

The Interventional Pain Management Team at the Palliative Care Department of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre confirmed the success of the first-of-its-kind surgery in Oman on a patient to control chronic pain associated with cancer. The implantation of an intrathecal pump in a patient is one of the most advanced procedures that offer a radical solution to the chronic pain in cancer and non-cancer patients. **DETAILS ON P5**



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MBAPPE TO BECOME NEW FRANCE CAPTAIN



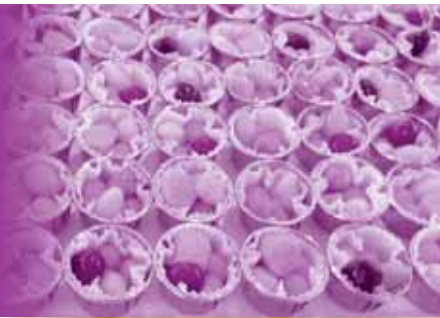
P15

A PROMISING BIOMASS FOR BIOFUEL GENERATION



P20

THE CULTURAL ART OF THAI CUISINE



HM ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 16/2023 ratifying the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

Article (1) ratifies the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Arab Charter on Human Rights according to the version attached to this Royal Decree, while taking into consideration a reservation on the provision of paragraph (2) of article (19) of the aforementioned charter.

Article (2) stipulates that departments concerned shall deposit the document of joining the abovementioned charter as per its provisions, while taking into consideration the aforementioned reservation.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

— ONA

HM receives credentials of ambassadors

AMBASSADORS AFFIRM TO EXERT SINCERE EFFORTS TO PROMOTE RELATIONS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received, separately, at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday, credentials of Ambassador of several Arab and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors: Mohammed Nakhira Juma al Dhaheri, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Muhammet Hekimoğlu, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Republic of Türkiye, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Pierluigi D'Elia, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Sergio Mattarella of the Italian Republic, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

During their meeting with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries' leaders and their best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to His Majesty. They also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

The ambassadors also



expressed their great honour and delight to present their credentials before His Majesty the Sultan. They affirmed to exert sincere efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty affirmed that they would receive all support from him, the Government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

The credentials presentation ceremony was attended by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Head of the Royal Protocols and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

INSIDE



PUTIN, XI DISCUSS CHINESE PROPOSAL FOR UKRAINE

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OLD DIVISIONS TO HAUNT THAILAND'S MAY ELECTION

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Ramadhan working hours announced

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadhan 1444 AH, the Ministry of Labour announced official work hours at units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and private sector establishments during the holy month.

The working hours for units of the State's Administrative Apparatus: Flexible working hours: The official working hours will be from 9 am to 2 pm. The head of a unit may determine the hours of attendance and leave that suit the unit's work as per scheduled work hours based on the following timeframes: from 7 am until 12 pm. From 8 am until 1 pm. From 9 am until 2 pm. From 10 am until 3 pm.

Remote work: The head of a unit may implement remote work for employees whose jobs' nature allows for remote work, without prejudice to the workflow in that unit.

In all cases, the number of employees who are required to attend their workplaces shall not be less than 60 per cent of the total employees of the unit.

Secondly in private sector establishments the working hours for Muslim workers are reduced to be 6 hours per day, with no more than 30 hours per week. — ONA



Oman flays racist Israeli statements

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has denounced the extreme, racist statements made by an official of the Israeli occupation, in which he denied the existence of the brotherly Palestinian people, and his use of a misleading map that contradicts facts and the international law.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, Oman expressed its total rejection of such provocative, irresponsible statements and actions, which represent a blatant violation of all international laws and norms. Oman calls on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities by deterring these incitement practices targeting the Palestinian people.

Oman also reiterated its support for all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace in a manner that would enable the brotherly Palestinian people to obtain all their legitimate rights and establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Al Quds as its capital, in accordance with the two-state solution, the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. — ONA

HEAVY RAINS IN MANY WILAYATS



Heavy to medium rainfall was reported from a number of wilayats in the Sultanate of Oman, which resulted in overflowing of some wadis. In North Al Batinah Governorate, rain was reported in a number of wilayats, accompanied by hail. **DETAILS ON P3**



# His Majesty welcomes new ambassadors





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# Heavy rains lash Muscat, Batinah

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

Rains with strong winds stormed across Muscat with varying intensity right after sunset in Muscat on Tuesday.

The active downward winds carried debris and construction materials almost making it impossible for pedestrians to walk.

There was also a decrease in horizontal visibility in parts of the governorates of Muscat and South Al Batinah.

There were thunder cells with continued rain of varying intensity accompanied by active winds and a decrease in horizontal visibility in several areas of Dhofar Governorate. The Empty Quarter also received its share of rain.

At around 5.40 pm on Tuesday, a belt of rain clouds and thunderstorms covered over the governorates of South Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah, gradually approaching towards the governorates of Muscat and North Al Sharqiyah, and scattered thunder cells over the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Dhofar and Al Wusta.

Earlier, the satellite images had shown clouds currently over the Sultanate of Oman with sporadic rain of varying intensity in parts of the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah and Dhofar, and is expected to extend in the coming hours to the rest of the governorates.

Many of the places experienced



hailstones with flowing of wadis.

Active northerly to northwesterly winds have been blowing with a speed of 20-25 knots over most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, which has also resulted in rising dust.

A low level of horizontal visibility has been reported.

In regards to sea state, high sea waves, moderate to rough, ranging between 2.0-3.0 metres, have been forecast on most coasts during the next two day.

According to the weather forecast, Wednesday is going to be partly cloudy to cloudy over most of the governorates with chance of isolated rain occasionally

thundershower associated with fresh downdraft winds and hail over Dhofar, Al Wusta, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Musandam and Muscat governorates. Chance of dust rising is to continue over deserts and open areas.

# Efforts on to ensure food supply during Ramadhan

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

Efforts are on to ensure a smooth flow of foodstuff, predominantly fruits and vegetables, before the beginning of the holy month of Ramadhan, according to the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).

The CPA officials made random visits in the past few days and vendors were told not to hike prices without any reason failing of which will invite action by the authority.

“We have made sure that the essential commodities are available before, during and post Ramadhan besides ensuring that the suppliers comply with laws and legislations related to consumer protection, prior to the beginning of the holy month of Ramadhan,” said Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection



Authority.

He led a field visit of a team comprising Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Farmers Association, and a number of officials of the concerned government agencies

on Tuesday.

During the tour of Mawaleh Central Market, suppliers were emphasised of the importance that this market represents to consumers, and the provision of their needs, which necessitates the availability of various varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables in sufficient quantities throughout the month and after.

They were also urged to continue their cooperation with

the concerned authorities and not to exploit the occasions when demand is high.

The officials also met with a number of consumers and listened to their observations and suggestions about the availability of commodities in the Mawaleh Central Market in sufficient quantities to cover the surging demand.

The teams from CPA have been visiting various commercial markets, shopping centres to get a closer look at their status and enhance and improve the quality of services provided to consumers by the suppliers.

There are efforts to meet with consumers and suppliers on the ground and engage in talks with them in everything related to the demand and supply of essentials during the month, according to the CPA.

# Expats find Oman easy to settle

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Expat Essentials Index of the InterNations has released the list of 52 destinations that make life abroad easy and those that make life most challenging for foreign expatriates.

The index is based on data from the Expat Insider 2022 survey by InterNations, the world's largest expatriate community with over 4.5 million members.

While the Sultanate of Oman (rank 5) figures in the top 10, the report said that the top three destinations, Bahrain (first), the UAE (second) and Singapore (third), offer easy communication with the lack of a language barrier, while also posing minimal bureaucratic issues.

On the other hand, expatriates struggle the most with getting started in Germany (52), Japan (51) and China (50). Expats in all three countries struggle with the local language and a lack of modern digitalisation.

The report said that the Sultanate offers a smooth start for expatriates.

Expats find it very easy to find their footing in Oman — it excels in the Expat Essentials Index (5th), ranking among the top 10 in both housing (8th) and language (7th) subcategories.

Expats report that housing is both easy to find (79 per cent vs. 54 per cent globally) and to afford (57 per cent vs 39 per cent globally).

It is also easy to live in Oman without speaking the local language (75 per cent vs. 51 per cent globally).

In fact, only 33 per cent speak it fairly or very well, 20 percentage



points less than the global average of 53 per cent.

However, the Sultanate has its restrictions and joins Kuwait (51st) among the bottom three destinations for unrestricted access to online services (e.g., social media).

In fact, 13 per cent of expatriates feel that their online access is limited, nearly twice the global average (7 per cent). This leads to a below-average 38th place in the digital life subcategory.

The Expat Essentials Index is part of the annual Expat Insider survey by InterNations. In the 2022 edition, InterNations asked 11,970 expats representing 177 nationalities and living in 181 countries or territories to provide information on various aspects of expatriate life, as well as their gender, age and nationality.

Participants were asked to rate up to 56 different factors regarding life abroad on a scale of one to seven.

# Man injured after falling from building in Mawaleh

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

A person was injured after falling from the top of a building in Mawaleh, according to Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA). Rescue teams were able to transfer him to a hospital to receive treatment.

In a statement, CDAA

said, “The rescue teams of the authority in Muscat Governorate responded to a report that a person had been injured after falling from the top of a building in Mawaleh area.” The rescue teams were able to reach him using a hydraulic crane, provide him with emergency medical care, and take him to the hospital for further treatment.

# Healthy workplace motivates employees to work better

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

The health of employees was in focus at the seminar on Health and Wellness organised by Protectol with IOSH Oman held at Inter City Hotel, Muscat, raising the discussion on whether employee health is an investment or an expense.

As the holy month of Ramadhan approaches and summer is around the corner, a set of expert panelists from various industries discussed the common health issues faced by employers and employees at the workplace.

The event was attended by Abdul Rahman al Yahyaei, OPAL CEO, guest of honour. The panel discussion moderated by Dr Neelesh Sogani (IOSH Oman Branch Chair) had Dr Ali al Lawati (OQ), Humaid al Balushi (OPAL Oman), Dr Idris al Obaidani (bp), Sulaiman al Sulaimi (OQ), Dr Hani al Shraiqli (Sohar Aluminium), Dr Dilip Singhvi (Shifa Hospital) and Mohamed Aasim from Protectol as panelists.

Changes in health parameters for the better will motivate an employee to work happily, pointed out the panelists. They also asked why should organisations wait



for their employees to develop ear damage to compensate them because of the noise they were exposed to. Why not tackle the problem beforehand?

During the discussions, Abdul Rahman al Yahyaei, OPAL CEO, said workers' welfare is a cause that

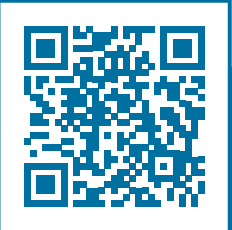
has been taken up to be projected and implemented through all the sectors. “The basic law of the Sultanate of Oman has clearly stated that every individual has the right to work in a safe, decent environment. We must play as industry experts to combat chronic

diseases. Stress at the workplace could result in chronic diseases – it is an impact of physical or mental stress,” he said.

The panel discussion headed by Dr Neelesh and the industrial representatives debated around challenges faced by individuals at workplace and the reality in the unorganised sectors. “There might be a situation when some employees might not be fit to attend work but they do it anyway and this is known as presentism. You attend the workplace but physically or psychologically one is not a hundred per cent fit. The reason might be due to multi

factors, it could be personal, financial, social or organisational issues. The end result is burnout,” said Dr Hani al Shraiqli, from Sohar Aluminium.

The CEO of Protectol Mohammed Nissamudin explained why it is important to stay hydrated. “On a summer day when the temperature goes up to 45°, with high humidity a normal person might sweat about 2L a day on average, compared to that a labourer might sweat 2L per hour. Sweat is a liquid that goes out of your body, which is a cooling mechanism to maintain the temperature at the average level,” he said.



P O S T - P A N D E M I C   R A M A D H A N

# RAMADHAN MOOD SET, MOON SIGHTING TODAY

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY  
@shadadm

For the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic, Muslims this year will mark Ramadhan without fear of the virus in the Sultanate of Oman. They are looking forward to observing the holy month without any restrictions as they did before the pandemic. On Monday, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs called on everyone to be alert for sightings of the crescent of the month of Ramadhan on Wednesday evening. “We invite all to look out for the crescent of the month of Ramadhan on Wednesday.” “In the event of sighting the new moon, it requested the information be relayed to the authorities concerned. The moon sighting committee will meet on Wednesday,” it added. Expected to begin on Thursday, Ramadhan is the most anticipated time in the Islamic

calendar with elaborate preparations taking place weeks before. “Ramadhan is the most sacred month and hence deserves adequate preparations. We missed the real feel of the month the last two years, so we are happy that this Ramadhan will be full of activities because almost all Covid-19 restrictions are a thing of the past,” said government employee Bader al Harthi, as he shopped in a hypermarket in Muscat. Amour al Touqi, a shopper who was seen buying Ramadhan items, said, “Because Ramadhan is special for everyone, we have to prepare in a number of ways including mentally. In any case, we welcome the month with eagerness. I’ll finish all my shopping so that I can be free to observe the month.” With shopping centres wooing customers with special Ramadhan offers, Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) took efforts to monitor markets for irregularities. “CPA has been conducting an intensive campaign in

commercial centres and has issued notices against violators to control prices, promotions and discounts for Ramadhan,” a CPA official said. Muscat Municipality has also intensified inspection and control visits to ensure the quality of foodstuffs and storage facilities to ensure public health. In addition, on Monday, it announced new working hours for Seeb and Al Amerat slaughterhouses for the month of Ramadhan. A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said, “Working hours of slaughterhouses throughout Ramadhan will be from 8 am to 1 pm for individuals and from 6 am to 8 am for companies.” Ramadhan, however, is not just about food. It is also a social occasion when family and friends come together. “We are happy that we will get to celebrate Ramadhan evenings with our family and friends without any restrictions,” said Seeb resident Aiman Khalaf.



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# State Council debates draft Biometrics Law, study on arts

**MUSCAT:** The State Council debated the draft Biometrics Law referred by the Council of Ministers, on Monday.

Besides, the State Council discussed a study submitted by the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee on arts and their role in supporting the national economy.

The State Council held its seventh meeting of the seventh annual session under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Monday.

Dr Rashid bin Salim al Badi, head of the Legal Committee, delivered a statement in which he said that the committee values the draft Biometrics Law due to lack of legislations governing the collection, preservation and utilisation of biological data and regulating the utilisation of biotechnology and the protection of genetic data in the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that the committee discussed the draft law, the opinion of Majlis Ashshura, and the observations made by



the members of the council and prepared a report that includes formal and substantive observations about the articles of the draft Biometrics Law, noting that the committee proposed some amendments on other articles.

The meeting witnessed elaborate discussions by the council members on the draft Biometrics Law.

The council then discussed the study presented by the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee on arts and their role in supporting

the national economy. Dr Aisha bint Hamad al Darmakiyah, Chairperson of the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee, explained the importance of the sector in supporting the national economy and diversifying revenue sources. — ONA

# Shura refers draft Social Protection Law to State Council

**MUSCAT:** Majlis Ashshura has referred the draft Social Protection Law to the State Council. The draft law was referred following discussions on its articles during the 11th session of the 4th annual sitting of the 9th term held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura. The draft Social Protection Law included 163 articles divided into seven chapters. Shura made many



observations on various articles. A set of development proposals were presented for several articles and provisions of the draft law.



# Premarital workshop held in Nizwa

**AMAL AL RIYAMI**  
NIZWA, MARCH 21

With an aim to curb alarming increase in the number of divorces in Oman, the Ministry of Social Development is organising several premarital counselling workshops across the country to educate youths about marriage, family responsibilities, financial planning and raising children. This also includes medical tests to reduce the spread of genetic blood disorders and other inherited conditions.

The Department of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, in cooperation with Al Dakhiliyah

Governorate, recently organised this awareness programme in Al Dakhiliyah Municipality building hall.

Dr Kafala bint Hamoud al Omairi, head of the Marriage Counselling Team in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, presented a number of sessions on family relations, marital compatibility, and the foundations for building happy and stable families.

She also talked about the importance of dialogue among spouses, how to face marital challenges and disputes, and the skills for managing stress. The sessions also touched on rights of women and principles of family life.

Fadel bin Abdullah al Shezawi, Director-General of Social Development, said during the launch of the programme: “The idea of allocating a team for marital counselling came after the increase in divorce cases. Divorce rates have increased due to several changes that occurred in the family. The idea of training those about to get married in the Sultanate of Oman emerged through national programmes to emphasise the importance of family cohesion and stability. The number of beneficiaries of this programme has reached more than 20,000.

According to NCSI statistics, 3,837 divorce cases have been filed in the country, an average of 10

cases every day and an increase of 12 per cent or 411 cases in 2021 compared to the year before 2020. Reports said that 67 per cent of the divorce cases were initiated by women.

In 2020, divorce rates in Oman also rose by almost 50 per cent, compared to the previous year, with pressures caused by the pandemic thought to be the main cause.

At least 3,426 divorce certificates were issued in Oman in 2020, which came up to about nine a day. Muscat recorded the highest number of divorces, at 796, followed by North Al Batinah (672), while Musandam had the lowest number of divorces (18).

# Indian Schools BoD chairman elected

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
@kabeeryousef

Dr Sivakumar Manikkam (pictured), the current Chairman of the Board of Directors, will continue to be the head of the BoD of 21 Indian Schools in Oman.

He was elected after securing 13 votes out of 14 in the elections held on Monday.

The new 15-member BoD will assume office on April 1. The tenure will be two years.

Apart from Dr Manikkam, the new board comprises PP Nitheesh Kumar, PTK Shameer, Krishnendu, Dr Sivakumar Manikkam, the Indian Embassy nominees and 2 representatives each from Indian School Wadi Al Kabir and Ghubra, and 1 representative of Indian School Muscat and Darsait and an educational adviser.

“The second term in the chairmanship reposes more responsibilities and tasks as well as challenges. It is a clear indication of the trust reposed by the parents



and my colleagues on board to discharge better quality services. We have weathered the storm posed by the pandemic and are confident that we can do better,” Dr Siva, who won with a landslide victory in the elections, said.

“I’m humbled by the unwavering support extended by my fellow Board members in making me be part of yet another journey of community service for the Indian diaspora. I would like to ensure that our kids do receive high quality education through a highly productive learning environment with better infrastructure.”

# SQCCCRC implants pump in cancer patient to relieve chronic pain

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Interventional Pain Management Team at the Palliative Care Department of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCRC) confirmed the success of the first-of-its kind surgery in a patient in to control chronic pain associated with cancer.

The implantation of an intrathecal pump in a patient is one of the advanced procedures that offer a radical solution to the chronic pain, which cannot be relieved by medication or injection.

Professor Roberto Ariconi, Senior Consultant in Interventional Pain Management at SQCCCRC, said intrathecal pan pump delivers medication to the spinal fluid to treat chronic pain after the medical staff had



exhausted all standard pain management therapies, which did not work with the patient.

He explained that the pump is implanted under the skin, and it is connected to the spinal canal where the medication goes through a catheter and into the intrathecal space around the spinal cord accurately. The pump is filled with the medications such as morphine or Ziconodite (painkillers), or Bupivacaine (local anaesthetic) and is programmed by a computer to continuously release a specified dose that is determined by the physician.

Professor Ariconi added, “This

treatment is favourable and most appropriate to the patient case as the morphine released around the nerves directly will achieve immediate effectiveness.”

Samah Said Al Sarmiento, Advance Nurse Practitioner specialised in Pain Management, said that after implanting the device in the patient’s body and pumping it with the necessary medicines, we programme the device and operate it online and remotely, through a tablet. It is used specifically to programme the appropriate doses for each patient and monitor other vital indicators of the device.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



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

| Sl. No. | Tender Ref.          | Description                                                             | Last date for Collection of Tenders Document | Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am on Wednesday | Eligibility                                                                                          | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1       | MOH/DGKH-6/1102/2023 | Supply & Installation of new Medical Gas System at Wattayyah Polyclinic | 06/April/2023                                | 26/April/2023                                                | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade | RO. 25/000                  |
| 2       | MOH/DGKH-7/1103/2023 | Refurbishment Work in Neuro Surgery Wards at Khoula Hospital            |                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                      |                             |
| 3       | MOH/DGKH-8/1104/2023 | Refurbishment Work in Plastic Surgery Wards                             |                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                      |                             |

Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

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

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)



# Afghanistan school year starts but no classes held

**KABUL:** Afghanistan's schools reopened for the new academic year on Tuesday, but no classes were held as students were unaware of the start and hundreds of thousands of teenage girls remain barred from attending class.

Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls are prohibited from going to secondary school.

Taliban authorities have imposed an austere interpretation of religion since storming back to power in August 2021 after the withdrawal of the US-led foreign forces that backed the previous governments.

The education ministry made no public announcement of the reopening of schools, several teachers and officials said.

"A letter issued by the minister of education was given to us by our principal to reopen the school today but, since no public announcement was made, no students came," said Mohammad Osman Atayi, a teacher at the Saidal Naseri Boys High School in Kabul.

Seven schools in Kabul only a few teachers and primary students were seen arriving but no classes were held.

Schools also reopened in provinces including Herat, Kunduz, Ghazni and Badakhshan but no lessons were held there either.

Officials held a ceremony to mark the start of the new academic year at a boys school in



Deena Rahimi, a twelfth grade student from a secondary school, reads a book at her residence in Kabul. — AFP

Kabul.

Tuesday's start of the new academic year coincided with Nowruz, the Persian New Year, celebrated widely in Afghanistan before the Taliban returned to power but now considered "illegal" by the country's new rulers.

Hundreds of thousands of teenage girls remain barred from secondary school.

"The Taliban have snatched everything away from us," said 15-year-old Sadaf Haidari, a resident of Kabul who should have started grade 11 this year.

The international community has made the right to education for women a key condition in negotiations over aid and recognition of the Taliban government.

The United Nations mission in

Afghanistan (UNAMA) urged the authorities on Tuesday to lift the ban on girls' education.

"UNAMA reiterates its call to de facto authorities to reverse all discriminatory policies against women and girls," the mission said.

"They not only impede the aspirations of half of the population but are causing great damage to Afghanistan." — AFP

## Chad jails 400 rebels for life after ruler's death



**N'DJAMENA:** More than 400 rebels in Chad were handed life sentences on Tuesday following the death of former ruler Idriss Deby Itno, who was killed in 2021, a public prosecutor said.

After a mass trial, they were sentenced for "acts of terrorism, mercenarism, recruitment of child soldiers and assaulting the head of state," said Mahamat El-Hadj Abba Nana, prosecutor for the capital N'Djamena.

He did not give a detailed figure for those jailed, saying only that "more than 400 were sentenced" to life, while 24 other defendants were acquitted.

The trial opened last month behind closed doors at Klessoum prison, 20 kilometres southeast of the capital.

In early 2021, the country's main rebel group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), launched an

offensive on the north of the country.

On April 20, the army announced that Marshal Deby, Chad's iron-fisted ruler for the previous three decades, had died from wounds sustained in the fighting. His death was announced just a day after he had been declared victor of a presidential election that gave him a sixth term in office.

He was immediately succeeded by one of his sons, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, who took the helm at the head of a 15-member military junta.

Several defendants were also ordered to pay damages of more than \$32 million to the state and \$1.6 million to the ex-president's family, said FACT lawyer Francis Lokoulde.

"It's a masquerade that follows no law, no convention," said FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali. — AFP

# India says committed to boost millets at global conference

**KAUSHALENDRA SINGH**  
@patkaushal

India expressed hope to further strengthen ties in agriculture sector with various countries and lauded the efforts of the World Food Programme (WFP) in promoting food self-sufficiency and supporting governmental and global efforts to ensure long-term solutions to the challenge of hunger.

Taking part in the deliberations of the Global Millets Conference in New Delhi, the Indian Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with

the WFP of the United Nations, said a statement released by the ministry in course of the conference on Sunday.

Agriculture ministers from Guyana, Zambia, Suriname, Mauritius and Sri Lanka took part in the conference to promote production of millets. India is taking active part in the International Year of Millets (IYM) and promoting the production of millets by giving it the status of 'Shree Anna' (grains of grace).

India's Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said, "The International Year of Millets



is being celebrated so that the Indian Shree Anna, its recipes and value-added products are

accepted globally as a people's movement."

During the global conference,

the MoU between WFP and the Government of India for cooperation between 2023-2027 was signed in the presence of Agriculture Minister Tomar. During this, Manoj Juneja, Deputy Chief Executive Director, Management and Chief Financial Officer of UNWFP, and Elizabeth Faure, WFP Representative and Country Director in India were present, according to the statement.

During his meeting with Guyana's Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustafa, Tomar recalled the visit of the President of Guyana, Mohammad Irfan Ali, and the country's Vice-President

Bharat Jagdev, and said that agriculture is a very important area of cooperation between the two countries, said the ministry of agriculture statement.

"India is keen to share its expertise and experience in the development of agriculture and allied sectors in Guyana, for which an MoU is under finalisation. He assured that Guyana's request for the deputation of two experts to ITEC from India for three years to support the Guyana Sugar Corporation management and revive the sugar estates/plants in Guyana would be considered at the earliest," the statement said.

### SHORT TAKES

#### MEXICO CITY

##### 7 dead in explosion at house making fireworks

A blast at a home in central Mexico that doubled as an unauthorised fireworks producer killed at least seven people and injured 15 others, state officials said.

"The explosion occurred inside a house where fireworks were being clandestinely manufactured and stored," the Morelos state office of civil protection said late on Monday.

The accident happened in the town of Totolapan, about 80 kilometres south of the capital,



Mexico City.

Fatal explosions at fireworks manufacturers, particularly those that are operating off the books, are relatively common in Mexico.

#### ISTANBUL

##### Death toll from southern Turkiye flood hits 20

The death toll from last week's massive flash floods in south-eastern Turkiye has increased to 20 after bodies of a mother and her 1-year-old daughter were found, local media reported.

The dead bodies of Fatma Tekdal and her daughter Zeynep Zümra were found in the south-eastern province of Adiyaman, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted late on Monday.

Flood water had swept away a container house where Tekdal and her family lived. The private news



agency Demirören reported that the death toll increased to 20.

Several tents housing quake survivors were flooded in Adiyaman and surrounding provinces of Sanliurfa and Hatay.

#### QUITO

##### Ecuador declares state of emergency

Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso declared a state of emergency in 14 provinces worst affected by severe weather and a strong earthquake that shook the country over the weekend, the government said on Tuesday.

The measure adopted on Monday night will be in force for 60 days and will help authorities to mobilise economic resources to support the population and repair infrastructure.



In addition, some 21 people have died, according to government data, as heavy rains destroyed roads, bridges, and public and private infrastructure.



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## In brief

■ TOKYO



### JAPAN PM KISHIDA ARRIVES IN KYIV

Japan's Fumio Kishida arrived in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on Tuesday to meet President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, broadcaster NHK said, a rare, unannounced visit by a Japanese leader that signalled Tokyo's emphatic support against Russia's war.

Kishida is due to voice support and solidarity with Ukraine following the war by Russian forces more than a year ago, Japan's foreign ministry said. He will also convey "his respect for the courage and perseverance of the Ukrainian people standing up to defend their homeland," it said.

■ NAIROBI



### 200 ARRESTED IN KENYA PROTESTS

A university student in Kenya was killed and more than 200 people arrested in nationwide protests against President William Ruto's government over high living costs on Monday, police said.

Protesters took to the streets of the capital, Nairobi, and several other cities in response to a call for demonstrations by opposition leader Raila Odinga.

Some lit fires in the streets and threw rocks at police. Police fired tear gas and water cannons, including at Odinga's convoy as he addressed supporters from the sunroof of his car. Police said 24 officers were injured in the clashes. They gave no figure for injuries among the protesters.

■ PRETORIA



### HUNDREDS ARRESTED IN SOUTH AFRICA'S PROTESTS

More than 550 people were arrested during South Africa's opposition rallies, security forces said on Tuesday, a day after marchers called for the departure of President Cyril Ramaphosa over the ailing economy and crippling energy crisis. The National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure said the arrests covered "public violence, intimidation, damage to critical infrastructure, theft and attempted looting."

The left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the country's third-largest party, had called for a "national shutdown," sparking fears of a repeat of bloody clashes and looting just under two years ago.

BEIJING SEEKS TO BROKER PEACE, KYIV WANTS RUSSIA OUT

# Putin and Xi discuss Chinese peace proposal for Ukraine

**MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping discussed Beijing's proposal for a ceasefire in Ukraine during a first day of talks in Moscow and they were meeting again on Tuesday, the Kremlin said.

Xi's visit is a boost to Moscow as it struggles to make ground in its year-long war on Ukraine. But it was criticised by Washington as providing "diplomatic cover" for Putin and for the war crimes his forces are accused of committing there.

While China has sought to cast itself as a potential peace-maker in the conflict, the visit underlined an ever-closer relationship between Moscow and Beijing and their challenge to the West.

The two men spoke for more than four hours on Monday and enjoyed a state dinner at the Kremlin, warmly praising each other as a "dear friend", Russian media reported.

By contrast, Xi may only speak to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy by telephone, if at all.

But in a trip pointedly coinciding with Xi's Moscow talks, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday to deliver a message of solidarity and support for Ukraine.

In other developments, Ukraine's defence ministry said an explosion in Dzhankoi in the north of the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula destroyed Russian cruise missiles intended for use by Russia's Black Sea fleet.

On the battlefields in eastern Ukraine, Russia kept up air raids



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping walk during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

as well as missile and rocket strikes over a wide area, the Ukrainian military said.

Ukraine said Russia's main aim was to reach the borders of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the Donbas, large areas of which are already under Russian control.

Russian forces had again made attacks on the city of Bakhmut — site of the longest and bloodiest battle of the war — and other targets but had been repelled, it said.

### VAGUE PLAN

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin and Xi had on Monday talked about a Chinese proposal calling for a de-escalation

and eventual ceasefire in Ukraine.

"There was a very thorough exchange of views, a serious conversation," he said.

He declined to give further details, telling reporters to wait for a joint statement later on Tuesday after the two leaders meet for a second day of talks.

The Chinese document sets out some general principles in a 12-point plan but contains no details on how to end the war, now in its 13th month.

The proposal has been largely dismissed in the West as a ploy to buy Putin time to regroup his forces and solidify his grip on occupied land.

Ukrainian and Western officials

fear any ceasefire would merely freeze the front lines, handing Russia an advantage as it struggles to make headway following a serious of setbacks since launching its attack in February last year.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Xi's visit suggested that "China feels no responsibility to hold the Kremlin accountable for the atrocities committed in Ukraine".

China has refrained from condemning Russia or referring to Moscow's intervention in its neighbour as an "attack". It has also criticised Western sanctions on Russia. Foreign policy analysts said while Putin would be looking for strong support from Xi

over Ukraine, they doubted his Moscow visit would result in any military backing. Washington has said in recent weeks it fears China might arm Russia, a plan Beijing has denied.

Kyiv, which says the war cannot end until Russia pulls out its troops, has been circumspect towards China, cautiously welcoming Beijing's peace proposal when it was announced last month.

It was not clear if and when exactly Xi would talk to Ukraine's Zelenskyy.

"We are waiting for confirmation," Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk told Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera. "That would be an important move. They have things to say to each other."

But the visit by Japan's Kishida at the same time that Xi was in Moscow was a signal of Western resolve in backing Kyiv.

### CONSTANT MORTAR FIRE

In the town of Chasiv Yar, just west of Bakhmut, and the nearby village of Kalynivka in eastern Ukraine, there was heavy artillery fire from nearby Ukrainian positions as well as incoming impacts.

Between apartment blocks in central Chasiv Yar, mainly elderly residents queued for water and food delivered by a team from the State Emergency Service.

Oleksii Stepanov, speaking in the town of Kostyantynivka, said he had been in Bakhmut until five days ago but was evacuated by the military when his house was destroyed by a missile. — Reuters

## Johnson accepts MPs misled over 'partygate'

**LONDON:** Britain's former prime minister Boris Johnson admitted on Tuesday that he misled parliament by telling MPs that parties at his Downing Street office did not break Covid lockdown rules. But in evidence submitted to a powerful parliamentary committee probing his statements, he insisted that he acted in good faith.

Johnson, who was fined by police for breaking the rules he set the public, has previously apologised and corrected the parliamentary record after insisting that the gatherings were above board.

But he is due on Wednesday to go before the cross-party privileges committee of MPs probing the statements to determine whether he was in contempt of parliament.

"I accept that the House of Commons was misled by my statements that the rules and guidance had been followed completely at No 10 (Downing Street)," said Johnson.

"But when the statements were made, they were made in good faith and on the basis of what I honestly knew and believed at the time. "I did not intentionally or recklessly mislead the House on 1 December 2021, 8 December



Former British prime minister Boris Johnson leaves his home, in London, Britain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

2021, or on any other date. "I would never have dreamed of doing so."

Johnson's 52-page submission is a defence of his position on the scandal, which contributed to his downfall last July in a ministerial rebellion. It could determine his political future, despite talk that he is mulling a potential bid to return to high office.

If the privileges committee rule Johnson was in contempt, MPs will get a vote on what sanction he could face, including suspension.

Any suspension over 10 sitting days could trigger a by-election in his Uxbridge and South Ruislip seat, where he would have to defend a slim majority of just 7,210. — AFP

## 'Weakened' Macron sticks with pension bill, eyes new reforms

**PARIS:** French President Emmanuel Macron is looking to move on and work on new reforms in the coming weeks after his government barely survived a no-confidence motion on Monday over an unpopular pension reform, a source said.

Macron does not plan any reshuffle or snap elections and has ruled out withdrawing the pension law, which will raise the retirement age by two years to 64, the source who took part in meetings between Macron and key allies on Tuesday said. He will instead try and use a TV interview on Wednesday to "calm things down," the source said.

With unions stepping up strikes and protests against the pension reform continuing across the country, Macron faces the most dangerous challenge to his authority since the "Yellow Vest" revolt four years ago.

Some in Macron's own camp have warned him against continuing with business as usual.

"We are all weakened. The president, the government and the majority," a senior MP in Macron's camp, Gilles Le Gendre, told Liberation newspaper. "It's not because the law was adopted



Railway workers hold a banner reading "Macron and his laws: out!" during a demonstration outside Montpellier railway station in Montpellier, southern France, on Tuesday. — AFP

that we can do business as usual."

Another MP in Macron's camp, Patrick Vignal, bluntly urged the president to suspend the pension reform bill in the face of the anger it has triggered, and its deep unpopularity.

Protesters played cat-and-mouse with police in cities across France for a fifth night on Monday, setting bins and barricades on fire. What may concern the executive is the large number of young people in the demonstrations.

Television images showed police firing tear gas and

charging at protesters in several towns. Some special motor bike officers were seen striking out at protesters.

In another sign of growing anger, scuffles broke out on Tuesday next to at ExxonMobil's Fos-sur-Mer oil refinery, as the government took steps to order striking workers back to work, footage from BFM TV showed.

The refinery site was enveloped in tear gas, while some demonstrators intermittently threw objects at police lines, BFM said. — Reuters

# Moral leadership tradition lives on trust, confidence



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Who would have guessed that children's stories written around two thousand years ago are still influencing our leadership styles to this day? Asian cultures, from the east to the west are fortunate to have a wealth of literature on morals and leadership.

Mirrors for princes, or the genre of literature aimed at sharing social and political morals with upcoming royals, offers the world written masterpieces on morals. These mirrors, or collections of stories, show us in a language the children can understand, how moral values such as decency, honesty and courage are indispensable character traits for any leader, whether a king or a line supervisor. Growing up, I learned how a book such as Kalila wa Dimna serves as the perfect example of a mirror for princes

where fables of animal characters served as a tool for royal leadership wisdom, for two millennia, across three cultures;- Indian, Arab and Persian.

### Royal moral leadership

A great example for moral leadership is His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's directives for open registration forums for interested members of the public to engage with top official in three significant areas: vision, finance, and people development. Establishing the tradition for such open forums chaired by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, provides a two-way platform where the top leadership in the three said area are in open discussion with members for the

TRUST AND CONFIDENCE OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COMMON VISION IS THE SINGLE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR TO THE SUCCESS OF ITS EXECUTION. AS A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC, IT MEANT A LOT TO ME TO HEAR FOR THE RESPONSIBLE LEADERS WHAT REALLY MATTERS WHEN IT COMES TO VISION EXECUTION

to reach common consensus and understanding in pressing post-pandemic matters.

### Oman Vision 2040

Oman Vision 2040 is an example

of strategies and execution must go hand in hand. One point that the Unit Chairman Dr Khamis Al Jabri emphasised is how trust and confidence of all stakeholders in the common vision is the single most critical factor to the success of its execution. As a member of the public, it meant a lot to me to hear for the responsible leaders what really matters when it comes to vision execution.

### Finance

Contributing to the overall welfare of the society is everyone's responsibility, yet when considering the impact of global rising cost of living it is understandable how challenging it is to make new government fees popular. In all cases, financial policies are always better received when their return

is well explained to the public through such forums.

### Human resources

Workforce policies are without a doubt the most significant strategic tool in a nation's arsenal. One matter that was clear in this form is that creating synergy between knowledge, productivity and lifestyle is still a challenge which all stakeholders must work together to resolve.

Overall, His Highness Sayyid Theyazin's remarks on the importance of direct, open exchange of feedback on government policies were clear and uplifting. The Sultanate of Oman has a long moral leadership tradition, and this forum enhances trust and confidence that this tradition lives on.

## Biden picks his 2024 path — right down the middle

SEBASTIAN SMITH

When President Joe Biden motorcades from the White House to an environmental protection event on Tuesday he will hear grumbling on the left and grumbling on the right. And the 80-year-old Washington veteran will be perfectly happy.

The country is still waiting for Biden to announce officially that he will seek a second term next year. But already the Democrat has made clear what path he intends to use to get there: down the centre.

In an era of intense blacks and whites, Biden wants gray.

So when he addresses the environment forum at the Department of the Interior, he will highlight what his press office calls the administration's "historic investments to advance conservation, restoration, and stewardship." He may mention that he oversaw Congress' passing of the biggest green energy spending bill in history, the IRA. Or his raft of orders giving national monument protection to wild areas that Donald Trump — whom he beat in 2020 and could face again in 2024 — tried to open to development.

But Biden will also be speaking a week after approving a huge ConocoPhillips oil drilling project in the Alaskan wilderness that is projected to release the pollution equivalent of two million cars.

Biden has similarly baffled friends and wrong-footed enemies on his approach to the chaotic southern border with Mexico.

Last year, a constant flow of undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers left his administration looking near helpless. This year, strict new measures discouraging them from even trying have resulted in dramatic reductions.

Biden is even reportedly considering authorising a revival of one of the most fiercely criticised policies under Trump — detaining whole families if they cross the border illegally.

"The Biden administration has really turned a corner," said Bilala Askaryar, an activist in the group Welcome With Dignity, demonstrating outside the White House.

Biden's calculation seems to be that he can afford to annoy some of his most passionate supporters.

In a presidential election that could well see Trump or fellow right-wing populist Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as the Republican candidate, the left will have nowhere else to go.

And in the meantime, Biden hopes to build a consensus that the country's often ignored centrists can embrace. — AFP

# What if kids are sad and stressed because their parents are?



David French

There is a depressing familiarity now to the conversations I'm hearing among parents of teenagers. After the obligatory pleasantries, talk often turns to mental health. Someone's daughter is struggling, battling body image issues. Someone's son is sullen and lost in video games. The parental concerns of previous generations (sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll) have been replaced by a new triumvirate: anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

As a parent of a teenager, I see this world every day. It's the message I hear from my peers. So I've been following the discussion of rising teenage anxiety with intense interest — in particular, the role of social media, secularisation and politics in immiserating our children. But there's a factor that's received insufficient attention in the debate over external factors in teenage suffering: What if the call is also coming from inside the house? What if parents are inadvertently contributing to their own kids' pain?

Just as there is a depressing familiarity to parents' conversations about their children, there is a similar familiarity to kids' conversations about their parents. I spend much of my time travelling to college campuses, both secular and religious, and I hear a similar refrain all the time: "Something happened to my parents." Sometimes (especially at elite schools) they share stories about parents obsessed with their kids' education. More often I hear about parents consumed by politics. And at the extreme end, I hear stories about the impact of conspiracy theories of all kinds. Just as parents are upset about their children's anxiety and depression, children are anxious about their parents' mental health.

First, let's map out the very bleak landscape. In 2021, nearly 60 per cent of teenage girls reported feeling "persistent sadness," Azeen Ghorayshi and Roni Caryn Rabin wrote in The New York Times. Overall, 44 per cent of teenagers reported "persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness," according to The Washington Post, an increase from 26 per cent in 2009. These are the familiar numbers — the scary uptick that has spawned

soul-searching across the length and breadth of this land.

But let's place them in a grim context. The same year that 44 per cent of teenagers reported suffering from serious sadness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 41.5 per cent of adults reported "recent symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder," an increase from an already high baseline of 36.4 per cent just months before.

Moreover, while suicide rates have gone up in the youngest cohort of Americans, they still materially lag behind suicide rates among their parents and grandparents. Deaths of despair — the name for deaths due to suicide, drug abuse or alcohol poisoning — have particularly afflicted white middle-aged men, and the

JUST AS THERE IS A DEPRESSING FAMILIARITY TO PARENTS' CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN, THERE IS A SIMILAR FAMILIARITY TO KIDS' CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THEIR PARENTS.

numbers overall are simply staggering, especially since they started to increase sharply in 2000.

Aside from self-reported statistics about depression and anxiety or the grim toll of drug abuse and suicide, there are other indicators that the adults simply aren't all right. Partisan animosity, for example, simply keeps rising. Adult anger and pessimism are pervasive: A recent NBC News poll indicated that a record 58 per cent of registered voters surveyed believed that America's best days were behind it.

And when we think about children and screens, let's also consider the relationship between adults and their TVs and smartphones. Watch cable news (where grandparents get their news), and you'll see a discourse dominated by fear and anger. If you spend any time at all on political

Twitter (or observe the discourse on political Facebook posts), you'll quickly see a level of vicious, personal attacks that differ little from the most extreme personal bullying a person can experience in middle school or high school.

This isn't to say parents are the full story. I'm open to the smartphone thesis (and the secularisation thesis and the political thesis) as providing the primary explanation for teenage unhappiness, but I'm not convinced that the kids will ever be all right as long as Mum and Dad suffer from their own profound problems. Helicopter parenting is potentially stifling on its own terms, but it's got to be incalculably worse when the hovering parent is gripped by fear and anxiety.

So what is to be done? I don't mean to make parents feel even more anxious about their own anxiety, but to the extent our mental health is rooted in factors beyond our immediate control — an especially salient point when considering national politics — it might be worth asking a simple question: How much fear and anxiety should we import into our lives and homes? Forget teens, for the moment. Are we proving any more capable of handling the information age?

It's a question I honestly ask myself. I know that my experiences online drift into family life. I know that my anxiety can radiate outward to affect my kids. Our own addictions — to alcohol or drugs, yes, but also to information and outrage — can devastate our families. I think often about the poignant words of a British pastor named Andrew Wilson (that, yes, I saw on Twitter): "One of the things that has struck me in my last two US visits has been how very painful the culture wars have become for many, many people. Online, you see combatants appearing to enjoy the fight (or even monetise it). But on the ground, you see the hurt, confusion and fatigue."

Now it's time for us to realise that our hurt can become our kids' hurt, and if we want to heal our children, that process may well start by seeking the help we need to heal ourselves.

— The New York Times

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# Water is a human right, do not deny it...

Billions of people and countless institutions including schools, healthcare centres, farms and industries today do not have access to clean water and sanitation. And millions more are expected to go without these basic services in the coming years!

The United Nations General Assembly, through a resolution on July 28, 2010, explicitly approved access to clean water and sanitation as a human right and declared that they are fundamental to everyone's health, dignity and prosperity.

However, misuse, poor management, over-extraction of groundwater and contamination of freshwater supplies have exacerbated water stress, and people are denied this fundamental to everyone's health, dignity and prosperity.

Even in countries with adequate water resources, water scarcity is not uncommon. When water is scarce, sewage systems can fail and the threat of contracting diseases like cholera surges. Scarce water also becomes more expensive.

According to the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2022 report, about two billion people worldwide don't have access to safe drinking water, and roughly half of the world's population is experiencing severe water scarcity for at least part of the year.

These numbers are expected to increase, exacerbated by climate change and population growth. A Unicef report pointed out that half of the world's population could be living in areas facing water scarcity by as early as 2025.

Some 700 million people could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030. By 2040, roughly 1 in 4 children worldwide will be living in areas of extremely high water stress.

Failing to ensure such large numbers of people enjoy their human right to water can only make the world more unstable. Climate change, in combination with political turmoil in some parts of the world, is only likely to make this situation worse.



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GREAT ATTENTION HAS BEEN ACCORDED TO WATER RESOURCES IN OMAN SINCE THE EARLY 1970S, CONSIDERING THE COUNTRY'S DEPENDENCE ON GROUNDWATER AND RAIN

This means demand for water is rising, pollution is worsening, funding is lacking, and governance is often too weak to manage this precious resource efficiently and effectively in many countries.

Amid these situations falls World Water Day, together with Sustainable Development Goal 6 of the UN 2030 Agenda, to shed light on those people who currently do not enjoy their rights to safe water and sanitation.

Goal 6, which is central to the entire Agenda, plays a vital role in ensuring human health, dignity, equality, productivity and the survival of the ecosystem. Just as the water crisis is negatively affecting the global society so fast, our policymakers should focus on action plans that will ensure "water for all", and that nobody is overlooked in policies and programmes.

The success we have seen in expanding water services in some countries in the recent past shows that this is possible. What we need is greater political will and resources to make this happen.

An example is the Sultanate of Oman, where, according to the 2019 Voluntary National Review, significant progress in this regard has been made, with 98.7 per cent of the population benefiting from safe drinking water services in 2016. Desalinated water accounts for over 86 per cent of the total drinking water needs and is considered one of the strategic options to meet drinking water requirements. Other sources of drinking water, such as wells, contribute by approximately 14 per cent.

Water management and increased water use efficiency are among the priorities of Oman 2040. The Sultanate also aims to expand the development of wastewater treatment plants and extend sewage network lines at a cost of up to \$7 billion, averaging \$381 million per year.

The country also seeks to ensure sustainable freshwater availability and supply by 2030 by balancing supply and demand and expanding the use of non-conventional water resources currently used to replenish some coastal aquifers.

## CELEBRATING SPRING



Tajiks participate in Nowruz celebrations in Dushanbe on Tuesday. Nowruz, The New Year in Farsi, is an ancient festival marking the first day of spring in Central Asia. – AFP

# Some new faces but old divisions to haunt Thailand's May election

PANU WONGCHA-UM AND PANARAT THEPGUMPANAT

Thailand's general election set for May 14 will bring new faces into the fray but is likely to be over-shadowed by old animosity between the military-royalist establishment and popular opposition parties challenging the status quo.

The confrontation in the kingdom has shaped a tumultuous two decades of street protests, judicial intervention and coups that were quelled in recent years, largely by Covid-19 curbs, but could well play out again.

The main election contest will be between the rural-based political juggernaut founded by telecoms tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, and the conservative, Bangkok-based political elite, dominated by pro-military forces that have ruled since the last coup in 2014.

The prospects of a democratic winner either standing up to the pro-military order, or working with it, will determine the political and economic trajectory of Southeast Asia's second largest economy, analysts said.

"In contemporary Thai politics since the 1990s, this is the most consequential election," Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist

SOME NEW FACES BUT OLD DIVISIONS TO HAUNT THAILAND'S MAY ELECTION

at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, said.

Leading the charge for the billionaire Shinawatra family is Thaksin's daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who has been campaigning hard in the vote-rich rural strongholds of the family's Pheu Thai party.

The 36-year-old, who is pregnant with her second child, has been drawing enthusiastic crowds and looks set to rekindle the kind of fervour that swept her father and aunt, Yingluck Shinawatra, to power in landslides.

Thaksin and Yingluck were toppled by the army in 2006 and 2014, respectively, despite overseeing economic growth. Both live in self-imposed exile to avoid graft convictions their allies say were aimed at preventing political comebacks.

While loved in the countryside and by working class voters, the Shinawatras are detested by many middle- and upper-class Thais who accuse them of cronyism to enrich business friends and buying off the poor with wasteful populist policies that unfairly burden urban tax-payers. The Shinawatras deny the accusations.

Leading the conservative

campaign is Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a dour former army chief who led the last coup in 2014 and has ruled since.

The 68-year old royalist army man is running for the newly formed United Thai Nation Party and is appealing to conservatives with a promise of a steady hand and the slogan: "Have done, doing, and will continue".

Prayuth would appear to have his work cut out.

He came third in an opinion poll by the state-owned National Institute of Development Administration released on



Paetongtarn Shinawatra attends a Pheu Thai Party news conference in Bangkok, Thailand. – Reuters file photo

Sunday on who would make the best leader. Not surprisingly, Paetongtarn came first followed closely by Pita Limjaroenrat of the progressive opposition Move Forward Party.

But it might not be the voters who decide who moves into Bangkok's Government House as prime minister.

An outsized influence in determining the next leader will be wielded by the 250-seat upper house Senate, which was appointed by the military government before the last election, won by Prayuth, in 2019.

The leader of the biggest party

in the lower house after the election could be denied the top job if the Senate wanted to stymie them in a vote with minority parties in the lower house.

"One of the most important deciders of the election result is the power of the military-appointed Senate, which will likely side with the pro-military candidate," said Titipol Phakdeewanich, a political analyst from Ubon Ratchathani University.

In the past four years, the Senate has regularly voted to support the establishment, blocking legislation proposed by the opposition despite the approval of the elected lower house.

Paetongtarn, who warns voters of the dangers of coups setting the country "backwards", has spoken of the importance of a landslide victory in forcing the Senate to respect the vote. She has not said what she would do if her party won the most seats but was denied victory.

The Shinawatras' supporters have taken to the streets over the past two decades, as have their pro-military rivals, on occasion sparking bloody chaos when the army cracked down. — Reuters

# sport

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## RICHARLISON, MARQUINHOS OUT WITH INJURIES FOR BRAZIL-MOROCCO

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Tottenham forward Richarlison and Paris Saint-Germain defender Marquinhos will both miss Brazil's friendly against Morocco on March 25 due to injury, joining star Neymar on the absent list, the team said.

The new injuries leave the five-time world champions without a string of top players as they prepare to take on surprise World Cup semi-finalists Morocco in Tangier in their first match since Qatar.

Richarlison, 25, left the pitch in tears on Saturday after suffering an injury early in Tottenham's 3-3 draw at Southampton.

"National team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar contacted Richarlison's club, and established that the athlete will not be fit to play for the friendly," the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said in a statement late on Saturday.

Marquinhos, 28, is still recovering from a muscle injury in his abdomen and will not be fit in time, it added.

Interim Brazil coach Ramon Menezes called up 22-year-old Yuri Alberto of Sao Paulo club Corinthians to replace Richarlison and 26-year-old Bremer of Juventus to replace Marquinhos, the CBF said.

It will be Yuri Alberto's first cap. Bremer was in Brazil's 2022 World Cup squad.

Menezes, who coached Brazil's under-20 squad to the South American championship last month without losing a match, has called up a young team featuring just 10 players the "Selecao" brought to the World Cup.

Brazil are looking to shake off the disappointment of their quarter-final exit against Croatia in Qatar, but face a Morocco squad galvanized by going further in the World Cup than any African or Arab team in history.

Brazil talisman Neymar, 31, who suffered his latest ankle injury last month for PSG, underwent surgery on March 10.

Doctors say they are still uncertain when he will be able to return to play. — AFP

## OBA signs agreements for youth training centres



AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has signed agreements with coaches of training centres for basketball players in the governorates. The agreements include 12 club centres, which are Qurayat, Bausher, Ahli Sidab, Seeb, Nizwa, Al Bashayer, Sohar, Al Shabab, Salalah, Musandam, a centre for training young women, and a centre for preparing female players for national teams based in the Bausher Sports Complex.

The agreements were signed in the presence of Eng Khalfan

al Naabi, Chairman of the Oman Basketball Association, Hisham bin Juma al Sinani, Director-General of Sports Welfare and Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, members of the OBA Board of Directors, and coaches of basketball training centres.

The signing of the OBA for training contracts with the coaches of the centres came after the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth recently launched a project to develop a system for preparing athletes under the slogan 'From Exploration to Achievement' as part of the government support



projects provided by the Ministry to sports associations and committees to raise the efficiency of their performance and increase the effectiveness of the sports performance system.

The Oman Basketball Association chose a number of coaches for training in the centres for preparing basketball players, namely Yasser al Sulaimani, Mahdi al Busaidy, Ali al Balushi, Alaa al Hadhrami, Nidhal al Mughiriyah, Ahmed Bu Hass, Sulaiman al Hinai, Ashraf al Yaarubi, Ammar al Kathiri, Majid al Balushi, Abdullah al Muqbali and Mohammed al Dhahouri.

OBA Vice-Chairman Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, who is also heading the Basketball Players Preparation Centres Committee, gave a presentation that included the tasks of the committee to activate the centres by setting up a mechanism for making contracts for coaches and their assistants and providing transportation and training tools.

Shortly after signing the agreements, Eng Khalfan al Naabi, stressed the importance of partnership agreements with a number of clubs to activate centres for preparing basketball players in various governorates.

### TWO CENTRES FOR GIRLS

The project to launch these centres comes in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth. The centres are aimed at providing players for the clubs and the national teams. Two centres have been identified for girls, due to the women's interest in basketball.

Al Naabi added that a large number of players joined the centres, and this is an excellent indicator to ensure the continuity of the work of the centres. The partnership between the ministry and the OBA resulted in the ministry

providing financial support, while the association set the mechanism for the work of the centres and set the criteria and conditions for selecting coaches and players and technical supervision over them. The association will also follow with up the clubs and their boards of directors to find out about developments in the progress of work in the centres.

The main objective of these centres is to spread the game more widely in the Sultanate of Oman, form a strong player base and prepare technical and administrative cadres.



## Struggling Sevilla sack Sampaoli

**MADRID:** Argentinian Jorge Sampaoli was sacked as coach of struggling Sevilla on Tuesday, with the club just off the relegation zone.

"Sevilla FC have today relieved Jorge Sampaoli of his duties," the club said in a statement.

"Following the defeat at Getafe, which leaves the side just above the relegation zone, the club have decided to part ways with the Argentine coach ahead of the international break."

"Sevilla FC would like to thank Jorge Sampaoli for his dedication and commitment at the club and wish him the best of luck in his future." The former Chile and Argentina coach joined Sevilla in October, but the club has failed to shake off its disappointing mid-table form. Sampaoli's second stint at the club saw him oversee

13 wins, six draws and 12 defeats in 31 matches.

Sevilla sit 13th in La Liga on 28 points, two off Getafe -- to whom they lost 2-0 on Sunday -- and Almeria, who currently occupy two of the three relegation spots.

Sevilla will face Manchester United in next month's quarter-finals of the Europa League, a competition the club has won a record six times.

"It's time to say goodbye to a club I love," said Sampaoli, 62.

"I go with my head held high. Football doesn't always make you happy. It can even give you insomnia.

"But there's no doubt it was worth my while. It seemed like a good idea at the time," said the fiery coach who was under contract until the end of next season." — AFP

## Second All-Omani T20 tourney from March 25



**MUSCAT:** Oman Cricket has announced the start of the second edition of the All-Omani T20 tournament for the Oman Cricket League 2022-23 which will be played during the holy month of Ramadhan. It will be held from March 25 to April 10 at the Oman Cricket Academy with the start time for all matches at 8 pm.

Seven teams competing for the coveted cup are OCT Ruwi, OCT Al Mabela, OCT Al Amerat 'A', OCT Al Amerat 'B', OCT Al Hail 'A', OCT Al Hail 'B' and OCT Al Nahdhah. The tournament will be played in round-robin format between the 7 teams with the team claiming most points will be named winners.

Speaking on the vision of the tournament, Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket, Duleep Mendis said, "It gives me great

joy to announce the start of the second edition of the All-Omani competition.

One of our aims at Oman Cricket has always been to build on successful staging of events and further cultivate an active interest towards the game of cricket in the nation's local youths. In addition, I believe that grassroots cricket and the inclusion of ethnic participation is the foundation that holds up the game in any country.

We have already taken multiple steps in ensuring its robust health in Oman and this event is another milestone on that same path. I thank all the players and teams that have signed up and wish them the very best of luck."

There will be arrangements for the spectators to watch the games live at the Oman Cricket Academy.

## DeRozan, Bulls leave Sixers waiting after overtime thriller

**LOS ANGELES:** DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points as the Chicago Bulls snapped Philadelphia's eight-game winning streak with a thrilling 109-105 victory in double overtime on Monday.

The red-hot Sixers had been looking to clinch their playoff ticket with victory in front of an expectant home crowd at the Wells Fargo Center.

But despite a 37-point performance from Joel Embiid — the MVP front-runner's 10th straight 30-point game — Philadelphia were left waiting to reach the postseason after a gritty road win from Chicago.

Embiid missed an attempted tip-in after Tyrese Maxey's attempted three-pointer at the end of regulation which would have snatched victory for the Sixers.

Embiid put Philadelphia 99-97 ahead in the final minute of the first period of overtime but DeRozan levelled with a driving lay up.

The Chicago star missed an attempted three-pointer with less than two seconds on the clock, to take the game to a second period of overtime.

The Sixers looked to have taken a grip on the contest after opening up a 105-101 lead in the second overtime period, but with Embiid absent after fouling out, the Bulls reeled off eight unanswered points to close out the win.

It was the first time in 12 career meetings against Chicago that Embiid has finished on the losing side.

DeRozan admitted that he was aware of that statistic prior to the game.

"I knew that," DeRozan told reporters. "It was only a matter of time. Not saying that was part of the motivation. We've got a bigger goal than just trying to beat him. But I'm glad we got the win."

Chicago improved to 34-37 and remain in 10th place in the Eastern Conference standings, leaving them on course for a place in the play-in tournament for teams ranked between seventh and 10th, which determine the last two spots in the eight-team conference play-offs.

Philadelphia, third in the East with a 48-23 record, remain one win away from formally clinching their playoff spot.



Randle dazzles in vain

In other games around the NBA on Monday, Julius Randle erupted for 57 points in a scintillating performance but it was not enough to stop the New York Knicks falling 140-134 at home to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Randle's masterpiece included eight three-pointers from 19-of-29 shooting, while Jalen Brunson added 23 points. Three other Knicks players finished in double figures.

However Minnesota's balanced offence was enough to give the Wolves victory, with Taurean Prince leading the visitors scoring with 35 points.

All of Minnesota's starters

posted double-digit points totals, while Naz Reid (12) and Jaylen Nowell (14) combined for 26 off the bench.

In Utah, the high-flying Sacramento Kings, who remain third in the Western Conference, came unstuck in a 128-124 loss to the Jazz, who are 11th in the standings.

Ochai Agbaji led the Utah scoring with 27 points, with no fewer than eight Jazz players making double-figures. De'Aaron Fox led the Sacramento scoring with 37 points.

In Houston meanwhile, the Golden State Warriors finally snapped their miserable losing streak on the road with a 121-108 defeat of the Rockets.

The NBA champions had gone into the game on the back of 11 straight defeats away from home, but ended that sequence against a Rockets team who have just 18 wins this season.

Steph Curry and Klay Thompson combined for 59 points, including 10 three-pointers yet the Warriors still made hard work of the win, coughing up 20 turnovers, 14 of them in the first half.

"We were not focused, but second half we did a better job of taking care of the ball," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

"I don't remember the last road game we won," Kerr added. "It's been a while. We needed it obviously." — AFP

## Fitbox Club opens in Al Khuwair

**MUSCAT:** Fitbox Club opened its second branch in Al Khuwair recently.

Sayyid Aymen bin Hamed al Busaidy, Vice-Chairman, Sabco Group, was the chief guest and led the launch of the Fitbox Club.

Owned by a couple, Ali Kerdi from Lebanon and Katerina Kerdi from Latvia, Fitbox Club was founded over 3 years ago and now has branches in Muscat with more plans to grow.

They offer boxing, Muay Thai, BJJ, with private classes for ladies, kids and teenagers.

Says Katerina, "Fitbox is not just a gym but it is a community of like-minded people. It is one of its kind in Oman having a unique design and concept. The club welcomes kids starting from the age of 4. Kids classes



are normally from ages 4 to 13 and teens classes are from ages 13 to 18. Adult groups have all levels and no special preparation is needed. There are also ladies' classes headed by a ladies coach."

### OUTDOOR TRAINING

The new branch has facilities for showers and an outdoor training area. Fitbox coaches are highly professional and hail from Lebanon, Brazil and Kenya.

Registration is now open and the Fitbox classes are safe and beneficial to anybody who wants to step on a fitness path. They make one strong, fit, improves your flexibility, decreases stress and are a lot of fun. Fitbox opened their first branch in North Mawaleh in 2019. Their Instagram handle is fbclub.



# PSG re-enacting ‘Groundhog Day’ in yet another mediocre season

PARIS: Paris St Germain owners Qatar Sport Investments (QSI) have spent more than 1.5 billion euros (\$1.60 billion) in transfers since they took over in 2011, yet coach Christophe Galtier has been blaming the club’s miserable run on key absences.

PSG, who were knocked out of the Champions League by Bayern Munich last month and eliminated from the French Cup by bitter rivals Olympique de Marseille in February, lost 2-0 to Stade Rennais on Sunday, their first home defeat in Ligue 1 in almost two years.

Instead of blaming Lionel Messi’s poor performance or the Argentine’s dubious behaviour as

he walked straight to the dressing room while others, like Kylian Mbappe, went to greet the ever-supportive fans of the Boulogne kop, Galtier highlighted those who were missing.

“You have to put it in context — we were missing eight players, plus there was a compulsory substitution at halftime when Tim Pemele went off injured,” said Galtier, who has been in charge since the beginning of the season.

Neymar’s season is over with an ankle injury, centre backs Presnel Kimpembe and Marquinhos have also been injured, but the lack of creativity in midfield and attack was for everyone to see on Sunday as PSG lost their seventh

game in 18 outings in the post-World Cup period.

The Ligue 1 title is almost guaranteed as they enjoy a seven-point lead over Marseille with 10 matches left in a season that could be dubbed the ‘Groundhog Day’ of European football.

PSG won the French title but stumbled in Europe, unable to find the stability and club culture that has been helping the likes of Real Madrid, Liverpool, Bayern and others establish themselves as powerhouses on the continental stage.

Galtier has another year on his contract but he has not even started to turn the tables at PSG, never blaming his players despite

some obvious shortcomings.

“The players were committed,” said Galtier.

“But then, when you’re 2-0 down against a team like Rennes, there can be a form of resignation.”

His predecessors Thomas Tuchel and Mauricio Pochettino opted for a similar approach, also asking for time and patience before being sacked.

“I came here for a two-year project,” said Galtier.

“Everyone is speculating about what will happen at the end of the season. The objective is to be champions. Will this defeat make the club officials think twice? Perhaps it will.” — Reuters

# Mbappe to become new France captain



PARIS: Kylian Mbappe will take over as captain of France after Hugo Lloris stepped down following the World Cup final defeat to Argentina, a source close to the team said.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe, 24, accepted the role after discussions with coach Didier Deschamps.

His first game as captain will be Friday’s Euro 2024 qualifier against the Netherlands at the Stade de France, Les Bleus’ first match since their World Cup final disappointment in Doha on December 18.

Tottenham goalkeeper Lloris, 36, brought an end to his international career in January, in the weeks after Lionel Messi’s Argentina side beat the French in a penalty shootout following a thrilling match that ended 3-3 in extra-time. Lloris had been skipper for more than a decade.

Atletico Madrid attacker Antoine Griezmann was named vice-captain after Manchester United centre-back Raphael Varane also hung up his boots following the defeat to Argentina in December.

Mbappe, who scored a hat-trick in the World Cup final defeat,

had been heavily linked with the captain’s role for weeks.

Michel Platini, who captained France to victory in the 1984 European Championship, said the decision was “a very good idea”.

“In giving him the responsibility of the captaincy, it allows Kylian, when necessary, to go still further, higher, stronger,” Platini, the ex-head of European football’s governing body Uefa, said in a statement.

Mbappe helped Les Bleus to World Cup glory as a teenager in 2018 and has established himself as arguably the leading forward on the global stage.

The Paris-born former Monaco player is vice-captain at PSG behind Brazilian defender Marquinhos and led the side in the defender’s absence during Sunday’s loss to Rennes.

Mbappe has scored 19 goals in 24 Ligue 1 matches this season and contributed seven goals in PSG’s run to the last 16 of the Champions League, where they were knocked out by Bayern Munich.

France are grouped with the Dutch, the Republic of Ireland, Greece and Gibraltar in their qualifying group for Euro 2024, to be held in Germany. — AFP



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# OIA-backed Omani ‘smart cities’ tech firm launched

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), presided over the launch of Future Cities Company (Tadoom) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, in the presence of a number of high-ranking officials and members of the State Council. Tadoom is an Omani semi-governmental company specialised in developing and providing smart city solutions that help create more efficient and sustainable communities and cities.

This is achieved by improving service efficiency using technologies, the latest IoT innovations, artificial intelligence applications, and big data, all aimed at enhancing quality of life and building sustainable, high-performance cities that meet the needs and requirements of their residents, while involving them in building a community environment that follows global trends. The company is one of the investments of the Oman Investment Authority in the IoT



sector. Tadoom seeks to enable both the government and private sectors to provide basic and service infrastructure through digital solutions, benefiting from global experiences in employing IoT, AI, cloud computing, and big data analysis, which in turn contributes to making cost-effective developmental decisions and achieving objectives according to service requirements based on the data collected via IoT. The company covers many

sectors and services that are essential for both governmental and private entities, contributing to their development and facilitation, such as smart water solutions, smart energy solutions, smart environmental solutions, smart mobility solutions, smart building solutions, and smart governance. Al Murshidi said: “Investing in an Omani company operating in a promising sector with global and local partnerships adds exceptional economic and developmental value to both the local and global

markets, and establishes a solid foundation for the technology sector.” Eng Abdullah bin Rashid al Badi, CEO of Tadoom, said the company provides solutions for smart cities and aims to increase the efficiency of services by reducing operational costs through a build-operate-transfer ownership system. “We have intensified our efforts in the renewable energy sector, where we launched Solar Valley Company, one of the first local companies involved in developing

TADOOM SEEKS TO ENABLE BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTORS TO PROVIDE BASIC AND SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH DIGITAL SOLUTIONS, BENEFITING FROM GLOBAL EXPERIENCES IN EMPLOYING IOT, AI, CLOUD COMPUTING, AND BIG DATA ANALYSIS, WHICH IN TURN CONTRIBUTES TO MAKING COST-EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DECISIONS AND ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES ACCORDING TO SERVICE REQUIREMENTS BASED ON THE DATA COLLECTED VIA INTERNET OF THINGS (IOT).

technologies by implementing one of the largest smart metering projects. We have also worked on designing, building, and operating the first commercial network for the Internet of Things” Al Badi added. Through its partnership with Omantel, Tadoom is adopting Internet of Things technologies, in addition to providing innovative financing solutions and opening investment spaces for partnership with institutions through the ‘Build, Operate, Transfer’ system – a move aimed at increasing efficiency by reducing operating costs.” The launch witnessed an exhibition of Future Cities Company ‘Tadoom’ products and their utilisation of artificial intelligence technologies. Tadoom also signed a cooperation agreement in the field of the Internet of Things with Omantel, represented by CEO Shaikh Talal al Mamari. Tadoom also signed an agreement to develop smart cities under ‘Marafiq’, represented by Eng Abdullah al Hashmi, Executive Director of Marafiq.

## Rakiza Fund raises \$1 billion towards infrastructure deals



Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Oman Infrastructure Fund (Rakiza), which is jointly managed by Oman Infrastructure Investment Management (an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority) and London-based investment fund Equitix, has announced the successful closing of a fund with an investment in excess of \$1 billion. Rakiza said in a statement to ONA that Fund has invested 25 per cent of the capital in three projects: a 30 per cent stake in the portfolio of passive telecom towers in the Sultanate of Oman, and 31 per cent stake in the container terminal in Sohar Port, and a majority stake in the new Central Fruits & Vegetables in Khzaen Economic City. Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri, CEO of Rakiza Fund, said that the success of the private placement is an important step towards achieving the goals of the Fund, which is designed to add value to



Hugh Crossley

strategic investments in the region. Hugh Crossley, Co-Founder and CEO of Equitix, said the Fund will generate dividends through investments in development and implementation of infrastructure projects in the Sultanate of Oman. He credited the Fund’s success to the efforts of the local investment teams at the fund’s headquarters in Muscat. Rakiza Fund’s investments in Oman focus on the telecommunications, energy, water, transportation, logistics, infrastructure and renewable energy sectors with the aim of achieving stable returns from these ventures. The Fund seeks to create value through its investments while supporting the achievement of the financial sustainability goals set by its main investors by taking into account environmental, social and institutional governance factors, in addition to making a positive long-term impact on financial performance, society and the environment.

## Madayn to manage Duqm Industrial Lands

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held its first meeting of the year 2023 at the Authority’s headquarters in Muscat on Tuesday. During its meeting, the Board approved the allocation of industrial lands in Duqm Special Economic Zone to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). The Board also reviewed the proposed amendments project of the bylaw of Urban

Planning and Building Permits, to facilitate investment and ensure the consistency of the overall appearance of existing buildings with the development of this regulation to be applied in new economic zones, free zones and various industrial zones. The Board also discussed the controls, rules and registration of engineering consultancy offices and their classification in SEZAD, to be applied to the rest of the special economic

zones, free and industrial zones in the future. The Board of Directors also approved a mechanism for signing usufruct contract agreements with government entities in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and unifying the usufruct fees for commercial lands allocated for petrol station projects and their annexes located in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm for a period of five years to come, so that all contracts are evaluated during this period.

## OPWP to explore energy storage options in the Sultanate of Oman

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the single buyer of electricity and water output in the Sultanate of Oman, says it plans to study options for energy storage development as part of the nation’s transition to a greener and sustainable future. The move – a first in Oman’s power sector – will help support the large-scale adoption of renewable energy resources for electricity generation, as well as accelerate the decarbonisation of the electricity sector, according to a key executive of the state-owned entity – a member of Nama Group. “One area that we are trying to focus on this year and next are options for energy storage,” said Abdullah bin Rashid al Sawafi (pictured), Chief Operating Officer. “Our goal is to capitalise on the utilisation of energy storage, and support the generation of renewable energy, as part of our commitment to achieving sustainability in this sector. To this end, we will tender out a Request



for Proposals (RfP) to the market, during this year, to get their support in this area.” Energy storage encompasses the ability to capture energy at a time of, say, surplus availability, for use later at a time when access to an energy source is either unavailable, limited in supply or intermittent. By utilising a variety of technologies and systems, energy storage can help address a major shortcoming in the large-scale adoption of renewables, such as solar and wind resources: the intermittency factor associated with such types of resources. Energy storage systems currently in use around the world

save energy in a variety of forms – chemical, kinetic, thermal and so on – and convert them back to electricity or other useful forms. In Pumped Hydroelectric Storage, for example, the system consists of two reservoirs maintained at different heights. When there is surplus availability of electricity – for instance, solar energy during daylight – water is pumped from the lower reservoir to the higher one. At night, when solar power generation declines, water from the higher reservoir begins to flow to generate electricity. Likewise, in thermal storage, excess heat or electricity generated

during the day is used to heat up liquids or materials, such as molten salts. This heat is harnessed to run a steam turbine at night for electricity generation. Other types of storage systems, such as Compressed Air Energy Storage, Flywheel Energy Storage, and so on, are also in use elsewhere around the world – their application depending on environmental conditions, as well as suitability to the end-user. Of late, however, the use of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), based on lithium-ion or other technologies, is becoming increasingly efficient and popular, particularly in conjunction with solar, wind and other such resources. Speaking at the Oman Sustainability Week, which was held in Muscat last week, Al Sawafi said the study will enable OPWP to evaluate the potential role of energy storage technologies in Oman’s power system. Furthermore, in addition to supporting the National Energy Transition Strategy, energy storage will also help optimise Oman’s generation portfolio, he added.

# Forum reviews success stories of student-led businesses

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, met with representatives of emerging student companies in North Al Batinah Governorate to review their business proposal, as well as to understand challenges they face, as part of the Ministry's push to drive entrepreneurship among young Omanis.

Also taking part were university students majoring in business and economics in the Governorate. The event was organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion with the support of the University of Sohar, and the Industrial



Innovation Academy.

All three entities recently signed a partnership agreement to enhance the Suhar Production Company for Transformative Industries – an initiative to support the manufacturing and

industrial innovation sector. The meeting highlighted success stories of these companies and identified the factors and potentials that contribute to their success and development. Participants also reviewed the facilities provided

by the government for students to register their inventions, obtain patents, and access financing for emerging companies. The meeting also discussed scientific disciplines in higher education institutions that focus on the economic

and commercial fields, which contribute to building pioneering Omani economic and commercial companies that support the national economy at all levels. Dr Masan's visit was part of a series of trips to various governorates to closely identify the needs of emerging student companies and enhance investment opportunities in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The goal is to attract more investments and develop economic projects in the governorates by strengthening their competitive advantages. Dr Masan and his accompanying delegation also visited the Suhar Production Company for Advanced Industries at Sohar University, which is one of the successful initiatives to emerge from the Vision 2040 strategy in support of economic diversification. This company is

a second phase of the project in cooperation between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion and the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Oman Vision 2040.

Under this agreement, the Suhar Production Company for Advanced Industries will provide specialised manufacturing and industrial support services in research and development, reverse engineering, precision parts manufacturing, mold and production tooling, and specialised spare parts manufacturing for various industrial companies inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to developing Omani expertise.

The company will also continue to generate knowledge and transfer advanced technology to localise it in the Sultanate of Oman.

## Muriya brings Wonder Island to Jebel Sifah



MUSCAT: Jebel Sifah hosted the first edition of Wonder Island recently in partnership with Taiseer Platform, the event showcased games, sports, talent shows, live music and entertainment, live food stations, and a family circus.

Guests enjoyed a virtual reality corner, electronic games, fire shows, traditional Omani dance, food, games and performances dedicated towards celebrating Ramadhan. The Jebel Sifah marina was open all weekend for guests to enjoy various land and water activities.

"This is a fantastic event for the whole family to enjoy," said Karim Boushra, Area Destinations Director at Muriya. "We are excited to partner with Taiseer Platform to bring such a wide-ranging entertainment spectacle to Jebel Sifah and provide a platform for local talent to perform, reach new audiences, and enrich the experience for residents, guests, visitors and the local community."

Further highlights included a special exhibit focusing on coastal life, including a live craft display where local craftspeople showcase the art of making fishing nets, traditional coastal songs, beach games and a bazaar corner featuring a selection of souvenirs.

"We are glad to collaborate with Muriya for the first edition of Wonder Island," said Nada Bassam, CEO of Taiseer Platform. "As we welcome the holy month of Ramadhan, Wonder Island is a great opportunity for families and friends across different nationalities and cultures to enjoy amidst the beautiful marina at Jebel Sifah."

Located only 45 kilometres from Muscat, Jebel Sifah is a residential resort community developed by Muriya and OMRAN.

# Sohar Islamic a strategic partner in Imam Jaber bin Zaid Waqf Foundation's annual forum

MUSCAT: Sohar Islamic, Sohar International's Islamic Window, has reiterated its commitment to advancing humanitarian causes for the betterment of society by sponsoring and participating in the 2nd edition of the annual forum of the Imam Jaber bin Zaid Waqf (endowments) Foundation.

The forum, which took place on March 12 at the Sheraton Hotel Oman, was held under the patronage of Abdulsalam al Murshidi, Executive President of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate of Oman's Sovereign Wealth Fund.

Abdulwahid al Murshidi, the Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Sohar International, represented the bank at the forum and participated at the panel



discussion which highlighted the Endowments Investment Planning.

Sohar Islamic, through a dedicated booth, exhibited its range of products and services and highlighted the pivotal role played by Waqf in the community. The occasion was conducive for

Sohar Islamic to showcase its unwavering dedication towards promoting social responsibility and making a positive impact on the community.

In recognition of its partnership and support, Sohar Islamic received a token of appreciation during the event which was

received by Abdulwahid al Murshidi.

Abdulwahid al Murshidi emphasised that Waqf, which is a form of Islamic philanthropy, is a crucial, effective, and meaningful resource for financing projects that align with sustainability, ethics, and transparency.

He commented: "As a responsible corporate entity, Sohar Islamic believes that it is incumbent to promote awareness of the advantages of Waqf and its potential to support humanitarian causes that contribute to the overall well-being of society.

By participating in the Imam Jaber bin Zaid Waqf Foundation's annual forum, Sohar Islamic further substantiate its emphasis on establishing meaningful

partnerships with organisations committed to promoting social solidarity, compassion, and philanthropy."

This forum serves as a testament to the Imam Jaber bin Zaid Waqf Foundation's unwavering commitment towards enriching the knowledge and awareness of the endowment sector in the Sultanate of Oman, with a particular emphasis on augmenting investment strategies.

Its principal objective is to foster heightened awareness and expertise among the individuals responsible for endowment institutions in the field of investment and to promote effective communication between such institutions.

# Alizz Islamic Bank celebrates graduation of first batch of Ruwad Alizz programme

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank, represented by the Learning and Development Department, celebrated the graduation of the first batch of the Ruwad Alizz programme.

The course conceptualised in collaboration with Harvard ManageMentor, an e-learning platform from the prestigious Harvard University, aims to enhance the skill and knowledge of middle management, enabling them to become future leaders.

The ceremony was graced by Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, Ali bin Saif al Mani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, and other members of executive management.

A group of 28 participants successfully completed the Ruwad Alizz programme that focuses on developing leaders from both the government institutions and private sector establishments. The programme looks to equip participants with the necessary skills required to meet future job market demands by providing a comprehensive and rapid development journey for future leaders.



The programme which spanned six months included a group of local and regional exceptional leadership guest speakers, including members of the bank's executive management team.

This provided a unique opportunity for participants to learn from diverse leadership styles and experiences, which is essential for future success. The programme's philosophy is based on the belief that personal growth is driven by the accumulation of experiences, whether from

individuals, societies, or different organisations.

In his speech, Ali al Mani, the General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank said, "We emphasise the importance of collectively serving our beloved country and continuously striving to develop middle leaders in alignment with Oman's Vision 2040.

We appreciate the significant praise that the Ruwad Alizz programme has received in the past, highlighting its exceptional nature due to the quality of its

teaching programmes, instructors, and affiliation with Harvard ManageMentor, a distinguished e-learning platform associated with Harvard University.

As a result, the programme welcomed a second batch of participants, and the third batch is currently undergoing the assessment process to select the most qualified individuals."

Al Mani added "The concept of Ruwad Alizz programme originated from the CEO of Oman Arab Bank, Sulaiman al Harthy,

during his tenure as the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank. Al Harthy was passionate about developing a professional programme that would equip those next in line with the skills needed to take on senior leadership roles, both within Alizz Islamic Bank and other organisations. After implementing the programme on ground, and presenting it to the Board of Directors, it was approved and launched under the name Ruwad Alizz."

The goal of the programme is to train 60 employees every year in two groups of 30. The programme which lasts for six months is not limited to Alizz Islamic Bank employees only. It is a community programme in which other institutions are also invited to participate to maximise its benefits.

The participants' progress is closely monitored through a specific system that evaluates their performance and ensures they complete their tasks on time. The bank's training and development department provides direct follow-up, and each employee enrolled in the programme is assigned a mentor from senior management.



# Algae: A promising biomass for biofuel generation



MARYAM AL NOFLI

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The world is facing massive energy demands as a result of the rapid population growth and industrialisation occurring around the world, as well as the rising cost of fuel.

The usage of fossil fuels is responsible for 87% of the world's CO2 emissions, according to a recent scientific paper, with coal, oil, and natural gas each contributing 43%, 35%, and 20%, respectively.

Specifically, transportation systems account for about one-third of the world's energy consumption, with oil accounting for fifty per cent.

Between 2040 and 2050, the demand for fossil fuels is projected to increase by 40% due to the projected growth in global population.

According to a new IEA study of the most recent global data, these CO2 emissions were projected to rise by close to 300 million metric tonnes in 2022 and reach 33.8 billion metric tonnes by the beginning of 2023.

To meet the world's energy demands, alternative energy

sources such as solar, wind, and biomass are essential. Thus, there is a pressing need to solve these issues, and academics are currently devoting close attention to this by developing sustainable and cost-effective methods of energy production.

Globally, the production of liquid fuels from biological material, or "biomass," is becoming more prevalent.

Recently, the dual challenges of energy security and global warming have made biofuel an appealing alternative to conventional fossil fuels. Numerous recent studies have revealed that green algae as a fuel source falls under the category of renewable energy sources, especially given the continual increase in the cost of fossil fuels.

They grow very quickly, do not influence the environment, and do not affect world food demand, unlike wheat, maize and sugar.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, particularly those on the Arabian Peninsula, provide an enticing value proposition for large-scale algae production due to their advantageous geographical location.

The location features a favourable climate that permits year-round production, vast areas of unused land, close proximity to the ocean, and a significant number of CO2-rich flue gas point sources. Despite these positive characteristics, little research has been conducted on the commercial viability of native algae in the GCC region.

According to scientists, Oman has a substantial capacity to generate algae for biofuel production. Oman has grown in importance as a producer of biofuels based on algae in recent years. This is owing in part to the country's



abundance of arid territory and connectivity to the Gulf of Oman, which provide an excellent habitat for algae growth.

Oman has also made significant investments in the area, offering financial incentives to companies that participate in the manufacture of algae-based biofuels. Oman plans to make history by making its first investment in a sizable project on the South Al Sharqiya coast and breaking new ground in the multibillion dollar global algae growing industry.

A significant British corporation supports this endeavour. Advanced bioreactors are used in this facility to grow microalgae and collect their lipids, which are then converted into biodiesel.

The UK-based SuSeWi (formerly Feed Algae), which oversees a number of algae

farming ventures around the world, is leading the construction of an algae farm in the Sultanate of Oman with a 100,000-tonne annual capacity. With a projected expenditure of \$430 million, it will rank among the biggest microalgae farming initiatives worldwide.

Given the scope of the project and the requirement for approvals from numerous regulatory agencies, the Implementation Support and Follow-Up Unit (ISFU), a special task force established under the supervision of the Diwan of Royal Court, has been facilitating the approvals process to aid in its prompt delivery.

ISFU's goal is to move ideas and initiatives forward that will hasten Oman's economic diversification. The new company will be crucial in helping Oman enter a market

that ISFU predicts will be worth \$45 billion by 2023.

The Sultanate of Oman's 2019 Annual Report states that the area's unique natural surroundings and climatic conditions are ideal for algae farming. Other smaller businesses in the nation are also making investments in the manufacturing of algae-based biodiesel.

These businesses use a range of techniques, including open pond systems and photobioreactors, to produce and extract lipids from microalgae.

The future of algae biofuel production in Oman is an exciting one, as the country has the potential to become a leader in the sector. In order for this to happen, it is important for the government to invest in the technology and create an environment that is

OMAN HAS A SUBSTANTIAL CAPACITY TO GENERATE ALGAE FOR BIOFUEL PRODUCTION. OMAN HAS GROWN IN IMPORTANCE AS A PRODUCER OF BIOFUELS BASED ON ALGAE IN RECENT YEARS. THIS IS OWING IN PART TO THE COUNTRY'S ABUNDANCE OF ARID TERRITORY AND CONNECTIVITY TO THE GULF OF OMAN, WHICH PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT HABITAT FOR ALGAE GROWTH.

conductive to investment.

Additionally, it is important for companies to invest in research and development in order to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the technology.

In conclusion, the production of biofuels derived from algae might be an effective option for the Sultanate of Oman to generate electricity.

This technology offers a wide range of advantages, including the enhancement of energy security and the reduction of our reliance on fossil fuels such as oil and gas. However, the technique does have a few drawbacks, the most notable of which are the expensive prices and the dearth of available water.

In order for the production of algal biofuel to be successful in Oman, the government will need to make an investment in the technology, provide businesses with incentives to participate in the technology, and educate the general people on the potential benefits and drawbacks of the technology.

The development of algae biofuel has the potential to become a profitable energy source in Oman if the appropriate investments are made and public education is provided.

## SWIFT was West's first major option when Russia invaded



ANDY JALIL

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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Cutting off Russian banks from SWIFT – the vital global payments network – was seen like a 'nuclear option' against Putin's invasion of Ukraine. But it has not had the knock-on impact and now looks insignificant.

When Russia invaded just over a year ago, the West realised what problems SWIFT would cause Russia as the network is relied on for some \$5tn in daily transactions by the 11,000 banks that own it. Yet the organisation's name did not leave the discussion circles of high finance.

However, it soon became a bold, unexpected way to punish president Vladimir Putin's aggression.

In the hours after his forces surged into Ukraine,

governments around the world unleashed an unprecedented package of economic sanctions. Asset freezes, bans on using clearing houses and limits on Russian activity in dollars, pounds and euros were all announced on 24 February 2022.

However, one measure became known as the financial "nuclear option" – banning Russian banks from SWIFT's messaging network.

Suddenly everyone took notice of what it was, according to Nick Kerigan, head of innovation at the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication. The potential of the Belgium-based cooperative to cripple Russia's financial flow suddenly became a major talking point for politicians and the media.

But leading industry figures cautioned against the move. Prior to the invasion, Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey warned that the consequences of removing Russia from the network "would be quite substantial".

Financial Stability Board chair Klaas Knot warned the West to "think twice" about the potential risks of banning Russia from SWIFT, calling it a "severe measure".

French finance minister Bruno Le Maire described the move as a "financial nuclear weapon". SWIFT itself is apolitical and declines to comment on political decisions. The organisation is governed by the G10 group of central banks and the European Central Bank. Its members – which are also its owners – come from virtually every country and range from small regional lenders to multinationals such as JPMorgan and HSBC.

In Russia, 300 banks use the system, according to the Russian National SWIFT Association. In the early days of the war, a senior regulatory source said that removing Russian Banks from SWIFT risked collapsing the global energy sector.

A complete ban would have made it more difficult for buyers of Russian oil and gas to make payments. Without SWIFT messages, banks would need to rely on antiquated systems such as telex to send payment messages.

But less than a week after the invasion began, the button on the – so called – "nuclear option" was pushed. On 1 March, Western governments agreed to eject seven Russian banks from the network – Bank Orkrite, Novikombank, Promsvyazbank,

Bank Rossiya, Sovcombank, Vnesheconombank and VTB Bank. An eighth, Sherank, was added in May.

Kerigan said that when the order came to remove them, it was not something SWIFT had much experience with. He said: "It is a fair amount of technical work. We don't exist with the expectation that we are going to switch off banks or countries."

The only other time SWIFT has disconnected banks from the network was in 2012 due to European sanctions against Iran.

Despite the SWIFT ban, Russian oil and gas exports have continued over the past year. The West has taken further economic measures to ramp up pressure on Russia elsewhere and greatly expanded its assistance to Ukraine. Western leaders have said they are in it for the long haul and will support Ukraine for "as long as it takes".

There are now 10 European sanctions packages, including a ban on crude oil imports and a Western price cap on Russian oil; Ukraine has also received billions of dollars in economic and military assistance. So what looked like a "nuclear option" a year ago now looks insignificant compared to the actions taken since.

## National Employment Programme inks pacts to support Omani freelancers

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The National Employment Programme has signed two cooperation agreements with research and wholesale market platforms to support and develop the economy of independent businesses and promote the culture of freelancing in the Sultanate of Oman.

This cooperation comes as part of the programme's efforts to support freelancers and enhance digital transformation across this emerging ecosystem.

The first agreement was signed with 'Bahthi', a platform that specialises in supporting scientific research and providing job opportunities for specialists in this field. The second pact was signed with 'Souq Al-Jamila', a platform that connects Omani farmers with consumers.

The two MoUs were signed by Eng Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of the National Employment Programme, with Mohammed bin Khalfan al Saadi, CEO of Bahthi, and Majid bin Sultan al Abri, CEO of Souq Al-Jamila platform.

In remarks, Eng Al Kindi said the MoUs are part of a broad effort to promote the culture of freelancing and the growth of the entrepreneurial economy system in which technology is increasingly playing a role.

The pacts will contribute to supporting entrepreneurial initiatives developed by Omani youth, thereby driving digital transformation goals in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Mohammed al Saadi of Bahthi said the platform is underpinned by modern technology that supports scientific research and provides job opportunities for freelancers who are graduates with a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree.



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**HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER**

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

He is a natural leader who is confident looking for global cooperation solutions. Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen.

"The United Nations values the role and expertise of the Sultanate," he said. Guterres added that the Sultanate represents a unique model not only in the Middle East but also in the world? He urged all who are committed to the cause of peace and stability in Yemen.

**MINISTERS:** Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Mr. Saad bin Khalfan al-Thumali, and Chairman of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, Saad bin Khalfan al-Thumali, and Chairman of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, Saad bin Khalfan al-Thumali.

**NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH**

AMMAN: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Jordanian independence and 50th anniversary of the Jordanian independence, the Jordanian Central Bank of Jordan (CBOJ) issued a new series of 50 Jordanian dinars (JD) banknotes which will begin circulation from July 10, 2020. The banknotes will also appear on the Jordanian banknotes for all other denominations during the first quarter of 2020. The banknotes will also appear on the Jordanian banknotes for all other denominations during the first quarter of 2020.

**STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN**

**CAMPAIGN:** The Jordanian government has launched a new campaign to encourage people to stay apart and break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The campaign is aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and preventing the health authorities from being overwhelmed. The campaign is aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and preventing the health authorities from being overwhelmed.

**PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE**

AMMAN: The Jordanian government has launched a new campaign to encourage people to stay apart and break the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The campaign is aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and preventing the health authorities from being overwhelmed. The campaign is aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and preventing the health authorities from being overwhelmed.

## The cultural art of Thai cuisine

The Thai community in the Sultanate of Oman introduced Thai cuisine last week at an event titled 'Inspiring Thailand: Destination for savoury gastronomy and magic culture'... **P20**



## Charles' mugs and plates: Workers busy making pottery fit for a new king

**BRITISH POTTERY** makers are continuing a tradition going back centuries by producing tens of thousands of commemorative mugs, plates and teapots to mark the upcoming coronation of King

Charles. Charles will be the first British monarch to be crowned for seven decades following the record-breaking reign of his mother Queen Elizabeth.



Workers at the Emma Bridgewater ceramics factory in Stoke-on-Trent, a city in central England famed for its pottery, are already busy producing swathes

of handmade and decorated ceramics for the occasion. "We're very excited, we've programmed in more than 100,000 units," Steve Beeston, the head of

production, said. "The demand has been exceptional." More than 1,500 new King Charles III half-pint mugs were snapped up on the first day of sale, making it the second fastest selling product ever for the company which has been operating for more than 30 years. It follows a tradition of producing pottery to mark notable royal occasions such as births, weddings and anniversaries which goes back hundreds of years, to the time of the current monarch's namesake and predecessor Charles II. "Royal commemorative ware has a very long history with pieces being made in Stoke-on-Trent since the late 1680s. It's a tradition we're very proud to be a part of," said Beeston. Charles himself visited the factory back in 2010, while his daughter-in-law Kate, the Princess of Wales, toured it five years later. — Reuters

### READ

#### STAR WARS JEDI: BATTLE SCARS

BY SAM MAGGS

Aiding an Imperial deserter could put Cal Kestis and his crew in the path of the Inquisitor known as the Fifth Brother.



### FASHION

Senegalese stylist Colle Sow Ardo (C) acknowledges the audience at the end of her show during the 16th Afrik Fashion Week in Abidjan. — AFP



### LIFESTYLE

French illustrator Catherine Meurisse poses during the presentation of her exhibition "Une place à soi" at the Tomi Ungerer Museum in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP





# Rap battle: young Tunisians fight stigma with the arts

**"WE'RE SICK OF** being seen as thugs," said Mohamed Ali Ayari, a rapper from a down-at-heel Tunis district, where jobless youth are finding a voice through music, cinema and photography.

The Tunisian capital's working-class districts have suffered

produced with the help of peace-building charity International Alert. Ayari was among the winners of a recent competition by International Alert, asking young people from four neglected Tunis districts to express themselves through music, documentary or photography,

**THERAPY AGAINST DEPRESSION'** - Wassim Tayachi, 22, said he and his friends "chose music to talk about ourselves and our lives, the lost youth and those of us who want to succeed, the police who attack us verbally and physically, the state

has qualified as a tax accountant and has set up a centre to give children extra education support – all by the age of 24. Many young people here "want to succeed more than others because their difficult circumstances push them harder", Chourabi said.



from decades of state neglect and poor services, and residents say the stigma attached to their neighbourhoods shuts them out of the job market. "This contempt and these prejudices really complicate our lives," said Ayari, a resident of the overcrowded Douar Hicher suburb. The 23-year-old works as a security guard, but his dream is to become a famous rap artist. "I want to come out into the light," he raps in a recent video clip,

focusing on the theme of violence. "People... experience violence on a daily basis – some practice it and others suffer it," said Houcem Ayari of International Alert. "We decided to channel that into cultural activities." In a drab building in Douar Hicher, rapper Ayari sits in a tiny room converted into a studio and records his latest track, with backing vocals from neighbourhood friends. Ayari and his friends agreed a lack of cultural spaces makes it easy for people to be dragged into crime.



that neglects us and society that stigmatises us." He said coming from poorer neighbourhoods makes it harder to find a job or get official paperwork. "A state that doesn't listen to its young people can't give them anything," Tayachi added. Ayari said he wants to become a successful rapper. But he doubts he can achieve his dreams in the North African nation, where a long-running socio-economic crisis has pushed many young people to try to reach Europe – including on dangerous and overcrowded inflatable boats across the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, he said he uses rap as "therapy against depression and illegal temptations". Another winner of the competition was a documentary depicting social and economic injustice, sexual harassment, shabby public transport and school absenteeism in the district of Fouchana. They are issues close to the heart of Mariem Chourabi, who

**ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE** Belhssan Jabri, a qualified civil engineer, won the photography category of the competition. "We deserve not to be neglected," said the unemployed 26-year-old from the working-class district of Sidi Hassine. Jabri's work focuses on what he calls "environmental violence", showcasing public spaces near his home strewn with trash. "These could be places for sports or cultural activities, or gardens, instead of being permanently cluttered with overflowing rubbish bins," he said. Jabri said those in power should find "real will" to change things for the better. "There are doctors, engineers, artists and many educated and qualified young people in our neighbourhood," he said. "Stop focusing on the negative side and stigmatising young people from working-class neighbourhoods."

— AFP

## SCIENCE

# NASA's New Spacesuit: It's a Look



**SPACE IS GETTING A** new look — sort of. On Wednesday, just a week after the end of the Paris fashion collections and with the sort of sonic crescendo attached to the most extravagant runway shows, NASA unveiled the new Artemis III lunar spacesuit at Space Center Houston. Which is to say, the first real reconsideration of the spacesuit in 40 years. Unlike the spacesuit redesigns of private companies like Elon Musk's SpaceX, Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin, the Artemis III spacesuit is not meant to be worn solely within a spacecraft but on the surface of the moon too, specifically the never-before-visited lunar south pole.

Created in collaboration with Axiom Space, it has an outer cover in black for a bit of edge, with cool splashes of navy and orange at the knees, shoulders and ankles and a deep-V overlay at the chest — for victory, or vroom. (There's also a little American flag on one shoulder.) The effect is less Michelin Man, the style of the old Apollo suits, and more Hulk-meets-anthropomorphic-anteater-meets-"Star Trek." At least that's the look of the current version, which will be worn by astronauts on the ground and during training. When astronauts step onto the moon in 2025, the dark cover layer will be swapped for a white insulation layer for thermal protection.

Still, the basic silhouette — with articulated joints at the elbows, a big backpack at the rear for life support systems, a humped torso that connects to the helmet, and arms that curve away from the body as if they are holding a giant beach ball — will remain the same. As will the fact that the suit is essentially gender non-binary and created with a variety of adjustable parts to fit all sizes of bodies and allow for increased flexibility.

For all that, however (and that is a big deal), the total effect is still very much within the recognisable spacesuit tradition, at least to the untrained eye.

So why make such a big deal about it? It's not just because of its cost (the order has a "base value of \$228.5 million," according to information provided by NASA) or its technical specifications, which are extreme: Nicholas de Monchaux, the head of architecture at MIT and the author of "Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo," described it as "really less a piece of clothing than a very small building or a very small spacecraft." It is because, as de Monchaux said, the spacesuit is "the costume for the drama we project into space." The way we "put ourselves into the heavens." Any small change to the way it looks has potentially big repercussions, not just for the astronauts who wear it, but in the popular imagination. Capture that, and you capture public support (which, when you are a government agency embarking on a very expensive mission, is no small thing!). It's not a coincidence that along with the Axiom engineers, seamstresses and technology specialists, Esther Marquis, the costume designer for the Apple TV+ series "For All Mankind," which imagines an alternate narrative for America's first moon colonies, was also involved in creating the new suit.

(In working with Marquis, Axiom is following in the footsteps of Musk, who turned to Jose Fernandez, a costume designer who worked on "Batman v Superman" and "The Fantastic Four," for the SpaceX outfits.)

The spacesuit occupies a singular place in our mental landscapes and has ever since John Milton used the term "space" for "outer space" — which is to say, the place angels reside — in "Paradise Lost."

The suit is "about the heroic quest for new land and new frontiers," said Debra Benita Shaw, an associate professor in cultural theory at the University of East London and author of the paper, "Bodies Out of This World: The Space Suit as Cultural Icon."

"Now, because of global warming and other threats to human life, it has also taken on new meaning as a symbol of escape," Shaw said. "It also represents the fragility of that life." For most viewers, the suit is the human point of connection to the unknown, the one familiar item in a foreign world of technology and science. We may not understand the language of astronauts or even how they live in a zero-gravity environment, but everyone wears clothes.

According to Shaw, sometimes technology feeds our imagination, but oftentimes, our imagination actually shapes our technology.

Indeed, de Monchaux said, the first spacesuits, the ones that appeared on the cover of Life magazine on Jan. 6, 1958 — silvery, gleaming, evocative of "frontiers beyond Earth," as the cover lines read — were silver not because of any specific technical reason, but because the company that made them understood that if they were the colour of starlight rather than the dull khaki of previous flight suits, they would appeal to the watching public. They would play into popular preconceptions of what a spacesuit should look like. It was later, once astronauts began embarking on spacewalks, that spacesuits were remade in white because it turned out that silver reflected the sun and ran the risk of dazzling the astronauts. Now they come (at least for the moment) in black. One small step for man, one big step for space style.

The redesign may be a surprise to lunar aficionados, but fashionistas would understand. There's a reason fashion has long reflected a fascination with space travel, from the balloon sleeves of late 18th-century France, a reference to the hot air balloons that allowed man's first forays into the air, through the sci-fi styles of Paco Rabanne and André Courrèges. It was only a few weeks ago that Ib Kamara's Off-White ready-to-wear show was set in an imaginary lunar landscape and inspired by the question, "What would you wear in outer space if you were a boy who liked to rap and was cool enough?"

His collection provided one answer. This week, NASA and Axiom offered another. — NYT



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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Korean  
Barbecue-  
Style  
Meatballs



**THESE MEATBALLS, INSPIRED** by traditional Korean barbecue, bring the savoury-sweet flavours of caramelised meat without the need for a grill. As the meatballs bake, the soy sauce marries the garlic and scallions to create a glaze. This meatball mixture can be made ahead and left to marinate in the fridge for 3 hours or even overnight. Use ground beef that is 85 per cent lean meat, 15 per cent fat – or 80 per cent lean and 20 per cent fat for juicier meatballs.

The Ritz crackers here make for a more tender meatball, but feel free to substitute plain dry breadcrumbs. The meatballs are tasty on their own, but for a simple dipping sauce, combine 2 tablespoons soy sauce and 1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar. Serve over steamed rice with kimchi, or as a sandwich with mayonnaise or marinara sauce.

Yield: 4 servings  
Time: 20 minutes

**INGREDIENTS:**  
1/2 cup chopped scallions  
2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce  
2 tablespoons minced garlic  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
1/2 cup finely crushed Ritz crackers (12 crackers)  
1 pound ground beef (round or chuck)

**PREPARATION:**  
1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. In a large bowl, combine all of the ingredients and use your hands to gently mix.  
2. Shape the meat into 12 golf-ball-size rounds (about 2 inches in diameter), and arrange on a greased rimmed baking sheet.  
3. Bake until golden and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Serve warm.

**TIPS:** Leftover meatballs freeze well and can be reheated in the oven at 375 degrees until warmed through (about 20 minutes). To make the Ritz crumbs, place the crackers in a resealable plastic bag and lightly crush them with the back of a wooden spoon or measuring cup.

ENTERTAINMENT

Adam Sandler  
honoured with  
Kennedy Center's  
Mark Twain Prize



**ACTOR AND COMEDIAN** Adam Sandler became the 24th recipient of the Kennedy Center's Mark Twain Prize for American Humor on Sunday, at an evening event featuring stars Jennifer Aniston, Chris Rock and Conan O'Brien to celebrate his comedy and career.

Sandler, whose movies include "Spanglish," "The Wedding Singer," and "The

He's beloved." Sandler's friends and acting partners, along with his mother and his wife, took to the Kennedy Center stage to gently rib the actor and highlight his development as a stand-up comic, movie actor and singer.

"You're making a terrible, terrible mistake," comedian O'Brien quipped at the top of the show to the Kennedy Center for selecting

on politics. Carvey did impressions of President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, and comedian Chris Rock mentioned potential criminal charges against the Republican leader.

"Are you guys really going to arrest Trump?" Rock asked. "This is only going to make him more popular!" Rock, who was slapped on



Waterboy," was celebrated for his comedic chops that, while not always winning the hearts of critics, have won over fans and generated billions of dollars. Dressed uncharacteristically in business attire instead of his trademark shorts and T-shirt, Sandler, 56, said he thought his suit was baggy. "I don't know if this suit fits me or not, I just threw it on ... for the second time," he told reporters on the red carpet ahead of the show. "But everything else ... the honour itself, never thought about this in my entire life, never expected anything like this." Comedian Dana Carvey referred to Sandler's longevity. "No one's had a career like this," Carvey told reporters ahead of the show. "Who's lasted this long?"

Sandler, a former "Saturday Night Live" star. Sandler's mother, Judy, made light of his wardrobe preferences. "I say he's a slob," she said in her own quasi-comedy routine, before praising her son. "We are so proud of him." Comedian David Spade expressed mock awe at Sandler's box office success. "Four billion dollars in movies, with this much talent!" Spade said, with a hand gesture that suggested a minute amount. Aniston, who appeared with Sandler in films such as "Just Go with It" and Netflix's "Murder Mystery," praised her co-star. "Adam Sandler, you have no equal," she said. With the White House a short distance from the Kennedy Center, some presenters touched

stage at the Oscars in 2022 by actor Will Smith, also referred to Paul Pelosi, the husband of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was attacked by an intruder in their San Francisco home last year. "Paul Pelosi - only guy that knows how I felt," Rock said, as the Pelosis sat in the audience. Sandler joins the ranks of other comedians who have received the Mark Twain Prize, including Jon Stewart, Dave Chappelle, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, David Letterman, Carol Burnett, Eddie Murphy and Ellen DeGeneres. The prize is named after novelist and essayist Samuel Clemens, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain. The show will air on CNN on March 26. — Reuters

HEALTH WATCH



Monika Seth  
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Nutrition  
Among the  
Youth – A  
Concern

**HEALTHY EATING** is the foundation of a healthy body at every stage of life, and good nutrition can influence how you feel on a day-to-day basis and in the long run. But the sad part is that despite so much awareness, the youth of today refrain from adopting a healthy lifestyle. Today, highly demanding jobs, family and social pressures, etc. keep youngsters extremely busy and away from home most of the time, making them more prone to unhealthy eating causing them to have higher chances of becoming malnourished or overweight and vulnerable to many diseases coupled with lack of energy, restlessness, anxiety, and poor mental health. It is imperative that they focus on a balanced and nutritious diet, maintain an active lifestyle, and revamp their overall attitude.

Here are some simple tips:  
**REDUCE CALORIE-DENSE SNACKS.** — If you are hungry and craving to eat something, make it a healthy choice like fresh salads, fruits, nuts, etc. But if you snack out of boredom, try to identify the situations that trigger that impulse and formulate alternative strategies for dealing with that like going for a walk, reading a book or talking to a friend, etc.

**FILL UP ON FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.** — Since there is a limit to your calorie intake per day, especially if you are concerned about weight gain, it is best to focus on those foods that supply your body with essential nutrients rather than just filling yourself up with so-called, "empty calories" or junk food loads. Simply eating two servings of vegetables with a meal will help to fill you up and reduce your desire to overeat during the day; eating an apple just an hour before your main meal will also help you eat less at your meal time. This will also boost immunity and improve mental health due to the natural antidepressants in fresh fruits and vegetables.

**BEAT THE FATIGUE TRAP.** — Feeling tired can lead most of us to eat foods that give a quick burst of energy like chocolate, cakes, and ice cream to name a few but a well-balanced and healthy diet will maintain energy levels throughout the day.

**EXERCISE REGULARLY.** — Regular exercise works like a magic potion not only for long-term weight control but also to keep your brain happy and healthy, thus beating the blues naturally. To make exercise work, select an activity that you enjoy, start slowly, and stick with it. The best part about this healthy habit is that it makes you feel good and more energised, induces sound sleep, and is indeed self-reinforcing.

**JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP/CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL.** — A well-guided, supervised professional help offers sensible dietary advice, regular weigh-ins, and group support, which can really help with long-term motivation especially when you are struggling with irregular eating patterns, low energy, and trying to lose or control weight. This notion goes beyond saying that healthy and balanced eating can make you feel better; improve your quality of life, and even help you live longer, healthier, and happier.



# The cultural art of Thai cuisine

By Kaushalendra Singh

With Ramadhan around the corner, the Thai community in the Sultanate of Oman introduced Thai cuisine last week at an event titled 'Inspiring Thailand: Destination for savoury gastronomy and magic culture'.

The event aimed to promote Thai gastronomy and launch the Thai food campaign that continued from starting from March 10 to 18. Authentic Thai restaurants in Muscat city took part in the event, whereas some Omani entrepreneurs involved in procuring fresh fruits from Thailand displayed a variety of fruits that attracted the attention of a large number of visitors.

The 'Inspiring Thailand' allows the guests to discover Thailand as "the destination of magic culture" and see different perspectives of Thai tradition through the degustation of various Thai cuisine and delicacies, cultural performances and many more. The event also highlighted the close connection between the Sultanate of Oman and Thailand via the new travel routes.

"With the support from Salam Air, Oman Air and Fly Dubai, travelling directly from Muscat to Bangkok, Phuket, Krabi and Pattaya and vice versa is just at the fingertips," said a Thai resident who stays in Muscat.

The event was supported by the Royal Thai Embassy in association with the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

During the food week, the participating Thai restaurants altogether will offer promotions specially designed for foodies and Thai food lovers. During the food week, the participating Thai restaurants altogether offered promotions specially designed for foodies and Thai food lovers. Among the participating Thai restaurants were Thai Corner, Mai Thai, Pad Thai and Tiptara.

"Given Thailand is various award-winning destination for travel and tourism as well as her reputation for medical and wellness excellence and long-term vision towards sustainability, our food and culture campaign goes in pair with Thailand's campaign for the Expo 2028 - Phuket under the theme 'Future of Life: Living in Harmony, Sharing Prosperity'. The chosen theme is in line with the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) agenda and Thailand's development strategy to strengthen its positioning as a medical hub and become a top medical tourism destination as well as to address the current global challenges on health, reflecting Thailand's firm commitment to the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)," said Suwat Kaewsook, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Sultanate of Oman.

