

Pacts signed for training and employment

The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Defence signed a number of joint cooperation programmes for work-related training and employment support. The cooperation programmes aim at enhancing the skills of job-seekers by providing specialised on-the-job training and work-related training in the military and security fields. The joint cooperation agreements were signed by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. **SEE P3**



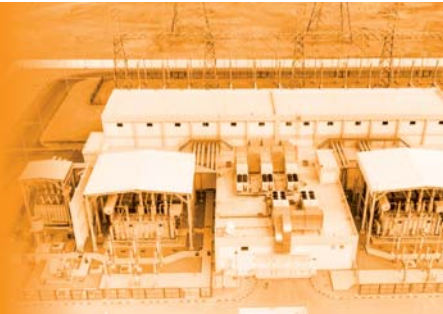
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JAALAN BANI BU ALI
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SET YOUR
EYES ON
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MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
UZBEKISTAN, SAO TOME
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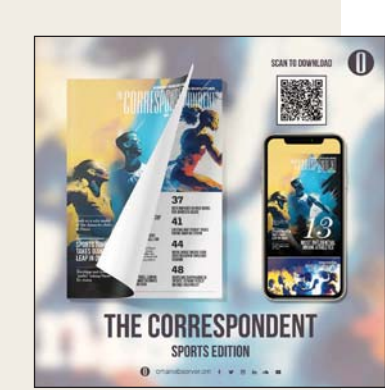
■ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan on being re-elected for a new presidential term. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev in leading the Uzbek people towards further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

■ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also sent a cable of greetings to President Carlos Vila Nova of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Carlos Vila Nova and the people of his country. — **ONA**

VILNIUS

NATO OFFERS UKRAINE
HOPE FOR MEMBERSHIP

Nato states say "Ukraine's future is in Nato" but they are not extending an invitation to Kiev at a summit of the military alliance in Vilnius, according to a declaration seen on Tuesday. Nato "will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance when allies agree and conditions are met," the summit declaration reads. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly appealed to allies to formally invite Ukraine to join Nato, a necessary first step to kick-start alliance's accession procedure. **SEE P7**



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OMAN'S
EXPANDING
SPORTS
LANDSCAPE

In this edition of *The Correspondent*, the *Observer* team looks at the sporting events Oman has hosted in the first two quarters of the year as well as the quantum development happening across the sporting industry. This digital magazine is the much-needed recognition of Oman's athletes, as the newspaper's sports team assessed and selected athletes based on their overall performance as well as their social impact.



AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR BIDS GOODBYE

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received on Tuesday in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to Oman. HH Sayyid Shihab thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to enhance relations between Oman and Austria, wishing him success in his future assignments. On his turn, the Austrian ambassador lauded the advanced relations bidding the two countries. He valued the cooperation he witnessed during his mission in Oman. — **ONA**

GCC reiterates solidarity with
Palestinians, slams Israeli aggression

GENEVA: The GCC states have affirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their condemnation of all aspects of the Israeli aggression against Palestinians.

They stressed the need to protect civilians and called for rapid intervention to stop the violations staged therein. This was the core essence of the GCC's collective stance expressed in a statement at the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva that was held within the context of interactive dialogue on the report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights situation in Palestine and Arab territories occupied since 1967 (Item VII).

The statement was delivered by Ambassador Idris bin



Abdurrahman al Khanjari, Sultanate of Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN and international organisations in Geneva.

He said that the Israeli occupation forces' continued aggression against the

Palestinian people hinders the efforts of the peace process aimed at resolving the Palestinian issue and establishing peace and stability in the Palestinian territories in a manner that guarantees the Palestinian people's ability to enjoy their legitimate rights.

The GCC countries expressed thanks to the Special Rapporteur for her report. They condemned what the report unearthed in terms of violations of basic rights of Palestinians. They condemned Israel's "widescale, systematic deprivation of Palestinians from liberty as a means of tightening control over the occupied territories". They rejected Israel's persistent expansion in actions that violate all international laws and resolutions. — **ONA**

HIS MAJESTY SENDS MESSAGE TO PUTIN

Oman, Russia
explore areas
of cooperation



MOSCOW: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. The message deals with the bilateral relations between Oman and Russia and means of promoting them.

It was handed over by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy when his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov received him in Moscow on Tuesday.

Sayyid Badr also held a session of talks with Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. This came within the framework of Sayyid Badr's visit to Russia.

During the session, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and explored areas of cooperation and means of enhancing them.

The two sides underscored their keenness to activate partnership opportunities in areas of transport, communications, renewable energy and converting industries, as well as encouraging tourism between the two countries.

The two ministers called companies of the private sector to utilise the existing friendship relations, agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) that regulate economic, business and investment cooperation.

On the political forefront, the two ministers exchanged views on several regional and international issues. They underscored the importance of promoting dialogue and backing all means that lead to peaceful settlement of disputes. — **ONA**

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN GENEVA

Oman showcases rich heritage of frankincense

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
[@afrahalbalushia](#)

The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the Omani Frankincense Exhibition in Geneva, with the aim of highlighting and promoting Omani frankincense as a product and a geographical indication.

The exhibition, which concludes on July 14 at the WIPO building in Geneva, will enable Oman to promote small and medium enterprises (SMEs) working among frankincense

products and its derivatives.

The works of the Omani frankincense exhibition during the meetings of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is being organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

This also provides the opportunity and scope to



highlight SMEs working in frankincense products for expansion in the global markets

to serve the national economy.

The exhibition also provides an ideal opportunity to exchange experiences and knowledge among the participating institutions. It is also an opportunity to increase sales, study the European market and know its needs.

Five SMEs that are distinguished in the production of frankincense and its derivatives are participating in the exhibition. They are Bank of Oud Corporation, Al Shoala Corporation for the sale and

production of frankincense, Oliban Corporation, Gold Dust Trading Corporation, and Natural Frankincense Products Corporation.

It is worth noting that the authority seeks to market and promote the services and products of SMEs by participating in internal and external events and exhibitions. It participated in four local exhibitions and six international exhibitions, benefiting 266 institutions during the first half of 2023.



SAYYID BADR MEETS CHAIRMAN OF RUSSIAN STATE DUMA



MOSCOW: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister met in Moscow on Tuesday Vyacheslav Viktorovich Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. The meeting underlined the two countries' keenness on enhancing friendship relations, particularly in the parliamentary field. — ONA

Army commanders visit 'Al Hazm' exercise site



MUSCAT: Several commanders and high ranking officials on Tuesday visited the site of the annual military exercise 'Al Hazm' of the Joint Command and Staff College. The visit was paid by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman

(Rafo), Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jabooob, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) and

several high ranking officers.

Upon their arrival at the college, they were greeted by Air Commodore Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mashaikhi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College.

The commanders and high ranking officers were briefed on the progress of the exercise and its various stages. — ONA

'Environmental Guardians' campaign looks at protecting nature

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Environment Authority (EA) is actively carrying out its initiative called 'Environmental Guardians for khareef Dhofar 2023' in the Dhofar Governorate whose goal is to enhance the cultural awareness of both citizens and tourists while also monitoring and addressing practices that contribute to a clean and sustainable environment during the khareef season.

One of the main objectives of EA is to raise awareness among citizens and tourists about the negative impacts that result from incorrect environmental behaviours and practices. The aim is to promote and strengthen the social responsibility of preserving the natural environment and green spaces.

To achieve this, a team dedicated to field monitoring and inspection has been deployed in various tourist-targeted locations across the governorate.

Ahmed bin Salim al Maashani, an environmental volunteer working with the EA explained that the 'Environmental Guardians' campaign has been going on since its launch in the beginning of July. The campaign's primary focus is to protect the environmental diversity within the governorate and emphasise



the importance of environmental preservation. This includes discouraging encroachment on green areas, discouraging tree cutting, and promoting responsible waste disposal.

Notably, one of the key issues identified by the campaign is the encroachment on green areas. Some tourists unintentionally drive through these areas due to a lack of awareness, but they are responsive when approached by the campaign team. However, there are individuals who deliberately use these green areas for activities like drifting with their cars. In such cases, the campaign team reports these incidents to the relevant authorities or captures photographs as evidence for reporting to the police.

In an effort to minimise such

practices, the team has blocked subways or access points to these areas using rocks. However, Al Maashani acknowledges that this measure is not entirely effective, as some people remove the rocks to gain access. Building more substantial barriers would require heavy equipment and government involvement, which may take time to implement.

The campaign comprises field teams consisting of more than 40 employees distributed across various areas of the Dhofar Governorate, having vehicles designated to this campaign. Al Maashani highlights that the campaign has successfully raised awareness among individuals, including citizens, residents, and visitors, demonstrating a high level of consciousness regarding environmental preservation.

Entries for Omani young water researchers award open

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 11

MEDRC is pleased to invite eligible participants to apply to this year's Omani Young Water Researchers Award. Held under the supervision of Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the award is designed to recognise young water researchers whose work contributes to advancing key areas of the water sector: water management, wastewater treatment and reuse, water treatment technologies. non-

revenue water, desalination and / or related environmental research.

This is the seventh year of the prestigious award first launched in 2017 to showcase the high level of water research being conducted in Oman by young researchers in the early stage of their careers.

To be eligible to compete, applicants must be Omani nationals and between 20-35 years of age. Submitted applications will undergo two rounds of review. They are first screened for eligibility and compliance against the terms and conditions of the award, before being evaluated and

scored by the Judging panel.

The panel, formed by leading water experts from academic institutions and organisations in the public and private sectors, will call selected finalists to present their findings, and assess them on their ability to communicate and defend their research work.

Winners will be announced in undergraduate, postgraduate and wastewater research categories. A total of three winners, one from each category will be awarded at an official ceremony at the end of the year. They will be awarded with a trophy, certificate and paid

trip to attend an international water conference.

The award is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Omar Zawawi Establishment LLC (OMZEST), Oman LNG and Nama Water Services with support from the Embassy of the Netherlands in Oman and the Oman Water Society.

MEDRC invites applications from eligible young Omani nationals via their website at www.medrc.org/apply. Further details can be found at www.medrc.org/research. Closing date for applications is December 1, 2023.

ONE ARRESTED FOR STEALING FROM MOSQUE

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 11

Al Batinah North Governorate Police Command on Tuesday arrested a person on charges of theft from a mosque in the Wilayat of Liwa.

In a statement, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said the thief took off some doors and sold them to a scrap shop.

It added that legal procedures are being completed against him. In another incident, Al



Buraimi Governorate Police Command arrested a person of Arab nationality on charges of stealing from several vehicles in Al Buraimi.

Smile Radiantly: Enhancing dental beauty, promoting oral health

NAZLI ANSARI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

While dental composites which are tooth-coloured materials used in dentistry to restore and enhance the appearance of teeth are generally safe and effective, there are situations where dental composites can potentially impact the look of a smile.

Dr Hafsa, a dentist at Babylon Medical Centre in Al Amerat, highlighted several negative outcomes resulting from improper use of composites. She said that one of the concerns is poor colour matching, where the composite restoration may noticeably differ from the surrounding teeth, affecting the overall aesthetic of the smile.

Additionally, dental composites can become stained or discoloured over time, particularly if the person consumes staining substances like coffee, tea, or red wine, resulting in a less vibrant or discoloured smile. Wear or chipping can also occur, especially if the person grinds their teeth or bites on hard objects, leading to an uneven or damaged smile.

Incorrect shaping of the composites can also affect the symmetry and alignment of the smile, and unfortunately, this is observed frequently in Oman.

Dr Andalibi, the first dentist in Iran to use composites at Nike clinic, compares composite restorations to manicures for nails. A dentist working on teeth must possess an artistic sense to choose



the appropriate size and colour to achieve a natural-looking smile.

However, Dr Andalibi acknowledges that laminate procedures are superior to composites since they involve

the use of specific machines, reducing the likelihood of human error. It is worth noting that poorly done composites can be removed and replaced with new ones, offering hope for those who

have undergone unsatisfactory procedures.

To enhance dental beauty in Muscat and raise awareness among the population, organising dental awareness campaigns in collaboration with local dental clinics, hospitals, or community centres can help. These campaigns can include educational sessions, workshops, and interactive activities to educate people about the importance of dental health and beauty.

Workshops and seminars on various dental topics, such as oral hygiene, cosmetic dentistry, and smile enhancement, can also be beneficial. Inviting dental professionals to share their expertise and provide practical tips and advice to participants

would be valuable.

It is crucial not to overlook the potential of social media and online platforms. Collaborating with local influencers, bloggers, and social media personalities who have a substantial following can help promote dental beauty and oral health. They can share their own experiences, tips, and recommendations with their audience.

Collaborating with schools, educational institutes, and local businesses like beauty salons, spas, and fitness centres can also be effective in promoting dental health. Including dental health as part of the curriculum or overall well-being education would ensure proper education and awareness.



NADIRAH CONQUERS MOUNT MATTERHORN

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Nadirah al Harthy, the first Omani woman and the second Omani to climb Mount Everest, conquered the Mount Matterhorn, one of the best-known hardest and most difficult to climb among world mountains, on Tuesday.

Standing at 14,692 feet (4,478 metres), also known in Italian Monte Cervino, French Mont Cervin, Matterhorn is one of the important mountains of the

world and icon for Switzerland, and one of the hardest mountains to climb.

Speaking to the Observer from the top of Matterhorn, Nadirah said she felt on top of the world yet again after she climbed the peak. "It's not an easy affair to climb Matterhorn because it's rocky and climbing for ten hours up and down is a risky effort altogether," she said.

Reports suggest that about 3,000 climbers summit the Matterhorn per year and in



summer up to 150 climbers can attempt an ascent each day. Tragically, more than 500 people have died climbing Matterhorn while ascending or descending from the summit since the 1865 ascent.

These statistics make Matterhorn amongst the deadliest mountains in the world. By the late 1980s, it was estimated that over 500 people have died whilst attempting its summit with an average of about 12 deaths each year.

"This time I was looking for different experience for myself and my countrymen to see that there are different ways to climb in Europe so that we can get more experience in climbing and feel the 'On top of the world' experience," Nadirah said.

In 2019, Nadirah was part of the all-female Arab team along with Joyce Azzam and Nelly Attar of Lebanon and Mona Shahab of Saudi Arabia who climbed to the top of the world's highest mountain, The Mount Himalaya.

MoD, MoL ink pacts for training and employment



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Defence signed a number of joint cooperation programmes for work-related training and employment support, on Tuesday.

The cooperation programmes aim at enhancing the skills of job-seekers by providing specialised on-the-job training and work-related training in the military and security fields.

The joint cooperation agreements were signed by

Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour.

From the side of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the joint cooperation programmes were signed by Maj Gen Salim bin Ali al Hosani, Commander of the (RGO), whereas Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, signed the programmes on behalf of the Ministry of Labour. — ONA

Oman, Iran explore boosting trade exchange, supporting private sector



TEHRAN: Hossein Selahvarzi, Head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, received on Tuesday Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the meeting, the two sides explored means of enhancing economic relations, boosting trade exchange and highlighting promising sectors in Oman. They also reviewed areas of joint business cooperation in the fields of industry, banking, food, tourism, health and mining. Investment opportunities in the Iranian market were also explored during the meeting.

Al Mu'aini said that special incentives are offered for foreign businesspeople in general and Iranian businesspeople in particular to invest in Oman.

He pointed out that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries reached RO 2 billion. He also underscored the importance of developing business and economic relations between Oman and Iran.

On his turn, Selahvarzi said that trade exchange between the two countries recorded a 40-per cent growth this year, compared to the corresponding period in 2022. He also affirmed the readiness of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture to expand economic cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to supporting the private sector of the two countries.

Selahvarzi announced that the 20th session of the joint Oman-Iran committee will be held in Tehran during the coming period. — ONA

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved a significant milestone in global travel rankings. According to the latest Global Passport Power Rank 2023, Oman has claimed the 49th position worldwide, signifying the country's efforts in expanding travel opportunities for its citizens and enhancing its global standing.

The Global Passport Power Rank is an influential annual report that measures the strength and accessibility of passports from around the world. It is the only real-time global ranking of the world's passports, invented and powered by Arton Capital. It provides valuable insights into the freedom of travel that citizens of different countries enjoy, based on the number of visa-free or visa-on-arrival destinations they can

access.

The 49th position attained by Oman demonstrates the increasing recognition and trust that the country's passport holds on the global stage. Citizens of Oman can now travel to a significant number of countries across the globe without the need for advance visas, fostering cultural exchange, tourism and business opportunities.

The Omani passport is given a 97 mobility score. There are 40 countries that Omani passport holders can travel to without obtaining a visa for 14 to 180 days, depending on the conditions of the destination countries. Some of these countries include Albania, Bahamas, Bahrain, Brunei, Ecuador, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan and Kazakhstan.

Oman's rise in the passport power rankings is a reflection of the nation's commitment

سُلْطَانَةُ عُومَانِ SULTANATE OF OMAN	
جواز سفر PASSPORT	
COMPARE	IMPROVE
MOBILITY SCORE	97
VISA-FREE	40
VISA ON ARRIVAL	50
ETA	7
VISA REQUIRED	101
PASSPORT POWER RANK	49
WORLD REACH	49%

to fostering international relationships and promoting

global mobility for its citizens. The Sultanate of Oman's diplomatic efforts, bilateral agreements and visa facilitation programmes have contributed to the steady growth of its passport power in recent years.

The improved passport power of Oman is expected to have a positive impact on the nation's tourism sector, attracting more international visitors and boosting the economy. With easier access to a diverse range of countries, Omani citizens can explore new destinations, engage in business ventures and contribute to the country's economic growth.

The index has considered 193 United Nations member countries and six territories (ROC Taiwan, Macao (SAR China), Hong Kong (SAR China) Kosovo, Palestinian Territory, and the Vatican) for a total of 199 passports.

Call for restoration of old houses

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

Calls are being made to restore old houses in Al Hamra, and there are significant efforts being made by locals and community organisations to preserve the cultural and historical heritage of the country.

This commitment to safeguard heritage and promote cultural tourism is evident in the initiatives taken by individuals and homeowners in the old neighbourhoods. These individuals understand the importance of preserving their cultural identity and the historical value of their homes, leading them to invest their own resources, time and effort into restoring and maintaining these properties.

Hamad al Abri, a homeowner in the Western Harat of Al Hamra, shared his experience.

He owns three houses in the area, and when these houses started to deteriorate, he realised the need to take action before they collapsed. Due to financial constraints, he could only



afford to restore one of the houses at the moment. He plans to save more money to restore the other two, as the restoration process can be costly.

Al Abri emphasised that individuals restoring their own homes in the absence of government attention demonstrates a strong sense of personal responsibility and pride in their heritage. Their actions contribute to the overall preservation of the neighbourhood and serve as an inspiration for others to do the same.

He expressed his concern about the deteriorating condition of houses in the old Harat, stating that it not only creates an unpleasant view, but also represents a loss of an important cultural element in the country. However, tourists visiting the area are amazed by the efforts made by some locals to transform their homes into masterpieces that blend traditionality and modernity.

Converting houses into cafés or hotels has also become a trend in Al Hamra, as many individuals see investment potential in these historic properties.



BURNING OF WASTE CAUSES CLIMATE, HEALTH CALAMITY

KABEER YOUSUF
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Burning waste is the easiest and economic way of disposing of them, as many might have hitherto believed but if one ever knows the multitude of damages it is causing to the humans as well as the environment, he or she shouldn't attempt to do so.

Burning the waste in public is one of the phenomena that is rampant nowadays and it is common in some areas where wrong disposal of agricultural waste and burning them are quite practised. According to Muscat Municipality, some farm workers dispose piles of waste that accumulate remarkably over time and burn them in these places, causing negative environmental dimensions as a result of the escalation of fumes and the emission of toxic gases polluting the environment which is harmful to human health.

The smoke from burning agricultural and construction waste causes damage to the respiratory system, especially those with diseases related to internal system. Additionally, burning waste can adversely affect the general appearance of the locality and give out unpleasant odours, affect the vital ecosystem of the region by bringing in rodents and insects.

The Sultanate of Oman has made it illegal to dump or burn any waste in public places or dispose it in places other than the designated disposal sites. Failure to do so will attract legal

procedures.

The instruction comes in the wake of the number of cases involving some people disposing of or burning them in public cases which have been brought to the attention of the civic authority and anyone caught doing such things will be booked under the law.

"Burning waste or dumping them in places other than the designated areas is an offence and poses great health hazards and causes environmental pollution. Muscat Municipality is warning those who violate the rule will face legal action," Muscat Municipality spokesperson said.

On how burning waste affects our environment and harms humans, he said it has manifold repercussions and one should abstain from doing so. "First, the phenomenon negatively affects the health of the individual and the environment and reflects a bad impression on pedestrians and road users. Secondly, burning waste affects crops and soil fertility. Hence, Muscat Municipality has efforts in place and continuous inspection campaigns are initiated at various waste accumulation sites, especially farms and valleys."

Muscat Municipality, represented by the Directorate-General of Health Affairs and all its service directorates, has taken strides in waste management. This is highlighted by the efforts that are being made to deal safely with that waste, and it has always worked to spread the culture of environmental awareness, and to educate individuals about issues and affairs of the environment

and sustainability.

More often than not, they are dumped in valleys and farms to get rid of them by burning them, which has a negative impact on the health of the individual and the environment and reflects a bad impression on passers-by and road users.

In order to limit this menace, the civic inspectors carry out continuous follow-up campaigns in farms and waste accumulation sites which has resulted in creating awareness among the public. The municipality also allocates a specific site next to those farms so that these wastes are transported.

On the other hand, there are other solutions to get rid of this waste, which is to take advantage of it by recycling it and converting it into organic fertilisers, fodder, food for humans which contributes to achieving agricultural wealth and protecting the environment from pollution.

Given the natural resources that the environment contains, we can take advantage of the solid waste resulting from human activity, especially organic materials in several forms, such as producing high-value organic fertilisers, and converting garbage into sources of energy, as well as for the production of fodder and foodstuffs, as a component in the manufacturing of minerals and glass, and the production of building bricks that meet all standard specifications.





Shura office reviews ministerial reports



MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ashshura held its 10th ordinary meeting of the 4th annual session (2022-2023) under the chairmanship of Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the office reviewed the Council of Ministers' letter regarding ministerial reports for the year 2022 before referring them to the relevant committees for study and to decide whether they are consistent with the Law of the Council of Oman.

The office also reviewed responses provided by government authorities regarding questions raised by members of Majlis Ashshura on the government oversight tools including the response of the minister of housing and urban planning's response to a request for briefing regarding the development projects of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The office reviewed the response provided by the chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) on the financial performance of the global integrated energy company OQ for the fiscal year 2022. The response contained the financial report of OQ which included the investment portfolio and the policies and programmes of social investment.

The meeting discussed the response of the minister of labour to the request for briefing on the employment of Omanis in cultural attachés, and the response of the minister of health to the question about addressing the problem of the large number of resignations by medical professionals. In his response, the minister of health stated that the ministry had studied the conditions of health professionals and the importance of creating a motivating work environment that raises job satisfaction and reduces resignations.

Also reviewed at the meeting was a request for briefing submitted to the minister of transport, communications and information technology regarding Oman Rail. The request included a briefing on the extent of transparency of the bidding system at Oman Rail and the role of the competent authorities in reviewing the project, supervising the validity of the bidding and tracking the stages of project delivery and the details of the financing plans. This was in addition to a request for briefing submitted to the minister of agriculture, fisheries and water resources on the ministry's contribution to the provision of job opportunities for Omanis and the mechanisms applied by the ministry to ensure food security.

AJWAA AL ASHKHARAH

Captivating blend of entertainment

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Ajwaa Al Ashkharah, an event set against a backdrop of moderate temperatures and an exceptional ambiance, has been attracting a substantial number of visitors eager to indulge in a captivating experience. Spanning twenty days, until July 24, the event promises an array of activities catering to diverse groups of society, tourists and visitors.

Designed to offer a blend of entertainment, art, heritage and sports, the Ajwaa Al Ashkharah presents an extensive programme of engaging experiences. Highlights include the heritage corner, pioneers exhibition featuring the participation of entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, and the entertainment and beach games corner. Cultural and recreational activities are also prominent features of the event, ensuring a comprehensive and engaging atmosphere.

Featuring the participation of numerous governmental and private agencies across various sectors, visitors have the opportunity to explore a multitude of corners. The Department of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah will showcase an interactive tourism awareness corner, aimed at familiarising visitors with tourism information about Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. Furthermore, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in the governorate is hosting the third pioneers market exhibition, which presents an assortment



of products ranging from palm fronds, woodwork, incense, and Omani fashion, and other locally made goods.

Complementing the event's activities are interactive character shows, circus performances, entertainment games for all age groups, kite shows, a virtual reality game corner, theatre performances, electric and electronic games, folkloric and show performances, and a beach

games corner featuring sports competitions.

Ahmed al Rashdi also highlighted the opportunity provided to explore the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah and acquaint oneself with its picturesque nature and tourism potential. The event also plays a vital role in supporting small and medium enterprises by promoting their products and showcasing them to the public.

Visitors are welcome to partake in its evening events, with the park open daily from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Public spaces have been carefully prepared, incorporating guidelines to ensure a seamless flow for attendees, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the enchanting autumn atmosphere synonymous with Al Ashkharah and other coastal areas of the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.



MUSCAT WITNESSES CIRCUS EXTRAVAGANZA

KABEER YOUSUF
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Al Naseem International Circus, which began amusing the audience from various walks since July 9 at Al Amerat Park, is a major crowd puller with its never-before acrobatics and animal show, trapeze and deathwell performances.

"This is the first time a circus is coming to Oman and we are glad about it," said Mohammed al Hinai, partner of the project.

Some of the breath-taking performances by artists from 8 countries which include Africa, Argentina, Columbia, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Mexico and Pakistan are a sure shot to keep the audience at the edge of their seats, according to the organisers. The show is presented by Oman's acclaimed presenter Maan al Maani.

Activities one can look forward to at Al Amerat Park include spine-chilling acrobatics, awe-inspiring puppetry, scintillating aerial displays, and taming the beasts besides internationally reputed martial arts by acclaimed artists from Colombia, Argentina, Iran and Africa.

Animals are trained under world-renowned champion trainer Mohammed Ali Kahramani who will grace the



stage with brainy performances. The trained acrobatic teams will showcase astonishing art forms, ensuring a show brimming with surprises.

The circus is brought to Oman by Dr Musab al Hinai, CEO of Al Naseem Group, which has various family entertainment and amusement projects running.

Performances are taking place all days from 6 pm and 8.30 pm.

Tickets are priced at RO 8 for adults and children, while VIP tickets are available for RO 10. Children under the age of two enter for free. There are raffle coupons up for sale RO 3 where members of the audience are given a chance to win exciting prizes.

Next station Salalah: As per the earlier plans, the circus will be in Al Amerat for 16 days and is scheduled to move to Salalah for 40 days. However, the troupe may have an earlier move due to the extreme weather conditions, according to the management.

"Although we planned to station in Muscat for 16 days, we may move some days in advance due to the temperatures and enjoy more of Khareef. However, we might come back to Al Amerat after Salalah," Mohammed added.



ICC urged to probe possible ‘war crimes’ in Darfur

GEDAREF: Human Rights Watch on Tuesday called on the International Criminal Court to investigate possible “war crimes” in Sudan’s Darfur region where fighting has intensified despite calls for an end to the conflict.

The New York-based group charged that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied Arab groups “summarily executed” at least 28 members of the Massalit ethnic minority when they ransacked and torched much of the town of Misterei in May.

Efforts to broker an end to the violence have continued, and the east African regional bloc IGAD on Monday led a renewed push, calling on the warring parties to “sign an unconditional ceasefire”.

The Sudanese army nonetheless boycotted the gathering in Addis Ababa, dampening hopes for an end to the nearly three-month-old

conflict with the RSF.

Air strikes again shook the capital Khartoum, residents said on Tuesday as they sheltered from gunfire.

Experts believe army leader Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, have opted for a war of attrition and are hoping to extract more concessions at the negotiating table.

US Ambassador John Godfrey, who along with other diplomats was evacuated near the start of the conflict, warned that “a military ‘victory’ by either of the belligerents in the Sudan conflict would entail unacceptable human cost and damage to the country”.

Godfrey called instead for “a negotiated exit from the crisis”, which he said “does not — and cannot -- mean returning to the status quo that existed before



Pedestrians and vehicles move along a road outside a branch of the Central Bank of Sudan in the country’s eastern city of Gedaref. – AFP

April 15”.

Before the conflict erupted that day, the two generals had jointly ruled the country following an October putsch that derailed Sudan’s fragile transition to civilian rule.

Around 3,000 people have been killed in the violence, according to

the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Godfrey further slammed “irresponsible” calls for continued fighting, pointing to the “horrific deaths by air strike of at least six people” in Khartoum North on Monday and of “at least 22 people on Friday in Omdurman”.

US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee was due to meet regional and Sudanese officials on Tuesday in Addis Ababa.

IGAD on Monday said it would request the African Union to look into possibly deploying the East Africa Standby Force — usually tasked with election observer missions — in Sudan “for the protection of civilians and... humanitarian access”.

But such a move would likely face hurdles as the conflict has seen multiple successive ceasefires violated. — AFP

US to move forward with transfer of F-16 jets to Turkiye

VILNIUS: Washington will move ahead with the transfer of F-16 fighter jets to Turkiye in consultation with Congress, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday, a day after Ankara gave the green light for Sweden to join Nato.

Turkiye, which had been the main stumbling bloc on Sweden’s path towards the alliance, had requested in October 2021 to buy \$20 billion of Lockheed Martin Corp F-16 fighters and nearly 80 modernisation kits for its existing warplanes.

Speaking ahead of a summit of Nato leaders that started on Tuesday in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, Sullivan said US President Joe Biden “had been clear that he supports the transfer”.

“He has placed no caveats on this... He intends to move forward with that transfer,” Sullivan told reporters, without giving any details on the timing.

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez, a Democrat who had blocked the transfer, said on Monday he is in talk with the Biden administration about his hold and that he could make a decision “in the next week”, suggesting he could lift it.

Both Turkish officials and the Biden administration have rejected any suggestion that Ankara’s approval of Sweden’s Nato accession was being linked



Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (L) shakes hands with Turkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he arrives for the Nato Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. – AFP

to the F-16 sale in the months of talks to address Turkish opposition.

However, some diplomats and analysts believe that Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan had been using Swedish membership to pressure Washington on the warplanes, and that Biden made a deal.

“There seems to have been a big push by the Biden administration to allow Turkiye to modernise its air force and acquire new F-16s,” said Camille Grand, a defence specialist at the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

“This push together with the Swedish efforts on the PKK front might have played an important role in convincing Erdogan to

move forward on Sweden.”

Oneformer French ambassador to Washington, Gerard Araud, wrote on Twitter in response to Sullivan’s announcement that “The Swedish blackmail’ paid”.

To explain its opposition to Sweden’s Nato accession, Ankara had accused it of not doing enough against people Turkiye sees as terrorists, mainly members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

A statement issued by Turkiye and Sweden on Monday said Sweden had reiterated that it would not provide support to the Kurdish groups and would actively support efforts to reinvigorate Turkiye’s EU accession process. — Reuters

Protests erupt hours after Israel reform clause voted through

JERUSALEM: Protests erupted across Israel on Tuesday, hours after parliament adopted in a first reading a key clause of the government’s judicial overhaul package which opponents say threatens democracy.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu forged ahead with the controversial move despite mass demonstrations since the reforms were proposed in January.

Protesters blocked roads across Israel and gathered at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, with police reporting more than 40 arrests during the morning.

“I came here because this government is demolishing -- totally -- democracy in Israel,” said Eitan Galon, a doctor protesting on a highway outside Jerusalem.

“We will fight until the end,” he added as police nearby used water cannon to disperse demonstrators.

Traffic was also brought to a standstill by protesters along a highway near Modiin, a town between Jerusalem and Israel’s commercial hub Tel Aviv.

Near parliament in Jerusalem, more protesters waved the blue and white national flag and banged drums while police deployed mounted officers.

Police in a statement said they “authorise the freedom to demonstrate while upholding law and order”.

Israeli protest leaders had



Members of Israel's mounted police move to disperse a protest in Tel Aviv. – AFP

announced a day of mobilisation in anticipation of the parliamentary vote, with dozens of rallies expected across the country.

A demonstration was due on Tuesday evening in Tel Aviv outside the embassy of Israel’s top ally, the United States.

In an interview aired on Sunday, US President Joe Biden said he hoped Netanyahu would “continue to move towards moderation and change in the court”.

The Israeli premier told the Wall Street Journal last month that he had removed one of the most controversial elements of the overhaul, a clause that would allow parliament to override Supreme Court rulings.

The latest parliamentary vote aimed to scrap the so-called

“reasonability” clause, through which the Supreme Court can strike down government decisions.

The measure was used recently to force Netanyahu to remove Aryeh Deri from his cabinet, over the senior politician’s previous tax evasion conviction.

Speaking in parliament during the overnight debate, opposition leader Yair Lapid slammed “this damned government” and vowed the bill would not make it through its second and third readings.

Lapid and fellow opposition chiefs were involved in cross-party talks over the reform package, which collapsed last month.

Addressing the chamber, Justice Minister Yariv Levin said the current system contradicts democracy. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAMAKO

Journalist acquitted over PM ‘assassination’

A prominent Malian TV and radio journalist was acquitted on Tuesday on charges that he falsely claimed a former premier had been murdered in detention by the ruling junta.

Mohamed Youssouf Bathily was placed in custody on March 13 after allegedly saying former prime minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga had not died from natural causes while he was behind bars, but had been “assassinated”.

Maiga died in jail in March 2022 despite pleas from his family



to be treated abroad for his deteriorating health.

Bathily was acquitted of charges of “faking crimes... and inventing evidence for a non-existent crime,” his lawyer Kassoum Tapo said.

TUNIS

At least 2 migrants found dead at border

The bodies of at least two migrants have been found in a desert region near Tunisia’s border with Algeria, a judicial official said on Tuesday.

“Both bodies are of men, and rescuers have recovered the one found yesterday,” a witness added.

It is said that in one week two convoys were seen transporting migrants to the desert, with nearly 100 left in the vicinity of Hazoua.

“Many of these migrants are



trying to reach oases in the area,” a witness said.

Authorities have launched a “dubious death” investigation to determine the exact cause of the two deaths.

LUBUMBASHI

3 die in corporate helicopter crash

Three people died when a helicopter owned by a mining corporation crashed in southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a source in the security services and a witness said on Tuesday.

The helicopter crashed into a ravine several minutes after taking off in bad weather at a mine at Kambove.

All three onboard -- the French pilot, a South African administrator and a Polish executive in charge of security -- were killed, the source in the security services said.



The helicopter, owned by a cobalt and copper firm called Boss Mining, was scheduled to head to Kolwezi in neighbouring Lualaba province, Francis Lwamba said, a company security guard.



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In brief

■ KATHMANDU



6 DEAD IN TOURIST HELICOPTER CRASH

All six people aboard a tourist helicopter in Nepal were killed when it crashed soon after take-off in the Everest region on Tuesday, aviation authorities said. The Manang Air flight was heading for the capital Kathmandu from near Lukla, the gateway for climbing expeditions, with five Mexican travellers and a Nepali pilot onboard.

“The six bodies have been recovered and brought to Kathmandu,” Pratap Babu Tiwari said, general manager at the Tribhuvan International Airport.

Two helicopters were deployed for search and rescue but could not land at the crash site because of the weather.

■ LE VERNET



STILL HOPE TO FIND MISSING TODDLER IN ALPS

Dozens of French police and soldiers backed by helicopter searched the terrain around a tiny hamlet in the French Alps on Tuesday, saying they still hoped to find a toddler who has been missing for three days.

Emile, who is two and a half, was staying with his grandparents when he went missing on Saturday. He was last seen by two neighbours walking alone on a street of Haut-Vernet, a tiny village of 25 inhabitants at an altitude of around 1,200 metres.

“We’re not stopping the search, we are not losing hope,” the local prefect, Marc Chappuis, told reporters late on Monday.

■ BAKU



AZERBAIJAN CLOSES ROAD LINK TO KARABAKH

Azerbaijan on Tuesday temporarily shut the only road linking its breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia, accusing the Armenian branch of the Red Cross of smuggling.

“The passage through Lachin checkpoint of the state border is temporarily suspended” pending an investigation into the Red Cross using its medical vehicles for “smuggling”, Azerbaijan’s state border service said on Tuesday.

It said the decision was made after the Red Cross failed to “take necessary steps to prevent illegal actions” such as smuggling mobile phones from Armenia to Karabakh, using the organisation’s medical vehicles.

Nato head sees ‘positive message’ on Ukraine’s membership bid

VILNIUS: Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Ukraine would get a “positive message” on its path to membership on Tuesday, as leaders of the Western military alliance meet to discuss the fallout from Russia’s war that brought war to their doorstep.

Divisions among Nato’s 31 members mean there will not be a date or straightforward invitation for Ukraine to join, something its Soviet-era overlord Moscow says would threaten its national security.

But Stoltenberg said Kyiv would get more military aid and security guarantees, an easing of formal conditions to join, as well as a new format of cooperation with the alliance, the so-called Nato-Ukraine Council.

“I expect allies will send a clear, united and positive message on the path towards membership for Ukraine,” Stoltenberg said on arriving at the Nato summit he was due to host.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan also said the gathering would send a “positive signal” about Kyiv’s membership bid. Diplomats were upbeat as negotiators were drawing close on the final agreement.

US President Joe Biden, speaking alongside Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda,



Nato members pose for a family photograph during the summit, in Vilnius. — AFP

whose country is extremely wary of consequences of Russia’s war in Ukraine for eastern Europe, reaffirmed Washington’s commitment to the alliance.

The summit is also set to approve Nato’s first comprehensive plans since the end of the Cold War to defend against any attack from Russia.

Moscow, which has cited Nato’s eastern expansion as

a key factor in its decision to attack Ukraine nearly 17 months ago, has criticised the two-day summit.

Russia’s state news agency RIA quoted a Vienna-based senior Russian diplomat as warning that Europe would be the first to face “catastrophic consequences” should the war in Ukraine escalate.

While Nato members agree Kyiv cannot join during the

war, they have disagreed over how quickly it could happen afterwards and under what conditions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, due to attend the Vilnius gathering, has been pressing Nato for a clear path for Ukraine to join once the war is over. On Tuesday, he said Ukrainian troops were keeping Russian aggression from Europe.

“The eastern border of Ukraine, the border of our state and the positions of our warriors are the line that the Russian dictatorship... will never cross again,” he said.

Nato members in Eastern Europe have backed Kyiv’s stance, arguing that bringing Ukraine under Nato’s collective security umbrella is the best way to deter Russia from attacking again. — Reuters

First French long-range missiles already in Ukraine

PARIS: France’s announcement on Tuesday that it would send SCALP long-range missiles to Ukraine comes months after Britain began delivering its identical Storm Shadow.

Developed jointly by the two Nato allies, Storm Shadow/SCALP is a 1,300-kilogramme missile armed with conventional explosives, usually launched from aircraft such as the Royal Air Force’s Eurofighter Typhoon or French Rafale.

The first SCALPs were already in Ukraine as President Emmanuel Macron announced their delivery, a French military source said on Tuesday on the sidelines of the Nato summit in Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

Built by missile maker MBDA, the missile’s range of over 250 kilometres makes it the longest-range Western weapon supplied to Kyiv so far.

It is capable of striking targets far into the country’s Russian-occupied east, well behind front lines that have remained relatively fixed for months.

Such capability is “critical for Ukraine’s forces to disrupt Russian logistics and command and control,” said Ivan Klyszcz, a researcher at the Estonia based International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS).

SCALP strikes could help “with Ukraine’s current approach to operations... namely to advance slowly so as to protect its forces and reduce its own casualties as



French President Emmanuel Macron (C) attends the Nato Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. — AFP

much as possible,” he added.

French deliveries would “preserve the clarity and coherence of our doctrine, which is to allow Ukraine to defend its territory” from Russian war, Macron said.

The subtext is that French-supplied weapons should not be allowed to hit Russian territory, after Moscow’s repeated warnings of reprisals.

Macron’s message matched that of Britain’s Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, who said in May that Storm Shadow would “allow Ukraine to push back Russian forces based within Ukrainian sovereign territory”.

“With these weapons, a few jets operating within the safe space of their own air defences can make

a difference,” said Dylan Lehrke of UK-based private intelligence firm Janes.

“Russian forces can deny Ukrainian aircraft the use of airspace above territory they control, but they have been unable to defend against deep strikes,” he added.

Manufacturer MBDA says on its website that the SCALP is “designed to meet the demanding requirements of pre-planned attacks against high-value fixed or stationary targets such as hardened bunkers and key infrastructure”.

The missile uses inertial navigation, GPS and terrain referencing to chart a low-altitude course to its target to avoid detection. — AFP

Rescuers continue search for migrants off Canary Isles

MADRID: Spain’s coastguard was on Tuesday looking for three migrant boats reported lost at sea by an NGO a day after rescuing scores of migrants from another vessel near the Canary Islands.

A spokeswoman for Salvamento Marítimo said that it would deploy a rescue plane during the morning and had also requested help from other ships navigating in the area.

“For the moment, we’ve not found anything,” she said.

During their searches on Monday, rescuers found a boat carrying 78 sub-Saharan migrants who were taken to shore at Gran Canaria island, she said.

They had initially thought there were 86 on board.

The three missing boats are believed to have left the coast of Senegal in recent weeks, according to Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras which helps migrant boats in distress.

“One is carrying around 200

people and the other two between 50 and 70 people,” a spokesman for the NGO said.

Caminando founder Helena Maleno said the biggest boat had left the southern town of Kafountine on June 27 with “many minors on board”, quoting family sources who said they had lost contact with the vessel days ago.

Kafountine is a fishing village in southern Senegal which lies at least 1,700 kilometres south of the Canary Islands.

A Spanish rescue plane had initially thought the boat spotted on Monday was the one carrying some 200 people, but it was only on reaching the vessel that they realised their mistake.

“Every minute counts if we’re to find these more than 300 people alive who are in three Senegalese pirogues which have disappeared in the Atlantic,” Maleno tweeted on Tuesday, referring to a long wooden canoe-like vessel. — AFP



Migrants disembark from a Spanish Maritime Rescue vessel in the Port of Arguineguin on the Canary Island of Gran Canaria. — AFP

Sponsorship deal ignites mixed reactions



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“Branding is much more designing logos and merchandising,” says Mudhafer al Sarmi, a branding expert in one of the top-selling Omani authors, in his book ‘Serotonin Brands’ (2016).
He adds brilliantly that “Chemicals carry different feelings between our nerve cells and the rest of our body; while Dopamine carries rewards, Oxytocin facilitates us feeling loved, and Endorphin helps kill our pain, successful branding can release that mood stabilisation feeling.”
This was evident in the recent public conversations about the sponsorship and selected co-branding deal announcement between Oman Air and Chelsea Football Club of the English Premier League, for an undisclosed sum.
In our highly connected world, the public has become even more aware of the look and feel of successful branding.
Moreover, successful branding on such an international level inspires all and signals that the level of strategic alignment between public and private sector leaders is world-class.
In reality, there are three different opinions about this deal; while the majority think it is a good deal, there are others that think it is bad, and a few even opined that it is an ugly deal.

The good deal argument

The good deal camp loves three aspects of it.
First, that our national airline will be Chelsea’s global travel partner offering brand visibility in airports where the team would play.
Second, a few players are likely to visit different parts of the Sultanate of Oman which would be a boost of tourism with the Club followers.
Last but not least, Oman Air’s air hostesses and air hosts will be present at relevant match events. What makes this argument even stronger is that Chelsea is a rising football star with fans in every corner of the world who root for the underdog. In addition, there is no such thing as a perfect deal and this was a quick global marketing win.

The bad deal argument
This camp focuses on one main argument; the greatest value in football club branding deals lies in what football sees the most; the t-shirts and stadiums and this deal doesn’t include either. We love associating with the brands we love from our clothing style to cars and even clubs we support.
Hence, it was a disappointment that a deal with an undisclosed sum couldn’t secure such a branding opportunity.
It’s worth mentioning that regional players struck successful branding deals; for example; Emirates with Arsenal, Manchester City with Etihad, Saudi with New Castle, and perhaps soon Qatar with Manchester United.

The ugly deal argument

THE RECENT OMAN AIR AND CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB DEAL EVOKED MIXED REACTIONS. WHILE THE MAJORITY THINK IT IS A GOOD DEAL, THERE ARE OTHERS THAT THINK IT IS BAD, AND A FEW EVEN OPINED THAT IT IS AN UGLY DEAL

A few deal followers argue that this is more than an airline sponsorship gone wrong, it’s a strategic branding failure.
They also argue that the recently announced of National Negotiations Team could have guaranteed a better deal with a better Return on Investment - RoI.
More significantly, good governance principles call for transparency, especially in a deal that is about one of the most followed topics by the public- sports, and football.
Even though the deal partners held a press conference a number of points are still unclear: What’s the RoI?
How will the players promote Oman as a brand? What is the visibility and significance of having staff present at the matches from a strategic perspective? And if other benefits were discussed can the deal be re-negotiated?
I am amazed at how much joy and excitement our new generations still feel about this global sport football. In every house in Oman and around the world, there’s at least one kid who not only enjoyed watching the world cup but also knows more about the players and data more than the sports channels.
I pray that such coming significant national deals will be more successful in gaining unified public support, enough to release our Serotonin and stabilise our positive mood.

Sudan civil servants go hungry as war claims livelihoods

Sudanese public school teacher Imad Mohammed had worked for 32 years when war broke out almost three months ago, tearing his country apart and his finances to shreds. “We only eat one meal a day now,” he said about his family of five.
“And we don’t know how long this will go on,” said the teacher from Al Jazirah state, which has been spared the brutal fighting but has still suffered dire shortages.
Like other civil servants, Mohammed has gone without a salary since the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces took up arms against each other. When the first blasts shook Khartoum on April 15, banks there shuttered their doors, and branches nationwide have since struggled to provide services because they are cut off from headquarters in the capital.
Since then, the only government salaries that have been paid are the army’s.
Deprived of their pay and annual holiday bonuses for Eid Al Fitr in April and Eid Al Adha in June, around one million desperate public sector workers have been forced to survive on their savings or on social aid networks.
“What teachers and their families are going through, in both the public and private sectors, is catastrophic,” said Ammar Youssef, head of the Sudanese Teachers Committee.
The livelihood losses and descent into poverty have compounded the horrors of the war, which has already killed around 3,000 people and displaced three million.
More than 1.5 million people have fled from Khartoum alone, using whatever money they had when the fighting started, to escape the air strikes, artillery fire and street fighting that have turned the capital into a war zone.
But some who were unlucky enough to have had little or no savings they could access, have been left stranded, unable to pay for expensive transport as fuel prices have surged 20-fold.
“Not only are they struggling to feed their families even once a day, but they also can’t afford to take their families to safety, away from the combat zones,” Youssef said. “State education alone employs over 300,000 people, who were already underpaid before the war,” he said, adding that the education ministry has been unreachable since the war began. “Those who aren’t killed by a bullet will die of hunger.” — AFP



Patricia Mazzei
The writer is the Miami bureau chief for The New York Times

‘FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ORIGINALLY FROM TROPICAL COUNTRIES, THEY GROW UP WITH MANGOES, A TROPICAL FRUIT CROP. SO THERE’S A CONNECTION WITH MANGOES FROM THEIR CHILDHOOD’

“For people who are originally from tropical countries — say, Southeast Asia, or the Caribbean, or Latin America — they grow up with mangoes,” said Jonathan H Crane, a tropical fruit crop specialist at the University of Florida’s tropical research and education centre

EDITORIAL					
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A mango tree at the University of Florida's tropical research and education centre in Homestead.

in Homestead, south of Miami. “So there’s a connection with mangoes from their childhood.”
I grew up with mangoes in Venezuela but did not fully appreciate their succulence until I moved to Miami two decades ago. Without a yard of my own, I trawl the suburbs for fruit residents put out for sale, saving some for my mother’s mango ceviche.
A friend hosts an annual mango daiquiri party that has become one of my favourite ways to celebrate the start of summer. Inevitably, it rains.
Most everyone has mango stories. Stern likes to eat them over the sink, juice dribbling down his chin. Xavier Murphy, who is from Jamaica, has gone through such lengths to try to protect his East Indian mango tree from hungry wildlife that one year, he used his children’s life-size cutout of a Jonas brother as a scarecrow. (It worked, for a while.)
Natalia Martinez-Kalinina, who was born in Cuba and raised in Mexico, bakes mango pies in honor of her grandmother, who would give away buckets full of mangoes every summer in Cuba.
“It’s become this really lovely communal exchange,” Martinez-Kalinina said. “People text me and say, ‘I have mangoes — do you need more for mango pie?’”
Mangoes originated in Southeast Asia and were spread by colonists across the globe — including, in the mid-19th century, to South Florida, where wealthy landowners cultivated them as a potential moneymaking crop. But workers from the Bahamas and Cuba also brought seeds in their pockets because the fruit reminded them of home, said Timothy P. Watson, an English professor at the University of Miami who is working on a book about the history of mangoes in Florida.
“They literally mix here in Miami,” he said of the varieties from around the world. “The combination produces mango culture, which is now one of the very few things that joins people together in this incredibly fractured metropolitan area. It’s a complicated story — and a bitter story, in many ways.” — **The New York Times**

Breaking through to a better future

It was in 2016 that the United Nations announced 17 sustainable development goals accompanied by 169 targets. Each goal matters on its own and they all interconnect, incorporating social, economic and environmental sustainability.

According to a UN report, of the approximately 140 targets, half of them show moderate or severe deviations from the desired trajectory. Furthermore, more than 30 per cent of these targets have experienced no progress or, even worse, regression below the 2015 baseline.

Let's start with something that's working very well.

Progress in some areas illustrates the potential for further advances. The share of the global population's access to electricity increased from 87 per cent in 2015 to 91 per cent in 2021, with close to 800 million additional people connected.

Additionally, the number of people using the Internet has grown by 65 per cent since 2015, reaching 5.3 billion people of the world's population in 2022.

The latest UN report shows that 133 countries, by 2021, had met the target on under-5 mortality, and an additional 13 are expected to do so by 2030. Despite the global manufacturing growth slowdown, medium-high- and high-technology industries demonstrated robust growth rates.

Regarding funding, donors including governments and charity organisations have made strong commitments to aid and other forms of support for the poorest, using the goals to guide where they spend the money.

France, the Netherlands, the United States and China have recently increased their funding for health in low-income countries. The Gates Foundation said it would increase its total giving by 50 per cent to \$9 billion a year by 2026. This will be mainly for health and development.

Although we have made progress in some of the targets since the



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THE COVID-19 CRISIS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICTS IN SOME COUNTRIES HAVE ALL CREATED SPIN-OFF IMPACTS AND HAMPERED THE PROGRESS TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

declaration of the goals, there is still more to be done. We are far away from where we should be. The Covid-19 crisis, climate change and conflicts in some countries have all created spin-off impacts and hampered the progress towards the goals.

This means the stakes are huge as only seven years remain for the implementation of the goals. As such a fundamental shift is needed mainly in commitment, solidarity, financing and action.

Looking at the events of the past three years, trust in public institutions has declined. Changes in the world of work, globalisation and technological breakthroughs – which raise aspirations, but also fear – left many people in a perilous position.

Interestingly, even after record commitments from donors, one report recently found that the funding for the goals will be short of at least \$10 to \$15 trillion each year for the rest of this decade.

The world's poorest and most vulnerable are experiencing the worst effects of these unprecedented global challenges!

"If present trends persist, by 2030, a staggering 575 million people will remain trapped in extreme poverty and an estimated 84 million children and young people will still be out of school," the report warns.

"Failure to redouble global efforts to achieve the goals – the promise of a better world for all – may fuel greater political instability, upend economies and lead to irreversible damage to the natural environment," a special edition of the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 warns.

Having so many targets in the goals wouldn't necessarily be an issue if the world step up through the combination of collective action and strong political will, and the effective use of available technologies, resources and knowledge.

This will ultimately lift hundreds of millions out of poverty, improve gender equality, put the world on a low-emissions pathway and secure human rights for all.

SUN MELONS STACKED



A man arranges sun melons atop a vehicle, at a whole sale fruit market in Peshawar, Pakistan. - Reuters

Meet the women pioneers creating green jobs in Arab countries

As the co-founder and CEO of a green tech company based in Morocco, Salma Bougarrani said she often finds herself the only woman in the room.

"This isn't very encouraging. You feel like you're an extraterrestrial," said Bougarrani, 34, whose Green Watech company specialises in using energy efficient techniques to cleanse wastewater as worsening droughts deplete supplies.

Of the 20 firms selected by a business incubator in the North African country last year, Bougarrani said hers was the only one led by a woman, reflecting women's limited participation in the job market - especially in leadership roles.

Only 19 per cent of women in Arab countries are part of the labour force - the world's lowest rate and far below the global average of 48 per cent, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In green jobs, that figure appears to be even lower.

ILO projections suggest that of the 400,000 jobs that could be created for Arab youth as a result of green policy measures less than 10 per cent would be occupied by women, "reflecting the persistent gender inequalities that



Nazih Osseiran

The writer is the Middle East Correspondent at the Thomson Reuters Foundation

LESS THAN 20 PER CENT OF WOMEN IN THE ARAB WORLD HAVE A PAID JOB AND AS THE GREEN ECONOMY GROWS, WOMEN SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES, SECURING CLIENTS AND INVESTMENT AMONG THE HURDLES

hamper the region's progress", the report said.

Arab women entrepreneurs say gender bias also makes it harder for them to attract investment from regional investors.

In the first nine months of 2022, women-founded businesses in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) received just 2 per cent of the \$2.4 billion in investment channelled into nearly 500 start-ups, according to a report by Wamda, which advises and invests in regional start-ups.

More than half of 125 female founders surveyed by Wamda said investors based in the MENA region were less likely to invest in women-led startups compared with international investors.

Almost 66 per cent of the founders said securing investment was the biggest obstacle they faced.

"When you get bigger you have to raise money," Bougarrani said, adding that women entrepreneurs are more likely to be rejected when they approach potential investors for financing.

"They think women have more... responsibilities: she will have to take care of children so she won't be available for work. So, they will prefer... to invest in men,"

she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender bias can make it harder to find clients, too, said Basima Abdulrahman, 37, founder and CEO of KESK, which calls itself the "first Iraqi Greentech company".

Frustrated that her professional life was not focused on fighting climate change, Abdulrahman quit her job as a structural engineer with the United Nations and launched KESK.

The company provides solar-

powered air conditioning units. They also provide engineering services and equip Iraqi business with solar energy systems.

Despite growing demand for such equipment in a country with strong solar power potential, Abdulrahman said it had taken her nine months to land her first client.

Convincing buyers and investors is a constant battle, she said.

"When I go into a meeting and I know there's a 99-per cent chance that they'll say 'no' and a 1-per

cent chance they'll say 'yes', I'm going to focus on how to convert that 1 per cent to a 100-per cent," she said.

Besides changing traditional ideas about women's role, numerous practical hurdles must be overcome for women to have a bigger presence in the labour market - from adequate childcare to parental leave, said feminist researcher Farah Daibes.

A commitment to a more equitable distribution of senior positions among men and women should also include "committing to ending all forms of discrimination and harassment in the work place", said Daibes, who works at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a German political foundation.

MOROCCAN DROUGHT

Bougarrani's business plan started off as a childhood dream: she wanted to safely swim in the river that ran through her grandfather's village of Ait Bouguemez in the Atlas Mountains south of Marrakech.

Growing up, many of the kids around her would get sick with fever and diarrhoea after mistakenly drinking while swimming in the waterway.

— The Thomson Reuters Foundation



Basima Abdulrahman, founder and CEO of Kesk, poses in front of a solar panel in this undated handout. - Thomson Reuters Foundation

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Jaalan Bani Bu Ali tops traditional horse sports competition

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Oman Equestrian Federation announced the results of the traditional horse sports competition for the 2022/2023 season, where Jaalan Bani Bu Ali snatched the title among number of wilayats from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

These governorates competed to hold this competition through organised and implemented the Oman Equestrian's rules in traditional competition.

The results of the competition were close in terms of points, as the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali won the first place, while the Wilayat of Bahla achieved the runner-up position, and the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi came in the third place.

These competitions have received wide public attention, and such competitions are an opportunity to introduce them in importance and wide spread, in addition to being one of the most important sports activities practiced by many of Omani.

This is what distinguishes it from other countries interested in horses, as unique in its own way in the way performs since ancient times, as it is one of the immortal heritages that characterises the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to registering horses in the name of the Sultanate of Oman in the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of human in Unesco since 2018.

On the other side Oman Equestrian Federation(OEF) all set to organise the endurance competition in Dhofar Governorate during khareef season. recently OEF in cooperation with the Dhofar Equestrian Committee qualified 18 horses for endurance competition, at Khor Al Dahariz



KHALID ALHADHRAMI



Beach in Salalah.

The qualified race was included one stage for a distance of 40 km, in the presence of Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, Secretary-General of the Federation. Where 18 horses were passed successful and 4 horses were excluded from the race for not passing the veterinary examination.

Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, Secretary-General of the Oman Equestrian Federation, said "The qualifying race is held in cooperation with the Dhofar Equestrian Committee, where great efforts have been made by the Oman Equestrian Federation to prepare the tracks for the qualifying race, and there is a great awakening of citizens who own horses, trainers and riders to deal with horses to pass this race".

OOC kicks off advanced sports management diploma programme

MUSCAT: The 5th semester of Sports Management Diploma programme launched on Thursday, organised by Oman Olympic Committee, represented by Oman Olympic Academy in cooperation with the International Olympic Solidarity.

the fifth chapter of the programme that titled of 'marketing field management', in the sports institution, in line with the international strategy of institutions and the needs of partners and chiefs, which will conclude on Thursday.

The 5th chapter is presented by the lecturer, Jaber bin Mohammed al Shabibi, where the chapter discusses the management of effective communication areas, ways to improve the quality of services, marketing from a strategic perspective, and an analysis of the relevance of the institution's services in relation to the requirements of partners,



in addition to analysing the sponsorship programme for sports institutions.

The Sports Management Diploma Programme is one of the most important programmes organised by Oman Olympic Academy for this year, it contains modern skills and concepts for those targeted in sports

institutions, which is the latest book in the field of sports and submitted by the Olympic Solidarity. The last chapter is devoted to presenting the studies and final projects of the participants and evaluating the general return of this programme. The International Olympic Committee grants a diploma in the Advanced Sports Management

Programme after the study submitted by each student fulfils the conditions for submission and evaluation by the programme director.

With regard to the contents of the programme, each of the chapters covers an important aspect of management and includes a number of secondary parts and illustrative tables supported by graphs. Each of the six chapters is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation of a specific applied study that explains to the participants how the Olympic Sports Foundation deals with the topics that have been discussed. As well as, introducing it during the semester, whether in the administrative, financial, marketing, strategic or human resources fields. The course also provides the highest level of development for participants who work in the sports and Olympic administrative fields in general.

Oman cricket all set for Asian Cricket Council



MUSCAT: Following a top-six place in the recently concluded ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe, (ACC) Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka during July 13 to 23.

The Oman A squad reached Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Monday evening for the fifth edition of the eight-nation continental tournament.

The tournament will feature U23 sides of defending champions Pakistan A alongside four other full member ACC nations - India, Bangladesh, hosts Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. They will be joined by the top-three teams from the inaugural edition of the ACC Men's Premier Cup [Nepal, UAE and Oman], which was held in Nepal in April-May 2023.

Oman chief coach Duleep Mendis announced the 15-member squad for the Emerging Teams Asia Cup and retained ten of the players that played in Zimbabwe while picking three new faces among the five called up. Aqib Ilyas, who led Oman in the final two Super Six matches in the Qualifier, has been retained skipper of the Oman A side.

All-rounder Rafiullah, who was a member of the provisional squad of 17 for the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier before being dropped, has been recalled. The 26-year-old has already represented the national team in T20Is. Another player recalled into the team is 24-year-old all-rounder Wasim Ali, who made his ODI debut for Oman against Namibia in March 2022.

The three new faces are 34-year-old wicketkeeper Abdul Rauf, 30-year-old batter Shubo Pal and 25-year-old pacer Muhammad Bilal Shah.

Regular skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, who is recovering from a hamstring injury that kept him out of the last two matches at the Qualifier has been rested along with pacer Bilal Khan, all-rounder Sandeep Goud, wicketkeeper Naseem Khushi and experienced all-rounder Mohammed Nadeem. All five were part of the team that returned from Zimbabwe recently.

Mendis said: "This is another great opportunity for our players to showcase their talent at a big stage. It will be a good test to play against A teams from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan."

Oman A are clubbed in Group A with hosts Sri Lanka A, Afghanistan A and Bangladesh A. Group B comprises Pakistan A, India A, Nepal and UAE A.

Oman A begin their campaign



with a match against Afghanistan A on July 13 and then meet Bangladesh A two days later on July 15. They conclude their group engagements with a match against the hosts Sri Lanka A on July 18.

In the ACC Premier Cup that was held in April-May, Nepal emerged champions with a win over the UAE.

Oman progressed to the ACC Emerging Teams Cup at the expense of Kuwait as the third-place play-off in Kathmandu was washed out early in the Omani chase. As the higher seeds ahead of the tournament, Oman were awarded the third spot for the ACC's second-tier tournament.

Oman had looked to be well on course for victory before rains came. Jay Odedra claimed 5-14 as Kuwait were spun out for just 130 before Kashyap Prajapati and Jatinder Singh's unbroken 41-run opening stand in reply was cut short by the elements.

Oman squad: Aqib Ilyas (captain), Jatinder Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Suraj Kumar (wicketkeeper), Jay Odedra, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Samay Shrivastav, Wasim Ali, Rafiullah, Abdul Rauf (wk), Shubo Pal, Muhammad Bilal Shah.

Officials: Head Coach: Duleep Mendis, assistant coach: Evert Laubscher, coach co-ordinator: Mazher Saleem Khan, analyst: Zeeshan Siddiqui, physio : Sean Nowak.

Oman athletes hope podium finish at Asian Athletics

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Oman athletes team will begin their actions on Wednesday at the 25th edition of 2023 Asian Athletics Championship. The Asia's biggest track and field meet will held in July 12 to 16 in Thailand, Bangkok city.

The national athletes will chase up for registering some advanced results in the Asian showpiece championship after they excelled in the previous West Asian, Arabian Athletics Championship and Arabian Sports Games in Algeria in the past few months. They are expected to compete in 100 metre race for men and women, 200 metre race for men and women, 4x100 metre relay and high jump competitions.

Oman's delegation arrived to Thailand recently and the athletes began their warm up sessions



ahead of the official competitions start. The athletes are all set to vie on the titles of the Asian Championship for seniors which is expected to feature strong

competitions. The national athletes team impressed in their latest participation at the Arabian Sports Games which concluded

recently in Algeria. The Omani athletes captured six medals including two gold, one silver and three bronze. Fatik Abdulghafoor claimed the first gold for

Oman in the Men's high jump competition after he registered a jump with a mark of 2.16 metres. Sprinter Barakat al Harthy clinched bronze in the men's

100 metre competition after he clocked 10:37 seconds. Long jumper Salim al Yarubi bagged the bronze as he registered a jump of 15.41 metre. Oman's relay team comprising Rashid al Asmi, Barakat al Harthy, Ali al Balushi and Mohammed al Saadi clinched the gold medal in the 4x100m competition after they registered a timing of 39:70 seconds. Sprinter Mohammed al Saadi captured silver medal in the Men's 200 meter race.

Oman's star sprinter Barakat al Harthy is among the squad in the top Asian event beside Oman's fastest woman sprinter Mazoon al Alawi who attended in the last Olympic Games. The delegation comprised also from: the youngest runner, Ali bin Anwar al Balushi, long jumper Salim al Yarubi beside other athletes including: Moahammed al Saadi, Rashid al Asmi, Khalid al Ghilani and Mohammed al Mabsali.

Vondrousova reaches semis after roller-coaster clash with Pegula

LONDON: Marketa Vondrousova reached the semi-finals of Wimbledon with a roller-coaster 6-4 2-6 6-4 win over American Jessica Pegula in the last eight on Tuesday.

The Czech came through a topsy-turvy encounter on Court One against the fourth seed to book her place in the last four against either world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland or Ukraine's Elina Svitolina.

The first set was a whirlwind with five breaks of serve in nine games, the momentum swinging wildly while many spectators were still taking their seats.

However, it was 24-year-old Vondrousova who secured the crucial break at 4-4 when a baseline rally ended with Pegula sending a backhand long.

The unseeded Czech brought up set point with an ace and duly held to love as she eyed a first Grand Slam semi-final since her runner-up finish at the French Open in 2019.

The twists and turns kept coming, though, as Pegula began finding her range in the second set. She began approaching the net more often to great success, breaking her left-handed opponent early en route to taking a 4-1 lead.

The American broke again at 5-2 with an excellent low volley to level the match.

In the decider, momentum looked to be staying with the 29-year-old as she saved three break points in the first three games and then broke Vondrousova by forcing her long.

But there was still time for one final twist. The roof was closed, as rain was expected, and when play resumed Vondrousva broke back twice more, as well as breaking her opponent's resistance from the baseline in a terrific game to lead 5-4.

She served out the match to book her semi-final spot, becoming the third woman in the Open era to reach the Wimbledon last four after defeating four seeded opponents - after Zheng Jie in 2008 and Barbora Strycova in 2019.

— AFP



Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova celebrates winning her quarter final match against Jessica Pegula of the US. — Reuters



Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts during her quarter final match against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina. — Reuters

Liton, Shoriful help Bangladesh avoid Afghanistan whitewash

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Liton Das top-scored with 53 not out as Bangladesh defeated Afghanistan by seven wickets to avoid a series whitewash in Tuesday's third and final one-day international in Chittagong.

The hosts raced to 129-3 in 23.3 overs after Shoriful Islam's career best 4-21 helped them bowl out Afghanistan for 126 in 45.2 overs.

Tail-ender Azmatullah Omarzai offered some late resistance for Afghanistan to top-score with 56, his maiden ODI fifty.

Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi gave Afghanistan a glimmer of hope, bowling out Naim Sheikh for a duck and Najmul Hossain for 11.

Liton and Shakib Al Hasan put on 61 runs for the third wicket to steady the innings and bring Bangladesh back into control.

Shakib fell to Mohammad Nabi after making a run-a-ball 39, but Liton, who struck three fours and two sixes in his 60-ball innings, took Bangladesh home.

Young Towhid Hridoy hit the winning boundary off Zia-ur-Rehman to stay unbeaten on 22.

The tourists earlier won the toss and elected to bat first, but never managed to get their innings going.

Shoriful struck early after taking the field for the first time this series, dismissing Ibrahim Zadran for one and Rahmat Shah for a duck in the third over.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who smashed a career-best 145 in the previous match, saw one catch land in no man's land but soon top-edged Taskin Ahmed to depart for six.

Shoriful compounded Afghanistan's woes by trapping Nabi leg-before to leave the tourists teetering at 15-4 inside nine overs.

Hashmatullah Shahidi and Najibullah Zadran stemmed the rot, but Shakib sent back the latter for 10 to stop their partnership from developing.

Shahidi dragged one off Tajjul Islam onto his stumps



Afghanistan are already only the second team to win an ODI series in Bangladesh in the past 7 years, with world champions England being the other. Victory in the match would have made them the first side to win all three matches of an ODI series in Bangladesh since Sri Lanka in 2014

to end his patient knock of 22 from 54 balls. Omarzai helped Afghanistan past the 100-run

mark after the quick departure of debutants Abdul Rahman (four) and Zia (five).

He was the last man dismissed, holding out a catch to Naim Sheikh at long-off off Taskin, who claimed 2-23.

Afghanistan are already only the second team to win an ODI series in Bangladesh in the past seven years, with world champions England being the other.

Victory in the match would have made them the first side to win all three matches of an ODI series in Bangladesh since Sri Lanka in 2014.

Following the ODI series are two T20s in Bangladesh's northeastern city of Sylhet on July 14 and 16. — AFP

BILBAO CLAIMS EMOTIONAL TOUR STAGE WIN AFTER MADER’S DEATH

ISSOIRE, FRANCE: Pello Bilbao claimed a tear-jerking victory as he prevailed in the 10th stage of the Tour de France on Tuesday, less than a month after his Bahrain-Victorious team mate Gino Mader died following a crash in Switzerland.

Bilbao outsprinted breakaway companions Georg Zimmermann of Germany and Australian Ben O'Connor, who were second and third respectively.

Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard of Denmark retained the overall leader's jersey as Bilbao moved up to fifth overall from 11th, giving Spain their first stage win on the Tour since Omar Fraile in 2018.

The 33-year-old Basque rider, who will retire at the end of the season, is donating one euro (\$1.10) to an association helping replant in local deforested areas for every rider finishing a Tour stage behind him - following an initiative by Mader before he died after crashing in a descent at the Tour de France on June 16.

“It’s an incredible feeling. The longer you wait for such a moment the sweeter it is when it happens,” said Bilbao.

“I had to win for Gino. I wanted to wait for the biggest moment to win for him. When I crossed the line it was an incredible explosion of feelings.

“It’s such a special Tour for me with the race having starting from home (in Bilbao),” the Guernica-born rider said.

“Usually I’m quite cold blooded but today I was very distracted, there was so much at stake.”

The stage got off to an explosive start with Tadej Pogacar, closely followed by Vingegaard, on the attack as he kept his rival on his toes while the peloton blew up.

Pogacar’s UAE Emirates team mate Adam Yates and his twin brother Simon, fifth and sixth overall respectively, were dropped, as well as fellow top-10 members David Gaudu and Romain Bardet of France.

They hovered two minutes behind the main bunch but as Gaudu’s Groupama-FDJ pulled and the peloton’s pace eased up, the junction was made before the Col de la Croix Saint Robert (6 km at 6.3 per cent).

A seven-man breakaway, featuring Bilbao, eventually took shape and they were joined by a group of seven, among which was former world champion Julian Alaphilippe, 81 km into the stage.

In the Cote de Saint Victor la Riviere, Esteban Chaves went solo but was quickly reined in with the peloton controlling the gap.

In the Cote de la Chapelle Marcousse (6.5 km at 5.6 per cent), Krists Neilands attacked as the breakaway group was split into three and the Latvian rider had a 20-second advantage 13 kilometres from the finish as temperatures reached 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 Fahrenheit) in Issoire.

Neilands was, however, caught with 3.2 km left and Bilbao was the smartest of a group of six to win the final sprint. (\$1 = 0.9099 euros).

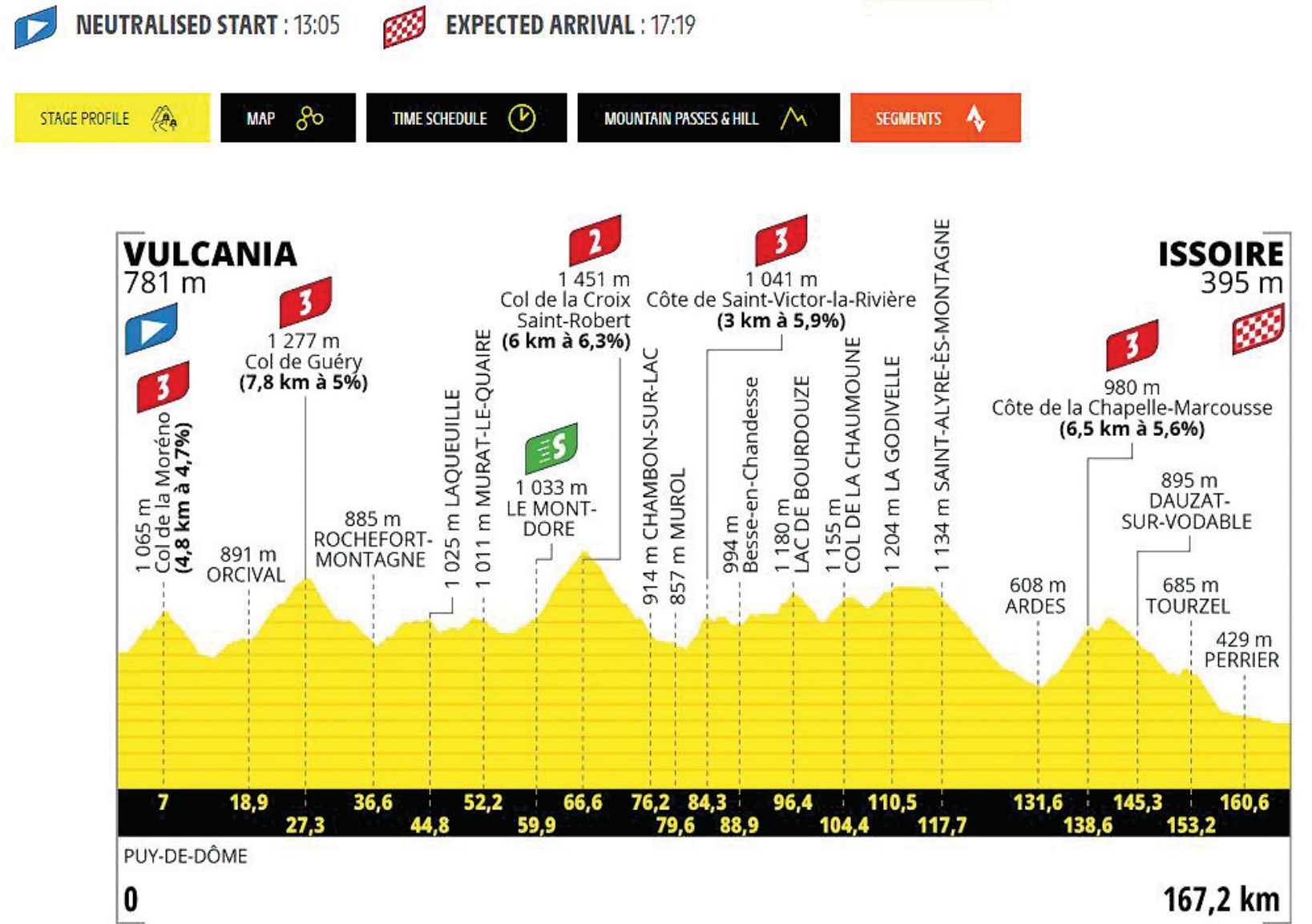
— AFP

It’s an incredible feeling. The longer you wait for such a moment the sweeter it is when it happens. I had to win for Gino. I wanted to wait for the biggest moment to win for him. When I crossed the line it was an incredible explosion of feelings

PELLO BILBAO
Spanish cyclist



Victorious’ Spanish rider Pello Bilbao cycles to the finish line to win the 10th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 167,5 km between Vulcania and Issoire, in the Massif Central highlands in central France, on Tuesday. – AFP



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Oman to explore investment opportunities in Syria

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

The Omani Minister of Economy, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri expressed the readiness of the Sultanate of Oman to address any potential challenges that might hinder the course of the ‘economic, investment and trade cooperation’ between Oman and Syria during a forum to explore economic potential between the two nations.

The Omani-Syrian Business Forum took place yesterday and was organised by the Omani Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

In his keynote address, Al Saqri highlighted the significant role the private sector plays in strengthening bilateral economic relations. “The Omani-Syrian economic partnership has significant potential, as private sector companies and business relationships are key drivers for enhancing economic relations between the two countries.

The development of these



relations is achieved through strengthening ties between private sector institutions in various investment projects and promising strategic sectors in both countries.”

He added: “There is no doubt that the convening of the Omani-Syrian Business Forum will provide numerous economic opportunities between the Sultanate of Oman

and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as stimulate cooperation between the two countries and take advantage of the available investment potential.”

Syrian Economy and Foreign Trade Minister, Mohammad Samer al Khalil, drew on the common national goals between the two nations in his address.

“One of the key national priorities in post-war Syria is achieving a developed economy that supports comprehensive and balanced development through sustainable growth rates and employment.

It also aims to achieve social justice within a broad participatory framework that includes all sectors

and segments of society. This is based on a diverse productive base that keeps pace with technological and knowledge advancements. It is worth noting that these national priorities are also central to the 2040 plan of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman, which focuses on various foundations, including economic development and efficient resource utilisation.”

Al Khalil added: “It is important to emphasise that the outcomes of our meeting should align with the national priorities of both countries. There are ample investment opportunities based on rich and diverse integration, while directing business activities to serve investment goals and enhance the role of the private sector in development through providing it with a leading role.”

“Therefore, we invite the Omani private sector to invest in Syria, whether through establishing direct projects to benefit from the advantages provided by the special investment laws, such as the Investment Law 18/2021,

which is one of the most important investment laws in the region, offering tax, customs, security, and procedural incentives.

Alternatively, investment can be made through establishing investment companies to achieve partnerships and synergies in two countries that possess the foundations and elements of integration.”

In 2021, the Syrian Government introduced a new investment law (18/2021) which offers various incentives for foreign investors. This includes tax exemptions, customs duty exemptions, and income tax incentives.

According to the Director General of the Syrian Investment Agency (SIA), Madian Diab, the agency identified over 60 investment opportunities across ten industries.

Last year, the Syrian-Omani Business Council was established to strengthen the private sector’s role in developing economic relations between Syria and the Sultanate of Oman.”

Vision to stimulate Al Dhahirah’s economic growth outlined



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

In a key meeting held on Monday morning, Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, engaged with a technical delegation from the National Employment Programme (NEP).

The purpose of the gathering was to devise sustainable practical solutions to enhance the qualifications and training of job seekers, as well as create employment opportunities across all sectors within the governorate.

The discussion further underscored the importance of bolstering commercial activities, development projects, small and medium-sized enterprises, self-employed individuals, and business leaders.

The technical delegation delivered a presentation, showcasing the programme’s notable projects, initiatives, and programmes. Key highlights included comprehensive value chain analyses within

THE DISCUSSION UNDERScored THE IMPORTANCE OF BOLSTERING COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES, DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES, SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS, AND BUSINESS LEADERS.

major sectors, amplifying the contribution of local added value, developing a robust self-employment support package, establishing synergies between education and the labour market, localisation efforts, management of labour market data, provision of vocational guidance services, efficient governance of economic sectors, and nurturing business prospects. The presentation also unveiled key demographic data, population distribution rates, and the governorate’s most vital sectors for development, economics, and tourism.

The meeting culminated in the signing of a cooperation programme between the governorate and the National Employment Programme.

TURN TO P14

Subsea power cable to link Masirah Island with Oman’s national grid

Integrated system: 33 km undersea cable, spanning the Masirah channel, is the first large-scale transmission project of its kind in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 11

In line with its long-term strategy to build a unified national grid that provides reliable and cost-competitive electricity to consumers, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) plans to connect Masirah Island off Oman’s eastern seaboard to its transmission system via a subsea power cable – a first such large-scale undertaking of this kind.

The cable – spanning a total distance of 33 kilometres under the Masirah Channel – is proposed to extend from a 132 kV overhead transmission running 60 kilometres from Mahout on the mainland all the way to the coast.

When operational by around late 2026, the project will help end Masirah Island’s long-standing dependence of diesel-powered electricity generation and enable supplies from a national grid that is being increasingly served by solar and wind-based power generation.

“The project, managed by the



Oman Electricity Transmission Company, aims to develop the island, improve the efficiency and integration of the national electricity transmission network, reduce fossil fuel (diesel) consumption, which will result in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the cost of energy production,” said the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in its newly published Annual Report for 2022.

A network of diesel-powered plants operated by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) – part of Nama Group – currently meets the island’s energy needs. But with parts of the island designated for significant infrastructure, commercial, economic, fisheries and tourism development, electricity demand growth is

anticipated to climb sharply in the coming years.

OETC, majority owned by Nama Group, has also been making substantial investments in expanding its two standalone transmission systems in the north and south of the country into one interconnected national grid.

Phase 1 of the 400 kV interconnection project (known as ‘Rabt’) has enabled the expansion of the Main Interconnection System (MIS) not only southeastwards towards Duqm (and eventually south to Dhofar), but also eastwards towards Mahout.

In the process, massive new tracts of desert land, suitable for renewable and green energy development, have been opened up for potential investment.

The presence of transmission

lines will enable the evacuation of green electricity from future projects set up in these parts.

Significantly, the subsea cable connection to Masirah Island is part of a new initiative by OETC to supply relatively small loads to remote areas falling within Tanweer’s auspices.

It centres on the implementation of a High Voltage Tapping Scheme involving 400 kV lines – a project slated for completion by Q2 2025.

Besides Masirah Island, coverage from the national grid will also be extended to Khuwaimah, Shahba Asaib, Mudhai, and Al Mazyunah by Q4 2026, according to OETC.

“These proposed extensions will enhance efficiency and reduce the cost of energy by displacing the existing diesel generation,” OETC added.

Fitch affirms OQ’s IDR at ‘BB’; outlook positive

MUSCAT: International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has affirmed Omani state-owned integrated energy group OQ’ Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at ‘BB’ with Positive Outlook.

“OQ’s IDR is constrained by that of Oman (BB/Positive) as underlined by strong links between OQ and its ultimate sole shareholder, the Omani state, in line with Fitch’s Government-Related Entities and Parent and Subsidiary Linkage Rating Criteria. OQ is ultimately fully owned by the state via Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and was established to strengthen and centralise Oman’s oil and gas industry,” said Fitch in a press statement.

OQ’s consolidated revenue accounted for 26 per cent of



Oman’s 2021 GDP, said Fitch.

OQ is the main downstream company owning all domestic refining assets producing transport fuels for the Omani market and is tasked with increasing the value per barrel of extracted oil by further expanding refining and petrochemical assets.

It is also the exclusive operator of Oman’s domestic natural gas transportation infrastructure.

In 2022 OQ was appointed the national champion for clean energy and green hydrogen by the government and will be the main developer of Oman’s alternative energy projects.

Fitch credited OQ with proactively managing its balance sheet using strong cash flow generation and proceeds from asset sales to prepay debt.

It repaid \$3.1 billion of debt in 2022 and its total reported debt stood at \$10.6 billion at end-2022, which is expected further decline to around \$8.2 billion by end-2023 and to \$5.8 billion by 2025, said Fitch.

The strength of the financial profile is further supported by OQ’s newly established financial policy of modest dividend payments. OQ generated over \$5 billion of Fitch-defined EBITDA in 2022, from upstream production of 216kboepd, and refining capacity of 308kbbld.

The latter will increase this year by a net 115kbbld as the Duqm Refinery JV comes online in 4Q23. Its large Liwa Plastics project is now also completed and has reached run-rate levels of utilisation, it added.

BankDhofar’s Al Riadah gives premium banking experience to customers

MUSCAT: Al Riadah Priority Banking, offered by BankDhofar, is a premium banking service tailored to the financial needs and goals of affluent individuals. It provides personalised services and exclusive benefits to enhance our affluent customer’s banking experience.

The key advantage of the Al Riadah programme is its customer centric beyond banking service. Apart from a dedicated Relationship Manager, customers benefit from preferential rates and priority processing of their day-to-day banking transactions across BankDhofar’s growing distribution network.

Customers can also benefit from a dedicated Al Riadah priority banking branch at the Royal Opera and take advantage of Locker Service for safekeeping their valuable items.

In addition to personalised financial solutions, Al Riadah members enjoy a range of exclusive privileges and benefits. These include preferential interest rates on deposits and loans, premium credit cards with enhanced features and rewards, access to exclusive lounges



at select airports, and special discounts and offers from partner merchants.

Al Riadah emphasises convenience and accessibility. Members can access their accounts and conduct various banking transactions anytime, anywhere through a dedicated online banking platform and a feature-rich mobile banking app.

These digital channels offer a seamless and secure banking experience, empowering members to effortlessly manage their finances.

Hind al Sabbagh, AGM & Head of Priority Banking at BankDhofar, stated, “Al Riadah is an extension of the bank’s

commitment to delivering exceptional banking services and building lasting relationships with its customers. By combining personalised financial solutions, priority services, and exclusive privileges, we aim to exceed the expectations of our affluent clientele and provide them with an unmatched banking experience.”

BankDhofar reaffirms its dedication to exceptional banking services through the introduction of the Al Riadah Referral Scheme.

The Al Riadah Referral Scheme, valid until the end of March 2024, is exclusively available to existing Al Riadah Priority Banking customers.

Bank Muscat holds financial and retail wealth planning event for customers

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised special meetings for customers in the wilayats of Al Musannah and Suhar titled “Financial and Retail Wealth Planning”.

These events come in translation of the bank’s customer-centric vision and to strengthen relationship and partnership ties with the bank’s valued customers from various governorates.

It also came as a part of a series of meetings organised recently by the bank in a number of wilayats with the aim of introducing customers to various updates developments related to the distinctive and exclusive benefits and offers offered by the bank.

In his opening speech, Saleh Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager — Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased today to meet with our valued customers in Al Batinah North and South governorates and to connect with them aiming to exchange views and ideas that will contribute to the development of banking services and facilities provided to suit their aspirations.



Over the past years, the bank has been keen to provide services up to latest modern developments in the sector by focusing on innovation and adapting to accelerated changes. The bank will to continue to provide the best banking services, solutions, offers and benefits that provide added value to customers. I would like to extend thanks and gratitude to all the bank customers for their trust and constant support”.

Expressing her happiness with this ongoing partnership between the bank and customers, Khadijah bint Khalfan al Rashdiyah, Head of Asalah Priority Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “Such events are important to meet with our customers. They represent a

motivation for us to continue hard work and maintain the bank’s leading role in the sector. I would like to thank our valued customers for their valuable participation to make the bank’s various events and activities a success”.

These events are an opportunity to introduce customers to the wide range of services provided by the bank, which have been developed to achieve the bank’s goals in terms of enhancing financial inclusion, like “Baituna” financing option for house loans and “Sayyarati” for car loans. It is a chance as well to highlight the advantages of personal financing and exclusive offers offered by the bank to Asalah and Al Jawhar customers.

Isuzu truck owners toast iconic brand’s continuing success at customer meet

MUSCAT: Trucking operators and retail distributors, united by their long-standing affinity with Isuzu trucks, attended a celebratory get-together hosted by OTE Group, exclusive distributors of the globally iconic truck brand in the Sultanate of Oman.

Gathering on the lawns of Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel recently, the guests toasted their ongoing association with an automotive brand that remains a cornerstone of their operational success and business growth.

As owners and operators of goods transportation and retail distribution companies, they have come to rely on their Isuzu trucks, universally acclaimed for their dependability, versatility and fuel efficiency, to meet demanding delivery and distribution schedules



on behalf of their clients.

The outdoor venue, adorned with the striking brand colours of the Isuzu label, made for a perfect setting as the roughly 100-plus patrons shared their personal experiences about the distinctive value that ownership of Isuzu trucks brings to their

respective businesses. They also engaged with members of OTE Group’s executive team who were in attendance as well.

Earlier, the formal part of the event began with brief welcome remarks by Satyen Salkar, Assistant GM, and Nasser al Saidi, Assistant GM. They were followed

by Girish Bhide, General Manager – Isuzu, who underscored in his address the fruitful and rewarding relationship upon which the Isuzu brand continues to thrive in Oman. Further details about Isuzu’s evolution as the commercial trucking solution of choice in Oman and the brand’s current product-line were shared by Sreejith Sreekumar, Manager – Sales.

Unquestionably, the world’s Number One commercial truck brand, Isuzu trucks continue to dominate Oman’s consumer goods distribution space.

Preferred by the majority of cargo distribution companies, Isuzu trucks are known for providing efficient, dependable and cost-competitive transport solutions.

Vision to stimulate Al Dhahirah’s economic growth outlined

FROM PAGE 14

The pact was jointly endorsed by Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, and Eng Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of the Programme.

The initiative underlines the need for rigorous training and qualification of local talent from Al Dhahirah, with a keen focus on securing employment opportunities within the developmental, economic, tourism, agricultural, food, logistical, and technical sectors. Additionally, the programme will conduct scientific studies tailored to the economic opportunities specific to Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Special emphasis will be placed on value chain studies across various economic sectors,

nurturing the growing tourism and heritage industry, organising specialised training courses for local residents in tourism guidance, and implementing initiatives that elevate technical competencies through targeted technology-focused camps.

In a statement, Al Kindi said the visit was part of a series of field tours aimed at empowering local administrations across governorates. The visit aims to strengthen their capabilities in rehabilitation, training, and job placement, thereby enriching the lives of the local populace.

By empowering Omani youth to directly engage in the labour market and encouraging them to establish their own enterprises, the programme actively harnesses the potential of the self-employment initiative.



Global energy demand to rise 23% by 2045

ABUJA: Global demand for all forms of energy is forecast to rise by 23% through 2045, Opec Secretary-General Haitham al Ghais told a Nigerian oil and gas conference on Tuesday.

Oil executives and officials from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) have repeatedly made the case for continued investment in oil, warning that prices will otherwise spike higher. Al Ghais also said calls to limit or stop funding new oil projects were unrealistic and unwise.

He acknowledged, however, the need for technology to tackle continued fossil fuel emissions. "Global primary energy demand is forecast to increase by a significant 23% in the period up to 2045, which means we will need all forms of energy," he said.

"We will require innovative solutions such as carbon capture



Opec's Haitham al Ghais speaks during the Energy Asia conference in Kuala Lumpur, in this file photo. — AFP

utilisation and storage, and hydrogen projects in addition to a circular carbon economy, which has received a positive endorsement from the G20."

The global oil industry needs \$12.1 trillion in investment during the same period, Al Ghais said, adding the industry was not on track to reach that level of investment yet.

Sources close to Opec have said it will likely maintain an upbeat view on oil demand growth for next year when it publishes its first outlook later this month, predicting a slowdown from this year but still an above-average increase.

Opec's forecast for 2024 will likely be lower than the growth it expects for this year of 2.35 million barrels per day, or 2.4%, an abnormally high rate as the world moves out of the Covid-19 pandemic. — Reuters

World's biggest gallium buyer says clients stockpiling



A worker miniature is placed next to the element Gallium on a periodic table, in this illustration picture. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: China's planned export controls on gallium have caused frantic stockpiling of speciality semiconductor wafers made from the metal, according to the world's largest gallium buyer.

Freiberger Compound Materials relies almost entirely on Chinese suppliers for its gallium needs to make wafers that go into mobile phone radio signal amplifiers and optical electronics.

Consuming an estimated 10% of global gallium output, the company has found itself at the centre of turmoil following China's surprise announcement to control exports of gallium and germanium products from August 1.

"My clients are not relaxed about this at all. There's now a burst of orders being placed to increase inventory levels. The industry is very much on edge," chief executive Michael Harz said.

Chinese gallium companies have driven most rivals elsewhere out of the market by undercutting them on price over the last decade.

Freiberger, with annual sales of 70-80 million euros (\$77-\$88 million) and a 65% market share in gallium arsenide wafers for smartphone power amplifiers, competes with Japan's Sumitomo Electric and a number of smaller Chinese manufacturers.

Red LEDs and red light sensors are another major use for gallium arsenide.

The group, which traces its roots to a state-owned electronics factory in the former East Germany, has several months' worth of gallium in stock because it had long anticipated some form of trade crisis and has little else it can do to react, Harz said.

Automakers are also in a dilemma over whether they can continue to rely on a metal which had been seen as a game changer for electric vehicles.

Harz said his Chinese suppliers were providing authorities with data needed to obtain export licences.

They have estimated that deliveries will stop when the export controls take effect on August 1 and resume about a month later when licence requests have been processed, though no reliable information is available.

Harz does not believe that China will disrupt gallium trade flows over the next few years because that would quickly damage its own electronics industry.

— Reuters

Oil prices steady as supply cuts counter economic headwinds

LONDON: Oil prices were little changed on Tuesday as traders weighed supply cuts by the world's biggest oil exporters and hopes for higher demand in the developing world in the second half of 2023 against a sluggish global economic outlook.

Brent crude futures rose 35 cents to \$78.21 a barrel by 01127 GMT and US West Texas Intermediate crude was up 38 cents at \$73.52. Supply cuts by top exporters Saudi Arabia and Russia for August helped to lift the benchmark prices, which were also supported by the US dollar hitting a two-month low.



A weaker dollar makes crude cheaper for holders of other currencies and often boosts oil

demand. "Oil has found a floor and the only thing ... that could break that

is if US inflation is scorching hot and the Fed is forced to tighten this economy into a recession," said OANDA analyst Edward Moya.

Markets are awaiting US inflation data on Wednesday to see if price pressures are continuing to moderate, which could provide clues on the interest rate outlook.

While central bank officials said the US Federal Reserve is likely to raise interest rates further to tame inflation, markets are somewhat pacified by indications that months of monetary policy tightening are nearing an end.

"Nevertheless, nerves are not completely calmed just yet. Anxiety

is still palpable that recession fears could lead to downgrades in oil demand," said PVM analyst Tamas Varga.

Still, the International Energy Agency (IEA) is standing firm with the expectation that oil demand from China and developing countries, combined with recently announced supply cuts, is likely to keep the market tight in the second half of the year despite a sluggish global economy, its head said on Monday.

Sources said China again requested less supply from the world's biggest oil exporter, Saudi Aramco. — Reuters

Clean tech minerals market surges to \$320 billion: IEA

PARIS: The market for the minerals key to the clean energy transition soared to \$320 billion last year but faces challenges including volatile prices, supply chain snarls and geopolitical tensions, the International Energy Agency said on Tuesday.

The market for minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper doubled between 2017 and 2022, fuelled by the record deployment of clean technologies such as solar panels and electric car batteries, according to the IEA.

"Rapid growth in demand is providing new opportunities for the industry," the Paris-based agency said in its first annual IEA Critical Minerals Market Review.

"But a combination of volatile price movements, supply chain bottlenecks and geopolitical concerns has created a potent mix of risks for secure and rapid energy transitions," it added.

The IEA, which advises developed nations on energy policies, said the "affordability and speed of energy transitions" will depend on the availability of critical mineral supplies.

— AFP

UK unemployment climbs as inflation weighs on economy

LONDON: UK unemployment rose back to four per cent in the three months to the end of May, official data showed on Tuesday, as the economy struggles with stubbornly-high inflation.

The unemployment rate increased from 3.8 per cent in the three months to the end of April, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. The rate was back at four per cent for the first time since the start of 2022.

Analysts' consensus had been for unemployment to remain at 3.8 per cent.

Despite the rise, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said Britain's "jobs market is strong with unemployment low by historical standards". The ONS added that pay excluding bonuses had risen at record levels.

"Due to high inflation, however, the real value of weekly earnings are still falling, although now at its slowest rate since the end of 2021," noted Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS.

In a keynote speech late on Monday, Hunt insisted there could "be no sustainable growth without eliminating the inflation that deters investment and erodes consumer confidence".

UK annual inflation has eased in recent months but remains close to nine per cent.



British musicians join unemployed young people as they stand in line outside a central London job centre. — AFP

This is far above the Bank of England's two-per cent target, triggering numerous interest-rate hikes from the central bank.

"UK inflation is already running far hotter than policymakers had hoped, and price pressures will struggle to abate any time soon so long as earnings continue to grow at the current scorching pace," said Matthew Ryan, head of market strategy at Ebury.

The ONS revealed that average regular pay, not including bonuses, was 7.3 per cent higher in the three months to May compared with the same period one year earlier.

While BoE governor Andrew Bailey and Hunt call for pay restraint, thousands of public and private-sector workers continue to strike in a push for wages rises that keep up with inflation. Rising interest rates are slamming

mortgage holders and worsening the nation's cost-of-living crisis.

The BoE has ramped up its key lending rate 13 times in a row to five per cent in an attempt to dampen elevated inflation.

Bailey said it was "crucial" the BoE met its "mandate to return inflation to its target, and provide the environment of price stability in which the UK economy can thrive". — Reuters

Leaders call for government to axe ‘tourist’ tax



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

There has been an increasing number of voices criticising the Government’s refusal to restore VAT free shopping for foreign tourists.

Tax free shopping for foreign visitors, which saves them 20 per cent on their eligible spending, was scrapped by then Chancellor Rishi Sunak in early 2021 when Brexit came into effect.

The Treasury has argued that the perk mainly benefitted central London and was not a major lure for overseas visitors.

As London’s Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, Justine Simons, has said, “culture is the heartbeat of our capital, with our world-class offer bringing in visitors from across the globe and playing a vital role in the UK’s economic recovery.”

During May’s Coronation weekend, footfall in the West End (central London) was up

almost 70 per cent compared to 2022, showing London’s enduring national and global appeal.

But visitor figures for some of the most important cultural institutions have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels with some up to 40 per cent below where they were in 2019.

A crucial reason for this is the abolition of tax-free shopping, whereby visitors from overseas are refunded the VAT on purchases made in the UK. This is a huge missed opportunity to attract tourists that the UK must seize to ensure future success.

Cultural destinations are typically heavily reliant on tourists from overseas. Prior to the pandemic, international visitors accounted for two-thirds of all visits to the British Museum and the National Gallery.

And some theatres have reported that more than a third of their audience comes from

international tourists.

Following Brexit, additional visas and other barriers that are now in place are making it harder for the UK to attract visitors from Europe and further afield.

And the lack of tax-free shopping, which is on offer in many other cities around the world, is one such barrier. International tourists for whom retail is a priority may, therefore, choose London’s competitors for their trip.

A simple solution is to reintroduce tax-free shopping. This was once a strong incentive to visit the UK, but since it was abolished, Britain is now the only major European country not to offer tax-free shopping.

The current campaign focused on how this directly impacts the retail sector. But the knock-on effect on the cultural sector must not be forgotten.

Data from Global Blue for last year shows a huge diversion of

retail spending by international visitors away from the UK, to Britain’s competitors, including France, Italy and Germany.

By choosing to visit these countries rather than the UK, international travellers are also spending less on UK’s fantastic, cultural attractions.

These attractions are world-class, acting as a major driver of tourism to London in their own right, performing a powerful ambassadorial role around the globe and promoting Britain overseas. The GVA of the arts and culture sector in the West End alone was an estimated £4.9bn in 2019, equivalent to 23 per cent of all London’s arts and culture sector output.

As Emma de Souza, executive director of audience and commercial at the Society of London Theatre has said, theatre exists in a complex and interconnected tourism ecosystem

with retail, hospitality and other businesses in culture and entertainment.

“Any action, such as the reintroduction of tax-free shopping, that increases visits to London will be welcome.”

There is no doubt that London is still an international cultural superpower. In the West End there are 100 commercial galleries, 78 archive collections, 53 music venues, 45 jewellery design houses, 44 theatres and 11 dance venues, helping to attract 200 million visitors a year.

From outlying shopping malls to regional airports to stores in fashionable streets, tax-free shopping would bring a much-needed £4.1 billion boost to GDP and support 78,000 jobs.

The government must review data and consider reinstating tax-free shopping to incentivise people from overseas to visit the UK and help spur economic growth.

Oil investors less bearish after Saudi output cut extended

JOHN KEMP

Portfolio investors tip-toed back into crude oil as Saudi Arabia extended its unilateral production cut for at least another month, dissipating some of the extreme pessimism gripping the market at the end of June.

Hedge funds and other money managers purchased the equivalent of 47 million barrels in the six major petroleum futures and options contracts over the week ending on July 3-4.

Buying was concentrated in crude with purchases of Brent and NYMEX and ICE WTI, according to exchange and regulatory records.

Elsewhere there were small sales of US gasoline and European gas oil partly offset by purchases of US diesel.

Purchases of crude essentially reversed sales the previous week after Saudi Arabia indicated it would extend output cuts of 1 million barrels per day in July for a further month through August.

Russia also pledged to cut production by 0.5 million barrels per day in August to help counter adverse sentiment and boost prices.

If all the production cuts are implemented in full they will reduce expected inventories by 75 million barrels from the start of the third quarter with Saudi Arabia contributing cuts of around 60 million.

Production cuts are expected to offset some of the weakening of expected consumption owing to the industrial recession in North America and Europe and China’s faltering recovery from the coronavirus epidemic.

The combined crude position was still only 258 million barrels with bullish long positions outnumbering bearish shorts by only 2.25:1.

Funds remained especially bearish towards WTI compared with Brent which may reflect the differential impact of

Saudi output cuts on the two markers as well as the recent incorporation of WTI into the Brent calculation.

By contrast, the investment community is relatively less bearish towards Brent and refined fuels, reflecting Saudi Arabia’s ability to tighten the Brent market, as well as low fuel inventories around the world.

Investors have started to become more bullish towards US natural gas prices building the largest bullish net position for more than a year.

Hedge funds and other money managers purchased the equivalent of 325 billion cubic feet in the week ending on July 3.

The combined position reached a net long of 606 billion cubic feet up from a net short of 1,201 billion cubic feet on February 21.

Working gas inventories have continued to accumulate slightly faster than average for the time of year but there are increasing expectations the trajectory will turn soon.

Gas stocks were +295 billion cubic feet above the prior ten-year seasonal average on June 30 up from +195 billion cubic feet on February 21.

But the number of rigs drilling for oil and gas was down by -93 on average in June 2023 compared with December 2022.

Slower drilling are likely to translate into less production of gas-well and associated gas from the third quarter of 2023 through until at least the first quarter of 2024, which could quickly erode surplus inventories.

In real terms, prices are still very low averaging just \$2.47 per million British thermal units in June 2023, up from a recent low of \$2.21 in April 2023, but in only the 4th percentile for all months since 1990.

From a positioning and fundamental perspective the balance of price risks is tilted to the upside encouraging investors to start rebuilding a bullish position, albeit cautiously. — Reuters

UK could borrow a leaf from Canada’s mortgage book



EDWARD CHANCELLOR

The writer is a financial historian, journalist and investment strategist and is the author of “The Price of Time: The Real Story of Interest”.

Extremely high house prices in the United Kingdom largely reflect the extraordinarily low interest rates of recent years. As the Bank of England tightens monetary policy to curtail inflation, rising mortgage costs are bringing misery to millions of borrowers, threatening an economic and housing bust.

Fortunately, there’s a relatively simple way to alleviate this problem that wouldn’t cost taxpayers a penny.

The relationship between property prices and interest rates is well established. The great American economist Irving Fisher, writing in 1930, described how interest rates impact valuations: “The price of a house is the discounted value of its future income,” he wrote. “In the process of discounting there lurks a rate of interest. The value of houses will rise or fall as the rate of interest falls or rises.”

In Britain, low interest rates produced soaring property prices. In England, the ratio of house prices to household income more than doubled between 2000 and 2021, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The amount of mortgage debt rose even more sharply. UK housing analyst Neal Hudson estimates that the average mortgage loan rose from 1.5 times income in the early 1980s to 3.4 times in 2021.

Falling interest rates meant that initial mortgage payments as a share of disposable income marginally declined. But



People walk past a row of colourful houses in London, Britain. — Reuters

homeowners were vulnerable to increased borrowing costs. Stubbornly high inflation forced the Bank of England to hike official rates to 5% last month.

The five-year mortgage rate is now above 6%. The Institute for Fiscal Studies warns that 1.4 million households will lose a fifth of their disposable income as mortgage costs rise.

The government is in a quandary about how to deal with the mortgage crisis. Senior minister Michael Gove has suggested introducing 25-year fixed-rate mortgages, as in the United States.

The UK, however, lacks the deep capital markets to implement that proposal. Leading UK banks will allow borrowers to extend the length of their mortgages, or go interest-free, for six months without damaging their credit scores. This is a step in the right direction but doesn’t go far enough.

A better approach, proposed by Patrick Macaskie, a former hedge fund banks analyst, would be to stabilise mortgage costs for households by varying the rate of repayment as interest rates rise and fall.

This would require lenders to fix total monthly payments

– of both interest and principal – relative to the outstanding mortgage balance.

Thus, when interest rates decline borrowers repay more of their loans, shortening the term of the mortgage. Conversely, as interest rates rise the mortgage automatically lengthens.

Such an adjustable-term mortgage would soften the blow to households from unexpected monetary tightening. In normal conditions Macaskie recommends total monthly repayments should be fixed at 6% of the balance outstanding. But for those who have recently borrowed heavily against inflated house prices the starting point could be lower, say 4.5% of the balance.

When interest rates rise sharply, as is happening now, repayments might be less than the monthly interest bill. The amount of mortgage debt outstanding would then increase as unpaid interest is added to the principal – a situation known as “negative amortisation”.

But that situation would only occur when both interest rates and inflation are high. Inflation rapidly reduces the real value of outstanding debt. Rising prices also tend to drag up nominal incomes. In the United Kingdom,

inflation is already lowering the ratio of household debt to income.

Periods of negative amortisation should therefore be self-correcting. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of adjustable-term mortgages would improve financial stability.

Since borrowers always hand over a proportion of their income, mortgage payments wouldn’t shrink when interest rates decline. Periods of easy money would therefore be less likely to lead to housing bubbles.

In Canada, which like the UK had a frothy housing market and mortgages priced off short-term interest rates, banks have found a way to soften the impact of tighter money.

At the end of the first quarter, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce had some C\$52 billion worth of adjustable-term mortgages on its books. For many of those borrowers, monthly mortgage payments currently don’t even cover the interest portion of their loans.

CIBC boss Victor Dodig boasts that this mortgage product is already helping households cope with spiking borrowing costs.

It’s time for Britain to take a leaf out of Canada’s mortgage book. — Reuters

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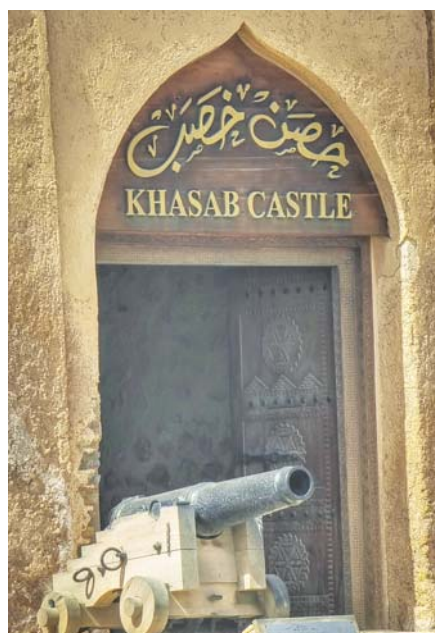
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Some of the best ways to enjoy your Musandam trip

By Yeru Ebuen

Anyone who has been to Oman would have realised by now that it is a big waterpark offering an amazing array of water adventures.

But a trip to Musandam would open a new world of even finer sea adventures.

Located north of Oman, Musandam can be accessed three ways from Muscat: first, by taking the long drive that can last 8 hours with a complex entry to the UAE border and then reentry to the Oman border; second, by taking the limited ferry schedule from Shinas or Masirah; and third, through daily flights via plane.

A full-day cruise in Musandam costs

around OMR 18, and while it may sound pricey, it's a cruise that's truly worth your money.

Having visited Musandam recently, we have come to realise that finding a dhow cruise is quite easy. While online direct bookings can be made through cruise company websites or social media accounts, you can also visit the port area and ask around to find a cruise that fits your schedule. We did the latter.

There are plenty of cruises to choose from, and the dhows, while they generally look alike, have different features. We chose the one that includes snorkelling and kayaking, with lunch coming free with the cruise. The cruise routes can vary, navigating the beautiful waters of Musandam and passing through popular islands like Telegraph Island.

If you're planning a trip to Musandam, here are a few tips to take note of.

1. ALLOCATE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE KHASAB CASTLE.

Among the many ancient structures in Musandam, Khasab Castle is right at the heart of it. This castle offers plenty of insight into the governorate. Walk around and check out the unique "House of Lock" as well as the "Summer Dwelling." There are helpful notes that talk about how they were built and what their purposes are.

Don't forget to go inside the differ-

ent wings of the castle as well. Upon entry, the one on the left is the Imam Room, the right is the Arsenal Room, and opposite it is the traditional cus-



toms museum. Armed with information from the Khasab Castle tour, the drive around the governorate will be more meaningful and experiential.

2. PRE-ARRANGE YOUR KUMZAR

ISLAND TRIP.

What a lot of people don't know is that Kumzar is quite a long boat trip that arranging for a private boat to take you there would cost you a minimum of OMR 80. The cheapest option is joining a dhow cruise with Kumzar as one of the stops but this option may not be readily available upon arrival. If you're going as a group, splitting the private tour charge will make more sense but due to its location, you might end up visiting Kumzar and not be able to do other island adventures. Make sure to find a tour operator early on as this will save you from disappointment.

3. THE BEST WAY TO ENJOY SEA-FOOD.

If you know where to look, seafood in Musandam is really cheap. One thing you have to understand though is that you might not find a fine-dining seafood restaurant on the island. If you're up for a true foodie adventure, you can buy fresh seafood from the marina/port and bring it to one of the restaurants and ask them if they can cook it for you. You can also try this option before embarking on a dhow cruise. If you're going camping, then cooking your own seafood will be an amazing experience, one that will save you tons of money.

4. VISIT PLACES LESS TRAVELLED.

Bukha is known for its amazing ancient forts as well as the beautiful

mosque fronting the long, white sandy beach. Between Khasab and Khada, you will also find pockets of beaches with small charming coastal villages perfect for an afternoon drive and exploration. Do not stay on the main road but instead, take some of the unfamiliar roads leading to the mountains. One of the amazing discoveries we made is the mini-forest in Sall Ala that between November to March, depending on the rains, transforms into a paradise like those found during Khareef in Dhofar. Everything in Musandam, by land, is about an hour and a half drive so if you have a four-wheel drive, you'd be able to explore the tops of mountains with an amazing view of the fjords.

5. THINGS TO REMEMBER.

If you're flying, remember not to take any photos at the airport. This is strictly forbidden as the airport belongs to the Royal Oman Police and is therefore subject to very strict measures.

While Musandam can be visited the whole year through, of course, the best time to visit is somewhere between October to March when the temperature is cooler.

Cars can be rented right at the airport and options for sedan or four-wheel drives are readily available.

Do not miss on taking the dhow cruises as this is the heart of visiting Musandam.

FASHION

Thom Browne debuts Paris haute couture with dramatic show at Opera



THOM BROWNE marked his debut on the Paris haute couture calendar on Monday with a dramatic display of voluminous fashion in the French capital's famous opera house.

The American designer drew his audience in through the back door of the baroque monument, up dusty flights of wooden stairs to the runway set — the middle of the stage, with the audience seated on both sides.

The curtain lifted at the start of the show to reveal a full theatre — the red velvet seats and gilded balconies occupied by rows of cardboard cutouts of a man in a grey suit and sunglasses.

Models emerged slowly, on towering platform shoes, marching

past a flock of fabric-covered pigeons and pausing under an enormous grey, fabric covered bell hanging above the set.

Some wore headgear in the shape of birds, while others had bandages wrapped around their heads, worn with elaborate grey wigs.

Browne puffed out the volumes of dresses, giving them balloon-like sleeves, and paired tweed ensembles and pleated skirts with long coats embroidered with pigeons or

seaside motifs like starfish.

Browne, who is chairman of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, is best known for his signature grey suit, but he has also built a reputation for showmanship — last fall, for example, he closed a Cinderella-themed show with Mj Rodriguez dancing in a pink Cadillac made of tulle.

The Paris Haute Couture shows run until July 6 and include fashion houses Chanel, Balenciaga and Valentino. — Reuters

ART

Lost Rembrandt portraits fetch more than £11 mn at auction

THE LAST KNOWN pair of Rembrandt portraits in private hands sold for more than £11 million (\$14 million) at Christie's in London on Thursday — nearly 200 years after they first went under the hammer at the auction house.

The paintings, which are thought to date from 1635, had been expected to fetch between £5 million and £8 million as part of Christie's "Old Masters" sale.

But the hammer came down at £11,235,000, the auction house said in a statement.

The 20-centimetre high (eight-inch) oval portraits depict an elderly plumber named Jan Willemsz van der Pluyt and his wife Jaapgen Carels.

The couple, painted in an unusually intimate style for Rembrandt, were



friends of the artist's family and hailed from his hometown of Leiden in the Netherlands.

Henry Pettifer, international deputy chairman of Old Master Paintings at Christie's, said in Amsterdam last month that he was "stopped in his tracks" when he first saw the portraits.

"I was really staggered to discover that the pictures had never really been researched and never been addressed in any of the literature on Rembrandt over the course of 200 years."

An ancestor of the current owners bought the paintings at auction at Christie's in 1824, where they were

listed as Rembrandts, and they have remained in the same collection ever since.

"They've been sitting quietly and enjoyed by the owner's family over the course of two centuries... rather casually enjoying them very much," said Pettifer.

After spotting them, "forensic" work began on verifying that they were genuine Rembrandts, including scientific analysis by art experts from Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum.

The paintings are the smallest known portraits by the 17th century Dutch master, who was better known for much larger works commissioned by wealthy families. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

Tailored Tours Give Paris Trips the Perfect Fit

ON A RECENT MORNING at the Louvre, Anya Firestone handed out bottles of Evian. "Because 'the art of drinking' begins with hydration," she said.

Firestone, 34, a museum guide-conférencière (tour guide) and art integration strategist, wore rhinestone earrings in the shape of olive martinis, pink Manolo Blahniks, the Mini Bar clutch by Charlotte Olympia and a Marni dress printed with likenesses of Venus.

She escorted Matt Stanley, her client, and his Parisian date, Salomé Bes, 30, past the long lines at the museum's entrance and toward the Code of Hammurabi. The set of ancient Babylonian laws included "an eye for an eye," she explained, and it also dealt with issues of alcoholic beverages, like watered-down wine and the people's "right to beer," as she pithily put it.

"Pretty impressive!" said Stanley, the chief executive of a memory care community near Austin, Texas. Stanley, 43, had hired Firestone to design a two-day visit around alcohol.

"You're going to see that drinking and art had the same upbringing and moved in the same direction — from a religious context with prayers and libations to decadence and debauchery," said Firestone, who calls her custom tours "cou-tours," a play on couture.

Last fall, Firestone starred in "The Real Girlfriends of Paris," a reality show broadcast on Bravo that followed six 20- and 30-something American women as they navigated work, life and l'amour. She said the opportunity to put her business, called Maison Firestone, on public view was the main reason she had done the show.

But Firestone had also liked the idea of elevating the oft-scorned TV genre with art and culture. (Not to mention some pun- and Yiddish-inflected wit.) "By the way," she said, "I don't describe myself as American. I say I'm New-Yorkaise."

After a master's degree in French cultural studies from Columbia Global Center in Paris, she spent a few years travelling between New York and Paris, offering custom tours and writing about art and brand intersections for Highsnobiety. Maison Firestone — which also designs themed events with luxury brands — followed from that interest in "art as branding," she said.

At "Winged Victory of Samothrace," a white marble statue from Hellenistic Greece, better



known as "Niké," for example, Firestone noted that the figure's wings had inspired the sportswear empire's Swoosh logo.

Firestone's clients used to find her only by word-of-mouth, but now about half of them, including Stanley, come to her via the Bravo show and Instagram. The majority are visiting France from the United States; the cost of a tour starts at \$2,400 for one or two people for one day.

Her angle is to take "art off the wall to show its intersection with things that people already enjoy and consume," Firestone said, be it



Champagne or Schiaparelli or NFTs. Recent and upcoming tours have been designed for drag queens, the crypto team at a venture capital firm, "Eloise-like" little girls with a fondness for dinosaurs, and a man who is blind.

Working her way through Dionysian art and decorative works, Louis XIV's stemware, and the occasional Bravo fan ("I just want to say that I loved the show!"), Firestone directed Stanley and Bes into the museum's largest room, where the Mona Lisa hangs on a wall across from "The Wedding Feast at Cana," an immense piece by 16th-century artist Paolo Veronese that depicts Jesus Christ turning water into wine. "You can see wine tastings happening all over the painting," she said.

After lunch at the Ritz, which

naturally featured cocktails and Champagne, the itinerary called for the Musée d'Orsay. "The Louvre was a former palace, this is a former train station," Firestone said. She likes companion visits to the two museums, which, she said, help to show how art entered modernity by breaking from the monarchy, the church and the academy and spilling into the cafes of Paris.

"L'Absinthe" by Edgar Degas pictured what she called a "tapped out" woman with a glass of the infamous green spirit on a table before her. Nearby was a painting by Édouard Manet of the same woman (actress Ellen Andrée), titled "Plum Brandy." Firestone prompted her clients to ponder the difference. "She's not nearly so sad or so schnockered here, right? She seems OK."

Paris, she said, had by then been transformed by Napoleon III's urban planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann, bringing with it grand department stores like Le Bon Marché and Samaritaine.

Firestone and Stanley met the next day at Samaritaine, where she had arranged for a cognac tasting and some shopping in the private apartments with a stylist. "Bonjour. How y'all doin'?" Stanley said, greeting the staff. "I'm not an aristocrat — I'm just a cowboy!" He chose a pair of drawstring trousers by Maison Margiela.

Afterward, in a taxi, Firestone pointed at a Prada ad featuring Scarlett Johansson. "I think they're referencing that Man Ray photo of Kiki de Montparnasse," she said. "We like a good art-brand ref." She Googled the Man Ray photograph on her phone and held it up for Stanley to see, who said he felt like he had gotten a master class.

"Who doesn't love their hand held in Paris?" Firestone said.— NYT

DISCOVERY



Proof humans reshaped the world? Chickens

WHEN ALIENS OR our distant progeny sift through layers of sediment 500,000 years from now to decode the Earth's past, they will find unusual evidence of the abrupt change that upended life half-a-million years earlier: chicken bones.

That is the conclusion of scientists whose findings are offered as proof that rapid expansion of human appetites and activity so radically altered natural systems as to tip Earth into a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene, or the "era of humans".

There will be other telltale clues in mud and rocks of a planetary-scale rupture around the mid-20th century: the sudden rise of CO2, methane and other greenhouse gases; radioactive detritus from nuclear bomb tests; omnipresent microplastics; and the spread of invasive species.

But chicken bones could be among the most revealing findings, and tell the story in more ways than one.

To begin with, they are a human invention. "The modern meat chicken is unrecognisable compared to its ancestors or wild counterparts," said Carys Bennett, a geologist and lead author of a 2017 study in Royal Society Open Science laying out the evidence for the animal as a "marker species" of the Anthropocene.

"Body size, the shape of the skeleton, bone chemistry and genetics are all distinct."

Their very existence, in other words, is evidence of humanity's capacity to hack nature and intervene in natural processes.



CLEAR SIGNAL

The modern broiler chicken's origins are in the jungles of Southeast Asia, where its forebear, the red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), was first domesticated some 8,000 years ago.

The species has long been prized for its meat and eggs, but its engineered breeding into the rotund, short-lived creature found in supermarkets the world over started only after World War II.

"It usually takes millions of years for evolution to occur, but here it has taken just decades to produce a new form of animal," Jan Zalasiewicz, an emeritus professor of palaeobiology at the University of Leicester, said.

Last year, the official Anthropocene Working Group he chaired for more than a decade determined that the Holocene Epoch — which began 11,700 years ago as the last ice age ended — gave way to the Anthropocene in the mid-20th century.

On Tuesday, it will announce which spot on Earth best exemplifies that shift.

Another line of evidence is the omnipresence of broiler chickens: virtually anywhere on Earth there are people, there will also be copious remains of our species' favourite source of animal protein.

Today, there are some 33 billion of the flightless birds worldwide at any given time, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The biomass of domesticated chickens is more than three times that of all wild bird species combined.

At least 25 million are culled every day, whether for chicken tikka in the Punjab, yakitori in Japan, poulet yassa in Senegal or McDonald's nuggets everywhere.

And while many societies shun the eating of beef or pork, how many cultures in the world do not have chicken on the menu?

"Chickens are a symbol of how our biosphere has changed and is now dominated by human consumption and resource use," said Bennett, formerly a researcher at the University Of Leicester and now an officer at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in Britain.

"The enormous number of distinctive chicken bones discarded worldwide will leave a clear signal in the future geological record," she said. — AFP