the eastern Alps in Switzerland, said study co-

author Heinz Furrer, a retired curator at the University of Zurich's Paleontological Institute and Museum who discovered them along with other geology students at the time. The fossils are being described scientifically for the first time.

The inexorable movement of the immense plates that make up Earth's crust in a process called plate tectonics explains how fossils that formed in an ancient seabed ended up atop mountains.

"The Alps have a very complicated structure, with giant slabs of rock consisting of former seafloor, called nappes, piled on top of each other by the African plate pushing into the European plate. The nappe that the ichthyosaurs come from is the highest in the pile. This piling up happened in the last 35 million years or so," Sander said.

The remains are too incomplete to definitively determine their species but probably belong to an ichthyosaur family called Shastasauridae. This family includes the biggest-known ichthyosaur: Shastasaurus, with a specimen from Canada indicating a length of 69 feet (21 meters).

Some researchers have proposed longer ichthyosaur lengths based on partial fossils.

Until now, giant ichthyosaurs had not been known from so near the end of the Triassic. They apparently disappeared in the mass extinction event at the conclusion of the Triassic about 201 million years ago — and no marine creatures got as big again until baleen whales about 3 million years ago. Smaller ichthyosaurs lived until about 90 million years ago.

"There were three groups of animals in the history of life on Earth that were true giants: ichthyosaurs of the Triassic, which came first but remain mere ghosts; long-necked sauropod dinosaurs on land; and today's baleen whales," Sander said.

Today's blue whale, up to about 98 feet (30 metres) long, has been considered Earth's largest-ever creature. Sander said future research on giant Triassic ichthyosaurs may challenge this conclusion. — Reuters



Inside the sanctum of Alia al Farsi: Where Eve with apple for a head lives with well- dressed Omani women of yesteryears

By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

It's not everyday that one will find an art gallery in the middle of an industrial area. In a place of grit that communicates hard labour and noise, Alia al Farsi's Alia Gallery in Rusayl is a sanctuary — an escape into a contemporary, abstract world where the artist's works take you on a journey of years of evolution and adaptation that led to the creation of a world that is not only unique but a safe space for her to be just who she is, an artist through and through.

From Qurum, the gallery is around 30-minutes drive away. But once the giant doors of the gallery opens, the hot summer sun blinding everything outside, the cool breeze of the gallery and the burst of colours of the paintings automatically give you a sense of peace.

Alia wasn't present during our visit. It was a good thing. Her presence would have overshadowed her work and from the comfort of silence, it was better to form an opinion without the artist present.

On her behalf was Hassan, currently a one-man team that looks after not just the gallery but everything else — from social media to content creation even sales. After a series of pleasantries, he gave us the layout of the gallery — an intimate coffee shop on the first floor, a beautiful, well-lit library adjacent to it, over 1,000 sqm of space just for art display, a section for reception and some finer details totally lost to me as the eclectic pieces were too demanding to be ignored.

I knew Alia by reputation. She is one of Oman's most prolific and enterprising women artists. With a career spanning more than 15 years, she's done massively to carve a space for herself in a male-dominated industry. She's showcased and demonstrated her works worldwide, allowed for them to be

made the cover of books and magazines, created a partnership with different organisations within the Middle East and signed pacts that ultimately made her one of Oman's icons when it comes to combining business with art. By reputation, it was easy to see that Alia has a dream and she will stop at nothing to make that dream a reality.

Of the hundreds of artworks on display, two pieces would definitely capture your attention. By the entrance is a motorbike painted in



her typical style, bursting with life and colour sometimes just looking at the details makes you forget that at one point, she used to drive that vehicle.

"With Alia, she's very very conscious about the things she uses. She masterfully mixes different mediums and no two art pieces are alike. In one piece, she could be mixing fabric with wood and acrylic paints and at other times, you will find them in pieces like chairs and even her motorbike. She gives new life to things she no longer uses," Hassan explained which gave a lot of insight about the woman.

"The motorbike is a statement piece. It wasn't just there for display. It is there because she loves to ride a bike," he added.

Behind the bike serving as a backdrop is a giant self-portrait of Alia sitting on a chair. The actual chair recreated in the painting is sitting on a corner allowing visitors to take a sit on the throne of a kingdom she has meticulously carved out of the richness of her imagination.

This giant piece of art is the priciest in her collection. Its price tag is pegged at RO 40k and understandably, it is justifiable because you are bringing the woman and her essence to your home or gallery if you're buying it. And personally, the essence of an artist is priceless.

Overall, the complex houses nearly 200 art pieces, the latest that joined the gallery is her collection of golden paintings.

It's easy to get lost amongst the aisles of art pieces. Sometimes, they make sense, sometimes they don't but typical of any art, they all elicit an emotion.

It took us around two hours to get a good understanding of the woman behind the artwork but felt that there was plenty to unpack. Her style, while contemporary and abstract showcases the beauty of Oman and its culture to the world. She found power in her own heritage and she uses the feminine touch and bank on her uniqueness and the originality of her views to elevate her storytelling. She's bold taking her art to directions no one paved for her and as a result, she's masterfully crafted a world of imagination where the likes of Eve with the apple for a head walks in the same alley with Omani women of yesteryears dressed fancifully while doing chores all stuck in their own squares but are willing to leap off the canvas just to be recognised for their beauty.

If you're looking for a new place to explore, this writer would definitely encourage you to check out this world that Alia has created. It might be out of the way but it's a drive worthy of your time.

