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OMAN U20 TEAM AIMS FOR BETTER SHOW AGAINST QATAR



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NEW ELECTRONIC PORTAL TO PROCESS REQUESTS FOR GAS ALLOCATIONS



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MUSCAT WITNESSES GUITAR VIRTUOSOS BREAKING DOWN SPANISH RHYTHMS



**MUSCAT**

**DEADLINE FOR MAJLIS CANDIDACY FORMS**

Thursday is the last day to file nominations for candidacy to the Majlis Ash'shura's 10th term membership. The Ministry of Interior on Wednesday called on citizens wishing to contest the Majlis's membership elections to submit their applications via the elections' website (elections.om) or through the "Entekhab" application. The ministry stressed that it will not accept any applications for candidacy received after the deadline or submitted by means other than the ones stated above. — ONA

**CRUDE PRICE AT \$83.47 A BARREL**

Oman oil price for April delivery on Wednesday reached \$83.47, comprising a decline by \$1.72 from the price of Tuesday, which was \$85.19. The average price of Oman oil for February delivery has stabilised at \$77.43 per barrel, thus \$8.72 per barrel lower than January delivery. Brent crude futures slid as much 1.3 per cent, to \$84.45 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude dropped 1.7 per cent to \$77.75 before recovering some ground.



MATTEO JORGENSON CLINCHES TOUR OF OMAN 2023 TITLE

Matteo Jorgenson (Movistar) of the United States of America won the 12th edition of the Tour of Oman 2023 after keeping his rivals at bay on the climb up Jabal Al Akhdhar, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. Finishing with the same time as stage winner Mauri Vansevenant (Soudal Quick-Step), Jorgenson managed to hang on and keep the leader's red jersey by just one second. **DETAILS ON P12**



INSIDE



INDIA TO HARVEST RECORD WHEAT THIS YEAR

P7

Oman sympathises with New Zealand over cyclone

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman expressed its sympathy with New Zealand following the Cyclone Gabrielle that hit several cities. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday that Oman expressed its sincere condolences to the government, the friendly people of New Zealand and families of the victims due to the cyclone. It also wished the injured a speedy recovery.

Meanwhile, the Consulate General of the Sultanate of Oman in Australia said in a statement that all Omanis and students on scholarships at various universities in New Zealand are safe. The Consulate General urged everyone to take caution and avoid beaches and all coastal places, especially those close to the New Zealand city of Wellington, and to follow instructions issued



by competent authorities in New Zealand, and requested them to communicate directly with the Consulate General in Australia during an emergency.

New Zealand declared a national state of emergency for only the third time in its history on Tuesday after a cyclone flooded parts of the country, knocking out power to nearly 250,000 residents and stranding people on rooftops.

**SEE ALSO P7**

REMNANTS OF 25TH CENTURY BC FOUND

New archaeological discoveries uncovered in Ibri

**IBRI:** The French National Scientific Research Centre, in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, announced the discovery of a 151-metre water channel. It also announced the discovery of another water channel dating back to the old Islamic age in the Al Aredh archaeological site in the Wilayat of Ibri.

Also unearthed were houses dating back to the Third Millennium BC. The building has two rooms and numerous fireplaces. The foundation of the house was built with rocks and the walls with mud. Among the new discoveries at Al Aredh archaeological site are remnants of seven towers and nearly 1,000



The discoveries date back to the ancient Magan civilization.

burial grounds dating back to the Third Millennium BC. The mission unearthed remnants of human skeletons, pottery and a semi-intact jar dating back to the Jemdet Nasr period in Mesopotamia.

The mission is carrying out archaeological excavations at a building located to the west of the site believed to be dating back to

the Fourth Millennium BC. Inside the house were numerous copper pieces. The building is believed to have been used for melting copper.

Corinne Castel, head of the French mission, explained that the discoveries date back to the 25th century BC, to the ancient Magan civilisation which coincided with the Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia in what is now south Iraq. During the excavation, the mission uncovered graves containing utensils belonging to Mesopotamia civilisation. A factory for making weapons of copper was found at the site suggesting that ancient Oman was famous for copper industries.

— ONA



SCOTLAND'S STURGEON ANNOUNCES PLAN TO RESIGN

P9

A building is not just a structure, but a space with a purpose

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

Today there is a new technology found in architecture, and there are global ideas for interior designing.

Architects tend to have in mind people and of course the climatic conditions while designing, but what about the interior designers?

"Interior designing, architecture and engineering all work together to create beautiful projects. It is not just about the beauty and aesthetics. Eventually everything has to work well. It has to be human centred based on the design of how humans can interact with it as well. So I would say architecture and designing have to go hand-in-hand," said HH Sayyidah



Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, an interior designer and an artist who has been adding to her accomplishments from frames to buildings.

"In other words, whatever is built externally has to be communicated internally," she noted.

She is by profession an interior designer, and thus in the business of transforming spaces, her experience has

had her serve on the design management aspects for many real estate projects in Oman such as the W Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn Hotel and A'Raya Complex.

The 'gathering place' seemed to play an important role in designing a space. Traditionally in Oman the majlis has played this role. Does it still hold an important place in today's lifestyle? **DETAILS ON P20**



# Carbon neutrality in focus at sustainability conference



**MUSCAT:** Acting in cooperation with OQ Exploration and Production Company, Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability on Wednesday organised the third sustainability conference under the title “The Impact of Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Towards Carbon Neutrality”.

The conference focused on investigating the impact of greenhouse gas emissions as a result of various activities that cause carbon emissions in different sectors, including the construction sector, the aviation sector and the oil and gas sector.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos

University.

The conference included sessions on managing the process of cutting down greenhouse gas emissions reduction and reporting them and visual presentations and working papers on solutions provided by financing institutions in carbon neutrality. It also included a session of discussion on raising energy efficiency and switching to sources of renewable energy.

Sayyid Hamid bin Sultan al Busaidy, Executive Director of Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability, said, “The conference coincides with the next phase of the Oman Vision 2040, in which clean energy serves as a fundamental factor in achieving

carbon neutrality.”

He pointed out that countries seek to reach zero neutrality and reduce carbon emissions between 2030 and 2050.

Al Busaidy added that the conference studies the impact of the sectors of transportation, aviation, gas, oil and energy.

He said that the conference considered different solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, like improving transportation, using technology in extracting oil and gas, educating the community on clean energy uses and protecting the environment through recycling, cutting down pollution and landscaping in desert areas. — ONA



## Field survey project to track meteorite fall

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Wednesday implemented a field survey project aimed to monitor meteorites fall by distributing devices in various desert sites in the Sultanate of Oman.

The project is undertaken in cooperation with a specialised team of scientists from the University of Bern and the Natural History Museum in Bern, Switzerland, with technical support from Curtin University, Australia.

Hussein bin Ali al Ghafri, Director of Heritage Department at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the project was carried out this year in a number of stages, the first of which was an experimental period for monitoring

meteorites that enter Oman’s atmosphere.

Al Ghafri pointed out that the ministry has been working for over 23 years on the documentation of the annual meteorite fall in Oman. So far, more than 7,000 meteorite pieces have been documented, he added.

A number of geologists visit Oman on an annual basis to study the fall of meteorites, including some from Mars (grey in colour) and Jupiter (brown), in addition to another type of celestial bodies that consist of chondrite rock.

These meteorites allow scientists to know the original composition of the parent planets. They gain geological, scientific and economic value. — ONA



## Oman participates in UN Geospatial Data Management meeting

**ABU DHABI:** Represented by the National Survey Authority (NSA), the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday took part in the 10th meeting of the Arab Committee of United Nations Experts for Geospatial Information Management.

The NSA Chairman headed Oman’s delegation at the meeting, which was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The meeting explored ways of cooperation between the member states of the Committee on Geospatial Information Management. It also underlined the significance of sharing experiences and expertise among countries to help achieve sustainable

development goals (SDGs) in the same field.

The meeting also looked into the results of the committee’s teams tasked with integrated action on geospatial information, future trends and the sustainability of the Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF).

The meeting reviewed the annual report of the Arab Committee of United Nations Experts for Geospatial Information Management, as well as a report of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and relevant recommendations. — ONA



دار الأوبرا السلطانية مسقط  
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT

### A Venetian Evening with ‘I Solisti Veneti’

Conducted by Giuliano Carella



17<sup>th</sup> February | 7:00 PM

I Solisti Veneti is an Italian chamber orchestra made famous throughout the world under their founding director Claudio Scimone for their performances of Vivaldi. The orchestra is acclaimed for promotion of Venetian musical heritage and credited with reviving hundreds of previously works. The concert features a programme including the highlights of the Baroque repertoire, conducted by Giuliano Carella.



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# ‘Observer Roundtable’ sheds light on emotional challenges faced in post-Covid era

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Oman Daily Observer organised the 12th edition of its Observer Roundtable discussion, titled “The emotional conundrum in the post-Covid-19 era”. The event was aimed at brainstorming on the contemporary topic of post-Covid emotional impacts and its long and short-term results. The discussion invited participants to draw a better intellectual approach by the stakeholders.

The key speakers of Wednesday’s debate were Dr Hamed al Sinawi, an eminent psychiatrist, Sarah Said, an educationist, and Davis Kallukkaran, an auditing specialist and finance personnel. Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili, Chief Editor of Oman Observer Daily, was the Guest of Honour, while Lakshmi Kothaneth presented the event.

The discussion delved into the various facets of the pandemic and the need to provide emotional support to those who are traumatised in several ways. Reporters from the Daily were in attendance to cover the event.

During the debate, the speakers discussed the negative and positive impacts of Covid-19.

Dr Al Sinawi emphasised the psychological impact of the pandemic on society, which included fear psychosis, sleep problems, depression, anxiety and worrying about getting infected, among others. According to him, one out of five people experienced fear syndrome due to Covid-19, ranging from job loss to exam failure. He also noted that the



- Dr Al Sinawi noted that mental stress and strain have affected families and society as a whole, and that one in five people have experienced fear syndrome due to Covid-related issues.
- Sarah Said emphasised the importance of protecting children from cyberbullying and other online threats, and encouraging them to express themselves freely and fearlessly.
- Davis Kallukkaran highlighted the major disruptions in the global supply chain and the resulting impacts on small businesses and industries.
- The speakers also discussed some positive effects of the pandemic, such as the emergence of online life and the shift towards more proactive teaching methods.
- The debate provided an opportunity for experts and reporters to engage in a thought-provoking discussion on a contemporary topic and draw a better intellectual approach to the challenges of the post-Covid era.

parents and students faced various challenges, including finding alternatives to traditional learning and protecting children from cyberbullying and other cyber-attacks.

Sarah Said, an educator, emphasised the need for a shift in the pattern of education and a newer method of teaching. She noted that collaboration between teachers and students is crucial, and the policy of appointing qualified teachers is essential to adopt a balanced approach.

The discussion also covered the effects of Covid-19 on businesses and industries.

Davis Kallukkaran explained that the pandemic caused major disruption in the supply chain, affecting almost all countries due to the restrictions on mobility. Small-scale businesses were severely impacted during the pandemic, with many facing losses and closure.

However, Kallukkaran also highlighted the positive impact of Covid-19, which led to innovations in the business sector, including the emergence of e-commerce.

Overall, the Oman Observer Debate shed light on the emotional and psychological impact of Covid-19 and the need for emotional support for those affected by the pandemic. The event also highlighted the positive aspects of the pandemic, including technological advancements and innovations in education and business.

— Pictures by Huda al Bahriya



elderly and women were more affected due to their reduced immunity and higher anxiety

levels, respectively. However, he mentioned that the emergence of online life was the major positive

impact of the pandemic, which paved the way for technological advancements.

The event also highlighted the effects of the pandemic on education, where educators,

## Civil aviation forum to address emerging issues

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is set to host the 2nd Civil Aviation Legal Advisers Forum (CALAF/2) from February 21-23, which will be organised by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and convened under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs.

The event is being hosted in Oman for the first time and is expected to draw more than 30 professionals from over 63 countries and three international organisations to participate in the forum.

The forum will cover a variety of subjects related to civil aviation law and will focus on recent developments and emerging issues. Among the topics to be discussed are the outcome of the 41st ICAO Assembly, crisis management in the response to the pandemic and air travel recovery, data privacy, competency framework for legal advisers, settlement of aviation disputes, enhancing the capacity

and effectiveness of civil aviation legal advisers, and current issues in aviation law and practice.

The event will also include a youth group session on the next generation of aviation professionals (NGAP) and pursuing a career in aviation. This session will be attended by the secretary-general of ICAO and several high-profile figures in the aviation industry to listen to the ideas and perspectives of young people interested in the field. An accompanying exhibition will showcase the industry’s most recent technologies.

CALAF/2 was launched by ICAO as a platform for legal advisers to share their views, knowledge and experience on issues in the civil aviation field, and to discuss various challenges faced by state parties, potential cooperation opportunities, and possible solutions to address challenges emanating from technical, social and economic development. The first edition of the forum was held in Singapore in May 2019.



## Over half of Dhofar’s population now covered by fiber optic services

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

Nearly 49 per cent of the population in the Dhofar Governorate has been covered with fiber optic services, this was revealed by the Telecommunications Regulations Authority (TRA) on Wednesday.

According to TRA, around 142 residential areas have been covered by the 5G services while of 163 schools, 101 of them have 5G services, 52 of them have fiber optic services, and ten schools 10 are connected to other communication services.

Reviewing the plans for the year 2023, Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of TRA, has been visiting different areas of the Dhofar Governorate. It may be noted that nearly 600,000 buildings in the country were covered by fiber services in 2022.

Around 51 per cent of buildings with fiber optic services with plans to cover 50,000 new buildings in 2023 with optical fiber networks.

TRA has a target to cover 75 per cent of the buildings in the country with an optical fiber network by 2025.

According to TRA, the 5G and optic fiber services cover about 94 per cent of 880 schools.

**TRA’s #YourRight\_ToKnow campaign**

The Telecommunications



Regulatory Authority (TRA) is continuing with its awareness campaign on the protection of the rights of users of various services.

TRA campaign #YourRight\_ToKnow aims to protect the rights of beneficiaries by educating them about their rights and obligations towards telecom service providers.

In return, the telecom providers have participated in the campaign by publishing a number of messages through the hashtag #YourRight\_ToKnow, on various

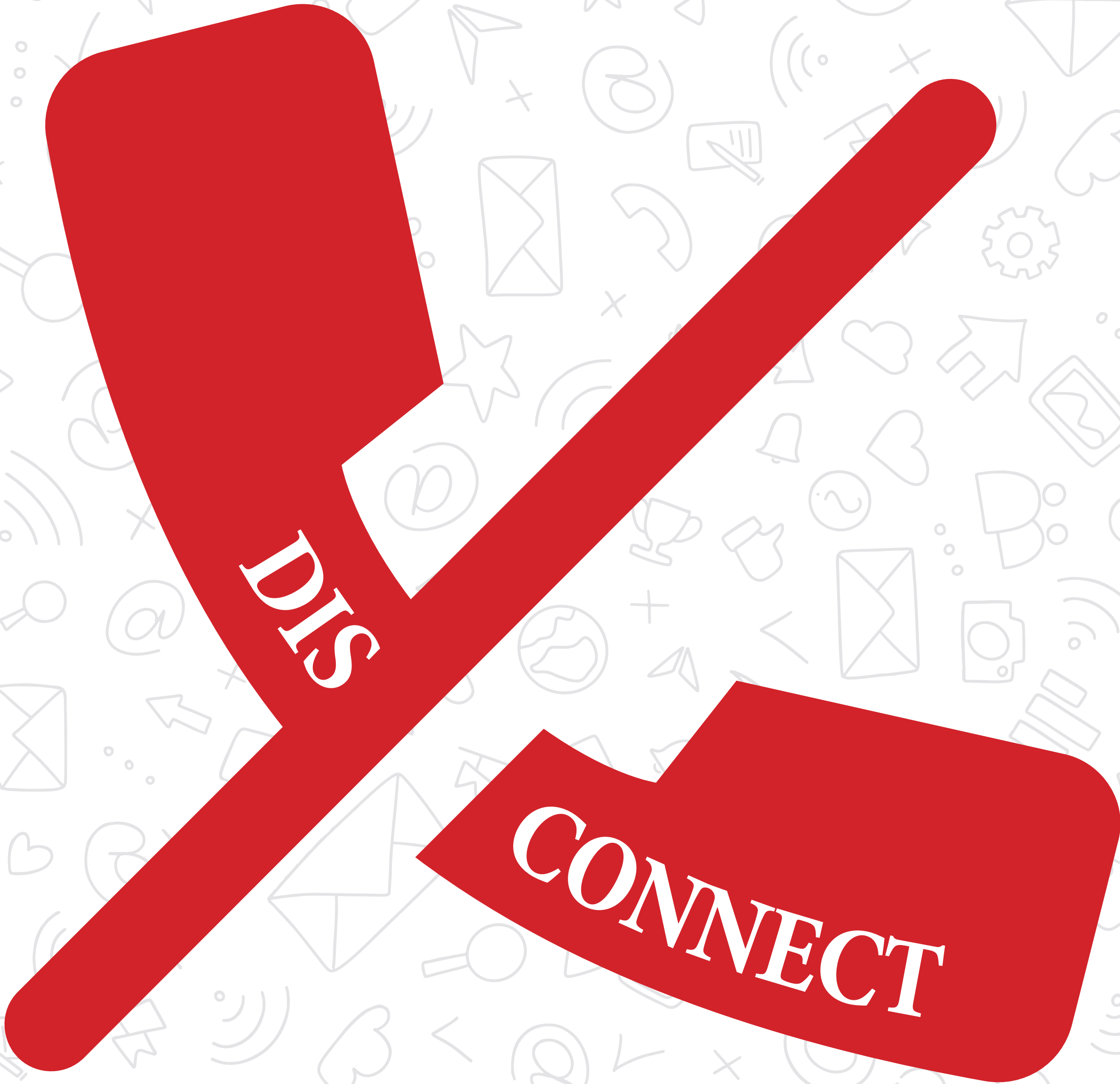
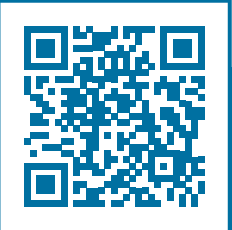
types of fraud issues and their risks, which targets all segments of society, and both citizens and residents.

The campaign includes educational messages on several topics of interest such as international roaming, billing, advertising messages, grievances of beneficiaries, and children’s rights, in addition to quality approval and the ‘Choose your package’ platform.

TRA issued a regulation of

the rights of beneficiaries last September, which included 11 chapters divided into 75 articles, concerned with regulating the relationship between beneficiaries and telecommunications companies or their licensees.

These regulations will be implemented in mid-February of 2024 as part of the TRA’s responsibility towards taking care of the interests of beneficiaries and promoting the use of telecommunications services.



# TO RECONNECT

AHMED AL KAABI

WITH the advent of technology, the world is more connected than ever. Phones have become an integral part of our lives to keep us connected with friends, family and work.

However, this constant connection can also lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout. To combat this, taking regular breaks from your cell phone is important.

Getting away from technology can provide much-needed opportunities for self-reflection and mindfulness. By disconnecting from the constant stream of notifications, messages, and social media updates, you give yourself space to think, relax and recharge.

Studies have shown that excessive screen time can lead to symptoms such as eye strain, headaches, and sleep disturbances. You can reduce these symptoms and feel refreshed and rejuvenated by getting away from your phone daily.

A recent study found that participants who spent some time away from their

## WHY TAKING A BREAK FROM YOUR PHONE IS KEY TO BETTER HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

devices reported lower stress levels and improved well-being.

Research shows that using your cell phone can be a huge distraction, and looking at your phone all the time can make it difficult to focus on other tasks.

Taking a break from your phone allows you to focus on the task at hand, resulting in increased focus and productivity. Work more

efficiently and complete tasks faster and more accurately.

Using your phone before bed can disrupt your sleep schedule. The blue light emitted by screens suppresses the production of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep.

Taking a break from your phone before bed allows your body to produce melatonin, which can lead to better sleep naturally.

Turning off technology not only improves your physical and mental health but also improves your relationships with the people around you. When you're not constantly checking your phone, you can be fully present at the moment and pay close attention to the people who matter to you.

It has been found that people who engaged in interactions reported stronger relationships and greater life satisfaction.

Taking a break from your phone for even an hour a day can significantly impact your life.

It reduces stress and anxiety, improves sleep, improves focus and productivity, and improves relationships.

Turn off your phone, take a break and experience the benefits of disconnecting from technology.



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# Green energy conference kicks off in Dhofar

**SALALAH:** The International Conference on Green Energy 2023 kicked off at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Recreation on Wednesday. A number of academicians from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad are taking part in the two-day conference.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubi'ee, Chairman of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, government officials and private sector representatives.

The conference seeks to encourage academics and industrialists to promote research focusing on sustainable energy stocks, protecting the environment and preserving natural resources. It



also discusses means of supporting research to develop renewable energy sources having positive effects on economic growth, in

addition to exchanging local and international experiences in the field of sustainable energy. The conference comes in line

with Oman's plans for achieving balance between sustainable development and limiting climate change impacts by utilising clean

technologies and diversifying energy sources.

The first day of the event includes a discussion session titled "Green Economy, Empowerment and Sustainability", with the following as speakers: Dr Ahmed bin Abdullah al Sayaari, Director-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, Faiza bint Mohammed al Harthi, Head of the Energy Sector, Environment and Natural Resources Priority at Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, and Eng Al Mokhtar bin Salih al Sifi, Director of New Technologies and Renewable Energy at Rural Areas Electricity Company "Tanweer Oman".

The speakers presented two themes. The first was titled "Transforming waste into energy and its resources in the context

of the circular economy Oman". It was introduced by Dr Khalifa bin Saif al Jabri, Lecturer of Civil Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University.

The second, titled "Different Low-Carbon Solutions in the Journey from Gray Hydrogen to Green Hydrogen", was presented by Helen Hull, Strategic Director, Johnson Matthey company in the Middle East, Africa and India.

The conference sessions cover green economy's future in Oman. The academicians exchange views through debate on 33 research papers that are presented at the conference. The papers deal with green hydrogen energy, hydrogen fuel stocks, technologies on building green energy facilities, the establishment of a sustainable environment and green nanotechnology. — ONA

## US Capstone Programme team meets officials



**MUSCAT:** Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received at his office on Wednesday a delegation of the US Capstone Programme led by retired general John Kelly, Director of the programme.

The meeting exchanged cordial conversations and discussed a spectrum of topics of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Commodore Issa bin Salim al Owaisi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Administration and Supply, and the Military Attaché at the US Embassy in Muscat.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received

in his office at Bait Al Falaj a delegation of the US Capstone Programme led by retired general John Kelly.

The two sides exchanged views on a range of academic and training topics.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Nassir bin Abdullah al Qatabi, Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, and the Military Attaché at the US Embassy in Muscat.

Later, the US Capstone Programme delegation visited the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum at Bait Al Falaj Fort.

Members of the delegation toured various sections of the museum and viewed the historic manuscripts and models. They were briefed on the march of SAF's development. — ONA

## Workshop explores local solutions to mitigate climate change challenges

**MUSCAT:** The Environment Authority on Wednesday organised a workshop on facilitating nationally determined contributions (NDCs) towards the control of climate change impacts on basic economic sectors.

The workshop elaborates on the current progress in contributions made in Oman for alleviating and adapting to climate change. It discusses innovative local solutions, capacity building for addressing the impact of climate change on economic sectors, the main challenges and the best practices to achieve such objectives at a national level.

Khoulia bint Mohammed al Zahrani, Director-General of National Policies and Programmes at the Ministry of Economy, said in a speech that the workshop seeks to compile a report on Oman's efforts in implementing the NDCs, defining the main challenges facing NDCs' implementation and discussing innovative local solutions designed to mitigate and adapt to climate change. — ONA



## RAFO COMMANDER RECEIVES UK OFFICIAL



**MUSCAT:** Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), received at Thamrait Air Base Command on Wednesday Air Marshal Harvey Smyth, Deputy Commander of the British Royal Air Force (RAF) for Operations. The meeting came within the context of the Oman-Britain Military Exercise "Magic Carpet 2023". The two sides discussed a range of military topics of common interest. — ONA

## ODB, Arab Planning Institute ink MoU on training, consultancy

**KUWAIT:** Oman Development Bank (ODB) on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait to consolidate joint cooperation in the fields of training, capacity building, studies and consultations.

The MoU also states that the two sides will hold events and forums that serve the entrepreneurship sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman.

The MoU will contribute to enhancing the bank's contribution to financing SMEs specialised in innovative projects that have in-country value (ICV) and employ Omani youth.



The MoU was signed by Eng Mohammed bin AbuBakr al Ghassani, Chairman of ODB Board of Directors, and Dr Badr Othman Malallah, Director-General of the Arab Planning Institute. — ONA

# Oman's CDAA team continues rescue operations in Türkiye

VINOD NAIR  
@vinot\_nair

The National Search and Rescue Team of the Sultanate of Oman's Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has been continuing with its humanitarian efforts in a number of sites affected by the devastating earthquake in the city of Antakya, Republic of Türkiye, in search of survivors from under the rubble using special equipment and techniques.

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Board of the United Nations Office (INSARAG) has documented the number of missions carried out by the National Search and Rescue Team and the sectors in which the team worked in the Republic of Türkiye, which resulted in the safe rescue of two people. According to

official sources, the team has been combing buildings and houses in the affected areas despite the challenges.

Meanwhile, the International Rescue Committee has been responding to the crisis by providing critical financial support to partner organisations working in northwest Syria and Türkiye.

This will include providing thousands of households with cash and essential items, such as household kits, dignity kits for women and girls, and hygiene supplies including towels and blankets. As part of our work to support essential health services in affected areas, the IRC is launching two mobile health teams which will provide treatment and care to survivors. We will also set up safe spaces for women and children affected by the crisis.





TOP ARMENIAN DIPLOMAT  
TO ‘BUILD PEACE’

ANKARA: Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan made a rare visit to Türkiye, underlining a desire to “build peace” in the wake of a devastating quake that killed nearly 40,000 people. Last week’s 7.8-magnitude tremor has been followed by a revival in talks between Türkiye and Armenia and Greece.



The Greek foreign minister paid a visit to quake-hit regions last weekend, and Armenia’s top diplomat arrived in Ankara.

“I would like to once again reaffirm the readiness and willingness of Armenia to build peace in the region, and especially to fully normalise relations with Türkiye , to establish diplomatic relations and fully open the border between Armenia and Türkiye ,” Mirzoyan said. — dpa



A collapsed building in the Islahiye district of Gaziantep after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake killed at least 35,000 people and devastated swathes of Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. — AFP

JORDAN’S FM VISITS SYRIA IN  
FIRST TRIP SINCE WAR

DAMASCUS: Jordan’s foreign minister Ayman Safadi arrived in Damascus on Wednesday in the first such visit since the Syrian conflict between the two neighbours who have long been at odds over regional issues, officials said.

The visit, to show solidarity after the recent earthquake will be followed by one to Türkiye , and will focus on humanitarian needs and how Jordan, a neighbour that hosts tens of thousands of Syrian refugees, can help in ongoing relief operations, Jordanian officials said.



“Safadi will discuss the humanitarian and aid needs that the two countries need,” a statement from the foreign ministry said, adding that aid planes will fly to both countries. — AFP

ROHINGYA REFUGEES  
DONATE WINTER  
CLOTHES TO VICTIMS

DHAKA: Rohingya refugees living in squalid Bangladeshi camps have donated winter clothes to survivors of the devastating earthquake in Türkiye , a Rohingya community leader said.

Some 700 blankets and 200 jackets were donated to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency’s office in Dhaka, Sahat Zia Hero, a freelance photographer and Rohingya community leader said.

“It is our goodwill gesture to the Turkish people, a token of love for the brothers and sisters in Türkiye who are living in difficulties,” Hero said.

“We can feel the pain of being homeless and we call on everyone to stand by the victims with whatever means they can,” he said. — dpa

SYRIAN WOMAN RESCUES  
CHILDREN, BAG OF MEMORIES

JABLEH: When she felt the first tremors of the earthquake which hit Syria and Türkiye last week, Um Kanan (pictured), woke her three children and rushed them to a small closet in her bedroom for shelter, along with a collection of family photos and documents.



The force of the quake brought their fourth floor apartment in Syria’s Mediterranean town of Jableh crashing to the

ground, killing almost all of their neighbours but leaving unscathed the four of them and their precious duffle bag of memories.

Um Kanan and her youngest child were tucked inside a space in the closet no more than a metre wide, while her two elder children huddled in a nook between the closet and her bed, using pillows to shield themselves when the building crumbled. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

Türkiye promises  
swift reconstruction,  
Syrians seek aid

HAREM/JANDARIS: Türkiye said it would demolish buildings heavily damaged by a huge earthquake last week and swiftly start a mammoth reconstruction effort, with thousands of families struggling to survive amid the rubble and freezing conditions.

Rescuers, who flew in to save people trapped in the debris, were starting to pack, although one woman was pulled out of a collapsed building on Wednesday after being buried for 222 hours.

In neighbouring Syria’s opposition-held northwest, already suffering from more than a decade of bombardment, the earthquake left many fending for themselves amid the rubble, with aid slowed by the complex politics of humanitarian assistance there.

The combined death toll in the two countries has climbed over 41,000, and millions are in need over humanitarian aid, with many survivors having been left homeless in near-freezing winter temperatures. Rescues are now few and far between.

In Türkiye’s southern Hatay province, half of the buildings have either collapsed, been heavily damaged, or need to



Huseyin Berber, 62, a survivor who was rescued after being trapped under the rubble for 187 hours in Antakya, speaks to media and doctors as he receives medical attention at Mersin City hospital. — Reuters

Türkiye says it will demolish and rebuild swiftly as relief efforts hampered in Syria, some aid comes through

be demolished quickly, the government said.

“We will quickly demolish what needs to be demolished and build safe houses,” Türkiye’s Environment and Urbanisation Minister Murat Kurum tweeted.

The government encouraged people to go back home, if and when authorities have deemed their building safe, “in order to

start getting back to normal,” Tourism Minister Nuri Ersoy told a news conference in Malatya, some 160 km from the epicentre of the earthquake.

Across the border, in Syria, relief efforts have been hampered by a civil war that has splintered the country and regional and global powers.

Though a single border crossing from Türkiye to Syria was open after the quake, the UN did not send aid through for days, citing logistical issues.

“The situation is really tragic,” Abdulrahman Mohammad, a displaced Syrian originally from the neighbouring province.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

SYRIAN TRIBES GET AID  
ACROSS FRONTLINE  
TO NORTHWEST

JANDARIS: An aid convoy has reached earthquake-hit northwestern Syria from the eastern Deir al Zor province, an example of assistance making it across a frontline of the country’s 11-year-long civil war since the disaster struck more than a week ago.

Organised by Arab tribes, trucks loaded with blankets, food, medical supplies and tents arrived overnight in the insurgent-held rebel northwest from a region controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a witness said.

More aid was being collected, said Hamoud Saleh al Darjah, an organiser. The aid would be distributed in the north without discrimination, he said. “This isn’t the last campaign,” he said. — dpa

UN APPEALS FOR NEARLY  
\$400M FOR QUAKE VICTIMS

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations launched an appeal for \$397 million on Tuesday to help earthquake victims in Syria, where the disaster has killed thousands of people and left millions more in desperate need of aid.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, announcing the appeal at the UN headquarters in New York, said the funds would bring “life-saving relief” for nearly five million Syrians and would cover a period of three months.



He added that the world body was in the final stages of a similar appeal for Türkiye . “One week after the devastating earthquakes, millions of people across the region are struggling for survival, homeless and in freezing temperatures. We are doing all we can to change this. But much more is needed,” Guterres pleaded. — AFP

Disease the new threat as Türkiye faces water shortage

KAHRAMANMARAS: More than a week after his home was wrecked in a deadly earthquake that hit southern Türkiye, Mohammad Emin’s body is still covered in dust and grime.

Like countless other victims of a catastrophe that killed more than 41,000 in Türkiye and Syria, he is still waiting for a wash - affected by a shortage of clean water that international health bodies say poses a risk to public health.

“We haven’t been able to rinse off since the earthquake,” said Emin, a 21-year-old graphic design student, as he carried flu medicine from the clinic of an open-air

stadium serving as a camp for displaced people in the city of Kahramanmaras.

With much of the region’s sanitation infrastructure damaged or rendered inoperable by last Monday’s two 7.8- and 7.6-magnitude earthquakes, Türkiye’s health authorities face a daunting task in trying to ensure that survivors, many homeless, now remain disease-free.

A doctor at the clinic, Akin Hacıoglu, said between 15 and 30 medics operated the facility, the only one of its kind at the camp, which serves up to 10,000 people during the day.

They are offering tetanus



A volunteer feeds Syrian girl Hanaa Sharif (8), the only survivor of her family following the earthquake as she lies in a hospital bed in Maarat Misrine, in Syria’s northern Idlib province. — AFP

shots to residents who request them, and distributing hygiene kits with shampoo, deodorant, pads and wipes, Hacıoglu said.

But Emin said there were no showers at or near the camp and the six toilets at the stadium were not enough to meet demand.

Arif Kirici, 42, has been sheltering at the same stadium since he dug himself and his mother out of their collapsed home on the day of the quake.

He also said he had not been able to take a shower nor, like several other camp residents who Reuters spoke to, change his clothes.

In the city of Antakya,

further south towards the Syrian border, greater numbers of portable toilets are in evidence than during the first days after the quake, but many residents say still more are needed.

Batyr Berdyklychev, the World Health Organization’s representative in Türkiye, said the water shortage “increases the risk of waterborne diseases and outbreaks of communicable diseases.”

The WHO was working with local authorities to step up monitoring of waterborne diseases, seasonal influenza and Covid-19 among those displaced, he added. — Reuters



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## In brief

### ■ PANAMA CITY



#### AT LEAST 33 DEAD IN PANAMA MIGRANT BUS CRASH

At least 33 people died on Wednesday when a bus transporting migrants bound for the United States crashed with a minibus in Panama, an official in the Central American country said.

Updating the death toll from 15, Panama's national director of migration Samira Gozaine told the Telemetro broadcaster: "for now, we have information of 33 people dead." President Laurentino Cortizo earlier announced. The bus had 66 occupants including the driver and an assistant when it crashed some 400 kilometres west of the capital Panama City, police transit commissioner Emiliano Otero told journalists. — **AFP**

### ■ MILAN



#### BERLUSCONI ACQUITTED IN BRIBE CASE

An Italian court acquitted former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi over allegations of bribing witnesses in a underage case that has dogged the conservative leader for more than a decade.

Berlusconi was accused of paying 24 people, mostly young guests at his so-called Bunga Bunga parties, to provide false testimony in a previous trial where he was charged with a 17-year-old Moroccan.

In a ruling read out in court, the judge said there was no case to answer. The other 28 co-defendants were also all acquitted. Prosecutors had demanded a six-year prison term for Berlusconi. — **Reuters**

### ■ MANILA



#### PHILIPPINES, US TO HOLD BIGGEST WAR GAMES IN YEARS

The Philippines and the United States will this year carry out their biggest joint military drills since 2015, Manila's army chief said against a backdrop of growing tensions with China in the South China Sea.

The exercises underscore improved ties with the United States under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, and come as the Philippines condemns China's "aggressive" actions in the disputed waterway, including its use of a "military-grade laser" against one of Manila's vessels earlier this month. The annual 'Balikatan' exercises will be conducted in the second quarter. — **Reuters**

# STURGEON ANNOUNCES PLAN TO RESIGN



‘In my head and in my heart I know that time is now. That it’s right for me, for my party and my country’

**NICOLA STURGEON**  
*Leader, Scottish National Party*

a series of political setbacks in recent months as her government sought to push through gender reforms, only for them to be blocked by Westminster.

She insisted the row surrounding a transgender double rapist being sent to a women's jail "wasn't the final straw" but said it is "time for someone else" to lead the party.

Sturgeon acknowledged the "choppy waters" but insisted her resignation was not in response to the "latest period of pressure."

"This decision comes from a deeper and longer term assessment," she said.

Sturgeon rose to power unopposed after the ill-fated independence referendum in 2014, taking over from Alex Salmond, the mentor with whom she would come into conflict in the years to come over the handling



Demonstrators hold placards during a protest outside of Bute House, as Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announces her resignation as First Minister, in Edinburgh. — **AFP**

of harassment allegations made against him.

Her surprise exit led political commentators to draw parallels with the sudden resignation last month of Jacinda Ardern as New Zealand's prime minister.

Sturgeon had planned to fight the next general election as a de facto referendum on Scottish independence, but her exit now raises questions about the immediate future of the cause itself.

But she vowed to continue in politics and said her life-long cause of independence is "being won."

Alister Jack, the Scottish Secretary in the UK government, said Sturgeon had been a

"formidable politician."

But he added: "Her resignation presents a welcome opportunity for the Scottish government to change course, and to drop its divisive obsession with independence."

"I want to see a Scottish government that works hand in hand with the UK government to realise our full potential as a country."

Labour Party leader Keir Starmer will also be closely following the next steps as the rise of the SNP to the detriment of Labour has played a role in keeping the party out of power in Westminster. Sturgeon indicated she will continue on the backbenches as a member of the Scottish parliament (MSP) "until,

certainly, the next election" for the regional parliament at Holyrood, which is due in 2026.

She described being First Minister as "the privilege of [her] life," adding: "Nothing, absolutely nothing, I do in future will ever come any where close."

Among those paying tribute to Sturgeon was potential successor, and Scottish Health Secretary, Humza Yousaf who said he was "gutted" to see her standing down.

However, SNP member of the UK parliament Joanna Cherry, who has clashed with Sturgeon particularly over gender issues, called for "reform and healing" in their party. — **dpa**

## New Zealand cyclone kills 4

### SURVIVORS PLUCKED FROM ROOFTOPS

**MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand:** Military helicopters winched stranded storm survivors to safety in New Zealand on Wednesday, after Cyclone Gabrielle killed four people and displaced 10,500 more.

With the storm now fading into the South Pacific, rescue teams are finally reaching regions cut off by days of torrential rain and gale-force winds.

The New Zealand military deployed three NH90 helicopters on reconnaissance and rescue flights to the hard-hit Hawke's Bay area, finding families, pets and workmates clustered on sodden zinc rooftops — surrounded by a sea of murky, debris-filled floodwater.

"In some cases, floodwaters were up to the second storey of homes where people were being rescued," a military spokesperson said.

The disaster has severed roads, collapsed houses and cut power across a swathe of New Zealand's North Island, home to more than three-quarters of the country's five million residents.

The human toll continues to rise. Police said the body of a child was found in a town on the remote east coast, with the youngster "believed to have been caught in rising floodwater."

Three other bodies have also been recovered, including a woman killed when her house was crushed by a landslide and a victim believed to be a volunteer



A coastal home after part of its back garden and sand was washed away during the storm surge caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in Waihi Beach in the Bay of Plenty. — **AFP**

firefighter trapped by a collapsing home.

"The devastation is widespread and has taken a toll beyond property and livelihoods to people," New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said.

"There have been four confirmed fatalities and the grief must be unimaginable."

With the cellphone network disrupted, police have received over 1,400 reports of people who are still "uncontactable."

"We expect the vast majority of these people will be accounted for," Hipkins said, "but there are several people missing for whom police hold grave concerns."

At an evacuation centre in

Whangarei in the far north, Margaret, 66 — who asked for her surname not to be published — said she fled her property when floodwater poured in and the power went out.

Her daughter, who lives 600 kilometres away in Napier on the east coast, was also forced out of her home when a landslide hit the area.

"She'd been calling me earlier, checking I was okay and then she's had this happen; it's unbelievable, really," she said.

"She's young, so it's a big setback for her and her husband. I'll be ok, I've got people up here I can stay with and things will dry out eventually." — **AFP**

## India to harvest record wheat crop in 2023

**KAUSHALENDRA SINGH**  
[@patkaushal](#)

After a shortfall in production last year, India's 2023 wheat production is likely to rise 4.1 per cent to a record 112.2 million tonnes. India's agriculture ministry released its Second Advance Estimates for 2022-23 crop production, which includes targets and estimates for the winter or 'rabi' crop.

According to the report, there will be record-sized crop production during the current crop year (July 2022-June 2023), although the forecast volume is well below the target set earlier.

The food grain production forecast, as per the Second Advance Estimates, is at 323.6 million metric tonnes (mmt), down from its target of 328 mmt, although 2.5 per cent or 8 mmt higher than its estimate for 2022-23. This forecast includes record-sized crops forecast for rice, wheat, corn, barley, pulse crops and oilseeds in addition to other crops.

India is the world's second-biggest producer of grain, at the same time, the world's second-biggest consumer of wheat. Higher wheat output is likely to help the country replenish depleted inventories and bring down prices.

The indication, however, is that the ban on wheat exports from the country will continue despite the expected



rise in output to bring down domestic prices, government sources said last week.

India banned exports in May 2022 after a sharp, sudden rise in temperatures clipped output, even as exports picked up to meet the global shortfall triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

One of the reasons behind the export ban was a fall in wheat output in 2022.

According to data released by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, wheat output fell to 107.74 million tonnes in 2022 from 109.59 million tonnes in 2021.

According to government sources, the production of wheat harvested in March is expected at record 110-111 million tonnes in 2023-24 on the back of higher acreage if the weather remains favourable throughout the season.

"Weather Inputs from the India Meteorological Department is an important consideration," a government official said.



# Can the West woo Africa?

The United States is finally paying attention to Africa. But recent attempts at engagement — the US-Africa Leaders Summit in December and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s ten-day tour of the continent last month — have offered no indication that the US has anything close to a meaningful strategy for engagement with the continent. And the European Union is no better.

Renewed Western interest in Africa is long overdue. The continent plays an essential role in world affairs, not least because of its outsized importance to future global economic growth and the green-energy transformation, rooted in its accelerating urbanisation, youth bulge, and abundant deposits of minerals and rare earths. All of this clearly merits sustained and consistent engagement by the West.

But Africa has drawn only sporadic engagement — primarily on security matters — from the US in recent years. The last US-Africa summit was held nearly a decade ago, and no US president has visited the continent since 2015. Donald Trump showed little interest in Africa during his term; in fact, his open disdain for the continent drove US-Africa diplomacy into the ground.

At the same time, US trade with Africa has plummeted — from \$142 billion in 2008 to \$64 billion in 2021 — despite much-hyped initiatives. For example, the 2000 African Growth and Opportunity Act provides eligible Sub-Saharan countries with duty-free access to the US market for some products, and the 2019 Africa Prosper programme aims to double US-Africa trade and investment. Neither has lived up to its promise.

The EU, by contrast, has maintained a robust trading relationship with Africa. But it has failed to build upon this to deepen engagement in other domains.

It does not help that Europe has pursued a patently hypocritical energy policy in Africa and, along with the US, disastrous vaccine diplomacy and development policies that sometimes had counterproductive conditions attached. The West got a wake-up call



Ana Palacio

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IN RECENT YEARS, THE WEST’S LACK OF ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICA LEFT BEHIND A VACUUM THAT CHINA AND RUSSIA EAGERLY FILLED

last March, when 25 of Africa’s 54 countries abstained or didn’t participate at all in a vote on a United Nations resolution demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine.

French President Emmanuel Macron called their decision hypocritical. But, for a continent that has all too often watched the world’s great powers use international law to advance their own interests, Western criticisms of Russia rang hollow, so there was little appetite for picking sides.

Moreover, while the West was failing to engage with Africa, Russia and China were actively deepening ties. Some European elites have yet to grasp, for example, that France’s recent withdrawal from Mali, after nearly a decade supporting the government’s fight against militant forces, allowed Russia’s Wagner Group to consolidate its grip on the Sahel and convert it into a second front against Europe.

Russia has also used disinformation and age-old colonial tropes to nurture anti-French and anti-European sentiment across Africa, raising the political costs for any African leader who seeks closer relations with the West.

But it is China that has been courting Africa most vigorously in recent years. The ambitious Belt and Road Initiative has enabled it to expand its economic footprint on the continent.

China-Africa trade reached a record \$254 billion in 2021, putting China well on its way to its goal of surpassing the EU as Africa’s largest trading partner by 2030. China has also secured dozens of lucrative mining deals, strengthening its control over rare earths.

China has leveraged its economic influence to advance its diplomatic goals. In stark contrast to the US, China has dispatched its foreign minister to Africa nearly every year since 1950.

China has also participated in the war of narratives. Its 2021 white paper, “China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals,” states: “In its cooperation with Africa, China applies the principles of giving more and taking less, giving before taking, and giving without asking for something in return.” @Project Syndicate, 2022

## GOOSE-BEAKED WHALES



This aerial view shows the rescue of the body of one of several dead goose-beaked whales (Cuvier’s beaked whale – Ziphius cavirostris) in Cyprus’ western village of Pomos on Wednesday. — AFP

# I am a human being as well: Scotland’s Nicola Sturgeon bows out

STUART GRAHAM AND JITENDRA JOSHI

Less than a month ago, Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Nicola Sturgeon said she still had “plenty in the tank” following the shock resignation of New Zealand’s prime minister.

Now the 52-year-old is following Jacinda Ardern out the door, after coming under pressure from a fierce row and as Scotland’s push to independence appears to stall. It marks the surprise departure of one of Britain’s most formidable politicians.

But like Ardern, Sturgeon said she felt unable to give “every ounce of energy that it needs” to see out the high-pressure job, and it was her “duty” to make way for a new SNP leader.

Acknowledging the strains of office after more than eight years as leader, and the same period as deputy first minister before that, she said: “I am a human being as well as a politician.”

In a move unprecedented since Scotland won back self-government in 1999, the law was blocked by the UK government in London, and Sturgeon’s handling of the affair drew internal SNP criticism.

Above all, the party’s raison d’être



Scotland’s First Minister, and leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Nicola Sturgeon, speaks during a press conference at Bute House in Edinburgh on Wednesday. — AFP

ACKNOWLEDGING THE STRAINS OF OFFICE AFTER MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS AS LEADER, AND THE SAME PERIOD AS DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER BEFORE THAT, SHE SAID: I AM A HUMAN BEING AS WELL AS A POLITICIAN

— Scottish independence — has been hitting the buffers despite her attempts to up the ante, after the UK government rejected its demands for a new referendum.

Criticism has mounted over Sturgeon’s intention to turn the next UK general election into a vote to leave, leaving voters with a stark choice that some in the party fear could rebound on the SNP.

But she remains relatively

popular in opinion polls and has been a towering presence with a reputation for assured leadership since becoming first minister in 2014.

Amid the Covid pandemic, in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, the SNP won a record 64 of the 129 seats — but one short of a majority on its own. It allied with the Greens to continue in government.

The build-up to the elections was marred by mudslinging between Sturgeon and Alex Salmond, her former mentor and predecessor as first minister.

The pair fell out spectacularly over Sturgeon’s handling of harassment claims against Salmond. Disagreements between the two political heavyweights reverberated into the election campaign and Salmond formed his own pro-independence party called Alba. But it failed to win a single seat.

Salmond and his supporters, however, could point to Sturgeon’s continuing failure to win new momentum for independence. In November, the Supreme Court in London sided with the UK government’s contention that

Edinburgh lacked the power to call a new referendum on its own.

Sturgeon said the ruling exposed the “myth” that Scotland could voluntarily leave the United Kingdom.

The SNP-led government would now look to use the UK election due by early 2025 as a “de facto referendum” on separating after more than 300 years, Sturgeon said.

But several surveys have shown waning popular support for breaking away, after Scottish voters rejected independence in 2014. For Sturgeon and the SNP, Britain’s vote in 2016 to quit the European Union changed the picture entirely. A majority of Scots wanted to stay in the EU.

A former lawyer labelled “Queen of Scots” by some in the media, Sturgeon argues for socially conscious policies she says were abandoned by the centre-left Labour party, once the dominant force in Scottish politics.

She was born in the industrial town of Irvine southwest of Glasgow, in 1970 to an electrician father and a mother who was active in local SNP politics.

Sturgeon joined the SNP aged 16, becoming politicised in the 1980s when Conservative Margaret Thatcher, still widely reviled in Scotland, was Britain’s prime minister.

She studied law at Glasgow University and stood unsuccessfully for the House of Commons in 1992, aged just 21, before starting her career as a lawyer.

When the Scottish Parliament was created in 1999, with Labour ahead of the SNP as the biggest party, Sturgeon was one of its first wave of lawmakers. Her nickname at that stage was “nippy sweetie” — Scots slang for a pushy person.

Her mother Joan once joked about her daughter’s hard-working tendencies: “The phone is never switched off — many of my family can vouch for that.”

Sturgeon married SNP colleague Peter Murrell in 2010.

The partnership has come under scrutiny after Murrell, the party’s chief executive, was also embroiled in the Salmond investigation and questions have mounted over a loan he extended to the SNP. — AFP

# sport

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## Oman U20 team aims for better show against Qatar



ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Oman Under-20 football team will clash again with Qatar team on Thursday in Doha city at Aspire (4) zone in a repeat warm-up match after the both teams met on Monday. Hosts Qatar thrashed Oman in the opening friendly by 6-1. The massive defeat was a warning for the coaching staff of the Oman national team ahead of their crucial assignment in the AFC Asian U20 Championship which will start from March 1. The duplicated fixture on Thursday will serve as a good opportunity for the team to work on addressing the weak areas and the mistakes that cost the team a huge loss. It is expected that the head coach of the national team, David Gordo, might enter today's encounter with a different style that will ensure Oman's comeback. Thursday's warm-up game is the penultimate match before

the start of the major Asian event, while the concluding and high-quality international friendly match will be against the hosts of Asian Championship, Uzbekistan on February 21. The team will head off to Tashkent on Sunday for an abroad camp with a duration of eight days. The majority of the announced squad by Spanish Coach Gordo took part in the opening Qatar match including 21 out of 23 players. The match provided a clear picture for the coaching staff on the readiness of each player for the Asian test. Oman will compete in Group C at the AFC Asian U20 tournament alongside South Korea, Tajikistan and Jordan while Qatar are grouped in a challenging Group B besides Iran, Australia and Vietnam. The top four teams in the Asian tournament will secure their spots in the Fifa U20 World Cup 2023 which will be hosted in Indonesia from May 20 to June 11.



## Tough competition in Al Bashayer camel races

WALEED AL JAHWARI  
ADAM, FEB 15

The Al Bashayer Festival for Arab camel races is underway with different activities taking place at Al Bashayer Camel Race track in Adam. The third day activities on Wednesday continued as part of the Al Bashayer Festival under the auspices of Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah. On the third day, the races were held in 15 rounds for the category of 'Elytha', which are four years old, for a distance of 6 km. The races were divided into two periods — 11 races in the morning with cash prizes for the top 10 winners and four races in the afternoon with cup, gun and cars for first place and cash prizes for the top 10. 'Tahther' snatched the



opening round, owned by Salim al Maliki, as it covered the race distance in 9 minutes and 32 seconds. 'Al Swalaeyah' claimed the second round, owned by Mohammed al Jenaibi and 'Mubher' owned by Humoud al Wahibi was ranked top in the

third race. The fourth round race saw 'Eshteal' finish first, owned by Rashid al Wahibi. The fifth round was won by 'Sharat' owned by Mubark al Habsi, 'Buhoor' owned by Mohammed al Jahafi won the sixth, 'Aldhabi' owned Al Hamdi al Daree claimed the seventh round and



the eighth race was claimed by 'Asyrami' owned by Said al Hashemi. The ninth race was won by 'Al Dhanah' owned by Abdullah al Ahibi while 'Awayed' owned by Majed al Durei won the honours in the 10th round. In the 11th and last race of the

morning session, 'Al khroof', owned by Awad al Balushi, finished first. **BIG ACHIEVEMENT** Abdullah bin Twarish al Wahibi, who won the ninth race through the camel 'Al Dhanah' said, "Winning in the

Al Bashayer Festival is a big accomplishment especially at the end of the season. Our focus now is on the final day on Saturday and we are looking for first place." In the afternoon period, the competition was very strong within the GCC participants' level with all looking for the top places. The first round was dominated by Hejen al Bashayer through 'Muteba', trained by Humaid al Gahafi. The second round was claimed by 'Mub' of Salim al Darei and recorded the best time in the km category with 9:07:88. The third round was won by Qatar's Hamed bin Jahweel through 'Dasman'. 'Sagah', owned by Mohammed al Khatri from UAE, clinched the concluding race of the third day.

# Coman haunts PSG again as Bayern take first step towards last eight



Bayern Munich's French forward Kingsley Coman (L) fights for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi during the UEFA Champions League football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Bayern Munich (FC Bayern Muenchen) at the Parc des Princes in Paris. — AFP

**PARIS:** Kingsley Coman came back to haunt Paris St Germain again as he earned Bayern Munich a 1-0 win at the Parc des Princes in their Champions League last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

Born in Paris and raised at PSG, Coman scored the only goal when Bayern beat the French side in the 2020 Champions League final and he was again the sole scorer as the German champions put one foot into the quarter-finals.

PSG, who have now lost five games in all competitions in 2023, held firm in the opening half but were eventually subdued and failed to fight back despite finishing the game with Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and Lionel Messi all on the pitch.

Christophe Galtier's side now face the prospect of a second elimination in a row in the last 16 on March 8 in Munich, although Mbappe's high-octane display as a second-half substitute will have given them hope.

"We played really well in the first 25 minutes and the best

team on the night won. It's an important victory but there's a second leg coming," Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said.

"We were dominant and aggressive in the beginning. Then they started to find some depth when Mbappe came on."

"We had a tough hour against a team who enjoyed possession and pressed high," said Galtier. "Conceding that goal before Kylian came on was a pity but they deserved to score."

**MBAPPE BACK FROM INJURY**

The stadium came to the boil when Mbappe replaced Carlos Soler, raising hopes that the France forward would bail out PSG on his comeback from a two-week injury layoff.

Before that, Eric Choupo-Moting had come close to doubling the tally for Bayern on two occasions, before Gianluigi Donnarumma fully stretched to parry Benjamin Pavard's header in the 64th.

— Reuters

# Diaz gives Milan slender advantage against Tottenham



AC Milan's Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz (C) celebrates with AC Milan's French defender Theo Hernandez after opening the scoring during the UEFA Champions League round of 16, first leg football match between AC Milan and Tottenham Hotspur on February 14, 2023 at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

**MILAN:** AC Milan took a step towards their first Champions League quarter-final appearance for 11 years as Brahim Diaz's goal gave the Italians a 1-0 win over Tottenham Hotspur in their last-16 first leg at the San Siro on Tuesday.

The Spaniard headed in a rebound in the seventh minute after a superb double save by Tottenham's second-choice keeper Fraser Forster and the seven-time winners kept the Londoners at bay.

Spurs, weakened by injuries and suspensions, responded positively in the first half to dominate possession but were unable to seriously worry the hosts.

Milan should have increased their advantage after the break with substitute Charles De Ketelaere and defender Malick Thiaw wasting glorious headed chances.

Tottenham sent on Brazil forward Richarlison for the last 20 minutes and, while they were unable to avoid a first-ever defeat by Milan, they will head home still hopeful of turning the tie around and reaching the last eight.

"It wasn't hard to prepare this game tactically, with all the duels, but I am very happy with how my players performed," Milan coach Stefano Pioli said.

"We could have scored a second goal — we had some clear chances. I am happy with the performance but it's only the first leg and the next game will be surely more difficult."

Milan's record against Premier League clubs has been lamentable in recent years with only one win in 17 ahead of their clash with Antonio Conte's Spurs side.

**TENACIOUS DISPLAY**

But faced with inconsistent

opponents who were without the suspended Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and injured Rodrigo Bentancur in midfield and sidelined goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, Milan deservedly ended that run with a tenacious display.

The San Siro crowd did not have to wait long to have something to cheer as Theo Hernandez got the better of Cristian Romero before powering a shot at Forster who saved well.

Diaz's rebound effort was also brilliantly saved but he reacted quickly to bundle in a header.

With 22-year-old Oliver Skipp and Pape Sarr, 20, in central midfield, Tottenham did gain a

foothold and Son Heung-min's free kick was met with a glancing header by Eric Dier but it went straight at Milan keeper Ciprian Tatarusanu.

Tatarusanu then saved well from Son with Harry Kane hitting the rebound against the crossbar, although a goal would have been disallowed anyway for offside.

Spurs huffed and puffed after the break without much reward and were fortunate that Milan did not give themselves a bigger cushion for the second leg in March.

In the space of a couple of minutes De Ketelaere headed

wide after Olivier Giroud nodded the ball back across goal and then Tottenham got another let-off as Thiaw also missed the target with an equally inviting chance.

Dier, who will be suspended for the second leg after picking up a booking, should have done better with a chance at the other end but Spurs could have few complaints about the final score.

"I expect another tough match in the return leg. We should have done better for their goal, then it was a battle in front of a difficult atmosphere," Conte said.

"Let's not forget, Milan won the league last year — we didn't."

— Reuters

# Brown, Wareham set up second win for Australia

**GQEBERHA, South Africa:** Leg-spinner Georgia Wareham made a successful return to international cricket with a player of the match performance for Australia against Bangladesh at St George's Park in Gqeberha on Tuesday.

Wareham took three for 20 as Bangladesh were restricted to 107 for seven despite a half-century by captain Nigar Sultana.

Australia won by eight wickets, with captain Meg Lanning making 48 not out.

"It was pretty tough," said Wareham, who suffered a left knee cruciate ligament injury in October 2021 and had a race against time to be fit for the current tournament.

"I missed the 50-overs World Cup, the Ashes and the Commonwealth Games," she said.

"To come out on the other side I am pretty thankful for those people who helped me. Thanks to the selectors for backing me despite me not having played any cricket leading up to the World Cup."

Lanning was delighted to have Wareham back and in form. "She's had a long way back after a serious injury. She's a game changer."



Australia's Georgia Wareham (2nd R) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Bangladesh's Sobhana Mostary (not seen) during the Group A T20 women's World Cup cricket match between Australia and Bangladesh at St George's Park in Gqeberha on February 14, 2023. — AFP

The initial damage was done by fast bowler Darcie Brown, who took two early wickets.

Nigar scored 57 for Bangladesh but lacked support. She came to the crease after Brown had reduced Bangladesh to 11 for two in the fourth over and was the mainstay of the innings until the penultimate over when she lofted a catch to cover off off-spinner Ash Gardner.

Nigar hit a six off leg-spinner Alana King and seven fours in a 50-ball innings but none of her teammates could make more than Shorna Akter's 12 against the varied attack of the defending champions.

"We need to work on our batting," said Nigar. "We didn't get as many boundaries as we wanted in the last five overs."

But Nigar praised the Bangladesh bowlers, who didn't allow Australia to race to victory. It took the champions until the 19th over to seal their second successive win.

Beth Mooney failed for the second successive match, caught at slip off 18-year-old fast bowler Marufa Akter for two. Alyssa Healy (37) and captain Meg Lanning (48 not out) put on 69 for the second wicket but failed to dominate against dogged Bangladesh bowling and fielding.

Marufa, who took three for 23 against Sri Lanka on Sunday, had another impressive outing, taking one for 18 in her four overs. "She's so young and she has so much talent," said Nigar. "I am really confident with our bowlers."

It was the first tournament match to be played in Gqeberha and the first of three to be played by Australia in the Eastern Cape city. — AFP

**Brief scores:**  
**Bangladesh** 107-7 in 20 overs (Nigar Sultana 57; D. Brown 2-23, G. Wareham 3-20).  
**Australia** 111-2 in 18.2 overs (A. Healy 37, M. Lanning 48 not out).  
**Result:** Australia won by 8 wickets.  
**Toss:** Bangladesh.

# Alcaraz eager to reclaim top ranking from Djokovic

**MADRID:** A near four-month stint on the sidelines saw Carlos Alcaraz lose the world number one ranking to Novak Djokovic and as the Spaniard prepares for his return to the court at the Argentina Open later on Wednesday he says he is determined to get it back.

Alcaraz climbed to the top of the ATP rankings in September after winning his first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open but a torn abdominal muscle during the Paris Masters in November put the 19-year-old out of action.

After 20 weeks at the top, Alcaraz slipped to number two in January when Djokovic won the Australian Open, an event the Spaniard had to skip due to injury.

"It has been a long time (I spent) at number one," said Alcaraz, who begins his season in Buenos Aires

against Serbian Laslo Djere in the second round.

"Now it's a goal for me to recover number one and try to do my best in these tournaments to be back on that number. I'm looking for that."

Alcaraz did not want to put too much expectation on himself in his first tournament since November.

"I'm feeling great. I'm getting used to these conditions, to play with the best players, so at the moment I'm feeling well," he said.

"It's tough to play my first tournament after a long time for me, after four months."

"So it's going to be really, really tough to win the tournament or be close to winning. My hope is to feel that I am okay with the injury, with my body and try to play well."

— Reuters



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz



# JORGENSON PEDALS TO GLORY

VANSEVENANT TAMES GREEN MOUNTAIN IN FINAL STAGE

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Movistar's Matteo Jorgenson edged final stage winner Mauri Vansevenant of Soudal Quick-Step by a second to clinch his first professional overall victory in Tour of Oman 2023 on Jabal Al Akhdhar on Wednesday. USA rider Jorgenson hanged on to keep his red jersey with an overall timing of 19:56:21. Wonderkid Vansevenant came second (+01) by a whisker.

AG2R Citroen Team's Geoffrey Bouchard (+28) took the third spot overall ahead of Rein Taaramae of Intermarche-Circus-Wanty (+46) and Diego Ulissi of UAE Team Emirates (+48).

"Today was about the team, they were super strong and gave me super support. In the end it was about confidence and doing my best on the climb if I could," Jorgenson said.

"It was between the top three in the GC and with the time bonuses at the finish, it was difficult to know how it would go. I had to finish at the same time as Mauri. He is a good sprinter, has a good kick and is strong. I think the guy with the strongest sprint won the stage and I hung on for GC, and it makes me so happy."

Jorgenson also became the youngest winner of the Tour of Oman.

"It's been a beautiful tour. Oman has treated me super well and I was happy to see the country. I hope to be back next year. I love Oman," the USA rider added.

The Stage 5 of the Tour of Oman 2023, set for the first time up the ascent of Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain), saw two 23-year-old talents battling in an explosive finale. Vansevenant was the strongest on the brutal slopes of a 5.7-km ascent with an average gradient of 10.5 per cent to take an emotional stage victory in front of his family, who came from Belgium to support him.

The young Belgian started only five seconds behind Jorgenson in the overall classification and gained four seconds thanks to the time bonuses but fell just short in the final stages.

Vansevenant said: "For sure I am happy, but a little bit disappointed. It was all or nothing. I knew if I got a good result today, I could win the General Classification."

"I won the stage but didn't win the Tour. I will come back, but for now I have to focus on the next races. It's



US Matteo Jorgenson of Movistar Team (C) poses on the podium with Belgian Mauri Vansevenant of Soudal Quick-Step (L) and French Geoffrey Bouchard of Ag2R Citroen Team (R), after winning the 2023 Oman Tour during its fifth stage, from Samayil Al Fayhaa Resthouse to Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) on Wednesday. – AFP

a steep climb and you need to push as hard as possible. I didn't attack on 500 metres to go to feel how it was, but if you attack you have to sit down again because with the heat it is not easy, and he came back and I knew it would be difficult. My family is here, and it's nice to celebrate with them."

Jorgenson also won 'Best Young Rider' for the second day in a row, along with the 'Individual Time' and 'Individual Points' awards, adding to his accolades from the Tour of Oman. Norway's Fredrik Dversnes (Uno-X Pro Cycling) claimed 'Most Active Rider' for the second successive day.

### FINAL SHOWDOWN

As the 152.2 km stage from Samayil entered the final phase, Intermarche-Circus-Wanty set the pace on the first part of the ascent of Jabal Al Akhdhar. Lawrence Naesen (AG2R Citroen) and Cerial Desal (Bingol WB) are the last riders to be caught, just inside the last 4 km of ascent.

With 3 km to go, only Jorgenson, Vansevenant and Bouchard could keep up with Rein Taaramae (Intermarche). But the Estonian climber dropped next.

It eventually came down to a brutal uphill sprint. Vansevenant was the most explosive to take victory, edging Jorgenson, who did just enough with a second place to take the overall crown.

### TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 5 RESULTS

|     | NAME               | COUNTRY | TEAM                     | TIME     |
|-----|--------------------|---------|--------------------------|----------|
| 1.  | Mauri Vansevenant  | (BEL)   | Soudal Quick-Step        | 03:53:51 |
| 2.  | Matteo Jorgenson   | (USA)   | Movistar Team            | + 00     |
| 3.  | Geoffrey Bouchard  | (FRA)   | AG2R Citroen Team        | + 12     |
| 4.  | Rein Taaramae      | (EST)   | Intermarche-Circus-Wanty | + 22     |
| 5.  | Maxim Van Gils     | (BEL)   | Lotto Dstny              | + 37     |
| 6.  | Diego Ulissi       | (ITA)   | UAE Team Emirates        | + 37     |
| 7.  | Cristian Rodriguez | (ESP)   | Team Arkea-Samsic        | + 58     |
| 8.  | Jesus Herrada      | (ESP)   | Cofidis                  | + 58     |
| 9.  | Carlos Verona      | (ESP)   | Movistar Team            | + 01:00  |
| 10. | Cian Uijtdebroeks  | (BEL)   | BORA-hansgrohe           | + 01:12  |

### GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

|     |                    |       |                          |          |
|-----|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|----------|
| 1.  | Matteo Jorgenson   | (USA) | Movistar Team            | 19:56:21 |
| 2.  | Mauri Vansevenant  | (BEL) | Soudal Quick-Step        | + 01     |
| 3.  | Geoffrey Bouchard  | (FRA) | AG2R Citroen Team        | + 28     |
| 4.  | Rein Taaramae      | (EST) | Intermarche-Circus-Wanty | + 46     |
| 5.  | Diego Ulissi       | (ITA) | UAE Team Emirates        | + 48     |
| 6.  | Maxim Van Gils     | (BEL) | Lotto Dstny              | + 58     |
| 7.  | Jesus Herrada      | (ESP) | Cofidis                  | + 01:20  |
| 8.  | Cristian Rodriguez | (ESP) | Team Arkea-Samsic        | + 01:22  |
| 9.  | Cian Uijtdebroeks  | (BEL) | BORA-hansgrohe           | + 01:36  |
| 10. | Carlos Verona      | (ESP) | Movistar Team            | + 01:37  |



# WTO talks to foster stronger Omani trade flows

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, FEB 15

A meeting hosted by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) with a visiting delegation of officials from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) focused on efforts to facilitate trade flows between the Sultanate of Oman and its trade partners globally.

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO, attended the meeting alongside OCCI Chairman Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, among a host of local government officials and business leaders.

The meeting reviewed several free trade agreements, including the Fisheries Support Agreement, the Trade Facilitation Agreement, and the Investment Facilitation and Promotion Agreement.

The meeting touched on the challenges faced by the private sector in general and the Omani private sector in particular, and the role of the World Trade Organisation in finding appropriate solutions to them.

In remarks to journalists, WTO's Director General said the visit aimed to enhance aspects of cooperation between the two sides by exchanging information on ways to facilitate the trade process between Oman and the world.



Discussions during the visit also explored ways for small and medium enterprises to contribute to job creation and stimulate Oman's internal and external trade.

She highlighted the importance of the fisheries sector to the national economy and noted the potential of renewables, especially green hydrogen, in

decarbonising the economy. She pointed out her current visit aims to ascertain Oman's views on ways to implement the agreements of the Twelfth Ministerial

Conference of the World Trade Organisation and to prepare for the twelfth ministerial conference to be held in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi in the first quarter of the

following year. She emphasised that the World Trade Organisation, in cooperation with member countries, seeks to find solutions to the trade challenges and issues facing the countries of the world, such as the challenges imposed by the coronavirus pandemic and the rise in food and energy prices, noting that the organisation contributed to finding solutions to many issues during the past period, such as the lack of access to coronavirus vaccinations to some developing countries.

She pointed out the efforts of the World Trade Organisation at a time of natural disasters, as the organisation plays an important role in this aspect by facilitating the movement of goods, goods and humanitarian aid, explaining that the organisation seeks during the coming period to update its regulations and laws in line with the requirements of the first century.

The WTO periodically visits its member countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, as part of its monitoring and review process.

The visits are usually carried out by WTO officials, who meet with government officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders to discuss the country's trade policies and practices, and to provide recommendations for improving its trade performance.

## New electronic portal to process requests for gas allocations



QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Applications for natural gas allocations may now be submitted via a new e-portal unveiled on Wednesday by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals part of its efforts to streamline requests for gas, as well as digitalise the process.

Henceforth, requests for natural gas as feedstock or fuel resource will have to be channelled through the e-portal: gasapplications.mem.gov.om. This includes both new investors or existing industries requires natural gas for their operations, the Ministry noted.

The electronic platform has been designed to enable investors and industrial consumers to not only submit requests for gas allocations, but also provide their



feedstock, furnish additional information to support their applications, and so on.

It also allows other government stakeholder agencies to review the requests and offer their inputs as well.

In a statement, Qasim bin Mohammed al Amri (pictured), Acting Director General of Marketing at the Ministry, said the launch of the platform is in line with the government's e-transformation drive aimed at facilitating the delivery of services to investors and the general public efficiently and transparently.

## Semiconductor summit to help Oman break into \$600 bn global industry

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the biggest investor in the Omani economy, is among a number of ministries and public sector entities that will take part in next week's International Semiconductors Executive Summit (ISES) – a landmark forum that promises to, at the very least, enable Oman's entry into the global eco-system undergirding the \$600 billion-worth semiconductor industry.

The Sultanate of Oman is hosting the first-ever edition of ISES, the world's leading platform for semiconductor industry stakeholders, in the Middle East during February 22-23, 2023 at Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa.

Organised with the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), the forum will also feature presentations from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion.

The theme of the two-day event is: 'Establishing a semiconductor ecosystem in Oman and the GCC to address future digitalisation growth', underscoring an ambition to ignite the growth of some elements of a semiconductor here in the Sultanate of Oman. "Oman is the perfect hub for the



creation of semiconductor design and infrastructure in the GCC. It is home to a young, prosperous and highly educated population.

In the global and regional hunt for tech talent, Oman will become a primary destination for leading tech companies establishing global development centres, and for local champions expanding internationally," the London-based organisers of the ISES global series said in a press statement.

"The International Semiconductor Executive Summits (ISES) advisory board members, members and community and I are committed to continually improving and reimagining how we expand to further serve and engage a more comprehensive value chain. In rapidly growing and emerging markets, like the GCC, we need to use our resources to stay ahead of the curve by delivering a valuable,

neutral platform to maximise and grow the supply chain that the World desperately needs," added Salah Nasri, President of the International Semiconductor Executive Summits (ISES).

The Muscat Summit presents a rare window of opportunity for Oman, and the wider GCC region, to make a concerted break into the lucrative global semiconductor industry as the world grapples with the lingering effects of a chips shortage that has unleashed chaos for chip-dependent sectors, notably the automotive industry.

Supply chain disruptions, initially stemming from pandemic-induced lockdowns and other factors, continue to impede the supply of chips to a wide array of industries that require them for their products and equipment.

In the wake of the crisis, some countries have taken steps to secure their own production of

semiconductors for their markets.

Notable is the example of the United States, which enacted the CHIPS Act last August to safeguard the interests of its national industries and maintain its technological prowess. In recent years, Oman has made some fledgling efforts in establishing the rudiments of a future domestic semiconductor industry. Last June, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Ministry of Labour signed a cooperation agreement with the Semiconductor Development and Investment Company (SDIC) to support the establishment of Oman's first project centring on the design and manufacture of semiconductors. SDIC is an affiliate of GS Micro Electronics (GSME), a global leader in semiconductor and microelectronics innovation, providing advanced technology solutions and products to customers worldwide. The company's Co-Founder and CEO, Farhat Jahangir, is due to address next week's summit.

"Oman is taking a lead in becoming a hub in semiconductor IC design and manufacturing in the GCC," said GSME in a post.

"The purpose of this summit is to enhance, strengthen and expand the global semiconductor ecosystem in the region.

GSME-Oman as the first semiconductor design and manufacturing training company in GCC is going to present in the event," it added.

# Workshop highlights perils of money laundering

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), organised a workshop on combating money laundering, with the participation of the National Centre for Financial Information, the Tax Authority and the Public Prosecution Office.

The workshop targeted the owners of institutions and commercial companies in the precious metals and stones trading sector, value-add sector, and accounting and auditing firms.

Eng Siham bint Ahmed al Harthiyah, member of the OCCI Board of Directors, said: “Some people may look at money laundering operations in a positive light if it is taken in the form of purchasing in-kind assets or direct financial investments, and the consequent availability of greater job opportunities and easing burdens.”

However, this view is superficial and not compatible with the actual reality of the effects of money laundering operations in terms of economic, social and security.



“It’s also affects economic stability, as money laundering operations contribute to the transfer of inflation to local communities and there is a possibility of exporting inflation from developed industrial countries to developing countries as a necessary consequence of the international system,” she added.

Money laundering affects monetary variables such as the

interest rate and the exchange rate, and in terms of the social effects of money laundering, it may lead to destabilising positive values, and the blood of loyalty and affiliation among some segments, and control of the media of all kinds, control and direct it according to their desires and tendencies.

Nasser bin Ashraf al Balushi, Head of the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist

Financing Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and a member of the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Team at the Ministry, gave a visual presentation in which he touched on the definition of money laundering, its stages and risks, special legislation in this field, the most important requirements to combat money

laundering and terrorist financing, and suspicion indicators.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued Ministerial Resolution 621/2022 setting out guidelines for monitoring accounting and auditing offices and companies, institutions and companies of precious metals and stones of value with regard to combating money laundering and financing terrorism, in order to limit the exploitation of sectors subject to supervision, Al Balushi said.

Al Balushi added the Ministry has also issued Ministerial Resolution 630/2022 regarding the issuance of a regulation regulating the procedures for knowing the real beneficiary.

Major Sultan bin Ibrahim al Balushi, Director of the Analysis and Statistics Department at the National Centre for Financial Information, indicated that the risk-based approach aims to enable institutions to develop policies and controls commensurate with the nature of their business and activities, the size and scope of those business and activities, as

well as the degree of complexity, indicating that the risk elements lie in the product, or the service, the customer, the geographical location, and the channels of dealing.

Abdulaziz bin Harith al Rawahi, Director of the Anti-Tax Evasion Department at the Tax Authority, explained that tax evasion is when the taxpayer after paying the taxes due to the state or reducing the amounts of these taxes through the use of illegal methods and methods, and laws have been enacted and deterrent penalties and sanctions have been imposed to combat this phenomenon.

Khalfan bin Said al Maawali, Chief Public Prosecutor of the Department of Public Funds Cases and Money Laundering Cases at the Public Prosecution Office, provided an explanation about the procedures imposed on the relevant institutions, and the measures that will be taken towards the institutions that are negligent in taking the measures or procedures that the law imposes on them to combat money laundering and financing of terrorism.

## Fitch Ratings affirms Ahli Bank SAOG at ‘BB-’; outlook stable

MUSCAT: International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has affirmed Ahli Bank SAOG’s (ABO) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at ‘BB-’ with a Stable Outlook. Fitch has also affirmed the bank’s Viability Rating (VR) at ‘b+’ and Government Support Rating (GSR) at ‘bb-’.

“Ahli Bank’s Long-Term IDR is driven by potential support from the Omani authorities, as expressed by its GSR of ‘bb-’.

The VR reflects its moderate but strengthening franchise, as well as a weaker risk profile and weaker capitalisation and funding than peers. The latter is being actively addressed,” said Fitch.

Fitch revised its assessment



of the Omani banks’ operating environment score to ‘bb’ from ‘bb-’ following the Omani sovereign upgrade in August 2022.

This signals improvements in operating conditions in the context of higher oil prices, which will drive credit demand and ease pressures on banks’ financial

profiles.

Ahli Bank is the fifth-largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman with a market share of 8%-9% by assets at end-3Q22. It primarily targets corporate clients (71 per cent of gross loans at end-2022).

The lender operates domestically (only 0.3 per cent of net loans were to non-residents at end-3Q22) and non-Omani exposures are bank placements, financial investments and off-balance-sheet trade finance transactions.

The franchise has been growing, aided by the opening of traditional and digital branches, which is benefiting deposit collection capabilities.

## Asyad signs pact with GBM Oman to develop all-new ERP system

MUSCAT: Asyad Group has signed an agreement with Gulf Business Machines (GBM Oman), a leading Omani digital solutions provider, to develop an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that will accelerate the digital transformation of the Group’s administrative processes and enhance its digital and operational capabilities.

This agreement is part of Asyad Group’s efforts to build a comprehensive ERP system that enables optimal resource management and improve administrative services across business units.

The new unified ERP system, powered by SAP SE’s cloud



technology, will encompass all Asyad business units that had each previously been operating its own independent ERP system.

This standardisation will ultimately deliver a smoother

and more efficient experience for all Asyad’s employees and ensure better business flow and continuity, impacting customers’ experience and relationship management.

## OETC to host international symposium on Power Systems Transition

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), in partnership with GCC CIGRE, will host the ‘CIGRE - Muscat International Symposium’ during March 6-8, 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

The three-day event will be held under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and will bring together key industry leaders to discuss developments, challenges, and solutions to ease power systems transition to be more resilient, innovative, and sustainable.

Muscat International Symposium will feature 12 impactful sessions and drive key discussions around various themes such as innovation in future power grids in energy storage, electric vehicles and digitisation, delivering an enhanced system with increased utilisation of renewable energy and development of HVDC grids



and multi-terminal HVDC.

Commenting on the event, Eng Thani bin Mohammed al Khusaibi, GCC CIGRE Board Chairman said, “Oman’s Vision 2040 places a strong emphasis on energy diversification and its commitment to carbon neutrality and we at GCC CIGRE are proud to be one of the organisations playing a key role in escalating work on energy transition. Through the Muscat International Symposium, our focus is to create a platform to bring together experts and

decision makers and contribute to important conversations about the transition to a net-zero economy and how we can mitigate the challenges it will bring on the power systems infrastructure.”

CIGRE, the International Council on Large Electric Systems is an international non-profit association with more than 15,000 members comprising of academia, engineers, CEO’s, and other key experts from over 100 countries who join forces to help improve existing electric systems

and resources. GCC CIGRE is an affiliate of the International Council and encourages and develop s scientific research and studies in the field of Electricity Systems.

Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, CEO – OETC, added: “Oman Electricity Transmission Company, Member of Nama Group, has been actively involved in undertaking vital projects to enhance the stability and reliability of electrical networks across the Sultanate of Oman.

As an economy looking to invest in building sustainable power systems, it is essential that initiatives such as the Muscat International Symposium are used to foster essential dialogue and collaborations within the power industry.

We are proud to be part of this Symposium which will highlight the next steps towards a green economy in Oman”.

## ISWK launches its alumni association



MUSCAT: The Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK) recently launched its Alumni Association during the formal farewell of its outgoing batch of class 12.

The launch ceremony took place in the presence of Chief Guest, Praveen Kumar, Chief Finance Officer, OHI Group of Companies; Anil Khimji, chief patron; Kiran Asher, former chairman of the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman; Rajendra Ved, executive director of ISWK and ISWK International; and Alkesh Joshi, honorary president of ISWK School Management Committee.

Other esteemed members of the School Management

Committee, Principal D N Rao, as well as teachers, parents, students and well-wishers were also in attendance.

The president of the ISWK Alumni Association, Antony Kallukaran, a graduate of the 2004 batch, revealed the new ISWK Alumni logo while announcing the objectives, intentions and purpose of the Alumni Association.

The members of the Alumni Management Committee were thereafter introduced: Krunal Ahya (Vice-President), Nitin Arvind (Treasurer), Sasha Saldanha (Secretary) and Makushla Santimano (Director – Marketing and Events).

# Helping small businesses become resilient is key



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

A number of small enterprises were adversely impacted over the past period as a result of pandemic-induced closures, suffering declining sales and the effects of the downturn in general. This was due to several other reasons, including the decline in global oil prices and the business's exposure to supply chain problems. Today, many of these young entrepreneurs are suffering because of the challenges and difficulties they went through, leading to an increase in their commercial problems, and their

debts to banking and financial institutions. Everyone realises that the prospect of failure is an inherent business risk, whether involving a large or small and medium project, but what distinguishes the work of a young entrepreneur is that their small business hasn't perhaps benefited from in-depth feasibility studies, but rather the efforts of the owners to keep learning and doing their best. Failure sometimes is part of the learning process and requires corrective steps. Small business owners should not to lose faith in the projects,

but try to take the right decisions, use suitable technologies and stay abreast of innovations in their field. It is very important for entrepreneurs to continue their scientific studies, in order to learn about new ideas in the business that they do, and to communicate with their customers to benefit from their feedback as well. They should study new projects to move forward, especially if they are related to their field of work. In anticipation of difficulties in running their projects, it is important that the owners plan alternative options to tackle any

challenges that may crop up. They need to try to understand how their competitors operate and keep up with new business trends in their line of work. It is also important for the entrepreneur to set aside resources that they can fall back on in the event of a financial shock, and focus on priorities so that he can control expenses and benefit from his financial and marketing plans. The better established ones should advise their fellow entrepreneurs to go public, improve the efficiency of product or service delivery, and enhance customer acceptability of their products and

services. This is what makes these institutions sustainable. Continuous perseverance is very important for the owners of these institutions despite the circumstances that they may go through, with the need to learn more quickly in order to keep pace with developments, and to focus on continuous investment in themselves and their workers in order to build skills that can carry out their duties and work through one team that manages these institutions, in addition to instilling ambition in its members so that they are ready to work in all environments.

## South Asia's LNG import appetite on radar after price plunge

GAVIN MAGUIRE

Traders of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and climate watchers alike are both on the lookout for signs of a rise in import demand from buyers across South Asia, which until 2022 had been the world's second largest market for LNG after North Asia. For LNG traders, more demand from buyers in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh would tighten global LNG supplies, and may support prices that have slumped nearly 70 per cent since August on lower consumption in key markets such as Europe and China. For climate watchers, South Asia's appetite for LNG has a direct correlation with the region's use of high-polluting coal to generate power, with higher use of cleaner-burning LNG a goal for government and businesses keen to reduce emissions. A key factor that complicates the outlook for South Asian LNG demand is how cost-sensitive buyers are across the region. In 2022, South Asian imports of LNG dropped by their most on record in response to the steep climb in LNG prices to record highs, ship tracking data from Kpler shows. But with benchmark LNG prices now sharply off their 2022 peak and forecasted by forward markets to remain relatively flat over the coming year, 2023 may trigger a turnaround in demand for LNG in India and elsewhere across South Asia, with potentially significant repercussions for both gas markets and regional air pollution levels. The 16.5 per cent drop in LNG imports in 2022 from 2021 was the first annual decline in South Asia's LNG imports since 2013, according to ship tracking data from Kpler. That in turn helped free up LNG supplies for other buyers last year, especially in Europe where utilities were forced to replace reduced pipelined natural gas supplies from Russia with LNG imports following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. However, reduced LNG

imports also triggered more coal demand in South Asia, with total thermal coal imports by the region jumping by 11.5 per cent to over 173 million tonnes in 2022. That reversed a declining trend in coal imports into South Asia since 2019, and pushed up coal purchases by more than any other region last year. South Asia also dialled up imports of other fuels that can be used in power generation in 2022, including diesel and fuel oil that can release sulphur and other pollutants when burned to generate power. In combination, the forced adjustment of power fuels and sharp swings in fuel imports pushed power prices higher last year, and along with a rise in interest rates took a toll on South Asian industry through widespread reductions in output levels. However, a key index of manufacturing activity in India — by far the region's largest economy — pushed to 9-month highs in December just as global power fuel prices slumped. In addition, Indian car production in January 2023 topped 200,000 vehicles for the first time since March 2021, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), suggesting the region is now gathering economic momentum. Greater manufacturing activity is expected to generate additional energy use throughout South Asia in 2023, which should support demand for all power generation commodities. The exact mix of power fuels deployed depends on the relative prices of each, as well as the extent of government pressure on industry to reduce emissions. Coal will remain the primary source of electricity generation, especially in India, where authorities said last month that utilities will burn about 8 per cent more coal in the coming fiscal year than the year before. However, a recent ban on burning coal around New Delhi due to smog is supportive over the near term for demand for cleaner-burning natural gas, which is the most efficient alternative to coal for utilities looking to generate baseload power. — Reuters

## A good year for China's economy



YU YONGDING

The author, a former president of the China Society of World Economics and director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, served on the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank of China from 2004 to 2006.

In March 2022, the Chinese government set a target of 5-5.5 per cent GDP growth for the year. At the time, such growth levels appeared perfectly attainable. But within a month, the Omicron variant had arrived, triggering strict lockdowns that, while stemming the spread of the coronavirus, caused serious damage to the supply and demand sides of the economy. China's growth rate for 2022 was just 3 per cent. Today, however, things are looking up for China's economy. Following the government's rapid shift away from its zero-Covid policy in December — and especially since the middle of last month — the economy has sprung back to life. This renewed vitality was on display during the Spring Festival holiday in late January, when more than 300 million Chinese hit the road, up 23 per cent from last year. There are good reasons to expect significantly higher growth in 2023. For starters, the headline rate will reflect the low base in 2022. Given 4.8 per cent average GDP growth in 2019-22, a back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that China should be able to achieve GDP growth of around 6 per cent in 2023. Moreover, China still has ample room for expansionary monetary and fiscal policy. In the monetary realm, there is space to lower both the reserve requirement for banks and policy interest rates, such as the seven-day reverse repo rate and the medium-term lending facility. As for fiscal policy, there are widespread — and legitimate — concerns about China's high leverage ratio. But the government's debt-to-GDP ratio remains significantly lower than in most advanced



A woman walks past the headquarters of the People's Bank of China, the central bank, in Beijing, China. — Reuters

economies. Add to that China's faster GDP growth and high savings rate, and it is clear that China's fiscal position is much stronger than in most developed countries. The question is how to direct the available policy support. Given the grim global outlook, exports cannot be expected to be a major driver of growth this year, despite making an important contribution to growth in 2022. Consumer demand can support growth, if it recovers strongly: in 2022, final consumption in China contributed just 32.8 per cent to GDP growth, despite accounting for some 55 per cent of GDP. But the likely impact of direct measures to stimulate consumer demand remains unclear. Where expansionary fiscal policy would be useful is in supporting investment. While investment's contribution to GDP growth has decreased significantly since 2010, it was the main engine of it in 2022. Yes, real-estate investment declined by 10 per cent. But investment in manufacturing and infrastructure rose by 9.1 per cent and 9.4 per cent, respectively. China's best hope for the real-estate sector in 2023 is that investment stabilises, while manufacturing investment will be decided mainly by market forces related to industrial and technological development. But infrastructure investment merits fiscal support.

Some economists have argued that China already suffers from excessive infrastructure investment, citing massive waste and white elephants. But while they are right that China has made inefficient investments, the country's infrastructure needs have not been met. For example, the pandemic highlighted weaknesses in China's public-health infrastructure. More broadly, compared to developed countries, China's (per capita) infrastructure gap is huge. So, infrastructure investment is still badly needed; it simply must be better targeted. Of course, another black swan event like the pandemic could thwart China's aspirations for growth in 2023. A more likely impediment is an increase in inflation, as has occurred in much of the rest of the world. Over the last decade, China's inflation rate has been very low, with the consumer price index averaging less than 2 per cent. But the pandemic has dealt a major blow to China's production capacity, and repairing supply chains and eliminating production bottlenecks may take time. As a result, supply may not be able to keep up with the surge in demand that accompanies reopening. The resulting imbalance will cause inflation to rise this year, at least for a while. Higher inflation will hamper the government's ability to implement expansionary fiscal

and monetary policy. But the policy priority must be to stabilise growth, so China may well need to tolerate an inflation rate higher than 2-3 per cent. Striking the right balance between growth and price stability may well prove to be a key challenge for China's government this year. Fiscal and monetary expansion cannot fix China's structural problems. What it can do is create space for China to implement the comprehensive reform programme set forth at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012. That programme called on the government to "encourage, support, and guide the development of the non-public sector"; "improve the property-rights protection system"; establish the basis "for the market to play a decisive role in the allocation of resources"; "put in place a modern market system in which enterprises enjoy independent management and fair competition"; and "build a law-based and service-oriented government". The government must act fast, given the possibility that its space for macroeconomic expansion will shrink as CPI inflation rises and other potential constraints take hold. If China's leaders make optimal use of fiscal and monetary policy, and unswervingly pursue reform and opening up, they can ensure that 2023 is a very good year. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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## A building is not just a structure, but a space that fulfils a purpose

Interior designer and artist HH Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said has added a hyphen to her accomplishments embracing not just frames but this time, even buildings. She's promulgating that whatever is built externally has to be communicated internally... **P20**



## 'Bridgerton' spin-off goes back in time to show 'Queen Charlotte' origins

**QUEEN CHARLOTTE**, the brazen and meddling monarch in the hit Netflix period drama "Bridgerton", gets her own spin-off series showing the popular character's origin story.

"Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton story", which will premiere on the streaming platform on May 4, goes back in time to tell the monarch's rise to power and love life.

The six-episode series is the

first spin-off from "Bridgerton", set in Regency London and whose first series became a global phenomenon when it was released in late 2020 and won praise for its diverse cast.

"I really loved the fact that we could expand the universe and show people how the 'Bridgerton' world that they know came to be," Shonda Rhimes, executive producer for both "Bridgerton"



and "Queen Charlotte", told fans at a teaser trailer reveal event on Tuesday.

"You get to see how stories from the past educate you on the stories

in the future... You get to see the growth and who they ('Bridgerton' characters) become."

With two time lines, Golda Rosheuvel reprises her "Bridgerton"

role as the monarch in the new series while India Amarteifio, whose past credits include appearances in television shows, "Line of Duty" and "Doctor Who", plays the young Queen Charlotte.

"There's so much time between our show... and the 'Bridgerton' that we've all come to know... which for us actors is great because it gives us the liberty of creating our own characters," Amarteifio said.

"You don't know their origin story, there's enough time for them to be completely different people for us to create completely unique characters... I know what she's like in future but to be able to create the foundations for that was exciting for me." On Tuesday, fans got to see a teaser trailer as well as clips from "Queen Charlotte", which also features other "Bridgerton" cast members including Ruth Gemmell, who plays Lady Violet, and Adjoa Andoh as Lady Agatha Danbury.

— Reuters

### READ

#### LITTLE BLUE TRUCK'S VALENTINE

BY ALICE SCHERTLE, ILLUSTRATED BY JILL MCELMURRY

Little Blue Truck delivers Valentine's Day cards to all his farm animal friends.



### FASHION

A woman walks by the destroyed Habib-i Neccar mosque in the historic southern city of Antakya in Hatay, Turkey, a week after an earthquake devastated parts of Turkey and Syria leaving more than 35,000 dead and millions in dire need of aid. Antakya, formerly known as 'Antioch', was founded in 300 BC by a former general of Alexander the Great and draws its heritage from the many civilisations that have established a presence there. — AFP



### LIFESTYLE

Luxury French brand Louis Vuitton on February 14, 2023, announced the appointment of hip-hop artist Pharrell Williams as its new head of menswear. — AFP





# Muscat witnesses guitar virtuosos breaking down complex Spanish rhythms

By Georgina Benison

Two quartets in last Friday evening's performance at The Royal Opera House of Musical Arts added up to an orchestra in texture and harmony. The "Costa Rica Virtuoso Guitars" (CGCR) proved to be more than the sum of their parts, whether performing as a quartet or an octet.

Backed by a String Quartet, the four Guitarists sat front of stage and performed the entire two hour programme by heart, without prompt or hesitation. The virtuoso elements of their playing came to the fore in fast solo runs and flourishes, but together they covered many roles and styles. Their music is not jazz, not Latin in the popular sense, nor Flamenco - though elements of all these are apparent - but inhabits the realm of Classical Spanish guitar, grounded firmly in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The first piece, "Danza Al Viento" (Dance in the wind) was composed by one of the CGCR musicians, Edmund Nuñez-Incer. The soothing, calm first violin theme was passed to viola and cello while the guitars provided percussive, arpeggio or tremolo backing. The balance between both quartets created a perfect blend in texture, and an almost hypnotic effect.

The next two pieces, it was explained by Nicolas Aguilar, were arranged by composer Alonso Torres. "Abril" had a warm, sensuous yet rhythmic melody, played mostly by Nuñez-Incer, against a significant cello bass part, while "Eso Es Imposible" featured romantic melodies and syncopated chords on guitars against sustained strings. It was sometimes hard to see who was playing the melody as it was passed around between the guitarists so imperceptibly.

The extensive, "Uarekeba" by famous Brazilian composer, Sergio Assad was performed by guitars alone. It was in a contemporary language, opening with a fast, modern waltz followed by a slow middle section using extended harmony, then a return to the opening ideas.

"Cumba-Quin", meaning 'Congas and Clavés' from its Cuban-Guatemalan roots by American film composer, Carlos Rivera, featured the body of the guitar being hit as percussion, and used all sorts of instrumental effects - dampening strings, harmonics, imitation between guitars, rhythmic strumming and syncopation. Throughout the concert the body of the guitar was used as percussion, highlighting the complex Spanish rhythms from the ten national composers featured in this programme.

It was followed by a substantial piece to conclude the first part, "Retorno; Concierto for guitar quartet" by Edin Solis. There was lovely interplay between the two ensembles with the strings taking on the orchestral breadth. It was a lush arrangement and completely capti-



vating. The second movement, "Return to the Air", was a slow, lyrical waltz with delightful interplay of textures beginning with a vibrant cello melody played beautifully by Sonia Bruno Alfaro. The final, "Return to the South" recalled Rodríguez' Andalusia with its crisp rhythms and irregular accents. There were fugue elements and a juxtaposition of Baroque and modal jazz harmony.

The second half's, "Quiccan" by American composer, Andrew York was written especially for the CCGCR. Its syncopated minimalism in a calming 6/8 time developed a neo-classical Spanish style. "Alfonsina y el Mar" by Argentinian, Ramirez brought the string quartet back on stage in a melancholic, chromatic arrangement by French guitarist, Roland Dynes. It was a slow ballad creation, deliciously rich and lush, recalling Astor Piazzolla's romantic suspended harmony and the most compelling performance of South America's Latin tapestry of the night.

"Preludio y Alborada" by guitarist Nuñez-Incer, dedicated to his wife, opened with guitars only in a simple, gentle melody played on the lower strings. It was a mesmerising, accessible piece with tinges of Philip Glass about it. The strings joined in the 'Alborada' with a fluid, shifting tonality to end the piece to great effect.

"La Trampa" by Eduardo Martín was built over a bass riff in a contemporary, filmic style. The atonal guitar flourishes suggested the uncertain progression of a tramp's life, while the lyrical unison resolution at the centre perhaps some

temporary peace until a return to an uneven metre and the opening bass riff confirmed his destiny.

The CGCR commissioned Alonso Torres to compose the lush, romantic Calypso, "Arrecife Urbano" for the whole ensemble, putting the emphasised calypso rhythms in the guitars parts.

The last number, a short and rhythmic "Noche Caribe" by Solis integrated the two ensembles with syncopated melodies and echoes of Grapelli and Django Reinhardt, and guitar-percussion conjuring the sounds and insects of a Caribbean Night. A prepared Encore, "Alice Dances" by Martín was a flamboyant Flamenco piece, with short guitar solos and the percussive sounds of clicking heels and castanets to send the audience out into the mild Muscat night.

## TRAVEL TALES

### Too warm in Canada: world's largest ice rink may not open



**THE CANADIAN CAPITAL'S** iconic Rideau Canal Skateway – the largest outdoor rink in the world and a UNESCO heritage site – may not open this winter for the first time in five decades, due to a lack of ice.

Ottawa is in the grips of its third-warmest winter ever recorded, according to Environment Canada, with temperatures hovering just below freezing through most of December and January.

And they're now forecast to climb.

"Mother Nature has presented us with a big challenge this year," Bruce Devine, National Capital Commission senior manager responsible for the skateway, said.

"Mild temperatures have made it difficult to make good, solid ice that can support the weight of our equipment and skaters," he said.

For the canal to freeze up, temperatures must hold steady at -10 to -20 degrees Celsius (14 to 16 Fahrenheit) for almost two weeks.

"Currently in several spots the ice is porous and of not very good quality," he said.

Although he remains optimistic for what would be the latest opening on record, others worry the skateway might not open at all this year.

A brief cold spell is forecast to be coming. "The weather will be more conducive (for skating) next week," according to meteorologist Peter Kimbell. "But will it be enough, I don't know."



## GOT SKATES FOR CHRISTMAS

Chantal Dussiaume, 57, was pessimistic as she eyed ice conditions: "I got skates for Christmas, so it is a big disappointment."

"I've heard so much about the canal and it would have been nice to go skating on it," said Lani Simmons, 46, visiting from Bermuda.

The winding 7.8-kilometre long (4.8 miles) skateway though the heart of Ottawa is the size of 90 Olympic rinks, according to Guinness World Records, which in 2005 confirmed it was the biggest anywhere, and in recent years attracted an average of 22,000 visitors per day.

They would leisurely skate up and down it, taking in views of parliament and quaint neighbourhoods, stopping at warming huts or food stands along the way offering snacks and hot beverages.

Commuters were also seen skating to work with a briefcase in hand.

"It's part of the DNA of local residents and attracts a lot of visitors from afar," said Devine.

The skateway normally opens at the end of December for 30 to 60 days of skating. But its opening has shifted later and later over the years, and for shorter periods.

"It's really too bad for all the businesses and all the people who find joy" in skating, said student Clara Harman-Denhoe, 22. But the situation highlights "the impact that climate change has on us here."

That view was echoed by Canada's environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, who said on Tuesday, "This is yet another example of how our climate is changing in Canada."

## BLOCKBUSTER' WINTER ATTRACTION

"I don't think anyone has seen it this bad," said Davey Wright, who operates shacks on the canal selling flat fried dough dusted with sugar or cinnamon.

Local businesses, after suffering through pandemic lockdowns and a disruptive trucker-led protest last year, are taking a big hit.

The city was forced to scale back outdoor activities for its annual Winterlude festival, which runs until February 20, while hotel association president Steve Ball said bookings are way down.

"Skating on the canal is our blockbuster (attraction) and what people talk about, why they come back," he explained.

The National Capital Commission has ordered a flurry of climate adaptation studies to try to keep the skateway open earlier in the season and for longer periods.

Shawn Kenny, a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa who studies climate impacts on ice, has tried various fixes inspired from ski hills and seasonal ice roads in the Arctic, for example, using snow fans to blow ice crystals onto the canal to kickstart ice formation, and clearing snow that acts as insulation.

He is currently testing thermosyphons, used in the far north to prevent permafrost from thawing beneath railways, roads, pipelines and buildings, to regulate canal ice temperatures.

But he warned that adaptation may not be enough in the future: "Eventually we'll get to a stage where it might not be possible to open the skateway." — AFP



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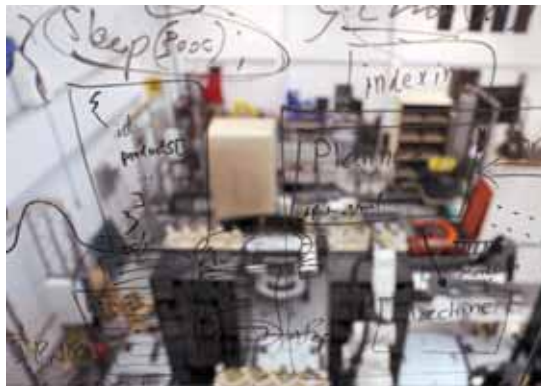
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## AROUND THE WORLD

### HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Vibrating pill, ingestible sensor: mini robots tackle gut disorders



**A PILL THAT VIBRATES** to relieve constipation, a sensor that can be tracked in the gut — medical researchers are turning to tiny robots to treat or diagnose gastrointestinal disorders.

"This is a very booming field," said Saransh Sharma, a doctoral student at the California Institute of Technology (MIT) and Caltech involved in the development of the ingestible diagnostic sensor.

"You have medical robots that are so small you can just send them inside a person using the oral passage and they can do a lot of sensing and actuation inside the gut," Sharma said.

About 16 of every 100 adults in the United States suffer from symptoms of constipation, according to the US health authorities, and the number doubles for Americans over the age of 60.

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Caltech have developed an ingestible sensor that can be monitored as it travels through the digestive tract.

The device, 20 millimetres in length and eight mm in diameter, could help physicians diagnose gastrointestinal motility disorders that prevent food from moving normally through the digestive tract.

The capsule's location reveals where a slowdown is taking place.

"That gives the doctor a lot of the essential information to do a better job in the curing and the diagnosis and the treatment plan," Sharma said.

The sensor could also provide an alternative to invasive procedures such as endoscopy or other diagnostic techniques such as nuclear imaging, X-rays or catheters.

It has been tested on pigs and the team behind the research hopes to eventually obtain the approval of the US Food and Drug Administration for human clinical trials.

"If we can demonstrate a device inside large animals like pigs up to a very high confidence, we can say that it will scale very well in human anatomy as well," Sharma said.

The authors published the results of their research on Monday in the journal Nature Electronics.

They said the sensor works by detecting a magnetic field produced by an electromagnetic coil located outside of the body.

The strength of the magnetic field varies with distance from the coil and the sensor's position within the digestive tract can be calculated to within millimetres based on measurement of the magnetic field.

### - VIBRATING CAPSULE -

While the ingestible sensor is still in the development phase, an Israeli company called Vibrant Gastro recently began marketing a vibrating food capsule in the United States designed to relieve chronic constipation.

The drug-free Vibrant capsule is intended for constipation sufferers who have not received bowel relief after a month of laxative treatments. It has been FDA-approved.

In a Phase 3 clinical trial of 300 people, participants who took Vibrant had bowel movements significantly more frequently than those who took a placebo.

The Vibrant capsule produces gentle vibrations to stimulate the colon and increases the number and frequency of bowel movements, according to the manufacturer. — AFP

### CULTURE

## 'Rebirth' in Rio as carnival street parties return



**COVERED IN GOLDEN** glitter, Brazilian domestic worker Vera Lucia da Silva is bursting to be back parading through Rio de Janeiro in a carnival street party, after a three-year hiatus for Covid-19.

This year marks the full comeback of the world's biggest carnival, after Rio hosted a watered-down version in 2022 — postponed by two months because of the pandemic, and held without the epic street parties known as "blocos" that usually swarm the iconic beach city this time of year.

"To people from Rio, street carnival is everything that's good in life," beamed Da Silva, as she paraded through the hillside neighbourhood of Santa Theresa in a bloco known as "Ceia na Terra" — Heaven on Earth.

It was just after sunrise on a Saturday morning, but the beer was already flowing as revellers bounced to the beats of the bloco's brass band, decked out in sequins, body paint, sparkly hot pants and masks — the costume-ball kind, not the Covid kind.

"Street carnival brings together people from all walks of life — everyone playing, everyone happy," said Da Silva, 58, who plays a traditional percussion instrument known as the "ganza" in the bloco band.

Rio authorised around 400 blocos this year. They have been flooding the streets ahead of the main carnival event: the city's samba school parade competition, scheduled for Sunday and Monday nights.

Many revellers are also celebrating because it is the first carnival since the election loss of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right conservative whose critics accuse him of authoritarian tendencies and attacking numerous causes close to the carnival community's heart, from diversity to the arts.

Some revellers poked fun at the ex-army captain, whose slogan was "Brazil above all, God above everyone."

"We're for 'carnival atop all, booze inside everyone,'" said 44-year-old teacher Amelia Crespo, who was sporting the Brazilian

football team's yellow jersey, a national symbol that Bolsonaro supporters attempted to claim as their own.

"This is a moment of rebirth," said Pericles Monteiro, a founder of Ceia na Terra and conductor of its 200-member band.

"We went through a very dark period, in terms of both politics and the pandemic," he said.

Brazil was one of the hardest-hit countries in the world at the height of the pandemic. Its Covid-19 death toll stands at nearly 700,000 — a figure opponents blame on



Bolsonaro's unorthodox policies.

"We were feeling suffocated on every level: as a cultural group, as citizens, as people dealing with a health crisis that caused so many deaths," said Monteiro.

### - PARTIES AND POLITICS -

"Brazil is emerging from a period in which political power was anti-carnival," said Adair Rocha, head of cultural programming at Rio de Janeiro State University.

"This year's carnival is all about happiness, the re-embrace of democracy, the freedom to celebrate cultural and sexual diversity.... Carnival is all about democratic expression, the celebration of life."

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the veteran leftist who narrowly beat Bolsonaro in October's elections, is more carnival-friendly. He met with samba school lead-

ers during the campaign, and may attend the official carnival parades this year, according to media reports.

First Lady Rosangela "Janja" da Silva has already signed up to be "godmother" at the Imperatriz samba school and support its social projects in Rio's slums.

### - 'REDEMPTION AND HOPE' -

There is an optimistic vibe in the air at "Samba City," the sprawling hangars where the samba schools prepare the towering floats and sumptuous costumes

### DISCOVERY

## Noise from deep-sea mining may disrupt whale song, study finds



**THE NOISE PRODUCED** by mining the seabed could interfere with whales' ability to communicate with one another, according to a study released on Tuesday, just as plans to start deep-sea mining for battery metals gather pace.

The peer-reviewed study, funded by Umweltstiftung Greenpeace, a foundation arm of the environmental organisation, argues that more research is needed to assess the risk deep-sea mining could pose to large marine mammals.

Several nations and companies are pushing ahead with plans to mine rocks rich in battery metals that blanket vast swathes of the seabed. Mining in international waters may not begin until regulations are agreed at the International Seabed Authority (ISA), a Jamaica-based UN body.

An estimated 22 to 30 cetacean species, including endangered blue whales, can be found in the Clarion Clipperton Zone, an ocean region in the northern Pacific, where the ISA has granted 17 seabed mining exploration licences.



"The sounds produced from mining operations, including from remotely operated vehicles on the sea floor, overlap with the frequencies at which cetaceans communicate," said the study, published in Frontiers in Marine Science.

Mining is likely to produce noise across a range of frequencies that could travel hundreds of kilometres, the study said, interfering with marine mammals' ability to navigate using echolocation and disrupting the messages they send via whale song.

Previous research on ocean noise has found whales can suffer negative effects. One study found man-made noise could increase the risk of humpback whale mothers being separated from their calves, because their normal vocalisations are quiet. "Far-from-sight impacts on cetaceans could go largely unquantified and unnoticed, along with those on other pelagic predator species that rely on deep ocean areas, including sharks," the authors wrote.

The ISA will host international negotiations in March and July this year as it works towards a July deadline to finalise regulations. — Reuters

# art & life

## Local Scene

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# A building is not just a structure, but a space that fulfils a purpose



By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Today there is new technology found in architecture and there are global ideas for interior designing.

Architects tend to have in mind the people and of course the climatic conditions while designing, but what about the interior designers?

"Interior designing, architecture and engineering all work together in order to create beautiful projects. It is not just about the beauty and aesthetics. Eventually everything has to work well. It has to be human centred based on the design of how humans can interact with it as well. So I would say architecture and designing have to go hand-in-hand," said HH Sayyidah Meyyan bint

Shihab al Said, an interior designer and an artist who has been adding to her accomplishments from frames to buildings.

"In other words, whatever is built externally has to be communicated internally," she noted.

She is professionally an interior designer and thus in the business of transforming spaces, her experience has had her serve on the design management aspects for many real estate projects in Oman such as the W Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn Hotel and A'Raya Complex.

The 'gathering place' seemed to play an important role in designing a space. Traditionally in Oman the majlis has played this role. Does it still hold an important place in today's lifestyle?

"Yes, the Majlis is very much part of our culture and I think it is a feature that will never leave. It is something that is embedded while designing private or public places. Even while designing hotels there is still a demand and requirement that is similar to Majlis setting. I believe this is an important element of Omani and Arabian culture," she reflected. Environmental principles had a house featuring a courtyard often, open area in the Centre of the house, even a tree at times and the terrace often was a space dedicated for goats at night keeping them safe.

"Some of the modern Omani homes still hold some of the traditional features. However, I do see a shift even with family dynamics now. I mean by that, the families in

the past were much larger and at present they are getting smaller. In the past, families were much more extended and today we see separate homes, yet there are features Omanis choose to keep," Sayyidah Meyyan pointed out.

When it comes to tips this is what the interior designer would like to share:

"I think it is important that one doesn't forget the cultural identity that we have because it is quite unique. Yet, one can be modern and go with the contemporary ways of designing - going along with the global trends. However, it is important that we still keep some of our culture and traditions thus maintain our identity."

Her Highness Sayyidah Meyyan

al Said holds a BA in Interior Design from Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar, and an MA in Design Strategy and Innovation Management from the University of Brunel London.

She is a member of the Photographic Society of Oman and has won the 'Best Photo Award' at the female photographer's exhibition in 2016. She was also chosen to be a speaker in the IDF Exhibition as part of the "Design Talks" collaboration with the AIA Middle East - Oman in 2020 to give a design talk on hospitality interior design. Her passion for art is showcased in multiple cafés, magazines, and several corporate publications. She also won the 2021 Apex Women of the Year Award in the arts category.

