

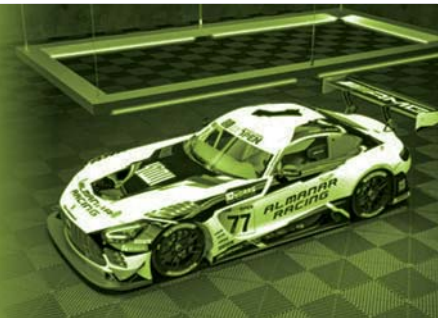
Omanis arrive in Jeddah from Sudan

The Sultanate of Oman's Consulate in Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday received Omani families and some Sudanese residents stranded in the Republic of Sudan. They were received at the Jeddah Port by Saif al Amri, Deputy Consul General, and Awad Raafit, First Secretary. It may be noted that they arrived aboard a ship carrying 1,687 civilians from more than 50 countries fleeing violence in Sudan docked in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN'S AL ZUBAIR TEAMS UP WITH SCHILLER TO START INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL



P13

ENERGY EFFICIENCY DELIVERS RO 300 MILLION IN SAVINGS



P20

WHY IS OMAN SO INVITING AS A CULINARY DESTINATION



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S KING OF NETHERLANDS AND SIERRA LEONE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Willem-Alexander of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, on his birthday anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to King Willem-Alexander. His Majesty also wished the people of the Netherlands further progress and prosperity. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Julius Maada Bio of the Republic of Sierra Leone on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Julius and the people of his country. — ONA

HM GREET'S SOUTH AFRICA AND TOGO

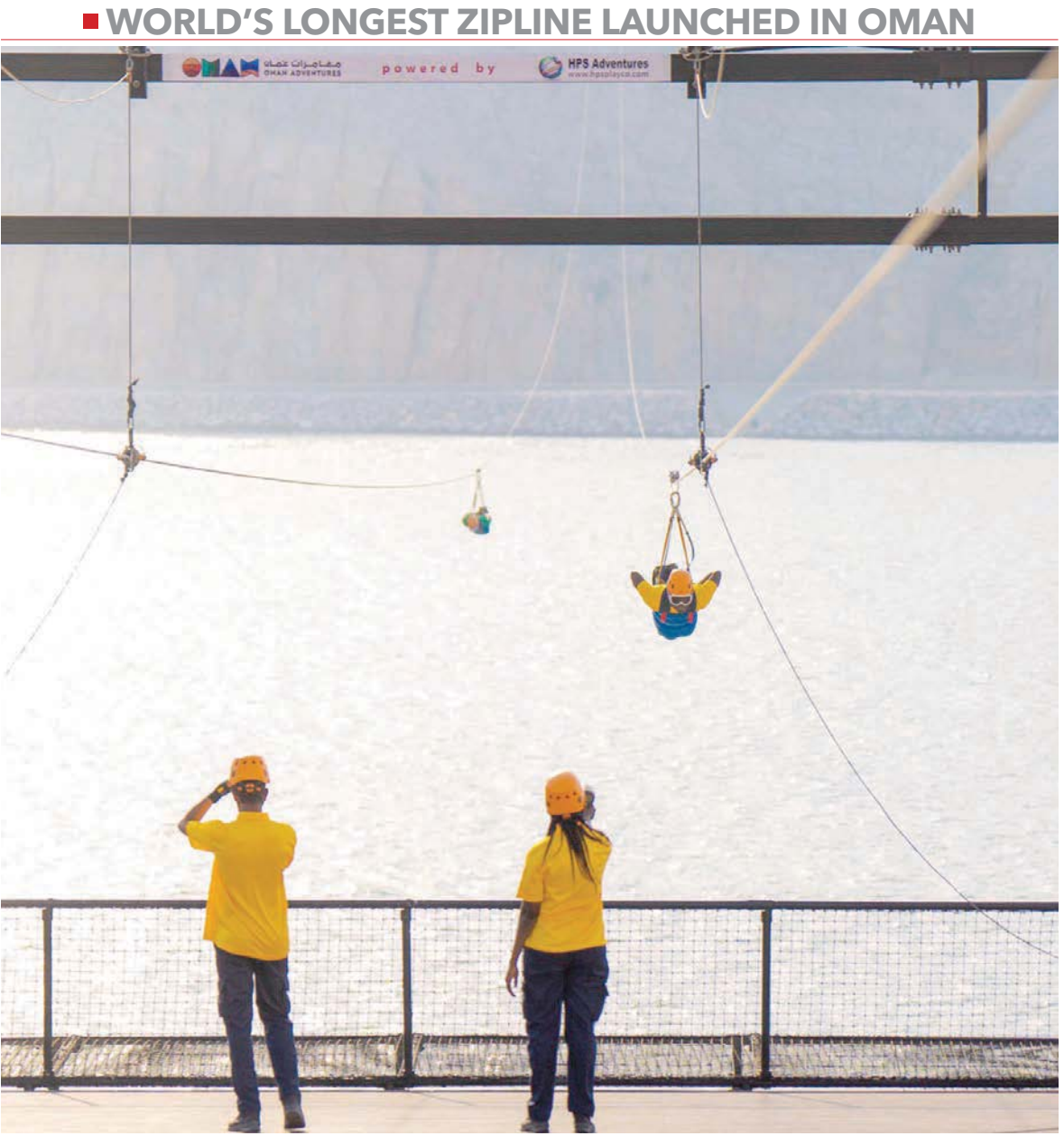
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to President Cyril and the people of his country. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Faure Gnassingbé of the Republic of Togo on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Faure Gnassingbé and the people of his country. — ONA

INSIDE



SOUTH KOREA, US SET FOR NEW COLLABORATION

P5



Oman Adventure Centre and the 1,800 dual zipline were launched under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, State Minister and Governor of Musandam, on Wednesday. The zipline project is one of the main ventures of Oman Adventure Centre. The zipline has been officially registered in Guinness World Records as the world's longest over-water zipline. Adventure-lovers will be able to enjoy and experience the zipline every day from 9 am to 4 pm throughout the week. **SEE ALSO P2**

Job-seekers rate falls by 4.1 in March

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Jobless rate fell by 4.1 as at the end of March compared to 5 at the end of February. The rate of female job-seekers recorded 13.7, while the rate of male job-seekers was 1.7, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The NCSI data indicated that the age group 15-24 is the most active among job-seekers with a rate of 15.4 followed by the age group 25-29 with 7.7. Bachelor's

degree holders represented the largest category among job-seekers with 11.3, followed by higher diploma holders with 10.4 and the General Education Diploma (GED) with 6.7.

Last week, the Ministry of Labour said that the total number of job-seekers registered stood at 110,000 by the end of the first quarter. The ministry stated that the jobless benefit won't be paid in November.

The ministry announced a plan to provide 35,000 jobs for the youth this year through replacement

and direct employment including 10,000 jobs in the public sector and 14,000 jobs in the private sector. It said that more than 45,000 jobs were made available so far through direct employment, replacement and work-related training and 18,000 job-seekers were employed for the first time in the private sector.

The NCSI data indicates that the number of national workers with insurance in the private sector by the end of March reached 279,800, a 1.5 decrease compared with the previous month.

Rains in many parts, hailstones fill Wadi Ghafir

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
[@lakshmioman](#)

Many parts of the Sultanate of Oman are experiencing heavy rainfall, and authorities are urging the public to be cautious of rockslides. The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office has predicted that rains will continue until Saturday, with the highest rainfall expected to occur in Al Sharqiyah North and South and Al Dakhiliyah.

There have already been reports of rockslides on roads in Nizwa, so people need to take extra care. Hail and downdraft winds are also expected, along with heavy rain, according to the forecaster. The local cloud formations over Al Hajar Mountains are contributing to rains.

Nizwa has recorded the highest amount of rainfall so far, with 35 mm until 6.30 pm on Wednesday. However, other stations are yet to report their records. Many people were seen collecting hailstones, while some unconfirmed images of a snowman made out of hailstones in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar have caused more excitement about the weather in the country.

A weather expert at Oman Met Office revealed that the strongest hailstorm was in Qurayat, and the most hailstones were reported in



PHOTO BY KHALFAN AL RUZAIKI

**SIX RESCUED**

The Directorate of Civil Defence and Ambulance in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate received a report that three vehicles carrying nine people was washed away in Wadi Al Batha in the Wilayat of Jalan Bani Bu Ali. Six people were rescued and the search is in ongoing for the other three.

Wadi Bani Ghafir in Al Rustaq. It was made of hailstones rather than water, which is quite rare. Heavy rains were also reported in Sinaw and Wadi Mistal in Nakhal was spectacular.

Overflowing wadis have cut off roads in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, so it is essential to take caution while travelling. The rainfall is expected to range between 20 mm to 60 mm, but some places are forecasting up to 90 mm.

AT THE MOUNTAIN NEWTON SUMMIT



Omani adventurer Suleiman bin Hamoud al Naabi managed to reach the highest mountain peak in the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic (Mount Newton summit), at a height of approximately 1,700 metres above sea level. Al Naabi said that his adventure began on April 12 when he accessed Longyearbyen area of Svalbard archipelago. **DETAILS ON P2**

Big history of postage stamp-sized Quran

**TIRANA:** The ritual is always the same. Mario Prushi carefully washes his hands and face before kissing and pressing one of the world's smallest Qurans to his forehead.

For generations, the postage stamp-sized book has been passed down in his family — surviving wars. Scholars say it is one of the smallest form of the holy book on record, with the minuscule holy book held inside a silver case blackened with age.

“We have kept it from generation



Mario Prushi holds in his hand one of the smallest Quran in Tirana.

to generation with absolute dedication,” Prushi, 45, said at his home in Tirana. Just 2 cm wide and one centimetre thick, the book almost disappears in the palm of Prushi's hand, and it can only be read with a small magnifying glass embedded in its case.

The Quran is difficult to date in the absence of scientific analysis, but according to Elton Karaj — a researcher in Quranic studies at Beder University in Tirana — the 900-page copy has been around

since at least the 19th century.

“This Quran was printed in a very small format, one of the smallest in the world. From its appearance, its publication dates back to the end of the 19th century. It is an extraordinary work, very valuable. It is fortunate that this copy is in Albania,” said Karaj.

But its size is not the only remarkable thing about the holy book. It is also responsible for converting the Prushi family from Catholicism to Islam. — AFP



## Gen Al Numani receives Iran's foreign minister

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Wednesday Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation and means of enhancing them to achieve joint

interests. They also highlighted the march of historic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides also discussed several matters of mutual concern.

The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of Iran to Oman and the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

## Omani adventurer climbs highest peak of Svalbard

OSLO: Omani adventurer Suleiman bin Hamoud al Na'abi reached the highest mountain peak in the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic (Mount Newton summit), at a height of approximately 1,700 metres above sea level.

Al Na'abi said that his adventure began on April 12 when he accessed Longyearbyen area of Svalbard archipelago. He pointed out that he experienced unpredictable environmental and climatic conditions that posed one of the most difficult challenges.

"Those conditions tested my ability to withstand various levels of hardship and I pursued my determination to climb Svalbard archipelago at such low temperatures and later climb to the top of Mount Newton," he said.

Al Na'abi said that temperature at the summit reaches minus 40 degrees. Other challenges include tackling the lack of vision caused by a sudden snowfall, coupled with strong winds that forced him to continue covering his face and wearing special glasses, in addition to the presence of predators like the polar bear, arctic wolf and foxes. — ONA



## Omani citizens arrive in Jeddah from Sudan

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The Sultanate of Oman's consulate in Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday received Omani families and some Sudanese residents stranded in the Republic of Sudan.

They were received at the Jeddah Port by Saif al Amri, Deputy Consul-General, and Awad Raafit, First Secretary.

It may be noted that they arrived aboard a ship carrying 1,687 civilians from more than 50 countries fleeing violence in Sudan. Saudi Arabia has received evacuees by air and sea since fighting broke out in Africa's third-biggest country on April 15.

On Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry affirmed that the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Sudanese capital Khartoum is safe and sound and had earlier affirmed the safety and health of all Omani citizens present in that country.

"Due to the unstable security situation in the capital Khartoum and other cities, the embassy continues with interest to follow up the plan to evacuate citizens to the Sultanate of Oman in



coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Muscat and the Sudanese authorities," the ministry said in a statement.



It called on Omani citizens to avoid travelling to Sudan until the situation returns to calm and stability, and called on citizens in

Sudanese territory to stay in their homes for the time being.

The group that arrived in the coastal city of Jeddah from Port

Sudan was transported by one of the kingdom's ships, the ministry said.

It included 13 Saudis, while

the rest came from countries across the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas, the ministry added.

## SALE OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS IN HAYY AL SAHEL PROJECT FROM APRIL 30

MUSCAT: Al Madina Real Estate will on Sunday, April 30, mark the launch of sales of Hayy Al Sahel tourism project in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Governorate of Muscat. The ceremony will be held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

Hayy Al Sahel tourism project occupies an area of 1,000,300 sqm along the seashore. It comprises 3-star, 4-star and 5-star hotels, luxury residential units, a golf academy, an equestrian academy, a leisure boulevard and a chain of international

restaurants and cafes. It also boasts other attractions, including gardens, green spaces, sports clubs and green homes that are environmentally friendly.

The project is deemed the first integrated tourism project that implements a freehold system with permanent residence for foreigners.

The project contributes to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to achieve optimal employment of tourism potentials in Oman that abounds a variety of natural, heritage and cultural attractions. — ONA

## Carnival highlights Musandam's development

AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
@Afrahalbalushia

Musandam Carnival, a major promotional campaign for economic development of Musandam, began at Bussa Beach in the Wilayat of Khasab. The event, which runs from April 26-28, features a range of activities and entertainment programmes for all segments of society.

The carnival has a food corner offering traditional and international cuisine, a shopping corner showcasing local products and home projects, a children's activities corner, and a youth activities corner for musical performances and electronic games. There are also marine activities, a theatre corner, and an events corner.

The Small and Medium



The dual zipline was launched under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, State Minister and Governor of Musandam, on Wednesday. The zipline has been officially registered at Guinness World Records as the world's longest over-water zipline.

Enterprises Development Authority is participating in the carnival with various SMEs and craftsmen showcasing their products and services.

According to Manea bin Abdullah al Shehhi, Director of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in Musandam Governorate, the authority is promoting its initiatives and services to

participants and encouraging them to benefit from them.

The tourism sector in the Governorate of Musandam has seen a significant growth, with an increasing number of ships docking at the Port of Khasab. The number of cruise ships in 2022 and the beginning of 2023 reached about 58, with a total of 18,999 visitors. The governorate has eight hotel establishments

with a rating of one to five stars, comprising 512 rooms plus hotel apartments and green lodges.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is playing a crucial role in the development of the governorate, with efforts to address the challenges facing small and medium enterprises operating in the tourism sector. The ministry has provided alternate opportunities for these enterprises to promote their heritage tourism product within the pavilions of the Sultanate of Oman that are supervised by the ministry.

The Musandam Carnival is expected to attract visitors from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad and promote business opportunities for local companies, including small and medium enterprises and home-based projects.



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# Firstpass is a gateway to better healthcare



STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Firstpass, the first unified patient experience and engagement platform, has been launched in the Sultanate of Oman in partnership with Vectramind Corporation. The platform is designed to focus on patients’ interactions and experiences at every touchpoint of their journey, starting long before they need care and continuing long after their clinical interactions are over.

Firstpass, launched by Oman Data Park (ODP), the Sultanate of Oman’s first IT-managed and cloud services provider, in partnership with Vectramind Corporation, includes various dimensions that focus on providing patient convenience, speed in providing care, attention to patient preferences, easy access to medical information, self-service, systems capable of capturing real-time feedback, and integration with EMR systems as required.

Firstpass offers a variety of features that focus on improving the patient experience at every touchpoint across the care continuum. This improves overall patient satisfaction, which leads to better medical outcomes, patient retention, improved patient referrals, optimised use of facilities, and return on investment.

In his statement about the launch of this health platform, Engineer Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, stated: “We are pleased to launch the Firstpass

- Unified Patient Experience & Engagement Platform, which is built on agile modelling that simplifies the transformation of the health services sector towards a sustainable sector in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This platform also constitutes a quantum leap in the healthcare sector as it focuses on achieving the five principles of patient care.”

The principles include providing opportunities for patients to speak to experts regarding the disease they suffer from, empowering patients and letting them be part of the decision-making process for their treatment and procedures, establishing trust and communicating with empathy, reducing waiting time during their visit and asking them for their feedback, treating patients with respect and personalising their care experience as well as being transparent in sharing information with patients and their families.

CP Vinodh, Director for Healthcare Solutions at Vectramind, believes that “understanding patient experience is a key step in moving toward patient-centred care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs, and values.” The Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered and machine learning system enables patients to have a smooth journey at the hospital with lesser wait allowing hospital management and staff to make the right decisions at the right time to ensure their patients’ concerns are addressed immediately.

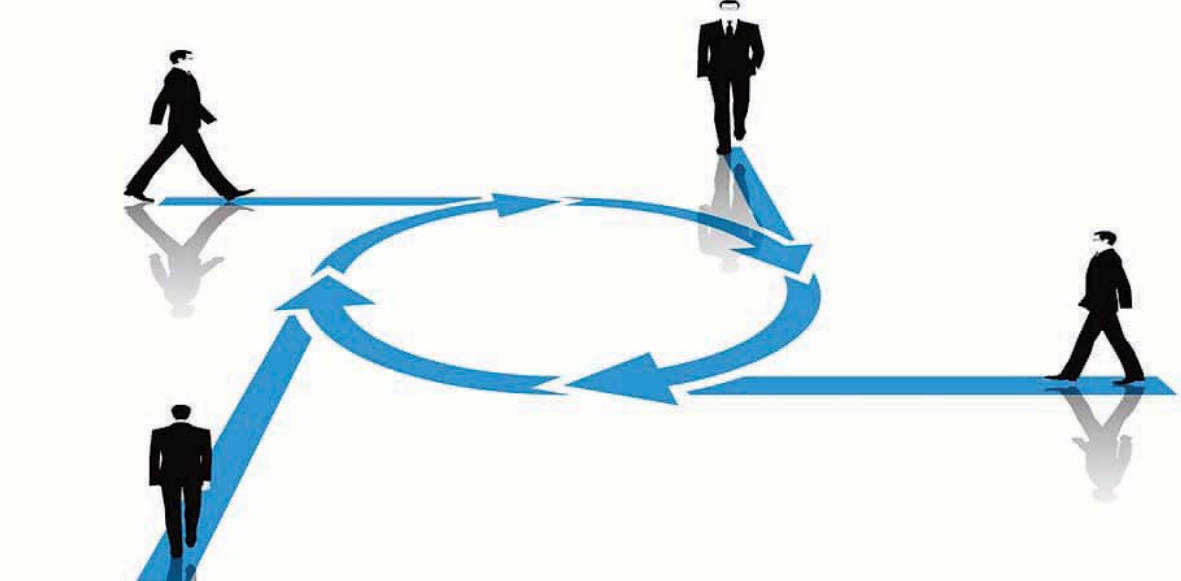
# MoL announces 3,233 job rotation opportunities through Ejada

AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
@Afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced the availability of 3,233 job rotation opportunities in 37 government units through the Ejada platform. The platform, which was launched in November 2022 as part of the Ejada system for career development, allows all employees of government units to view job rotation opportunities, apply for them and compete for them.

The Ejada platform is one of the most important electronic platforms launched in recent times. It directly benefits citizens by trying to improve the services they receive from employees in government and public institutions in the country. The platform provides more than one electronic service to all citizens.

MoL invited interested individuals to register on the Ejada platform for job rotation through the platform’s website by May 6, 2023. The job rotation opportunities are available in



government units and can be chosen based on functional and scientific expertise and geographical location.

Khalsa bint Habib al Farsiyyah, Director of the Job Rotation Initiative at MoL stated that the Sultanate of Oman has entered a new phase with confident steps towards a more developed and prosperous future. The Ejada platform for job rotation is part of an integrated national vision that

guarantees complete alignment and harmony, including at all levels, to achieve the aspirations that paint the image of Oman by 2040.

The general policy of job rotation as an administrative tool has been taken as a means to contribute to the advancement of individual and institutional levels. This policy will also make optimal use of the expertise and capabilities of human resources. The implementation of

the policy depends on using an electronic platform that allows all government units to enter their needs for job rotation opportunities specified according to a planned recycling organisation based on legal and regulatory controls and requirements.

This job rotation opportunity announcement by MoL will allow citizens to grow professionally and personally while making the best use of their skills and expertise.

# Training underway for media persons to meet future aspirations

MUSCAT: The Training Centre of the Ministry of Information unveiled its programmes for the rest of this year forming part of the centre’s approach to set annual plans for developing the resources of employees, media-related professionals, journalists, engineers and technicians in government and private institutions.

The programmes seek to groom the skills of the media personnel and improve their performance in a manner that achieves sustainable career development. This will reflect positively on the amelioration of media products in all forms — readable, audio, visual and



electronic.

Asya bint Yusef al Balushiyah, Acting Director General of the Media Training Centre, pointed out that the ministry takes keen interest in upgrading all its systems and that the Media Training Centre shoulders the responsibility of supervising the implementation of the relevant

programmes. These, she said, include updating the news system (EVS), which will be introduced next month (May 2023).

She added that the Media Training Centre targets media personnel at different government and private institutions, as well as students studying media in higher education institutions. — ONA

**Salalah Port receives cruise ship with 375 passengers on board**



SALALAH: Salalah Port on Wednesday received a cruise ship with 375 passengers on its board, including 150 tourists. The cruise ship has a tourist programme to visit many ports around the world. The tourist programme of the ship, which came from South Al Sharqiyah Governorate heading to Djibouti, included tours to tourist attractions and archaeological sites renowned in the Governorate of Dhofar, besides visiting beaches and traditional bazaars in the Wilayat of Salalah. — ONA

# Rains recharge ‘aflaj’ canals

TEXT & PHOTOS BY:  
YAHYA AL SALMANI

With rain in several wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman, the weather has become exceptionally good and aflaj are recharged here and there.

Some aflaj are overflowing while many others have subsided making the areas cool and attracting many visitors.

The rains have given hope to the farmers for a better agricultural season and enhanced commercial activity in local markets.

“The sight of water in the canals has aroused enthusiasm and joy among the farmers. Harvesting season has almost come and these rain drops accumulated in the canals are precious for the standing as well as future crops, as they are sufficient to irrigate them for the whole year,” a farmer from the Wilayat of Al Amerat, Jahlot village, said.

Aflaj are water channels that

run throughout the year. They descend in streams like waterfalls and penetrate the plateaus and plains covering wide areas.

Studies indicate that 90 per cent of the rainwater is deposited between the rocky layers in water pockets that continuously feed aflaj. The aflaj system is based primarily on the liquefaction of underground water to places that are higher than the accumulated water sites. It requires a perfect technique, which was known to Omanis in the olden days.

Water flows into the medium-sized aflaj at a rate of nine gallons per second. This quantity of water is sufficient to irrigate large areas of agricultural land.

People in some areas depend mainly on aflaj water, whether for domestic uses or for watering trees. The aflaj originated some 2,500 years ago, and the first stage of its construction begins with choosing the right place that has sufficient underground water reserves. Then two wells are drilled, the first of which is at the

front or source of the aflaj, while the second hole is constructed in a sloping place, with a degree of slope that helps the aflaj canal to continue the flow of water. A hole is dug every twenty metres using traditional tools, after which the water begins to flow naturally without the use of mechanical means.

After the completion of the water canal construction project, the water shares are divided equally among the beneficiaries of this water. There is a supervisory body, which follows up the method of water distribution and the maintenance of the aflaj.

Omani aflaj have been classified in the World Heritage List, which is an indication of the geological and historical importance of these water channels, which depend entirely on traditional irrigation. Therefore, the official authorities in the Sultanate of Oman maintain these aflaj periodically, to preserve the engineering wonder of ancient Oman for future generations.





# INNOVATION IS KEY TO EDUCATION

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH  
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Consumerism prevails over everything, including education, which has emerged largely as a commodity to ensure 9 to 5 jobs for those who buy this product. Priorities are changing, and a large number of students prefer courses that assure instant jobs soon after graduation. The preferences have largely changed for the current generation of students, who prefer jobs to knowledge. However, they don't mind accumulating quick 'knowledge' to get an instant job. What is the whole purpose of education: getting a job or working for knowledge, being innovative and serving humanity and the world in a better way? A large number of students limit themselves to the first option, while very few think of going for innovative knowledge.

It may be a debatable topic for educational institutions to design courses that encourage innovation, or those, which fulfil the students' requirements of being 'job-ready' soon after graduation. Of course, the focus is on job readiness over innovation and research, which are time taking process, the fruits of which are broad yet far.

The flip side of it is the fact that the very orientation of innovation is missing in the colleges. One innovation would have the potential to create thousands of jobs. Since the courses are not innovation-oriented, the college products are harping on the limited available resources, the completion for which is very high.

The gap thus of employers and employees is widening, and the whole world today is suffering from the crisis of joblessness.

The imbalance caused due to this situation needs to be noted. Earlier, higher education was a good choice among college students, many of whom were opting for research and academic jobs. Today, in the race of getting quickest possible jobs, they are not pursuing higher education, thus putting pressure on hiring system and creating a void in the academic field. Research also has become a victim in this race.

The three most popular streams today are medicine, engineering and commerce. They are fetching jobs, at the same time they are creating a situation for underemployment. Researchers and academics call for a balanced approach and proper counselling and based on their capabilities convince students to go also for humanities, applied sciences and liberal arts that offer good career growth. The approach would lessen the burden on the job market and ensure right jobs to right candidates.

THE FLIP SIDE OF IT IS THE  
FACT THAT THE VERY ORIENTATION OF  
INNOVATION IS MISSING KEY  
IN THE COLLEGES



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# South Korea and US set for new collaboration

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and South Korean leader Yoon Suk Yeol held White House talks on Wednesday to deepen collaboration on deterring North Korean nuclear escalation amid anxiety about its growing arsenal of missiles and bombs.

“Today we celebrate the ironclad alliance, the shared vision of our future and a deep friendship — the Republic of Korea and the United States,” Biden said in welcoming Yoon to the White House during a pomp-filled arrival ceremony.

Yoon said he wanted to celebrate 70 years of ties between the US and South Korea.

“The ROK-US alliance is an alliance of values, standing together to safeguard the universal value of freedom,” Yoon told thousands gathered on the South Lawn of the White House.

After a day of talks and a joint news conference, the two leaders were to attend a glittering state dinner catered by a US chef whose mother emigrated from Korea.

Biden and Yoon were using the first formal state visit by a South Korean leader in more than a decade to send a warning to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

North Korea’s rapidly advancing

weapons programmes — including ballistic missiles that can reach US cities — has raised questions about whether the US would really use its nuclear weapons to defend South Korea under what it calls “extended deterrence.”

Opinion polls in South Korea show a majority of the public wants Seoul to acquire its own nuclear bombs, a step Washington opposes. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby told a briefing the summit was expected to produce “major deliverables” on issues like extended deterrence, cyber security, climate mitigation, foreign assistance and economic investment.

Under a new “Washington Declaration,” the US will give South Korea detailed insights into, and a voice in, US contingency planning to deter and respond to any nuclear incident in the region through a US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group, US officials said.

While the allies will make a fresh appeal to North Korea to engage in diplomacy, Washington will deploy imposing military technology, including a ballistic-missile submarine, to South Korea in a show of force, senior



South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol and US President Joe Biden participate in a State Arrival ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. — AFP

US administration officials told reporters in a briefing call. It will be the first such submarine visit since the 1980s, they said.

The officials stressed that no US nuclear weapons would be returned to the peninsula, and South Korea would continue not to have control over the US nuclear arsenal.

South Korea will also reaffirm

its commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and its non-nuclear status, they said.

“This is modelled after what we did with European allies during the height of the Cold War in similar periods of potential external threat,” said one senior Biden administration official.

The agreed steps fall short of what some in South Korea have

called for and are unlikely to alter the direction of North Korea’s own nuclear programme. But they could allow Yoon to argue to his domestic audience that Washington is taking South Korea’s concerns seriously.

The US is briefing China in advance on the steps, the officials said, a measure nodding to desires to ease the tense relationship in

the region. It is only the second state visit Biden has hosted since he took office two years ago — the first such guest was France’s president. For all the extravagance, Yoon’s visit comes at a moment of high anxiety in the region.

A poll released on April 6 by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul found 64 per cent of South Koreans supported developing nuclear weapons, with 33 per cent opposed.

Yoon, in an interview with Reuters last week, signalled for the first time a softening in his position on providing weapons to Ukraine, saying his government might not “insist only on humanitarian or financial support” in the event of a large-scale attack on civilians or a “situation the international community cannot condone.” The topic is expected to be discussed on Wednesday, along with climate change and cybersecurity.

Washington has looked fondly on Yoon’s willingness to help on Ukraine and seek rapprochement with Japan, the other key US ally in northeast Asia, and on the wave of Korean tech investment in the US since he took office, which officials say now approaches \$100 million.

— Reuters

## ■ KING AT LIBRARY’S TWINNING



Britain’s King Charles III visits Liverpool Central Library, to officially mark the Library’s twinning with Ukraine’s first public Library, the Regional Scientific Library in Odesa, in Liverpool, Britain, on Wednesday. — Reuters

## Kenya cult death toll climbs to 95

**MALINDI, Kenya:** The number of victims linked to a suspected starvation cult in Kenya climbed to 95 on Wednesday, a government official said, with weeping relatives anxiously awaiting news of loved ones after investigators unearthed mass graves last week.

The discovery of dozens of bodies buried in Shakahola forest near the coastal town of Malindi shocked Kenyans, with cult leader Paul Mackenzie Nthenge accused of driving his followers to death by preaching that starvation was the only path to God.

The gruesome saga, which has been dubbed the “Shakahola Forest Massacre”, has prompted calls for a crackdown on fringe religious outfits in the country.

“We had five exhumations which brings the total number of those who lost their lives to 95,” Rhoda Onyancha, Coast Regional Commissioner, told reporters.

At the state-run Malindi Sub-County Hospital, whose morgue is already stretched well beyond capacity with dozens of bodies, families were desperate to know if their loved ones had been found.

Teenager Issa Ali was taken to Shakahola in 2020 by his mother and said he was beaten by Nthenge when he tried to leave, until his father rescued him.

“The last time I saw my mum was in February,” the soft-spoken 16-year-old said. “She was so weak the last time I saw her.”

Onyancha said on Wednesday that 39 people had been found alive so far in the 325-hectare bush around Shakahola, while 22 people have been arrested.

Hassan Musa, a Kenya Red Cross official, said that 311 people, including 150 minors, had been reported missing to its support staff in Malindi. “We are talking about people mostly from Kenya, but also from

Tanzania and Nigeria. Some have been missing for years.”

“We don’t know how many more graves, how many more bodies, we are likely to discover,” Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki told reporters during a visit to the site on Tuesday, adding the crimes were serious enough to warrant terrorism charges against Nthenge.

The majority of the dead were children, according to three sources close to the investigation, highlighting the macabre nature of the cult’s alleged practices which included urging parents to starve their offspring.

Hussein Khalid, executive director of the rights group Haki Africa that tipped off the police about Nthenge’s activities, said the pastor’s Good News International Church appeared to require children to starve first, followed by women, and finally men. — AFP

## Fish rescued from dried-out river as drought, heat hit Spain

**GIRONA, Spain:** Spanish authorities rescued native fish from a river shrivelled by a prolonged drought on Wednesday, as the country endured abnormally high temperatures that Spain’s meteorological agency attributed to climate change.

In the northeastern city of Girona, officials used small electric shocks to stun fish in the river Onyar before putting them into plastic bags and transferring them to the Ter river 10 km away, which has significantly higher water levels.

Only fish endemic to the river were transferred, while introduced species were euthanised. Spain has had 36-consecutive months of below-average rainfall. Reservoirs are on average at



A worker sets free some native fish species to another location due to the low water level of the River Onyar, in Girona, Spain, on Wednesday. — Reuters

50 per cent of their capacity, however, in the northeastern region of Catalonia and the southern region of Andalusia, levels have fallen to approximately 25 per cent.

The picture of a handful of wading workers trying to save the fish, with the water only reaching their calves, contrasted with January 2019

when the same river overflowed during a storm.

Last month, in the Sau reservoir located 100 km north of Barcelona — which is only 10 per cent full — boats rounded up several tonnes of fish.

The animals struggled to survive in the low-oxygen waters, so they were euthanised to protect drinking water from

contamination.

The country is facing unseasonably high temperatures more typical of summer. Meteorological agency AEMET said this month was likely to be the most intense April on the Iberian Peninsula since records began.

“Although each episode needs to be analysed in detail in terms of its intensity and early onset, it fits in with what is being observed to be caused by climate change,” AEMET spokesman Ruben del Campo said.

In its annual State of the Climate report, the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service said that in 2022 southern Europe experienced the highest number of days on record with “very strong heat stress”. — Reuters



**Sultanate of Oman**  
**Ministry of Agricultural,**  
**Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources**

### TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources  
Announces the following Tender:-

| Tender No.                  | Description                                                                                    | Tender Documents Price (R.O) | Class  | Last Date for Collection of Documents | Last Date for Submission of Documents |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 46/2023/MAFWR/HQ-9-Recall-1 | Rehabilitation and Maintenance of the Ground and First Floors of the Ministry's General Office | 26/500                       | Second | Thursday 4/5/2023                     | Monday 15/5/2023                      |

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in 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.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources. And the bidders can contact the Esnad technical support team at the number listed below to find out how to request electronic guarantees from local banks.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24402200** or **etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om**.
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

**TENDERS COMMITTEE**  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



The Saudi ferry passenger ship Amanah is carrying 1,687 civilians from more than 50 countries fleeing violence in Sudan. — AFP

# Fears mount for Sudan ceasefire as former regime members escape

**KHARTOUM:** A wanted Sudanese war crimes suspect has confirmed that he and others have escaped from prison during recent fighting, raising new fears for a fragile ceasefire that has enabled foreigners to flee.

The 72-hour ceasefire brokered by the United States was already struggling to hold after the regular army launched renewed air strikes against rival paramilitary forces in the capital late on Tuesday.

Anti-aircraft guns fired at fighter jets in the skies over Khartoum's sister city of Omdurman on Wednesday, witnesses said.

Armed clashes meanwhile continued in Soba on the

outskirts of Khartoum.

The escape of leading figures from the ousted regime has raised fears the conflict may take a turn for the worse. Members of the regime had been moved to a military hospital "due to their health conditions... and remain in the hospital under the guard of the judicial police", the army said in a statement, without specifying when they had been moved.

It was the third reported jail break to have taken advantage of the fighting between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and those backing his deputy turned rival, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. It is said that

jailed regime members "had now taken responsibility for protection."

Security fears had already been raised on Tuesday when the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a "huge biological risk" after combatants occupied a Khartoum laboratory holding samples of cholera, measles, polio and other infectious diseases.

The fighting between the rival generals, which has involved air strikes and artillery exchanges, has killed hundreds of people and left some neighbourhoods of greater Khartoum in ruins.

"In some places, humanitarian aid is all that is keeping famine at bay," UN chief Antonio Guterres

said on Tuesday. The fighting has killed at least 459 people and wounded more than 4,000, according to UN agencies.

A total of 14 hospitals have been shelled since fighting erupted while 19 others are out of service.

As the fighting eased on Tuesday, foreign governments organised road convoys, aircraft and ships to get their nationals out. A ship carrying nearly 1,700 civilians from more than 50 countries docked in Saudi Arabia early on Wednesday.

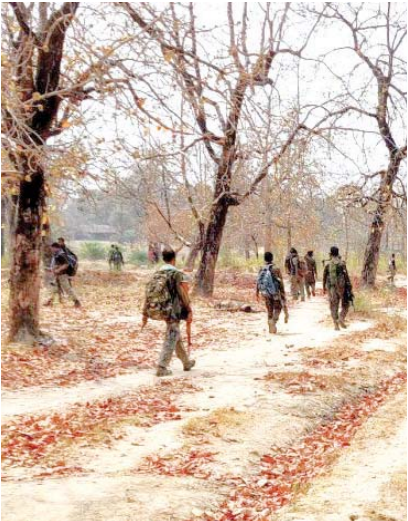
Sudanese workers meanwhile complained of being left in a state of desperation, unable to leave their homes during the fighting. — AFP

# Ten Indian police killed in Maoist rebel attack

**RAIPUR:** Ten police and their driver were killed in India's central Chhattisgarh state on Wednesday when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device, an attack police blamed on Maoist rebels.

India's long-running Maoist insurgency began in the 1960s and has cost thousands of lives in the decades since, although violence has waned considerably in recent years.

Wednesday's deaths were the worst casualties for security forces in more than two years and claimed the lives of police reservists returning from a mission to investigate rebel movements in remote Dantewada district. — AFP



Security force personnel patrol after an attack by Maoist fighters in the central state of Chhattisgarh, India. — Reuters file photo.

# China's Xi holds call with Ukraine's Zelensky

**BEIJING:** Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky by phone on Wednesday, Beijing and Kyiv said, the first call between the two leaders since the start of Russia-Ukraine dispute.

Beijing says it is neutral in the Ukraine conflict, but the Chinese leader has come under increased pressure from Western nations to step in and mediate.

"I had a long and meaningful phone call with President Xi Jinping," Zelensky said.

"I believe that this call, as well as the appointment of Ukraine's ambassador to China, will give a powerful impetus to the development of our bilateral relations," he added.

Zelensky's spokesman Sergiy Nykyforov said that the two leaders had "an almost one-hour-long telephone conversation".

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported that during the call -- which was initiated by Kyiv -- Xi told Zelensky that "talks and negotiation" were the "only way out" of the war.

"On the issue of the Ukraine crisis, China has always stood on the side of peace and its core position is to promote peace talks," CCTV reported Xi as saying.

According to a readout of the call, Xi said China "will neither watch the fire from the other side, nor add fuel to the fire, let alone take advantage of the crisis to profit".

"When dealing with the nuclear issue, all parties concerned should remain calm and restrained, truly focus on the future and destiny of themselves and all mankind, and jointly manage and control the crisis," Xi said.

— AFP

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

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

| Tender Ref.     | Description                                                                                      | Last Date for Collection of Tender Document | Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday | Eligibility                                                                       | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| MOH/HQ-105/2023 | Supply of Pharmaceuticals                                                                        | 04/May/2023                                 | 24/May/2023                                               | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board | R.O 25.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-106/2023 | Supply of Pharmaceuticals                                                                        |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   | R.O 95.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-107/2023 | Supply of Pharmaceuticals                                                                        |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   | R.O 45.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-108/2023 | Supply of Liquid Oxygen Gas for Ministry of Health Hospitals                                     |                                             | 31/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 25.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-109/2023 | Maintain, Enhance and Integrate MOH System with Health Insurance System (Dhamani Platform)       |                                             | 24/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 48.500 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-110/2023 | Supply of Consumable Items for the National Genetic Centre at The Royal Hospital                 |                                             | 31/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 25.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-111/2023 | Supply of Reagents and Consumables for Microbiology Laboratory at The Royal Hospital             |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   |                             |
| MOH/HQ-113/2023 | Provision of Maintenance and Operation of Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) at Khoula Hospital        |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   |                             |
| MOH/HQ-114/2023 | Replacement of Existing Outdated Electrical Main Distribution Panels at Ministry of Health (HQs) |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   |                             |

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

**Erdogan suspends election campaign due to health problems**

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cancelled his scheduled election campaign rallies on Wednesday due to a "minor sickness," the president announced.

"I will rest at home today as our doctors advised," Erdogan wrote on Twitter, citing health problems he suffered a day before. The president said he will resume the campaign on Thursday. Erdogan was scheduled to attend campaign speeches in three separate central Anatolian provinces on Wednesday.

Late on Tuesday, Erdogan had to briefly cut a live television interview after he suffered what he later described as stomach upset. The Kanal 7 station cut broadcasting after Erdogan failed to respond to a question on his election promises.

Some muffled voices were heard from the microphone, but the cameras did not show Erdogan.

— dpa

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

| Tender No.          | Tender Title                                                                                                    | Tender Fees | Last Date for Collection of Tender Document | Site Visit Date                                                  | Bid Submission Closing |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| CCCCRC/ T/237/ 2023 | Design & Build of Shelving Racks, MEP, Fire Alarm & Fire Fighting System for The New Proposed Medical Store "A" | 70 OMR      | 11/05/2023                                  | 04/05/2023 09:00AM<br><u>Meeting Point:</u><br>SQCCRC Main Lobby | 17/05/2023             |

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:

**Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre – Purchase Department.**

Biddings that meet the above requirements should be submitted in a sealed envelope (hardcopy & softcopy) and should be delivered and deposited in the tender box at SQCCRC.

**Please note:**

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than One week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: [purchase@cccrc.gov.om](mailto:purchase@cccrc.gov.om)
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



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THURSDAY | APRIL 27 | 2023

7

## In brief

■ MOSCOW



### EX-MAYOR FACE CHARGES IN DISSENT CRACKDOWN

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said on Wednesday he could face life in prison on “terrorism” charges while another popular opposition politician went on trial in Russia’s escalating clampdown on dissent.

Authorities are taking the crackdown on freedoms in Russia to an unprecedented new level over a year into Moscow’s assault on Ukraine, with independent media shut down and most key opposition figures behind bars or in exile. “They have brought absurd charges against me, according to which I am facing up to 35 years,” said Navalny, who wore his prison uniform and appeared gaunt but defiant. — AFP

■ WASHINGTON



### HIGH COURT CHIEF REFUSES TO TESTIFY

The US Supreme Court’s Chief Justice John Roberts is refusing to testify in Congress about business dealings by two conservative justices and lavish gifts one received that have raised ethics issues.

Roberts cited “separation of powers concerns and the importance of preserving judicial independence” in declining the committee’s invitation in a letter dated on Tuesday to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

He included a copy of court ethics guidelines and a statement signed by the nine justices in which they “reaffirm and restate foundational ethics principles and practices.” — AFP

■ BOGOTA



### PRESIDENT CALLS ON HIS CABINET TO RESIGN

Colombian President Gustavo Petro has called for the resignation of his entire cabinet as the government struggles to get legislation approved by Congress. The cabinet shakeup marks the most serious crisis within Petro’s government in his tenure as president.

After nearly nine months in power, Petro has been unable to usher in the profound reforms in labour laws, healthcare, pensions and the judiciary that he promised during his campaign. Petro, for his part, called for an “emergency government... given that Congress was incapable of approving simple very peaceful articles” on equitable redistribution of land. — AFP

# EU unveils reforms for cheaper drugs and to avoid shortages

**BRUSSELS:** The EU on Wednesday unveiled a long-awaited proposed reform of legislation governing pharmaceutical drugs to make them cheaper, prevent shortages and boost new antibiotic production.

“Over the last decade, reports of medicines shortages, including of antibiotics, have skyrocketed to the tens of thousands,” EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides told a news conference presenting the recommendations.

The biggest reform of its kind in two decades was in part informed by Brussels’ concerted action during the Covid pandemic that underscored the benefits of less-burdensome procedures, greater transparency and joint measures.

Kyriakides said that, under the proposal, “companies will have to notify potential shortages earlier and have shortage prevention plans for their medicines”.

By the end of this year, Brussels plans to draw up a list of critical medicines that will need to be stocked up by manufacturers.

The pharmaceutical industry intensively lobbied to change some of the proposals, the presentation of which had been pushed back several times.

The industry is especially incensed at a recommendation that the exclusive period companies had selling new drugs in Europe could be shortened from 10 years to eight before patent protection expired.

“Today’s proposals manage to undermine research and development in Europe while



EU commissioner for Health Stella Kyriakides speaks on the revision of the pharmaceutical legislation at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

failing to address access to medicines for patients,” the head of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations, Nathalie Moll, said.

The industry also railed against plans for EU-wide access to medicines, saying it would end up “penalising innovation” if a product was not available across the bloc.

Moll called the proposals “unworkable EU-level legislation that is destined to fail”.

While the European Commission aims to bring down the cost of medicines, notably by having more generic drugs on the market, it doesn’t have the power to set prices in the European Union.

That is the prerogative of national governments who negotiate with pharmaceutical groups.

“But so far, no one has proposed a better system,” said one EU lawmaker, Peter Liese, also a medical doctor considered close to the pharmaceutical industry position.

He said that virtually no new antibiotic had been produced in 20 years. On this issue and others the commission is proposing, “innovation-friendly regulation is indispensable,” he said.

The commission also wants a leaner approval process to get new drugs to market faster, as happened with Covid vaccines. — AFP

## French PM seeks to turn page after pensions fight

**PARIS:** France’s Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne on Wednesday pledged to cut unemployment and make industry greener as she sought to turn the page on months of unrest over a contentious pension reform.

“I only believe in results. We need to obtain some in all areas, and I hope for them to be concrete, tangible, visible for French people,” she told reporters as she announced her government’s next steps.

Borne has been the unpopular face of President Emmanuel Macron’s flagship pension reform to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64, which he signed into law earlier this month despite repeated mass protests.

She invoked a controversial executive power to push the bill through parliament without a vote last month, and is now under more pressure than ever to find a majority to back any future legislation in its hung lower house. Borne on Wednesday laid out the details of a 100-day target to relaunch Macron’s second term in office after his re-election in April 2022.

Her government would aim to improve work conditions, reduce unemployment, and make French industry more environmentally friendly among other measures, she said.

But a new bill on immigration, expected to be the next hot topic after the pension debate, would not be presented until the autumn for lack of consensus.

“There is no majority to vote through such a bill,” Borne said.

And “it’s not the moment to launch a debate on a topic that could divide the country”.

**IMMIGRATION**

She said some 150 extra policemen would however be deployed to the Italian border to battle illegal immigration.

The pension reform has sparked mass strikes and protests across the country, and eroded Macron’s popularity just a year into his second term.

After months of keeping a low profile, the president has, since signing the law, embarked on trips around the country to meet members of the public face-to-face.

But he has been greeted by pan-bashing protesters on most of these forays into provincial France. — AFP



French PM addresses a press conference after the weekly cabinet meeting at the Elysee Presidential palace in Paris. — AFP

# US and Philippine troops fire rockets at ship in largest-ever military drills

**SAN ANTONIO:** US and Philippine troops fired a salvo of rockets at a warship representing an enemy vessel in the disputed South China Sea on Wednesday, in the final exercise of the allies’ largest-ever military drills.

It was the first time the countries had conducted a joint live-fire exercise in the hotly contested waters.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, who has sought stronger defence ties with the United States, sat in an observation tower with US and Philippine officials watching the event north of Manila.

The live-fire drill kicked off with the US HIMARS precision rocket system launching a series of rounds at a decommissioned Philippine Navy corvette anchored about 22 kilometres off the coast.

The ship, which represented an enemy vessel approaching the Philippine shore, was sunk by guided bombs dropped by US Marines F-35B Lightning II fighter aircraft, a US military spokesman said in an email.

Artillery units also lined up along a grassy field to fire rockets at floating drums 10 kilometres offshore.

F-16 Fighting Falcons, AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and



US troops prepare a missile during the annual joint military exercises between US and Philippine troops, in San Antonio. — Reuters

Philippine Air Force FA-50 fighter jets also took part.

The drill was briefly interrupted when a small private aircraft entered the exercise area.

The drills aim to boost Manila’s military capability while serving as a US show of support for its Asian ally.

Nearly 18,000 troops have taken part in the annual exercises dubbed Balikatan, or “shoulder to shoulder”, in Tagalog.

Wednesday’s event “demonstrated new potential and revitalised the strength of our militaries while we continuously forge an ironclad

alliance”, the Balikatan director for the Philippine military, Major General Marvin Licudine, said in a statement.

The drills, which began on April 11, have involved helicopters landing on a Philippine island off the northern tip of the main island of Luzon.

The US military also showed off its Patriot missiles, considered one of the best air defence systems in the world.

This year’s Balikatan follows a deal announced earlier this month for US forces to use an increased number of bases in the Philippines. — AFP



The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

However, in reality and on the ground, we are living in the drones age, where we are doubling global

and plan a more just way to share land and natural resources. Drones can be more efficient and effective

Pandemics prove time and again that health services delivery operations are the most significant

Heavy rains, earthquakes, and volcanoes and other natural adverse weather conditions can be disastrous and costly. Drones can be much more safe, efficient and effective in conducting relief, search and rescue operations in affected

We are fully responsible for the choices we make today, including whether to invest directly or indirectly in any way, shape and form in life or death. Let us make no mistake, we have chosen in the past to invest more in nuclear submarines than in more sustainable, regenerative fishing and farming techniques. Today we have the choice between investing in health, educational and relief drones or nuclear drones.

LETICIA PINEDA

In mid-April, President Miguel Diaz-Canel admitted it was not “clear” how the country would “get out of this situation.” Countries that supply Cuba with fuel have had to cut back due to a “complex energy situation” globally, he said. The president did not name the countries, but Cuba relies heavily on fuel from ally Venezuela. — **AFP**

Russian service members take part in a rehearsal for the Victory Day parade in central Saint Petersburg, Russia, on Tuesday. – **Reuters**

To comment and email: [opinion@omanobserver.om](mailto:opinion@omanobserver.om)

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# Marketing tricks that work

Consumers are emotionally prepared to overindulge during periods of celebration, while retailers have a variety of techniques in place to boost sales before and during these times. Occasionally there are post-sale promotions.

It doesn't matter whether the celebration is religious, cultural, musical, or any other type of festivity; retailers pull out of their sleeve ad campaigns, discount offers, and promotions that are all tailored to the occasion and shopping behaviour.

Psychology helps us understand customers! People are not motivated to act by reason alone, mainly when it comes to spending money on a special celebration; therefore, retailers' marketing strategies are packed with emotional power. Cognitive psychology is commonly used in communication, in addition to visual merchandising clues inside stores that work as road signs directing shoppers to look for the best bargain. Because of the emotional response it prompts, one buys what he relates to.

One of the most widely used marketing methods is the frequency illusion effect. It involves selective attention and social proof (the recommendations of other consumers). Remarketing and retargeting are strategies also used in the frequency illusion to ensure that brands, products, or services are not forgotten. Messages offering discounts and other 'opportunities' pop up on our phones several times per day.

The festive season is a booster for the economy as consumers show a willingness to spend. From electronics to cars to home furnishings and services - free car insurance for a limited period, Ramadhan specials, Internet providers offering discounts on Iftar buffets in certain coffee shops and restaurants - the list is endless.

Persuasion in a techno-colonised world in which advertising rules every aspect of life, from junk food to exotic holidays, property acquisition to education to beauty treatments, and even medical treatment. Coercion, brainwashing, and peer pressure are all



Sonia Ambrosio

The writer is journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

engineered to assure that the populace wants comfort and the latest products. The world of real estate is packed with illusions. Luxury is the peg to attract potential buyers.

By focusing on desire, comfort, and reassurance, brands and retailers use illusion to attract and persuade clients by highlighting specific features while downplaying other less appealing parts of their product or service. This marketing strategy exploits people's ways of thinking and decision-making, fulfilling customers' own set of beliefs and experiences.

So, I have decided to venture out for on-site and off-site laboratory trips to supermarkets, shopping malls, car sales showrooms, beauty spas, and eco-adventure providers. The objective was to pay attention to the visual and non-visual marketing strategies for celebration and holidays. I was stunned by the intensive and sometimes pushy display of flyers, signs, and pricing exhibited, as well as some stations selling ordinary products using charity as an emotional plea.

Everything is up for sale. Customers seem to be in a rush to fill up their trolleys and sign up for Internet service offers, while retailers bombard them with attractive sales not just on-site but also via social media. I have managed to restrain myself from shopping – except for a pair of dancing shoes! Not that I needed a new one, but as I have mentioned above, you buy what you can relate to because of the emotional response it creates in you. New media platforms and cutting-edge marketing strategies are major drivers of online business performance, especially before and during the festive season. Compared to traditional marketing models, new media marketing attracts young people with higher purchase power. They are prepared to splurge.

We live in a world where marketing has become unleashed. We have created a nefarious marketing culture in which illusions are sold. Greed, hyper-materialism, and maniacal competitiveness reign. Companies use a range of psychological tricks to prey on consumers' dreams and desires to encourage them to buy. But hold on; offers aren't always the best bargains.

PEOPLE ARE NOT  
MOTIVATED TO  
ACT BY REASON  
ALONE, MAINLY  
WHEN IT COMES  
TO SPENDING  
MONEY ON  
A SPECIAL  
CELEBRATION

## SHOOTING THE CHERRY BLOSSOM!



A visitor takes photos of cherry blossom trees at Kungsträdgården park in Stockholm on Wednesday. – AFP

# No confidence in the Fed

The aftershocks of the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), while seemingly fading, are still reverberating around the world. Although Federal Reserve officials have taken pains to assure the public that the US banking system is sound, it is unclear why anyone should believe them. After all, Fed Chair Jerome Powell told Congress the same thing just days before SVB's collapse in March.

In the weeks since then, it was reported that the vaunted stress tests established by the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial reforms did not foresee the drop in value of government bonds caused by the Fed's aggressive interest-rate hikes. A recent study by Erica Jiang and her co-authors found that "marked-to-market bank assets have declined by an average of 10 per cent across all the banks" following the Fed's rate increases, "with the bottom 5th percentile experiencing a decline of 20 per cent."

While US President Joe Biden has promised to hold accountable those responsible for SVB's collapse, such promises, too, should be greeted with a healthy dose of skepticism. After all, the Obama administration, in which Biden served as vice president, never held any bankers responsible for the 2008 financial crisis.

The fact is that regulators – including the Fed – have failed to keep



Joseph E. Stiglitz

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank

WHILE FEDERAL  
RESERVE  
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TO ASSURE  
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BELIEVE THEM

the banking system safe. Banks depend on trust: depositors need to be confident that they can withdraw their money whenever they want. That has always been true. What has changed is the ease with which billions can be withdrawn in a nano-second online.

Even a whiff of danger that they will not be able to get their money back is enough to cause rational people to withdraw uninsured funds, and even insured amounts, if there is a risk of delay. The result is that when a bank fails, the people left holding the bag are those who have not been paying attention or, like many elderly customers, do not use digital banking services.

The current status quo – under which sophisticated depositors use intermediaries to engage in regulatory arbitrage and guarantee that all of their deposits are insured, or are prepared to withdraw funds above the insured amount at a moment's notice – is no way to run a banking system. To stabilise the sector, policymakers must establish comprehensive deposit insurance, paid for by depositors based on the benefits they derive and the systemic risks they pose. Until that is done, the banking system will remain fragile.

As the head of the government agency responsible for supervising SVB, Powell bears responsibility for the oversight failures that precipitated its collapse. Unlike the massive mortgage-lending fraud that caused the 2008 financial crisis (the extent of which became clear only years later, following numerous lawsuits and other legal actions), SVB's lending seemed sound. To be sure, even good lending can turn sour in the midst of a significant downturn, and suspicions of dubious activity inevitably arise when so much money is being held in uninsured low-interest accounts. But SVB's problems were more prosaic, and any banking regulator worth their salt should have acted, especially when the regulator was the one

creating the risk.

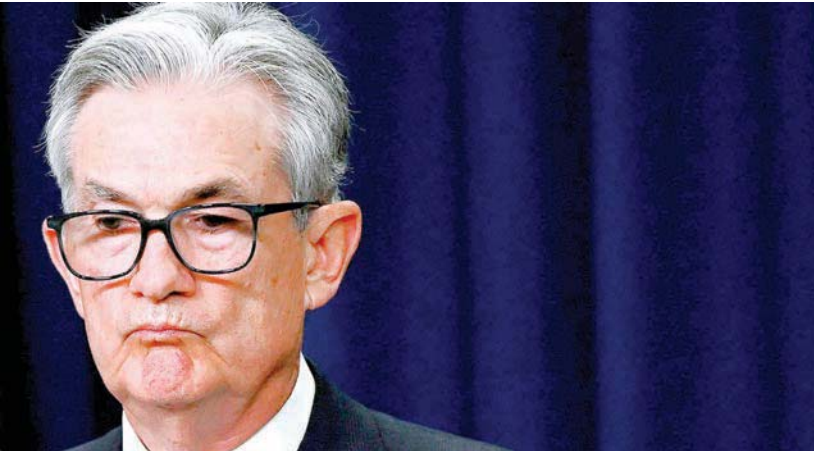
Banks always engage in maturity transformation, turning short-term deposits into long-term investments. While this process is inherently risky, banks are often tempted to gamble their depositors' money if taxpayers directly or indirectly bear the downside risk. This is what SVB did: it invested some customer deposits in long-term, ostensibly safe securities, betting that long-term interest rates would not increase. Supervisors should not allow this to happen, and they should make it a central part of stress testing when it does.

Yet the Fed allowed it to happen, and by neglecting the role of interest-rate hikes in triggering financial-sector fragility, it undermined the

efficacy of its own stress tests. In addition to these supervisory errors, SVB's collapse was preceded by regulatory failures, as the Fed under Powell relaxed regulations on banks like SVB, which it considered to be of regional economic significance but not systemically important.

Most people do not have the ability, resources, or access to information needed to assess the soundness of banks. Such assessments are a fundamental public good and, as such, the government's responsibility. If a bank can accept the public's money, the public should have confidence that it can repay it. The US government, particularly the Fed, has failed in that regard.

The Fed, like other independent central banks, jealously guards its credibility. The risk of losing it has been cited as the reason for the Fed's interest-rate hikes of the past year, which went far beyond normalising the ultra-low rates that characterised the post-2008 era. But by failing to recognise the risks posed by its rapid rate increases, and how more than a decade of near-zero interest rates had exacerbated these risks, the Fed undermined its own credibility – precisely the outcome it sought to avoid.



SVB's collapse was preceded by regulatory failures.

# sport

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## AL HARTHY DETERMINED FOR SEASON BEST AT SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS

AL HARTHY, DINAN, EASTWOOD EYEING STRONG RESULT IN SIX HOUR CONTEST

Spa-Francorchamps, one of the most iconic tracks in global motorsport, hosts the third race of the 2023 FIA World Endurance Championship this Saturday, 29th April — an encounter which Ahmad al Harthy hopes will mark a turning point in his rookie WEC season.

Performance-wise, Al Harthy and team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood have consistently delivered at the wheel of the No 25 Aston Martin Vantage since the championship curtain-raiser in America back in March.

From a strategy point-of-view too, the Oman Racing with TF Sport squad has been equally strong and everyone's combined efforts have certainly warranted more than the ninth and eighth place finishes achieved thus far in the first two races of the campaign.

Frustratingly, the Balance of Performance grading for the Aston Martin in the GTE Am class has left the car struggling for outright pace and top speed against the competition from the likes of Ferrari and Porsche. For the upcoming Spa race, it is hoped the playing field will have levelled out.

Belgium's famous 4.3-mile track, a staple on the calendar of global and European endurance categories, hosts the TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps on Saturday with free practice getting underway on Thursday, April 27.

Al Harthy, who is supported by key partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, is relishing being back in the Ardennes where the Omani has enjoyed

**2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM DRIVER STANDINGS:**

14th Ahmad al Harthy / Michael Dinan / Charlie Eastwood, 7pts

2023 FIA World Endurance Championship GTE Am Team Standings:

11th Oman Racing with TF Sport, 7pts

glittering success over the years with podiums, race wins and championship glory.

Most notably clinching the Pro-Am title in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup [then the Blancpain Endurance Cup] at Spa back in 2017, Al

Harthy and Oman Racing then went on to win the Total 24 Hours of Spa in 2019 — remarkably from an enforced pitlane start — and duly wrapped up a second Pro-Am crown during the following race in Barcelona, Spain.

In recent years, he has also been a winner at Spa in the International GT Open and last year, his first ever season in the European Le Mans Series, he and Oman Racing only just missed the podium.

**AHMAD AL HARTHY:**  
“Spa is an amazing track and somewhere we have gone very well over the years, with a lot of incredible memories — especially the championship victories in GTWCE. This year we arrive there with a new challenge in FIA WEC, with incredibly

high competition, and the whole team is looking forward to it.

“The first two races this season have had their frustrations, with the performance comparisons, but we are hopeful things will change for Spa and we can battle on a more even footing.”

“From a driving perspective, Michael, Charlie and I have been doing exactly what we need to and the team has been fantastic as well. If we have an equal chance this weekend, I’m confident of a strong result.”

The first two practice sessions ahead of the third race of the FIA World Endurance Championship season will take place on Thursday with a further session and qualifying following on Friday, April 28. The 6 Hours of Spa will then start at 12.45 local time on Saturday, April 29.

## Oman’s Al Zubair teams up with Schiller to start international GT open campaign in Portugal

**PORTIMÃO (PORTUGAL):**  
Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair gets his challenge for honours underway in the 2023 International GT Open at this weekend's opening race at the Autodromo Internacional Algarve, in Portimão, Portugal.

After finishing third in the 2023 Asian Le Mans Series, Al Zubair teams up with Germany's Fabian Schiller in the Getspeed Performance Team to drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 running under the Al Manar Racing banner.

Al Zubair, who finished third in the International GT Open series in 2021, said: “Very excited to get the European season started for 2023. I believe it will be a very good year. I am feeling very confident and happy with the atmosphere and performance levels at Getspeed.

“I’m looking forward to getting

| 2023 RACE CALENDAR OF AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR:                                                          |  |                                                                                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>International GT Open</b><br>April, 28 -30<br>- Portimao, Portugal<br>- 1 Hour Race (2x)         |  | <b>GT World Challenge America</b><br>September, 22-24<br>- Sebring, America<br>- 1 Hour Race (2x) |  |
| <b>Michelin Le Mans Cup</b><br>June, 8-9<br>- Le Mans, France<br>- 1 Hour Race (2x)                 |  | <b>Intercontinental GT Challenge</b><br>October, 5-7<br>- Sebring, America<br>- 8 Hour Race       |  |
| <b>International GT Open</b><br>June, 16-18<br>- Hungaroring, Hungary<br>- 1 Hour Race (2x)         |  | <b>International GT Open</b><br>October, 20-22<br>- Barcelona, Spain<br>- 1 Hour Races (2x)       |  |
| <b>IMSA SportsCar Championship</b><br>September, 15-17<br>- Indianapolis, America<br>- 3 Hours Race |  | <b>Intercontinental GT Challenge</b><br>December, 15-17<br>- Abu Dhabi, UAE<br>- 12 Hour Race     |  |

started with the GT Open. There are some strong line-ups in the championship so, for sure, it won't be so easy. Nonetheless, we are coming fully prepared and looking to turn ambitions into results. We

will definitely be aiming for the win.”

There are 33 cars on the entry list for the opening round of a series that also visits Belgium, Hungary, France, Austria, Italy

and Spain this season and is in its 18th year. Al Zubair, Schiller and Al Manar Racing have a varied race programme in 2023 and will compete in Hungary and Spain after their opening Portuguese outing.

International GT Open competitors are sharing the Algarve circuit with Euroformula Open, GT Cup Europe and TCR Europe entrants this weekend.

Private tests will be permitted on Thursday, before two free practice sessions on Friday (April 28). A 30-minute qualifying session follows from 11.10hrs on Saturday morning and the 70-minute race one fires into life with a rolling start from 16.30hrs.

The second qualifying session takes place at the earlier time of 09.00hrs on Sunday morning, prior to the one-hour second race of the weekend, starting at 13.35hrs.



Tsitsipas  
keen to build  
on run to  
Barcelona  
final



**BENGALURU:** World number five Stefanos Tsitsipas said his run to the final in Barcelona had served as a reminder of what it felt like to be a strong contender at a tournament again and left him full of confidence heading into this week's Madrid Open.

After missing out on a first Grand Slam title in January with defeat to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open final, Tsitsipas went out early in Rotterdam and Indian Wells before reaching the fourth round in Miami and the Monte Carlo quarters.

The 24-year-old then bounced back in Barcelona, where he lost to world number two Carlos Alcaraz on Sunday, but his recent form has him in good spirits with Roland Garros on the horizon.

Tsitsipas said he had a lot of matches on clay under his belt and he considered himself a "candidate" in Madrid.

"The run I had in Barcelona brought me joy because after the Australian Open I didn't go deep in tournaments," he said.

"Now I've had a first glimpse of what it is to be strong again. Things are looking pretty bright."

— Reuters

# Karunaratne, Madushka hit tons as Sri Lanka pile on runs



Sri Lanka's Dimuth Karunaratne (R) and Nishan Madushka bump their fists during third day of the second and final cricket Test match between Sri Lanka and Ireland at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle. — AFP

**GALLE, Sri Lanka:** Dimuth Karunaratne and Nishan Madushka both hit centuries as they amassed a record Sri Lankan opening stand in Galle of 228 in the second Test against Ireland on Wednesday.

The hosts were 357 for one at the close, still 135 runs behind but with nine wickets in hand.

Madushka was unbeaten on 149 at stumps, alongside Kusal Mendis, approaching a century of his own on 83, after Karunaratne departed for 115 — the only wicket to fall on the third day of the match.

The first Test ended inside three days with Sri Lanka's spinners dominating, but the pitch in the second encounter has offered the spinners little assistance and the batsmen dominated proceedings.

Captain Karunaratne reached the 16th century of his test career, and his second consecutive ton, in

just 116 balls.

But the left-hander mistimed a pull shot off Curtis Campher and was caught at deep fine leg in the last over before lunch, two balls after he was hit on the helmet.

Madushka had already brought up his maiden Test century, pulling a Harry Tector full toss for six.

Their 228 was a record Sri Lankan opening partnership at the ground, eclipsing the 193 between Marvan Atapattu and Sanath Jayasuriya against South Africa in 2000.

Mendis and Madushka continued the run-fest, with the number three racing to his 83 off 96 balls with seven fours and five sixes, including three in a row off debutant left-arm spinner Matthew Humphreys, who was rapidly taken out of the attack.

Bad light interrupted play before tea, before the rains came

down and it was called off for the day.

The prospect of a draw loomed large but Sri Lanka batting coach Naveed Nawaz insisted his side could still win the game "although rain has played havoc".

"There's a total of 180 overs left in the game now," he told reporters. "If we bat for another 90 overs, we'll be able to take a decent lead as our deficit is now only 135.

"We have wickets in hand and this is still a good batting pitch."

Play will resume 15 minutes early on the final two days to make up for lost time.

Sri Lanka lead the two-match series 1-0.

Ireland fast bowling coach Ryan Eagleson conceded his team's bowlers "are still learning and are less experienced in Test cricket". "So you have got to give them time and be patient," he said.

— AFP

## Young stunner as Hawks beat Celtics while Nuggets, Suns advance

**LOS ANGELES:** Trae Young nailed a last-gasp three-pointer as the Atlanta Hawks stunned the Boston Celtics 119-117 to keep their Eastern Conference postseason campaign alive on Tuesday, while Denver and Phoenix booked their places in the next round with series-clinching victories.

A nerve-jangling game in Boston was settled when Young drained a 29-footer with 1.8 seconds remaining to silence the Celtics' TD Garden crowd and set up a game six in Atlanta on Thursday.

Young, who finished with 38 points, 13 assists and four rebounds, said the Hawks had been determined to extend the series following the suspension of key guard Dejounte Murray.

Murray was suspended for one game after a clash with a referee after game four on Sunday.

"We were missing a big piece of ours and we want him to play game six, so we want to go back home and have him with us,"

Young said of Murray.

"I didn't feel there was any pressure on me. Obviously we were without (Murray) but we all had to step our game up another level — not just me, we all did tonight. Total team win."

Hawks coach Quin Snyder praised his team's refusal to buckle in a game that the Celtics had controlled for long periods.

"We were tough-minded," Snyder said. "It's tough to be down through the whole game. We were hanging in there and hanging in there. We just didn't capitulate."

The Celtics, leading the series 3-1, had looked to be cruising to victory after dominating for most of the second half to lead by 13 points midway through the fourth quarter.

But with Boston poised to wrap up a 4-1 series victory, Young and the Hawks took over with a startling late rally in the closing minutes that whittled away the Celtics lead.

— AFP



Atlanta Hawks forward Saddiq Bey (41) goes to the basket against Boston Celtics centre Al Horford (42) during the second quarter of game five of the 2023 NBA playoffs at TD Garden. — USA Today Sports

## Match of the tournament at Rajasthan?



It is a 74-match tournament (including final) and this is exactly the halfway mark to a long and exhausting clash-up between 10 extremely competitive teams in a nearly two-month long event. This IPL has been nothing short of entertainment and the excitement is only going to increase. There is no particular team that has been able to run away with the success, such as been the level of competitiveness. Even the low-scoring encounters have become interesting, that is the kind of pressure the teams are feeling.

### RR VS CSK AT JAIPUR

**TEAM INFO** – At the half-way mark of the league stage, Chennai are on top and Rajasthan are third by the difference of just two points. These two teams are expected to surely qualify for the play-offs with their balanced sides.

It is a revenge opportunity for Chennai, while Rajasthan will be eyeing top of the table slot with this win.

### PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER

Both the teams met in match number 17 of this IPL in Chennai, and it was Rajasthan that came on top. On the back of a team effort, Rajasthan finished at 175/8, while chasing Chennai saw a middle-order collapse which left them with 21 required of the last over with well-set Dhoni and Jadeja at the crease. Dhoni started in his fashion, but just when everyone thought of a one-sided finish with just 7 required from 3 balls, Sandeep Sharma nailed those toe-crushing yorkers for Rajasthan Royals to earn a 3-run win.

**Head-to-Head** — Played — 27; Won by RR – 12; Won by CSK – 15

**RR possible XI** – Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson (c & wk), Devdutt Padikkal, Shimron Hetmyer, Dhruv Jurel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Jason Holder, Trent Boult, Sandeep Sharma, Yuzvendra Chahal, Murugan Ashwin

**CSK possible XI** – Ruturaj



Gaikwad, Devon Conway, Ajinkya Rahane, Moeen Ali, Ambati Rayudu, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, MS Dhoni (c & wk), Matheesha Pathirana, Tushar Deshpande, Maheesh Theekshana

### Pitch & Weather Report

The pitch at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium is a balanced track. Batters will have to be patient early on. They will have to spend some time in the middle to get used to the conditions. Spinners are expected to play a key role. The conditions should be ideal for a game of cricket, with the

temperature expected to be in the mid-20s.

**Match Prediction** – Rajasthan are a wonderfully balanced team but they will have barely any home team advantage as Dhoni's presence will make Rajasthan his home ground. When two extremely competitive teams fight, it is the game of cricket and the fans that are going to be the winners. Chennai are in an unexpected run of form and I am expecting them to continue to turn Rajasthan yellow. So it's going to be Chennai Super Kings.

### Fan Comments

"Chennai are a fantastic team and Dhoni's attitude and strategic planning make them even more special. Expect high demand of 'dosa and idli' in Rajasthan, as the South-Indian boy Sanju Samson takes on the Chennai Super Kings." – V Karthikeyan, 58, Coordinator of Physical Education, Indian.

"It's a battle of the openers in CSK vs RR. CSK combo with 584 runs (Ruturaj-Conway) and Rajasthan Combo with 471 runs (Buttler – Jaiswal)" – Vamsi Krishna, 28, Senior Writer & Editor/Bouncer Avenue, Indian.

"As an expatriate, IPL is the best thing that happens from the perspective of entertainment. To add on, the recent rains in Nizwa has made the weather fantastic. IPL + Masala Chai + Fritters + Rain + my son Arihan company = Paisa Vasool Evening." – Dr Makrand Jewrikar, 38, Specialist pediatrician, Badr al Samaa hospital, Indian.

"With recent developments of cricketing activities in Qatar and now Saudi coming in line with the announcements, I would love for

the Omani government to take interest in popularising the game within the Omani youngsters. Also, congratulations to the Omani cricket team for qualifying to the semifinal in Nepal." – Nasir al Maawli, 51, Training and Development, Omani.

"CSK bring out the best from any player. The one of the most successful franchises is functioning like a family with pure bonding and the head of the family is MS Dhoni." — Mohammed Hassan Siddiqui, 19, Student, Indian.

Send us your comment for next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 78795978' and the best comments will be included in our article. '30 words on the team that you support', full name, designation, age, nationality.

You could post your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, Twitter — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR Instagram — @OmanObserver @pranav\_mehta\_18. Don't forget to use the #OOIPL2023 for better reach.



**MUSCAT:** Omani rally champion Abdullah al Rawahi on Skoda Fabia with Jordanian Navigator Atta al Hamoud will take part in the first round of Jordan National Rally on April 28. Another Omani rally driver Zakaria al Amri and his co-driver Mohammed al

# AL RAWAHI, AL AMRI TO COMPETE IN JORDAN NATIONAL RALLY



Mazroui on Subaru Impreza N14 will also attend the event. The rally, which consists of five stages at the Dead Sea, the Baptism Site and Ma'in area, will be attended by 24 drivers from Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Oman. All the participants will be looking at this rally as the main run-up for the Middle East Rally

Championship (Merc) second round which will be organised in Jordan next month. Abdullah al Rawahi, who won the first round of the Merc in Oman last January had withdrawn from the Merc second round in Qatar International Rally. Al Rawahi will try to overcome last rally disappointment with a podium finish and gain points in

this championship, led by Qatari world champion Nasser al Attiyah. Zakaria al Amri will try to recover from the last set back in Qatar International Rally as he was forced to leave the rally from the beginning in the super special stage due to some technical issues in the car. Al Rawahi said: "I am taking part in the Jordan National Rally

to prepare myself for the Jordan International Rally, which will be held in similar terrain and stages. We will be focusing on our strategy during the race and hope that it will end successfully this time without any technical problems for a podium finish for us." Meanwhile, Zakaria al Amri on Subaru Impreza is also joining this rally as pre-test for Jordan

International Rally, for a better look at the stages and to work out some calculations with Navigator Al Mazroui. Both drivers have good experience in Jordan's National and International rally championships and are looking forward to podium finish this time.

# Oman drawn with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The first ever Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 group stage is set to be a thrilling tournament following the draw on Wednesday at Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Oman are drawn with Group A hosts Uzbekistan along with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Group B will see Kyrgyzstan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan. The 'Red Warriors' will begin action in the spectacular event with a match against 74th world ranking team Uzbekistan on June 11 while they will meet Tajikistan on June 14 and conclude the group matches against Turkmenistan on June 17. The toppers from Group A will meet the winner of Group B while the second-placed team in Group A will face the same in Group B for the third and fourth play-off fixture. Taking part in the challenging friendly Asian event will be a significant part of the national team's preparation

for the future actions in the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar and the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers for World Cup in 2026 and AFC Asian Cup. Oman team, under the coaching of Branko Ivankovic, will aim for a different show in the forthcoming regional and continental main events. The Cafa Nations Cup 2023 will be played from June 10 to 20. The first group matches will be held in Uzbek capital of Tashkent while the following group games will be in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Red Warriors' last engagement was in March as the team underwent an intensive internal training camp that lasted for almost 10 days. The camp featured an international friendly game against Lebanon on March 27 which Oman won 2-0. The coaching staff of the national team headed by coach Branko are busy currently monitoring the last stages of the top-tier league ahead of announcing the squad of the next camp. The camp is likely to take place after the completion of the top-tier league on May 15 to gear up for the Central Asian tournament.





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**MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS:**  
Combination of energy efficient generation turbines and large-scale adoption of renewables will slash gas requirements to 38 per cent of consumption trends in 2005, when the sector was privatised: OPWP

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

A raft of measures adopted by Oman’s power and water sector with the goal of reducing its dependence on natural gas has translated into major savings for the industry, as well as the national economy.

According to a new report by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the national buyer of electricity and water output from this sector, significant savings have resulted from its policy of mandating the use of increasingly high-tech Combined Cycle Generation



Turbines (CCGT) in 2019.

This new measure builds on OPWP’s long-standing policy of requiring developers to install progressively more efficient generation plants – a practice that began in 2005 when the sector was

restructured and privatised.

Consequently, natural gas consumption per unit of electricity produced continues to plummet, says state-run OPWP – member of Nama Group.

“Since 2005, through the

introduction of progressively more efficient generation plants, OPWP has achieved a 46 per cent reduction in the gas required per unit of electricity production, from 374 standard cubic metres / megawatt-hour (Sm3/MWh) in

2005 to 202 Sm3/MWh in 2021,” the offtaker said.

“In 2021 alone, improvements in gas utilisation (when compared against gas utilisation rates in 2005) suggest savings in excess of RO 300 million. This is driven by OPWP’s procurement of new state-of-the-art CCGT plants in 2019, and new water desalination plants that shift water production from energy-intensive multi-stage flash (MSF) technology to efficient reverse osmosis (RO) technology,” it further added.

Significantly, this downtrend in gas consumption by the sector is set to further accelerate as Oman ramps up its transition to renewable energy resources, chiefly solar and wind, in the coming years.

A series of solar and wind projects in the pipeline are projected to contribute about 11 per cent of total electricity production by 2025, which will more than double to around 24 per cent by 2028, according to OPWP.

Within the Main Interconnected System (MIS) serving the northern half of Oman and the Dhofar

Power System, covering Dhofar Governorate, the contributions of renewables are expected to pare natural gas requirements by around 3 per cent annually through 2028, notwithstanding a similar trend in annual electricity demand growth during this period.

“Average gas utilisation by the generation fleet (sm3 per MWh produced) is projected to improve by 20 per cent from 2022 to 2028.

From 2022 onwards, the main improvements will be due to the introduction of solar and wind IPPs,” OPWP stated. Coupled with the interconnection of MIS with DPS in 2026, gas requirements for electricity generation will slump to around 142 Sm3/MWh by 2028 onward, or 62 per cent less than that required in 2005, it noted.

Around 2,840 MW of renewable-based capacity is planned for development over the next five years through 2028, up from 550 MW presently in operation. This is in line with Oman’s target of securing around 39 per cent of generation capacity from renewables by 2040.

Oman’s OQ eyes growth opportunities in China’s booming market

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, is eyeing growth opportunities in China’s increasingly open market and green industry, OQ chief executive of commercial & downstream, Hilal al Kharusi, said.

The state-owned OQ — a part of Oman Investment Authority — which operates in oil and gas, refining and petrochemicals, has been expanding its presence in China and is now well-positioned to benefit from the country’s huge market and growing demand for energy.

China has long been an important market for OQ, with the company exporting crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the country. OQ officially entered China in 2010. However, recent policy changes in China have opened up new opportunities for the company.

Following the country’s pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, China is investing heavily in renewable energy and clean technologies, creating a huge demand for hydrogen.

“China has published statistical



OQ highlights rigid packaging solutions at Chinaplas 2023. © OQ

FOLLOWING THE COUNTRY’S PLEDGE TO ACHIEVE CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2060, CHINA IS INVESTING HEAVILY IN RENEWABLE ENERGY AND CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES, CREATING A HUGE DEMAND FOR HYDROGEN.

data and growth target that reflect the strong signal that its economy is recovering very fast and therefore is creating huge opportunities for companies like OQ across the globe.

A thriving economic environment and improving business policy would certainly empower us to be well-positioned in the China market in the

coming years,” Al Kharusi said in an interview to *China Daily*.

OQ expects to see “growth across its business units including polymer, chemicals and trade in China. It also attaches great importance to enhancing local product research and development while stimulating more demand for its products in the local market,” he added.

As part of its drive to expand polymer horizons, OQ views China as a valued partner to make more possible. Recently, OQ participated in Chinaplas 2023 showcasing its solid insights and advanced solutions for rigid packaging to help customers across northeast and southeast Asia better capture market demand.

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رؤية عمان 2040  
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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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| Tender No.                           | OCEC/T/2023/05                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Scope of work                        | Inside / Outside Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| Tender Fees Payment (non-refundable) | OMR 25/- (SME Riyada holders Exempted)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Tender Document Sale Start Date      | 27/04/2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| Last date of seeking clarification   | 07/05/2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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# Central Banks mark Arab Financial Inclusion Day with focus on climate change

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

The issue of enhancing access to finance and financial services in the Arab countries is receiving growing attention from the Council of Arab Central Banks and Monetary Authorities' Governors, in recognition of the potential and significant opportunities that can be achieved by increasing financial inclusion to support inclusive and sustainable economic development, address unemployment challenges and achieve equality.

There is no doubt that enhancing financial inclusion plays an important role in supporting the efforts to address the impact of climate change, by enabling financial sector customers to deal with risks associated with climate change and enhancing their ability to recover from its effects, which in turn contributes to inclusive and sustainable development,



thus leading to soundness and resilience of the financial sector. In this context, it is worth noting that the need to adopt policies related to climate change within the framework of sustainability — in line with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the guidelines of the Paris Agreement — is receiving increasing attention from the international community and regional and international financial institutions. With these concerns in mind,

the Council of Arab Central Banks and Monetary Authorities' Governors will mark the 'Arab Day for Financial Inclusion, which is held on April 27 every year, under the overarching theme of: "Increasing Financial Inclusion to Support the Efforts to Address the Climate Change Repercussions". In this regard, it has urged the financial and banking sector to take initiatives to enhance its ability to deal with climate-related shocks, raise awareness of climate change repercussions, and deepen consumer confidence in financial

institutions to limit the negative effects of these changes in the Arab region. "Arab central banks and monetary authorities are keen to support the efforts of the international community in expanding financing that integrates climate considerations and sustainable development in general. These efforts also support the implementation of the United Nations SDGs, which have a close connection with climate change issues, and reinforces the efforts of G20 that adopted financial inclusion as one of the main topics to achieve the SDGs and enhance financial stability," the Governors said in a press statement. Within the framework of its strategy, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) pays great attention to priority financial sector issues, especially the impact of climate change and support to green and sustainable finance, to support the efforts for inclusive and

sustainable development and financial stability in the Arab countries. In this regard, Arab central banks and monetary authorities have adopted the guiding principles issued by the AMF for "Central Banks to Address the Impact of Natural Disasters and Climate Change on Banking System and Financial Stability". The conference on "Supporting the Transition to a Circular Carbon Economy to Achieve Sustainable Development", organised by the AMF, supported the adoption of the circular carbon economy model, which considers environmental aspects as well as promoting sustainable economic growth by reducing carbon emissions. In a related context, according to the AMF estimates, the issuances of the Arab countries of green bonds and sukuk related to sustainable activities, whether sovereign or private sector, amounted to \$5.5 billion in 2022.

## Regional banks turn to fintechs to boost digital transformation progress: Survey



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 26

Banks in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region regard fintech partnerships as important for growth and innovation, with respondents looking to connect with an average of two fintech providers in the next 12-18 months. The largest proportion of respondents want to plug into a platform of integrated fintech solutions (63 per cent), with only 7 per cent preferring to build capabilities in-house, according to new research by Finastra, a global provider of financial software applications. The research, conducted by East & Partners, finds that the core motivations of respondents to integrate fintech solutions is reducing operational costs (53 per cent), benefiting from broader technology experience than they have in-house (51 per cent), and aligning more closely with evolving compliance needs (46 per cent). When it comes to digital transformation progress, banks in MEA are behind. On average, 29 per cent of respondents say they have digitised their processes, compared to the global average of 47 per cent. Similarly, only 12 per cent of respondents in MEA feel they are ahead in their digital journey, and the largest proportion (62 per cent) say they are behind. Four out of five banks state that

regional differences in legal and compliance requirements is the biggest barrier for implementing new technology, and nearly three in four say this slows down the entire adoption process. This suggests that banks will prioritise connecting with fintechs that have deep expertise in local banking and regulatory practices. The global research was conducted amongst 783 interviewees at 260 banks in the UK, Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the Americas, as well as 393 interviews with North American community markets banks and financial institutions. The findings explore the current appetite in the marketplace for fintech investment and integration, and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG). "In an environment characterised by uncertainty, high inflation, fluctuating interest rates and recessionary risks, banks are under an increasing amount of pressure to drive operational costs down while continuing to improve how they serve their customers," said Isabel Fernandez, EVP Lending at Finastra. "Our survey demonstrates the recognition from banks in MEA that they cannot navigate these waters alone. They are instead opting to partner with fintechs, with a preference for plugging into a platform of integrated fintech solutions, to help them to adapt quickly while reducing costs."

## Salary transfer package attracts large turnout from customers to benefit from exclusive offers

Benefits include cashback and loans with competitive interest rates

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, continues offering all-new salary transfer package amid large turnout from customers who can benefit from many features including cashback on salary credit, attractive discounts at select leading retail outlets, eligibility for discounted loans at highly competitive rates, limited free transfers and waiver of cheque book fees on selected books. Benefits do not stop at the account holder; family members can enjoy supplementary credit cards with waiver of fee for the first year on both the main card and supplementary cards. The launch of this highly attractive offer came after a keen study by the bank of the needs of different customer segments in the country before coming up with a strategy to further enhance banking services and financial inclusion in the country. Customers will be particularly excited by the option to get guaranteed cashback for transferring their salary to the bank. Those with salaries of RO 700-999 can get 5 per cent of the total monthly salary credited as a one-time cashback for transferring their salaries to Bank Muscat, while those transferring salaries from RO 1,000 and above can get 10 per cent of the total monthly salary



as a one-time cashback subject to a cap of RO 500. Adding further cheer to the new package is the chance to get discounts ranging from 20 per cent discount on non-promotional items as well as a VIP discount of 5 per cent on appliances, electronic devices, accessories and extended warranties at select retail outlets. New customers can also get the fees on their first 3 fund transfers within Oman or international Speed Transfers reversed and credited back into their account. Bank Muscat customers also benefit from a number of excellent savings and investment options including the Themaar Savings Plan, Term Deposits and Bank Muscat Mutual Funds, applications for which can be easily submitted online through Mobile or Internet banking. The Themaar Savings Plan allows customers to put aside a fixed amount every month for a fixed period of time while Term Deposits allow them to save a lump sum for a specified period of time. Customers can choose the amount that they plan to save and the period according to their future financial goals. The Themaar Savings Plan and Term Deposit allow for safe investments with a guaranteed rate of return. Investors also have a chance of earning good returns from equity markets through lump sum investments or systematic investment plans (SIPs) in Bank Muscat Mutual Funds. Over the past years, Bank Muscat has succeeded in studying the market needs and providing the best services and facilities through cooperation with specialised and pioneer institutions at various aspects. As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, Bank Muscat is proud to have the largest branch network in Oman, comprising 174 branches spread across all governorates offering customers easy banking accessibility. The branch network is ably supported by the bank's large base of over 800 e-channel devices including ATMs, CDMs and statement printers. The bank's highly versatile Internet Banking and Mobile banking platforms help customers 24/7 from the safety and comfort of their homes and offices.

## Tethys Oil produces 847,002 barrels of oil during Q1

MUSCAT: Tethys Oil's share of production from Oman Blocks 3&4 during the Q1 2023, before government take, amounted to 847,002 barrels of oil, corresponding to 9,411 barrels of oil per day. The net entitlement, Tethys Oil's share of production after government take, amounted to 440,441 barrels of oil, corresponding to 52 per cent of the total production. A total of 471,550 barrels of oil were sold in the quarter with an achieved oil price of \$81.7 per barrel. Net entitlement is the share of production available for sale by Tethys Oil and is calculated monthly in accordance with the terms of the Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) for Blocks 3&4. The net entitlement will vary depending upon the level of production, oil price and recoverable costs incurred during the period. For further explanation of the calculation of net entitlement, see Tethys Oil's annual report for 2022. The oil sales of 471,550 barrels in the Q1 2023 reflects the January, February and March lifting nominations. Consequently, the first quarter 2023 achieved oil price reflects the Official Selling Price (OSP) of January to March 2023, average Official Selling Price in that same period was \$81.6.

## Oman's OQ eyes growth opportunities in China's booming market

FROM PAGE 13 OQ made its inaugural presence at Chinaplas in 2021, highlighting the importance of the Chinese market. OQ's expansion into China is part of its broader strategy to diversify its operations and expand its global footprint. The company has been investing heavily in research and development of new technologies, and has established partnerships with leading companies around the globe. Overall, OQ expansion into China's energy market is a positive development for both countries. It will help China meet its growing demand for energy, while also supporting Oman's efforts to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on oil and gas exports. It is also a testament to the company's commitment to innovation and sustainable development, and its ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

# What the future holds for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation



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

A new reality is taking hold in the Gulf region in the wake of agreements signed by China with Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Iran. Among other things, these initiatives have paved the way for a hoped-for breakthrough in the Yemen conflict. Elsewhere around the world, Asia is witnessing a lot of political and economic developments, especially with regard to the economic bloc called the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' (SCO) that was established in 2001 in the Chinese city of Shanghai.

Members included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan

and Uzbekistan besides China. The organisation later received several requests to join, including from Türkiye, India and Pakistan followed by Iran in 2021. Recently, several Arab and Gulf countries submitted requests to join this organisation and have become "Dialogue Partners" even as a request from the United States was rejected from the outset.

SCO aims to become a political and economic bloc rivalling American and European economic groups currently dominating the global economy.

Today, countries belonging to the SCO are working to increase trade among them, raise the ceiling of the share of national currencies

in trade exchanges and mutual settlements, and expanding their investment relations. The organisation is seeking to expand its role and position on the regional and international arenas by leveraging its aggregate geographical mass, manpower and output.

Since its establishment, it has also been working to promote mutual trust among members, combat terrorism, strengthen security, as well as cooperate in various political, commercial, economic, technical and other fields. Some of them have nuclear capabilities that help to develop the capacities of other countries in the humanitarian and economic

fields. Some experts describe the organisation as East Nato.

The presence of China and Russia in this organisation will lead to more cooperation, especially as China seeks, for its part, to attract a larger number of economically active countries to its membership, within the framework of its endeavour to consolidate a new global economic order.

The accession of the Arab countries will open new opportunities to enhance economic and energy developments, in addition to working to reduce dependence on the American currency in commercial transactions, within the framework of prospects for

converting the energy trade between Arab countries and China into the 'Chinese Yuan' currency, which helps to create an economic system of a multipolar world.

The Shanghai Organisation will constitute a shift in the face of the Western financial system that is managed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose policies are US leaning in the first place.

SCO is not a military alliance, but it works to develop mechanisms aimed at combating hostile activities and strengthen the frameworks of peace and cooperation in ensuring international information security among the member states.

## German \$13bn heat pump sale dents EU green hopes

PAMELA BARBAGLIA

Knowing when to sell out is a common dilemma among family-owned companies.

For 106-year-old German heat pump maker Viessmann it looks like an odd move, given its technology is in demand and at the forefront of the energy transition race. Yet a 12 billion euro sale of its core business to \$35 billion American fridge-to-air-conditioning group Carrier Global looks like a necessary step to stay ahead. It's also a lesson for German and EU politicians. Heat pumps may not be the most obvious sector to lead a revival in transatlantic cross-border M&A, down 31 per cent so far this year.

The technology may help cut emissions by replacing gas boilers, and has been identified by the European Union as a critical industry, just like wind turbine and battery manufacturing.

Brussels is implementing more relaxed rules on state subsidies to avoid losing out to the US's green technology plan, the Inflation Reduction Act. Privately held Viessmann is riding this trend: its sales have grown at a 15 per cent annual clip since 2020.

Yet creating continental champions is easier said than done. Asian manufacturers such as Daikin, Samsung and Mitsubishi are expanding rapidly in Europe and the likes of Viessmann are struggling to retain market share on their home turf.

Teaming up with Carrier gives the German group better access to the US market, as well as the benefit of Carrier's expertise in air conditioning. That will help it keep up with demand for pumps, which is set to skyrocket in Germany due to government incentives.

Carrier's green pivot isn't cheap. The group is paying around 17 times the Viessmann unit's 2023 EBITDA, far more than its own forward multiple of around 11 times, as per Refinitiv data.

Still, the price is not egregious: Viessmann's Swedish peer Nibe Industrier is valued at 25 times EBITDA including debt. And Carrier reckons it can squeeze out cost savings equivalent to some \$200 million. Taxed and capitalised on a multiple of 10, those could be worth some \$1.4 billion in today's money.

That valuation may also reflect the deal's terms. Viessmann has secured job protections in Germany and a Carrier board seat for current Chief Executive Max Viessmann.

But, with some 80 per cent of the purchase paid in cash, the deal effectively sees a prized asset of the future handed over to American control, rather than remaining a European champion.

But to thrive, rather than merely survive, such compromise looks like a necessary step.

— Reuters

## The key to responsible AI development



KLAUS SCHWAB

The author, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, is co-author of The Great Narrative: For a Better Future (Forum Publishing, 2022).



CATHY LI

The author is Head of AI, Data and Metaverse and a member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum.

for guiding the development of this powerful technology in ways that minimise the risks and maximise the benefits is closing fast.

AI-based capabilities exist along a continuum, with generative AI systems such as GPT-4 (the latest version of ChatGPT) falling within the most advanced category. Given that such systems hold the greatest promise and can lead to the most treacherous pitfalls, they merit particularly close scrutiny by public and private stakeholders.

Virtually all technological advances have had both positive and negative effects on society. On one hand, they have bolstered economic productivity and income growth, expanded access to information and communication technologies, extended human lifespans, and improved overall well-being.

On the other hand, they have led to worker displacement, wage stagnation, greater inequality, and increasing concentration of resources among individuals and corporations.

AI is no different. Generative AI systems open up abundant opportunities in areas such as product design, content creation, drug discovery and health care, personalised education, and energy optimisation.

GENERATIVE AI WILL CHANGE THE WORLD, WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT. AT THIS PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE TECHNOLOGY'S DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS MUST DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO ENSURE THAT THE PROCESS LEADS TO FAIR, EQUITABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES.

At the same time, they may prove highly disruptive, and even harmful, to our economies and societies. The risks already posed by advanced AI, and those that are reasonably foreseeable, are considerable.

Beyond widespread reorientation of labour markets, large-language-model systems can increase the spread of disinformation and perpetuate harmful biases. Generative AI also threatens to exacerbate economic inequality. Such systems may even pose existential risks to humankind.

For some, this is a reason to tap the brakes on AI research. Last month, more than 1,000 AI technologists, from Elon Musk to Steve Wozniak, signed an open letter recommending that AI labs "immediately pause" the training of systems more powerful than GPT-4 for at least six months.

During this pause, they argue, a set of shared safety protocols – "rigorously audited and overseen by independent outside experts" – should be devised and implemented.

The open letter, and the heated debate it has triggered,

underscores the urgent need for stakeholders to engage in a wide-ranging good-faith process aimed at aligning on robust shared guidelines for developing and deploying advanced AI.

Such an effort must account for issues like automation and job displacement, the digital divide, and the concentration of control over technological assets and resources, such as data and computing power.

And a top priority must be to work continuously to eliminate systemic biases in AI training, so that systems like ChatGPT do not end up reproducing or even exacerbating them.

Proposals for AI and digital-services governance are already emerging, including in the US and the European Union. Organisations like the World Economic Forum (WEF) are also making contributions.

In 2021, the WEF launched the Global Coalition for Digital Safety, which aims to unite stakeholders in tackling harmful content online and facilitate the exchange of best practices for regulating online safety.

The WEF subsequently created the Digital Trust Initiative, to ensure that advanced technologies like AI are developed with the public's best interests in mind.

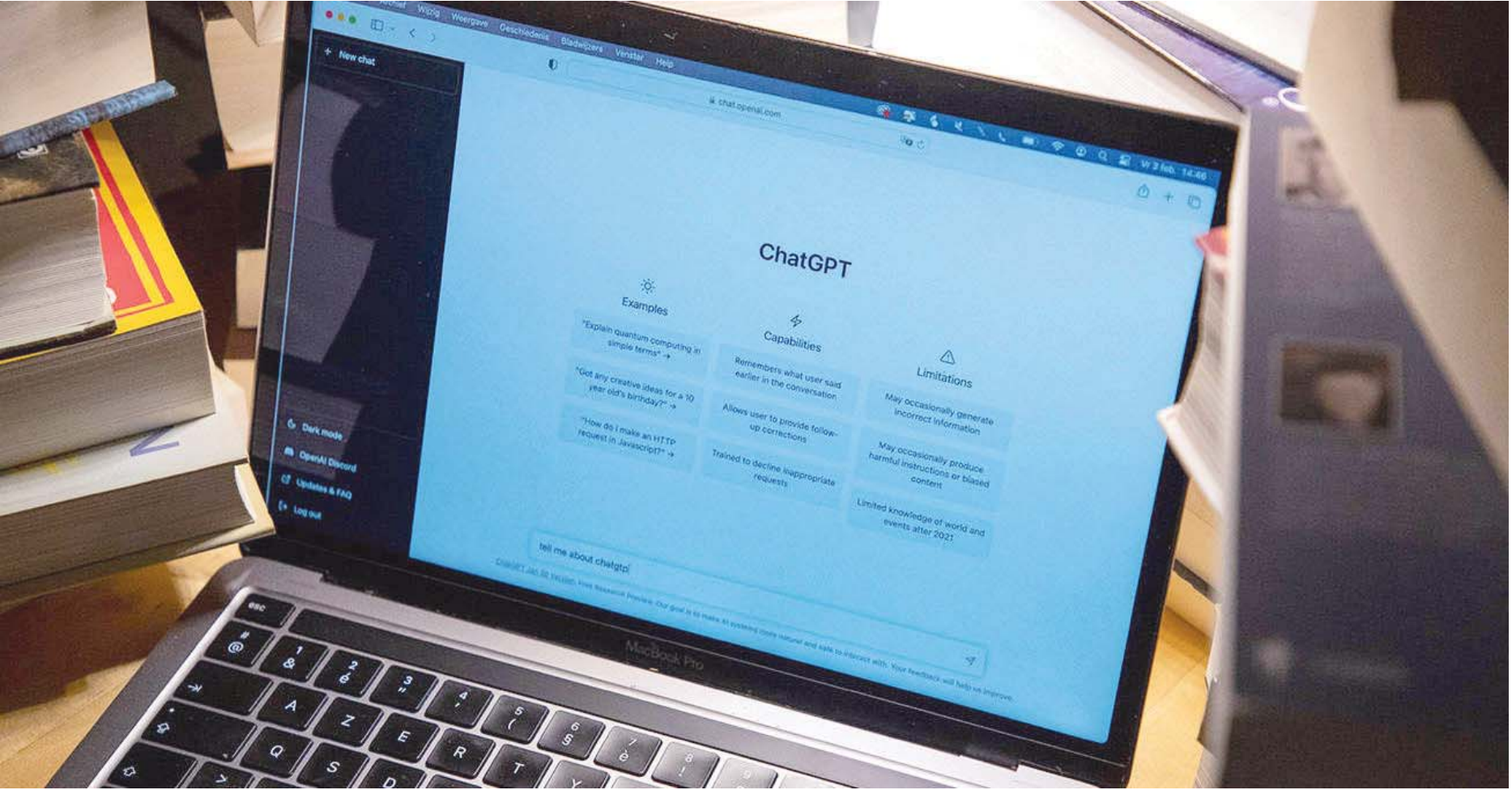
Now, the WEF is calling for urgent public-private co-operation to address the challenges that have accompanied the emergence of generative AI and to build consensus on the next steps for developing and deploying the technology.

To facilitate progress, the WEF, in partnership with AI Commons – a nonprofit organisation supported by AI practitioners, academia, and NGOs focused on the common good – will hold a global summit on generative AI in San Francisco on April 26-28.

Stakeholders will discuss the technology's impact on business, society, and the planet, and work together to devise ways to mitigate negative externalities and deliver safer, more sustainable, and more equitable outcomes.

Generative AI will change the world, whether we like it or not. At this pivotal moment in the technology's development, a co-operative approach is essential to enable us to do everything in our power to ensure that the process is aligned with our shared interests and values.

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## Why is Oman so inviting as a culinary destination for Michelin-starred chefs?

Oman luxury market commentators are saying they are positive that big name restaurants, especially Michelin-starred ones, will find success in Oman as many foodies in the country are hungry for unique experiences. Hotels, in return, are testing the waters with dozens of Michelin-starred chefs being invited to do pop-up events... **P20**

## Hoard of 1,000-year-old Viking coins unearthed in Denmark

**NEARLY 300 SILVER COINS** believed to be more than 1,000 years old have been discovered near a Viking fortress site in northwestern Denmark, a museum said on Thursday.

The rare trove — lying in two spots not far apart — was unearthed by a young girl who was metal detecting in a cornfield last autumn.

"A hoard like this is very rare,"

Lars Christian Norbach, director of the North Jutland museum where the artefacts will go on display said.

The silver coins were found about eight kilometres (five miles) from the Fyrkat Viking ringfort near the town of Hobro.

From their inscriptions, they are believed to date back to the 980s.

The trove includes Danish, Arab and



Germanic coins as well as pieces of jewellery originating from Scotland or Ireland, according to archaeologists.

Norbach said the finds were from the same period as the fort, built by king Harald Bluetooth, and would offer more insight into the history of the Vikings.

There could be a link between the treasure — which the Vikings would bury during wars — and the fort which burned down during the same period, he said.

Archaeologists have said they will continue digging next autumn after the harvest.

They hope to find the burial sites and homes of the troves' one-time owners.

The Vikings believed that burying their treasure allowed them to find it again after death.

The artefacts will go on public display from July at the Aalborg Historical Museum.

The girl who made the discovery is due to receive financial compensation, the amount of which has not been made public. — AFP

### READ

#### **DARK ANGEL** BY JOHN SANDFORD

The second book in the Letty Davenport series. Letty takes an undercover assignment that puts her in harm's way with a group of hackers.



### FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer Cylia Consolvas at the 2023 South Africa Fashion Week (SAFW) in Sandton, Johannesburg. — AFP



### LIFESTYLE

Visitors view the Giorgio Armani Casa furniture and furnishings showcase at Palazzo Orsini, the company's historic headquarters in Milan as part of the Milan Design Week 2023. — AFP





# Traditional Filipino Wedding Gowns Go Modern

**LIKE MANY BRIDES-TO-BE,** Jessica Louise Balanban turned to social media to jump-start preparations for her February 22, 2022, wedding in Los Gatos, California.

In lieu of hiring a planner, Balanban, 31, a registered nurse at the UCSF Medical Center at Mission Bay in San Francisco who lives in San Leandro, California, relied on Instagram. Late-night scrolling helped her secure a photographer, videographer, makeup artist and hair stylist. But what she would wear at the reception remained a mystery.

Balanban had already selected a white fit-and-flare dress for the ceremony, with 3D florals from top to bottom and off-the-shoulder, tulle sleeves. And after giving it some thought, she realised her reception dress presented an opportunity to honour her Filipino heritage.

Born in the Philippines in 1991 to parents from Kiangnan, Ifugao, Balanban and her family relocated to Vancouver, British Columbia, when she was an infant. They returned to the Philippines in 1999 before eventually settling in Northern California's Bay Area. She still has relatives in the Philippines.

On the wedding day, the groom, Johnson Cheung, also 31 and a registered nurse at the UCSF Medical Center at Mount Zion in San Francisco, wanted to honour his Chinese heritage by having a traditional tea ceremony with both sets of parents and family members to symbolise the two sides coming together. So, Balanban said: "It made me want to add a little bit of my heritage. That's when I was like, You know what, this is the perfect opportunity to do a Filipiniana dress as my reception dress."

The term "Filipiniana" can include a variety of styles. There's the form-fitting terno dress, which is known for its tall, visually striking butterfly sleeves. It is partly derived from the baro't saya, or "blouse and skirt," style. Indigenous women wore the baro't saya before Spain colonised the Philippines in 1521. During the Spanish colonial rule, the traje de mestiza, aka the María Clara gown, became popular among the aristocracy. Today, the terno outfit is an evolution of both styles and is just one example of Filipiniana attire.

Across the United States and Canada, designers from companies like Jillian Joy, Silviyana and Vinta Gallery are putting their own sartorial spin on traditional

Filipiniana outfits. In doing so, they're guiding a new generation of brides, like Balanban, who are eager to connect with their heritage through fashion.

On Instagram, Balanban stumbled upon the work of Jillian Joy San Juan, 26, a Filipino Canadian designer based in Toronto. She saw San Juan's July 2021 post on Instagram detailing the design

(formerly Ryerson University). After graduating in 2018, San Juan started a bridal line with a focus on Filipiniana fashion. Through her designs, she sensed an opportunity to help bridge a gap between generations.

"It turned into something bigger," San Juan said. "I was able to find that connection with my heritage and culture, and find more of an identity

wedding of Celina Ces Magnaye and Matthew Magnaye, which took place in Washington, the Filipino American bride and groom wore traditional attire. Ces Magnaye, 33, a social media manager at Sensis, a marketing agency in Arlington, Virginia, chose a custom Jillian Joy gown with a sweetheart neckline, lace detailing along the bodice and terno sleeves. She accessorised with a bridal fan from the Filipino-owned business Cambio & Co.

"The top portion of the dress and the sleeves are covered in a very leafy floral lace," Ces Magnaye said.

Magnaye, 33, a security program officer at the State Department, wore a custom barong tagalog, a formal shirt usually made of a lightweight fabric that is both sheer and stiff. It was sourced from his family's hometown in the Filipino province of Batangas and, by coincidence, happened to match Ces Magnaye's dress.

The groomsmen, the groom's father and the ring bearer were outfitted in custom barongs, too. The bridesmaids wore custom pañuelos, or triangular-shaped scarves, for the church ceremony. Guests were encouraged, although not required, to wear Filipino formal attire.

"We were joking that this should be the Filipino Met Gala or something," Ces Magnaye said. "We just really wanted to showcase and highlight our culture. That's one of the reasons we decided to get married in October, since it's Filipino American History Month. Everything was very Filipino inspired."

Seychelle Wilmouth started her Filipiniana bridal brand, Silviyana, in 2016. Wilmouth, 34, of Redmond, Washington, works directly with a cooperative of women weavers in the Aklan province of the Philippines. They are skilled in using hand-woven pineapple fabrics, called piña, and banana-fiber-based fabrics, called abaca. These materials are then used in Silviyana's designs.

"Even though we're trying to define our culture, it's interesting because groups of our Filipino American clients are actually quite different in their opinions about what our culture is," Wilmouth said. "We at Silviyana just try to explore what that would be for that person."

Custom dresses can take several months to complete. "Right now, I'm already fully booked until basically the end of 2023," San Juan said. "And I've already started taking orders for 2024." — NYT



process for her own custom terno wedding gown with detachable sleeves. Balanban knew she had found the designer for her dress.

The dress she ordered, she said, "fit like a glove and just made me feel so good about this whole decision of incorporating a little bit of me into our wedding."

San Juan started sewing in high school. She went on to study design and business at Toronto Metropolitan University

as a Filipino woman."

For international clients unable to meet San Juan in her Toronto studio, she aims to ship out their finished garments two to three months before their wedding date — so they can have alterations done locally. "Which is similar to if you were to order a dress from another boutique," she said. "Some alterations are inevitable either way."

At the October 22, 2022,

## LIFESTYLE

# Japan's 'cringeworthy' cartoon cars make image U-turn



**YOSUKE TAKAHATA DOESN'T** care what people think of his "itasha" car, which has his favourite anime character — a red-eyed horse-woman — emblazoned across both sides.

For him and other owners around Japan, plastering cartoon pictures all over their vehicles is just another way of paying homage to their two-dimensional true loves.

"Itasha" means "cringeworthy car", reflecting the misfit image the vehicles had when they first started appearing on roads around 20 years ago.

But perceptions have begun to change, with anime and other hobby subcultures gaining a new mainstream acceptance in Japan.

It's all the same for Takahata, a 31-year-old car shop employee, for whom looking cool is not the point.

"It's the character that I like, and that's all that matters," he said, holding an umbrella to keep the rain off his defiantly unfashionable mullet.

Driving around with the buxom Daiwa Scarlet from the manga and anime series "Uma Musume Pretty Derby" on show means he can "always be with the character", he said.

After all, if he worried about others judging his fully customised Jaguar XJ sedan, he "wouldn't be able to drive anywhere".

Itasha owners can spend thousands of dollars pimping their rides with huge vinyl stickers, turning their cars, motorbikes or even caravans into a canvas.

Shota Sato, who works at another car shop, describes owning an itasha as "an extension of having a character's picture on your phone".

The 26-year-old and his friends have all decorated their cars with different cute characters from the anime "Lucky Star", and they often go for drives together.



## - 'NO TWO ARE THE SAME' -

Owners also get together for events such as Itasha Tengoku, an annual show held in Tokyo that features up to 1,000 vehicles.

The cars on display are a riot of colour and imagination, upstaging even the neon wigs and outlandish costumes of the visitors who come dressed in cosplay.

Many of the vehicles also have customised frames, wheels, engines and interiors that cost eye-watering sums even before adding the artwork.

The culture grew naturally among young people interested in cars and anime, said event organiser Kenichi Kawahara, who also publishes a magazine for itasha enthusiasts.

"More than 99 per cent" of owners are men, who use itasha to "express their feelings for the things they like", he said.

"There are 1,000 itasha here today, and no two are the same."

Having an itasha can be hard on the wallet though, and a full car wrap can cost up to 1 million yen (\$7,500).

Some owners save money by sending their designs to a printing company and applying the stickers themselves, but most take their cars to a specialist shop.

## - LOOKING 'COOL' TO STRANGERS -

Naoya Imai runs a car-wrapping business in Tokyo that gets plenty of business from itasha owners.

He draws up a design in consultation with the owner and checks if they are happy with it, then prints it onto vinyl stickers that he applies to the car.

Lining up the lettering and other intricate details makes it a painstaking process that can take up to 10 days.

Imai said that simply slapping a character's picture on a car "doesn't look cool", and he uses his design sense to create something that exudes a particular ambience.

More owners nowadays are drawn to itasha because they "want to stand out", he said.

"In the past, itasha owners put stickers on their cars just because they liked it," he added.

"Now they want strangers to think their cars look cool." Seeing the finished product can be an emotional moment for owners such as Ryosuke Nakano, who took his customised Nissan Skyline to Imai's shop for a full body wrap.

Nakano had dabbled in small window stickers before, but nothing approaching the scale of Imai's design, which splashes massive gun-toting "Lycoris Recoil" characters on the front and sides of the car.

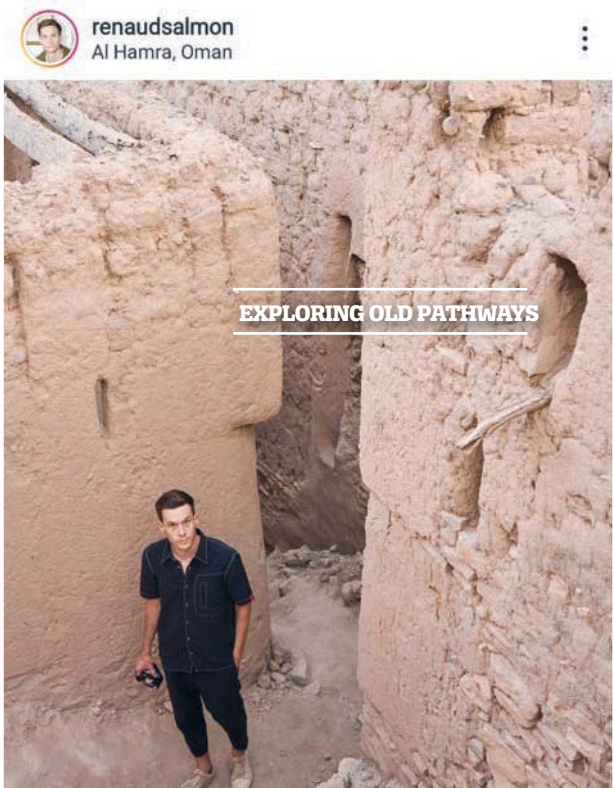
"When I had window stickers, it would only be the people behind me who could see it, so I'm a bit scared of how people will react when they see this from the front," said the 29-year-old.

"But I don't care. This is what I like." — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Visitors throw mashed potato at Vincent van Gogh reprint in Hamburg



**VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM** of the St Pauli football club in Hamburg threw mashed potato at a reprint of Vincent van Gogh's painting "Fifteen Sunflowers" during an action as part of the Long Night of Museums in the city. TV celebrity chef Ole Plogstedt, who was involved in the action, said he wanted to provoke a discussion about the goals and means of Last Generation climate activists. "How far may - how far must - protest go in view of the dramatic climate situation? Does the climate movement go too far in pelting works of art



with mashed potato or sticking themselves to picture frames in museums - or are the reactions to them exaggerated?" He said. Hamburg, in common with other German cities, uses the annual Long Night of Museums to promote culture in all its forms. Museums and other venues stay open late into the night, and stage special exhibitions and events. In recent months, climate activists of the Last Generation have attracted attention in Germany with numerous spectacular actions in museums. In the Hamburg Kunsthalle, for example, security staff stopped activists from plans to apply glue and put up an alternative work. Two activists wanted to paste over the safety glass of the iconic painting "The Wanderer over the Sea of Fog" by Caspar David Friedrich(1774-1840) with a modified picture they had brought with them. It showed the wanderer against an apocalyptic background instead of a foggy one. — dpa

ENTERTAINMENT

Warner brings 'Barbie,' Oprah and DC superheroes to CinemaCon

**CELEBRATING ITS 100TH** year, Warner Bros unveiled a packed lineup of new big-screen films at CinemaCon on Tuesday, from a live-action "Barbie" comedy to Oprah Winfrey and Steven Spielberg's remake of "The Color Purple."

The historic Hollywood studio also used its presentation at the annual Las Vegas gathering to tease a "10-year plan" to relaunch its DC superhero films, which include beloved characters such as Batman and Superman.

David Zaslav, who spearheaded last year's corporate merger of Warner and Discovery, took to the stage personally to court an audience predominantly made up of theatre owners.

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on the new version. Chalamet introduced footage from two new films in which he stars. He appears in "Wonka," set for December release, as a young, idealistic version of Roald Dahl's famous chocolatier, whose efforts to launch a magical candy empire are blocked by a sinister "chocolate cartel."

Chalamet described the "bizarre" process of shooting the origin story — which involved "a lot of swimming in pools of actual chocolate."

record-grossing Marvel films. James Gunn ("Guardians of the Galaxy") and Peter Safran ("Aquaman") were recently brought in as new heads of the division.

This year, the studio will release "The Flash," "Blue Beetle" and "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom."

Though those films were made under Warner's previous regime, Gunn said they will "lead perfectly into the DCU slate that we have coming up starting in 2024."



He also returns for "Dune: Part Two," the second and final part of Denis Villeneuve's Oscar-winning adaptation of Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi novel, which is due out in November.

The movie is based on the Broadway musical adaptation of Alice Walker's novel about Black women enduring trauma, sexual abuse and racism in the rural Deep South in the early 20th century. "The reason why it's not your mama's 'Color Purple' — but your mama's gonna really like it — is because the musical factor is so dynamic, and the magical realism is so perfected here," said Winfrey. Winfrey starred in the previous 1985 film, earning an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress, and is a producer

"Superman: Legacy," directed by Gunn, is already scheduled for July 2025.

Safran said the future DC movies would be "vast, interconnected and filled with promise and possibility," and promised he and Gunn are "cracking into" the universe's "first chapter."

Zaslav, a self-professed "lover of DC," told the audience that Warner has a new "10-year plan" for the titles.

CinemaCon, which runs until Thursday at Caesars Palace, provides Hollywood studios a chance to showcase their upcoming films to movie theatre bosses — while wheeling out the industry's biggest stars to whip up excitement. — AFP

THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI

Genuine Versus White Lie

**THE OTHER DAY**, just as I was preparing my mind for work, I got a call from the office requesting that I take the day off and swap it for a weekend.

I happily accepted. I then informed my right-hand friend, the woman in my house, that I would be spending the whole day at home.

I took advantage of the day, since I was doing a few renovations at home. There were many things to catch up with: damaged and blocked pipes, changing tiles to a colour that she wanted, and setting up her new kitchen because she just felt like making some changes.

All my focus was on studying the price quotes given by the contractor. I was quiet and concentrating when, suddenly, she came in with a fly swatter in her hand. I then diverted my attention to see what she was up to and alas, she killed the fly.

I thought things had ended, but she drew closer to me and said,

"You know what? I'm not good at targets, but one thing I'm confident in, is that with the fly swatter, I never miss a fly. Do you think I'm gifted, or is it the effectiveness of the fly swatter?"

I was lost; the response didn't come in handy, but I told her, it's her, who's gifted with talent of target. If I had said otherwise, she wouldn't feel like a winner.

However, no matter how supportive I got of her, she suddenly smiled at me and made squinted eyes to make her face look funny, then told me, 'my comment was not genuine.'

Being lost, I tried to remember which comment I had made, but she reminded me that it was about her target of effectiveness.

By now, I felt so confused. If I had told her the truth, she would have said it wasn't genuine, and if I had told a white lie, she would have complained. That's her...

My dear readers, what would you have done?

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

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By Yeru Ebuon  
Instagram: @yru\_here

His reputation preceded him, and his presence has caused quite a flurry in the kitchen of Anantara Salalah. It was through his skills and experience that everyone understood what it took to be a Michelin-starred chef.

He was precise and a perfectionist, and in a world that's always judged for perfection, consistency and service, Chef Thomas Buhner knows exactly what to do with his dishes, down to how they are to be served to guests.

Visiting Oman as part of the Salalah Food Festival organised by the hotel in the last quarter of 2022, Chef Thomas shared that it was always refreshing to share something different with a new country.

He has been to Oman multiple times; the first time was a courtesy invite to an event in honour to the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and from that, he was always back every few years in close collaboration with different people and hotels.

What Chef Thomas has achieved in his lifetime is quite extraordinary. He is a German three-Michelin-starred chef who gained his first star in 1991 while working for La Table Restaurant in Dortmund. It was followed in 1998 and then in 2011. On top of these accolades, he has also collected numerous awards from prestigious award-giving bodies in the industry.

Chef Thomas was front and centre at the Salalah Food Festival. On his visit, he was challenged by high-perfumery house Amouage through the company's Chief Experience Officer, Renaud Salmon, to interpret the four new fragrances as dishes, and the result was a multi-course dinner that took guests on a trip into the beautiful world of Oman, and more focused into the beautiful island of Masirah that inspired the collection.

When the night was over, the exhausted Chef Thomas then met with the media and, once settled, explained that Oman is full of potential as a unique destination for a fine dining restaurant.

In fact, Chef Thomas intimated that if the opportunity presented itself, he would gladly set up shop in Oman and open a restaurant.

"If I open a restaurant in New York or Dubai, it's only one of thousands. In Oman, it's really a culinary white paper," Chef Thomas shared.

Asked what makes Oman so inviting to chefs like him, he explained, "We create a mental picture of places in our heads. You close your eyes and think of Paris, and you have a beautiful photo of Paris in your head. The same thing is true for Oman. People close their eyes, and they know that this is more original and more down to earth. It demonstrates its uniqueness as a destination."

"For people dining at Michelin-starred restaurants, they are coming for the experience, and Michelin-starred restaurants have to deliver on these expectations. You need to have an excellent team behind you. 'Team' doesn't just mean in the kitchen, but also in the service. You need to have a setup that fits the expectations of the guests, and never forget that these guests have high expectations as they want to get great food," he shared.

With the right hotel or the right partners, Chef Thomas said that he is very open to the idea, adding, "Right now, we can take the chance and really write a new story. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do something, as there are more and more international guests coming to Oman who are looking for a great experience."

#### BEYOND THE STARS, IT'S QUALITY FOOD AND SERVICE

Chef Rohit Ghai is celebrated in the United Kingdom for the magic he did to elevate the reputation of Indian food in the country and earn a Michelin star in 10 months. When he finally opened his first solo restaurant, Kutir in 2018, it opened to rave reviews, and his career trajectory has placed him among the best chefs to follow in the UK.

When he visited Oman in 2022, he was only coming for a pop-up event but hinted that he would definitely return to give the Sultanate the same experience that the British had been enjoying when it comes to elevated Indian dishes.

Fast forward to the first quarter of 2023, Chef Rohit collaborated with Shangrila Al Husn and opened Aangan by Rohit Ghai, where he is now offering some of the best dishes he can concoct



for the people of Oman to try.

His move follows the same logic as Chef Thomas's: Oman has great potential as a market, and the Sultanate definitely deserves some of the world's best restaurants.

While the move may be unpopular with those who don't understand, Chef Rohit, in an exclusive shared that he hopes to be able to replicate the success of Kutir in the country but, beyond that, focus on the quality of food and service.

"It's good to dream of achieving a star, but a lot of the hard work starts with getting the food and the service right," he shared.

"Once you are on the Michelin-star inspectors' radar, they always keep an eye on what you are doing. Other than earning the star, you also have to work on keeping it. So keeping the service and quality of food consistent is key," he shared.

Today, Chef Rohit has refined the menu at Aangan and is inviting people in Oman to give it a try.

#### BIG RESTAURANT NAMES ARE COMING

As Oman opens more facilities for hospitality, many of the luxury hotels coming to the country are also bringing big restaurant names.

For instance, all eyes are currently set on the opening of St Regis Al Mouj which promises to bring big restaurant names like Hakkasan, Koma, Koya, Robertos, among others.

Many luxury watchers said that this is needed by the country, and in line with Vision 2040 to bring in more international tourists, conversations are happening everywhere about whether Michelin-starred restaurants and pricey dishes will have a market in Oman.

Oman luxury market commentators are saying they are positive that these restaurants, especially Michelin-starred ones, will find success as many foodies in Oman are hungry for unique experiences.

Hotels, in return, are testing the waters with dozens of Michelin-starred chefs being invited to do pop-up events annually.

With Michelin stars being awarded left and right in the neighbouring UAE, one may be in Oman soon too.

The question remains whether high-end businesses like these will be sustainable in Oman, and Chef Rohit's Aangan will definitely be the one to watch as its success will be one of the measures of whether Oman is ready to pay for worthwhile food experiences.

# art & life

## Local Scene

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THURSDAY | APRIL 27 | 2023

# Why is Oman so inviting as a culinary destination for Michelin-starred chefs?

