

P13

OMAN'S
AUTOMOBILE FUEL
PRODUCTION
SOARS BY 57.4%



P11

DJOKOVIC
WITHDRAWS
FROM MIAMI
OPEN



P19

HOW GOOD
SAMARITANS FILL
THE GAP IN SOCIAL
IFTAR GATHERING



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
IRELAND PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Michael D Higgins of Ireland on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him good health and happiness and more progress and prosperity for the friendly Irish people.



SSF TO MARK ANNUAL
DAY ON SUNDAY

The Sultan's Special Force (SSF) will mark its annual day on Sunday, which falls on March 15 every year. The SSF is striding steadily and confidently in terms of development and modernisation in all levels of organisation, administration and armament thanks to the great attention accorded to it by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. A celebration will be held on this occasion at Al Sumood Garrison Camp under the auspices of Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaaboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force. — ONA

OCCI'S RAMADHAN
NIGHTS BEGIN

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will organise four forums during the holy month of Ramadhan to discuss current economic trends and the challenges facing the private sector by hosting officials, experts and decision-makers. Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman, OCCI Board of Directors, said: "The OCCI has prepared a programme for forums (Ramadhan nights) for this year to discuss the requirements of the current stage and to achieve the strategic goals set by the OCCI that are consistent with the Oman Vision 2040 related to improving the business environment and attracting investments. DETAILS ON P2

A LAKE IN THE HEART OF THE DESERT!



Huge amounts of rainwater converge in Qoa Al Jouba in the Wilayat of Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate to form a great lake stretching as far as the eye can see in the heart of the desert. Water gushes from hilltops through Wadi Halfeen which runs some 400 km to Al Wusta forming the lake whose water reaches the Arabian Sea. Wadi Halfeen is one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest valleys in terms of area and length. DETAILS ON P2

Oman welcomes
UN move
to combat
Islamophobia

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the United Nations General Assembly's resolution calling for international measures against anti-Muslim and anti-Islam hatred phenomenon and appointing a United Nations Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry reiterated the Sultanate of Oman's stance calling for the significance of peaceful coexistence and tolerance among people of different faiths and the importance of criminalising all forms of incitement to hatred and conflict between religions and cultures and insulting them. Earlier, US President Joe Biden condemned what he termed an ugly resurgence of Islamophobia since the October 7 start of the Israel-Gaza war. — Agencies

Gaza ceasefire efforts revived again

GAZA: Efforts towards a truce in the war appeared to rekindle on Saturday after a new proposal from the Palestinian group which also called for more aid into Gaza, where the first food shipment by sea reached shore. Israel said it would send a delegation to Qatar for another round of talks on a possible deal. It also advanced plans for a military operation in Rafah, where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge from more than five months of war and deprivation. The US charity World Central Kitchen (WCK) on Saturday said its team had finished unloading almost 200

tonnes of food, the first shipment to arrive on a new maritime aid corridor from Cyprus. "All cargo was offloaded and is being readied for distribution in Gaza," WCK said in a statement. WCK's partner, the Open Arms vessel which towed the aid on a barge, had sailed from Larnaca port last Tuesday. The United Nations has reported particular difficulty in accessing the besieged Gaza Strip's north for deliveries of food and other aid. Residents say they have resorted to eating wild plants and animal fodder, and some have stormed the few aid trucks that have made it through.

"Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies," Dominic Allen, of the United Nations Population Fund, said after visiting Gaza's north. With the situation increasingly dire, donors have turned to the air and sea. Multiple nations have begun daily aid airdrops over Gaza. Germany's air force said on Saturday it successfully made its first delivery over north Gaza. The new maritime corridor is to be complemented by a temporary pier which United States troops are on their way to build. SEE ALSO P6

205,992 tourists
visited Al Jabal
Al Akhdhar



The wilayat boasts many attractions.

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: A total of 205,992 tourists visited the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in 2023 compared to 208,423 visitors a year earlier. The data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the number of Omanis who visited the wilayat in the course of last year stood at 102,241. Tourists from Saudi Arabia were the highest among other countries with 13,430, tourists from Kuwait were (1,218), the United Arab Emirates (951), Bahrain (554) and Qatar (729). The NCSI statistics showed that tourists from other Arab

countries accounted for 6,784 whereas 80,085 tourists came from foreign countries. The wilayat is distinguished by an exceptionally fine climate throughout the year making it one of the major tourist attractions for domestic, regional and international tourists. The wilayat boasts many elements of attraction that combine entertaining and adventure activities such as heritage landmarks, mountain camping, among others. Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman has been recognised as one of the 40 must-visit countries that might not be on your radar but deserve your attention. SEE ALSO P3

970m Indian voters to elect new parliament

NEW DELHI: India's parliamentary election will start on April 19, with almost 970 million people eligible to choose the new parliament in several stages, the Election Commission said on Saturday. Results are expected to be announced on June 4. Voters are called on to decide the 543 seats in the lower house of parliament. The election pits two-term Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his regional allies against a bickering alliance of two dozen opposition parties, with surveys suggesting a comfortable win for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). A victory would make Modi, 73, only the second prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru, to win a third straight term. "We address you at a precious moment, when we as a nation are set to reiterate our



Art school students pose with posters illustrating the upcoming India's parliamentary elections, in Mumbai, on Saturday. — AFP

pledge to electoral democracy, when Indians will together express their will once again," Rajiv Kumar, the head of the independent

Election Commission of India, told reporters. The last of the seven phases of voting will be held on June 1 and votes counted on June 4, he said. Modi said the "biggest festival of democracy" had started and his party would campaign on its track record of "good governance and public service". "I have full confidence that we will get the full affection and blessings" of more than 970 million voters for the third consecutive time, he said in a series of posts on X. Modi has set a target of 370 seats for BJP and 400-plus for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) it heads in the 543-member lower house of parliament, up from the 303 the BJP won and more than the 350 the NDA won in 2019. SEE ALSO P7



Qoa Al Jouba, a lake in the heart of the desert

SUHAIL BIN NASSER AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Huge amounts of rainwater converge in Qoa Al Jouba in the Wilayat of Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate to form a great lake stretching as far as the eye can see in the heart of the desert. Water pours down from hilltops through Wadi Halfeen which runs some 400 km to Al Wusta forming the lake whose water passes to the Arabian Sea. Wadi Halfeen overflow profusely after the heavy rains brought about by a deep depression that affected the Sultanate of Oman. As a result, water torrents converged into Qoa Al Jouba lake in a rare scene that occurs only in the event of extremely heavy downpours and torrential rain.

Wadi Halfeen is one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest valleys in terms of area and length. The valley basin is approximately 3,000 sq km and runs through the wilayats of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Nizwa, Adam, Manah and parts of the wilayats of Izki and Bahla.



OCCI's Ramadhan forum nights begin tomorrow

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will organise four forums during the holy month of Ramadhan to discuss current economic trends and the challenges facing the private sector by hosting officials, experts and decision-makers.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman, OCCI Board of Directors, said: "The OCCI has prepared a programme for forums (Ramadhan nights) for this year to discuss the requirements of the current stage and to achieve the strategic goals set by the OCCI that are consistent with the Oman Vision 2040 related to improving the business environment, attracting investments, enhancing economic diversification and discussing current trends current in different



Faisal al Rawas, Chairman, OCCI

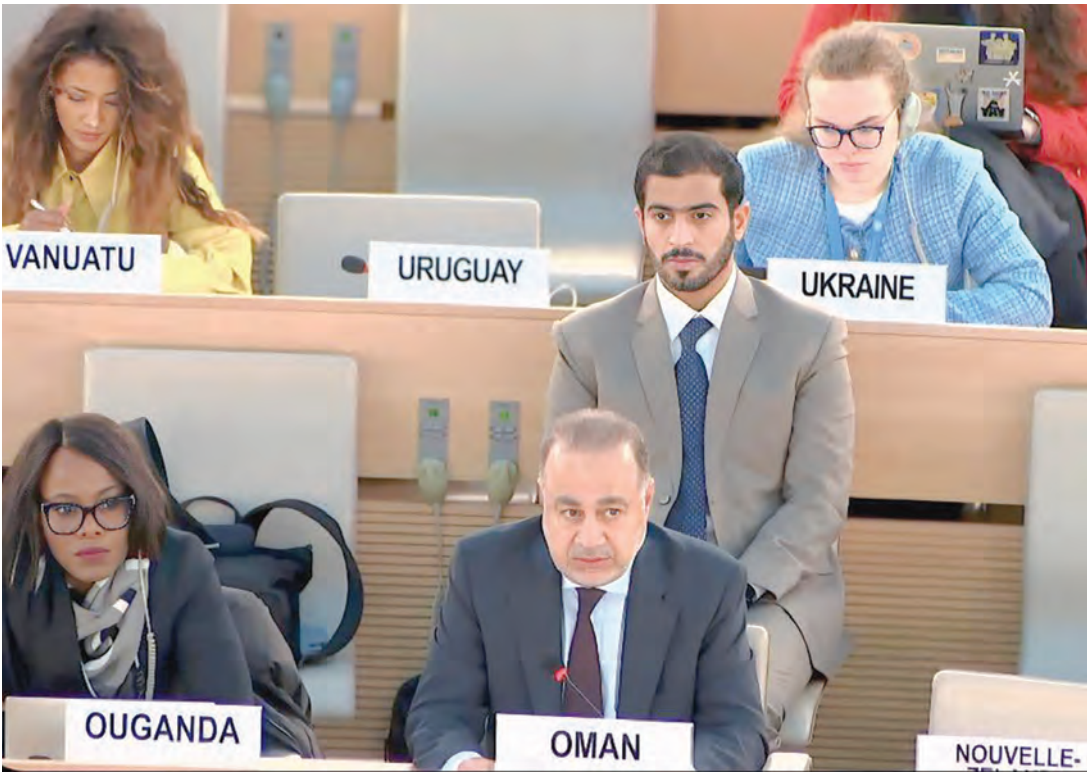
economic sectors." In comments to Oman News Agency, Al Rawas said that the first Ramadhan night will be on Monday and will discuss several topics related to the business environment and the sustainability of private sector businesses. He noted that the forum will discuss regulating the labour market through a dialogue between the three production parties and the role of the public-private partnership in boosting economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman. Also to be discussed at the forum are the role of the Oman Future Fund and introducing it as a major catalyst and enabler for economic growth and diversification programmes and facilitating litigation and the implementation of commercial rulings. — ONA

Oman affirms support for climate change efforts

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman affirmed its commitment to support all international efforts, and to implement the provisions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2015 Paris Agreement, and is making tireless efforts to reduce the challenges of climate change.

At the meeting of UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Sultanate of Oman's stance was conveyed by Ambassador Idris al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva. Oman encourages investment in sustainable agriculture to adapt to climate change.

"We must work to consolidate biodiversity in order to reduce dependence on chemical inputs, and improve food distribution systems and market infrastructure to ensure effective and equitable distribution of food, especially in times of natural disasters related to climate



Idris al Khanjari speaks at the meeting in Geneva

Oman envoy said food insecurity in the Gaza Strip is a result of the aggression and blockade imposed by Israel

change," he said. Al Khanjari said the Sultanate of Oman calls for the need to unify regional and international efforts aimed at building a sustainable world for future

generations, and to achieve this purpose, it announced the year 2050 as a goal to achieve zero neutrality in greenhouse gas emissions in all sectors. He said food

insecurity in the Gaza Strip is a result of the aggression and blockade imposed by Israel. The pollution in Gaza is caused by Israel's use of internationally banned white phosphorus that kills civilians, destroys farm land and vegetation, It also contributes to climate change and pollution in these areas. — ONA

Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tenders:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O.)
6/2024/PEIE/HQ-6	Consultancy Services for Detailed Design and Construction Supervision for Development and Rehabilitation of Existing Infrastructure Facilities and Detailed Master Plan for Wadi Al-Kabir Industrial City	31-03-2024	25-04-2024	Consultancy Offices	First and Above (Local)	150
7/2024/PEIE/HQ-7	Consultancy services to study the improvement of existing services and implement the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure and supporting services in Sohar Industrial City	31-03-2024	25-04-2024	Consultancy Offices	First and Above (Local)	150
8/2024/PEIE/HQ-8	Consultancy Services for Detailed Design and Construction Supervision of Development for Suwaiq Industrial City at Al Batinah North Governorate	31-03-2024	25-04-2024	Consultancy Offices	First and Above (Local and International)	150

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

madayn.om



مدائن
madayn

Omani actor-starring south Indian film ready for release on March 28

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Renowned Omani actor Dr Talib al Balushi will soon be seen in a leading role in a top-notch south Indian movie, which is a collaboration of many award-winning artistes. The movie will be released on March 28 in India and the US.

The film, *Aadujevitham* (Goat Days), an adaptation of the celebrated novel by the same name by Benjamin and directed by Blessy stars, acclaimed Malayalam actor Prithviraj Sukumaran in the lead while Dr Talib is cast



Dr Talib al Balushi

opposite him.

Speaking to the *Observer* from Kochi during its audio launch, Dr Talib, who is behind the upcoming Omani film *Dirty Feet*, said, "Praise be to Allah, this is my second

film in Malayalam and I'm glad to be the first Omani to act in the largest international film. The film is the story of an Indian person travelling to work outside his country to earn his living, and instead of working in an oil company, he becomes a goat herd," Dr Talib said.

The film began shooting in 2019, and faced many obstacles while shooting in Wadi Rum in Jordan during the pandemic. During one of their schedules in Jordan, as many as 255 artistes comprising students, tourists and business people were stuck in Jordan when the

country announced total lock down and suggested home quarantine. They were later airlifted in two special planes, thanks to an understanding between the two governments after spending 70 days in quarantine at one stretch.

The film is, by now, a highly anticipated creative work for two Oscar winners, AR Rahman and Resul Pookkuttu, who handle the background score and sound effects respectively for the movie, which is co-produced by Blessy himself, Jimmy Jean-Louis and Steven Adams.



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MAJOR FORTS IN DHOFAR TO REOPEN AFTER FACE-LIFT



The ministry is planning to promote Dhofar as an attractive tourist destination in GCC and other foreign countries

MUSCAT: In the wake of strong inflow of khareef tourists to Dhofar, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is pushing for a campaign to market the southern governorate in GCC and other foreign countries.

Khaled bin Abdullah al Abri, Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said the ministry is preparing to launch a promotional package targeting the GCC and foreign markets to promote Dhofar as an attractive tourist destination, as this year will witness the third edition of the frankincense season. MoHT is also preparing for the Empty Quarter Festival,

which will be held in partnership with the relevant government agencies. The Omani Culinary Arts Festival will be held for the first time in September, along with many diverse events, targeting all visitors to the governorate.

Visitors to the Khareef Dhofar 2023 season registered 18.4 per cent growth at 962,000. The number of charter flights in the winter season to Salalah Airport reached 239 direct flights. The hotel occupancy rate in 5 and 4 star hotels exceeded 95 per cent in the winter season.

Al Abri said a tender will be issued to develop the Hiyour Cave in Jabal Samhan, which will add a

number of services and facilities. A tender will also be issued to reconstruct two trekking trails for adventure tourism lovers, in addition to completing the signing of a contract for the management, operation and employment of the Mirbat Fort

The Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate said work is under way to issue a tender to set up more facilities in the Land of Frankincense Museum.

Another tender will also be issued to set up a market for antiques, gifts, and crafts in Al Baleed Archaeological Park. It will have stalls for small and

medium enterprises and Riyada card holders.

Al Abri explained that this year will witness the reopening of Sadah Fort and Rakhyut Fort after restoration in conjunction with World Heritage Day, which falls on April 18 of each year. He said, “the ministry has more than 20 direct and promising investment opportunities in the governorate. It hopes to open a number of hotels with the beginning of the Dhofar 2024 fall season.”

The total number of hotel rooms in the governorate by the end of this year is expected to touch 7,000 rooms from 6,000 last year. — ONA

Oman among the 40 must-visit countries

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

The Sultanate of Oman has been recognised as one of the 40 must-visit countries that might not be on your radar but deserve your attention soon.

This insight comes from a survey mentioned in an MSN report, authored by Stefanie Waldek, a freelance space, travel, and design journalist from the US.

With nearly 200 countries in the world, it is understandable that not everyone is familiar with each one. Even if you have heard some names before, you might not know why travellers are drawn to them. This list highlights 40 lesser-known nations, spanning Pacific islands to enclaves in Europe and Africa, all worthy of a spot on your travel bucket list.

From Benin to Vanuatu, the list includes lesser-known countries like Eswatini, Federated States of Micronesia, San Marino, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

The survey mentions Oman, located on the Arabian Peninsula, stands out with its azure seas meeting orange deserts, offering beautiful Islamic architecture and an Old World vibe. The pitch emphasises exploring not just

the coastal beauty but also inland towns and villages, creating a diverse and enriching travel experience.

Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director of Visit Oman, shares, “The Sultanate of Oman presents a unique opportunity for year-round exploration, offering travellers a remarkable diversity of landscapes, all conveniently accessible from capital, Muscat.

Visitors can experience the wonders of the underwater world at the Dimaniyat Islands Nature Reserve, just a 40-minute boat trip away. Alternatively, Al Jabal al Akhdhar, the ‘Green Mountain,’ awaits those seeking cooler climes and breathtaking mountain scenery, reachable within a two-hour drive. For a taste of the desert, the golden sands of the Rimal Al Sharqiya lie a manageable three hours by car from Muscat. Oman’s diverse landscape caters to a wide range of interests, making it a compelling destination for travellers from all around the world.”

The comprehensive list of countries worth a visit includes Brunei, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Cook Islands, Dominica, Eswatini, Micronesia, Gabon, The Gambia, Georgia, Guinea, Guyana, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan and Lesotho.



Oman’s diverse landscape caters to a wide range of interests, making it a compelling destination for travellers from all around the world

Combine content creation with AI to empower youths

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Content creation transcends normal boundaries. It involves crafting diverse media — text, images, videos and audio — tailored to specific objectives, in education, marketing, entertainment, or information spreading.

The integration of AI tools revolutionises this process. In the digital era, the fusion of artificial intelligence (AI) and content creation stands as a catalyst for innovation and empowerment.

Al Khalil al Abdali, an IT expert, explains the transformative potential of this synergy through an inspiring conversation.

Al Abdali aims to empower the next generation through the fusion of content creation and artificial intelligence (AI). His vision encompasses not just technological empowerment but the cultivation of leadership capable of steering the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

AI tools transform this arena,



Al Khalil al Abdali

grip data analysis to understand audience tendency, crafting personalised and engaging content across text, images, and videos.

This combination not only generates impactful content but also fosters vital skills among the youth.

They’re equipped with critical thinking, a profound understanding of AI, adaptability to emerging tech, and essential programming and data analysis skills. These competencies lay the foundation for future leaders ready to navigate the AI-driven landscape.

When asked about how he sees

AI’s role in content creation and the empowerment of the youth? Hereplied: “AI is pivotal in shaping the landscape of content creation. By harnessing AI tools, we can analyse audience preferences and create tailored content across various mediums. This not only enhances engagement but also cultivates crucial skills among the youth, preparing them for a future driven by technology.”

He highlights the income opportunities that thanks to AI tools provides for youth if they invest in their time beneficially. It goes around designing tools and content creation tools in general.

About the impact AI tools have on shaping content and fostering essential skills, he emphasised that AI tools enable the creation of highly personalised and engaging content.

Moreover, they equip the youth with critical thinking, adaptability to new technologies, and essential programming and data analysis skills. These proficiencies are fundamental for navigating the evolving digital realm.”

TENDERS

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tenders below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (QMR)
EHC/2023/24-03	Property All Risk for Nama Water Service	21-MAR-2024	31-Mar-2024	1500/- Plus VAT Total amount: 75 OMR
EHC/2023/24-05	Property All risk for Nama Dhofar Services (water & wastewater)	21-MAR-2024	31-Mar-2024	500/- Plus VAT Total amount: 25 OMR
EHC/2023/24-07	Industrial All Risk for Transmission and Distribution	21-MAR-2024	31-Mar-2024	100/- Plus VAT Total amount: 5 OMR
EHC/2023/24-08	Industrial All Risk for Tanweer Generation	21-MAR-2024	31-Mar-2024	100/- Plus VAT Total amount: 5 OMR

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available in the website. The deposit of purchasing should be at the last day of before 3.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 03.00 pm time of the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday 31-Mar-2024
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.

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KEEP SIMPLICITY, SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND WHILE SHOPPING

SIHAM AL SAIDI
Suhar, March 16

RAMADHAN, a month of spiritual reflection and purification, is also a time for shopping which is dictated by customs passed down through generations.

Fatima al Maqbali, a housewife, values the traditional aspects of Ramadhan shopping. “For me, Ramadhan is about upholding family traditions and cultural practices,” she said. For Fatima, the iftar meal is wholesome only when it has original flavour. “I prioritise the quality of the things I offer in family gatherings and strive to instil these values in my children. Money comes and goes but keeping these values and traditions which reflect the generosity will stay for long.” Ahmed al Khatri, a tech enthusiast, embraces online shopping as a convenient alternative during Ramadhan. “With heavy work schedules and family commitments, online shopping offers efficiency and convenience,” he said. Ahmed highlights the ease of e-shopping through a wide range of products, comparing prices, and arranging for door delivery. It allows him to balance his responsibilities while preparing for Ramadhan gatherings. “Nowadays, you can easily shop lying down on the bed. No need to ride a car or negotiate price due to shopping apps and home delivery.”

For Ali al Saidi, Ramadhan shopping means simplicity and sustainability.

“I believe in mindful consumption and reducing waste,” he said. He prefers eco-friendly alternatives such as purchasing locally sourced produce, reusing items from previous years and limiting unnecessary purchases. He highlighted that he still keeps the special dishes and Ramadhan decorations at home for future use.

“Ramadhan teaches us to appreciate what we have and prioritise meaningful experiences over material possessions,” he says. “No need to show others what we have and how we look. What is more important is to show simplicity and save your money.”

Hana al Kiyumi, highlights the importance of giving back while shopping during Ramadhan. “Charity is an integral part of the holy month, and shopping presents an opportunity to support communities,” she said.

Al Kiyumi actively seeks out ethical brands and participates in initiatives that donate a portion of sales to charitable causes. To be a socially conscious member is a need nowadays, especially with the current situation in Gaza. “By aligning our shopping habits with our values, we can make a positive impact on society,” she said.

Ramadhan shopping includes a diverse range of practices and perspectives, reflecting individual values, lifestyles and priorities. Whether rooted in tradition, convenience, sustainability, or social responsibility, each approach contributes to the rich tapestry of Ramadhan culture.



I believe in mindful consumption and reducing waste... No need to show others what we have and how we look. What is more important is to show simplicity and save your money

ALI AL SAIDI



Settlement committees ease burden of courts

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Reconciliation and settlement committees succeeded in reducing the burden on the courts. These panels settled 95 per cent of the total disputes in the wilayats of Muscat, 89 per cent in Al Amerat, 88 per cent in Al Seeb, and 97 per cent in Qurayat.

Dr Ibrahim bin Sulaiman al Amiri, Director of Reconciliation and Settlement Department in Muscat, said these committees were established according to Royal Decree No. (98/2005). It specialises in settling disputes between parties before filing a lawsuit.

Through conciliation between its parties, whether the subject of

the dispute is civil or commercial. These committees are affiliated with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MoJLA).

Regarding the role of these committees in settling disputes, Dr Al Amiri said that these committees have many advantages, especially the mandatory completion of procedures within 60 days starting from the date of application. It may be extended for thirty days.

The parties can file the application free of cost after which a date is set for the meeting. The committees guarantee confidentiality, privacy, and ease of implementing reconciliation reports by simplifying them in an executive format.

Al Amiri said reconciliation



Dr Ibrahim bin Sulaiman al Amiri

and settlement committees hold their sessions in a calm atmosphere. Each party presents its claims without complexity.

The committee listens to both parties, discusses with them fairly,

These committees have many advantages, especially the mandatory completion of procedures within 60 days starting from the date of application. It may be extended for thirty days

If the two parties agree, reconciliation shall be concluded between them directly and it shall be signed by both parties. Thus, the procedures are completed in one session, and the session may

be postponed to another date to complete the negotiations, but all of this does not exceed a week or two.

He said these committees work to promote a culture of dialogue and reconciliation between individuals without going to the courts.

It provides a safe and neutral environment for disputing parties to sit together and discuss solutions.

Amicable settlement and conciliation is an effective alternative to the traditional judicial path to resolve some disputes.

These committees constitute a role model in dealing with some issues and achieving consensus and harmony among members of society.

Muscat Governorate tops in ASMED-funded projects

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) gave funds worth over RO 24 million to 244 projects through its lending portfolio Al Azm until the end of February.

Industrial, commercial and service projects topped the list with 161 projects followed by contract projects with 44 projects as the programme specialises in financing contracts other than tenders or purchases, so that the financing decision is issued based on the work award letter from the awarding party.

Working capital financing projects ranked third with 29 projects. The working capital financing programme covers the daily needs of the organisation's operational expenses such as the costs of purchasing raw materials



Muscat came first as the authority financed 108 projects worth over RO 10 million followed by Al Batinah North with over RO 3 million (31 projects) and Al Batinah South with over RO 1 million (19 projects).

and semi-manufactured goods or goods, stores, spare parts, salaries, transportation, and other costs to maintain the continuity of the production of goods until its sale.

Rashid bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Director of the Finance Department, said: "The diverse and comprehensive financing programmes are aimed at supporting and stimulating

Dakhiliyah, 6 projects each in Al Sharqiyah North, Al Wusta and Al Buraimi, and three projects in Musandam.

The funded projects were distributed among the various financing programmes provided by the Authority, which are the in-country value programme, financing of industrial and service projects, working capital financing, financing incubated institutions and business accelerators, financing craft products, home-based businesses, street vendors, contract financing, and financing of small and medium enterprises that obtain tender contracts, purchases, or business opportunities by companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority.

All information related to the six financing programmes are available on ASMED website and social media



Oman takes part in Global Urban Festival

CANNES: The Sultanate of Oman, The ministry highlighted represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, took part in the Global Urban Festival, held in Cannes, France.

Over 6,500 investors and 300 international establishments and companies operating in the field of real estate development and marketing took part. The participants came from 90 countries.

The ministry highlighted several future projects that are geared towards establishing modern cities that are human-friendly and with a sustainable living standard.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning participated in several discussion panels, which include international speakers in the fields of investment and the urban sector. — ONA

SWIFTmfi founder receives award from UK Crown Prince William

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

In an extraordinary testament to his impactful contributions to global microfinance and community empowerment, Gobhanu Korisepati, the founder of Sustaining Women in Financial Turmoil (SWIFTmfi), has been distinguished with the Legacy Award at the Science Museum in London, United Kingdom. The prestigious award was conferred by the Crown Prince William of Wales, Duke of Cambridge as well as congratulated online by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex from the British Royal Family.

This prestigious accolade, inspired by the humanitarian legacy of the late Princess Diana, recognises Korisepati as one of 20 exceptional young leaders worldwide, selected for their visionary contributions to society.

Korisepati marks a significant milestone as the youngest founder of a microfinance institution underscoring the global reach and significance of his efforts at such a young age as well as the first and only individual to receive this award from Oman.

The Legacy Award, established by the Diana Award organization in 2017, is awarded biennially to 20 outstanding young leaders, visionaries, and role models across the globe. These



Gobhanu Korisepati receives award from Prince William in London on Friday

individuals are celebrated for their remarkable abilities to inspire and mobilise new generations to serve their communities, mirroring Princess Diana's profound commitment to humanitarian work.

The Legacy Award is the most prestigious accolade a young person can receive for their humanitarian work. This is the longest running award for young people through a retrospective nomination process only.

Gobhanu Korisepati's pioneering work through SWIFTmfi which originally started out of The ABA Oman School in 2019, has dramatically transformed the lives of women in marginalised communities by providing accessible microfinance solutions.

Over five years, his initiatives have

supported over 3,000 women in 77 countries to start sustainable businesses, achieve financial independence, and break the cycle of poverty with a direct estimated impact to over 70,000 lives.

In addition, SWIFTconnect, an innovative online tool launched by SWIFTmfi, has further extended financial literacy and empowerment to over 400 young individuals across Asia and Africa. In the previous year alone, Gobhanu has been a role model to over 4,200 students from various schools involved in fundraising, along with more than 15,000 students worldwide via a powerful social media outreach all while juggling being a dual degree student at the University of Pennsylvania's Huntsman Program.

Upon receiving the award, Korisepati expressed his deep gratitude and reflected on the honour's significance, "Being recognised with the Legacy Award is not just a personal achievement but a celebration of the collective effort and resilience of the communities we serve. It inspires me to continue working towards a world where opportunity is not a privilege but a right accessible to all. To be recognised as a part of the Late Princess Diana's legacy is an honour that transcends individual accolades, embodying the essence of compassion, philanthropy, and a tireless commitment to improving the lives of others"

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
116/2024	Supply and installation of shock floors at Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Suwaiq	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the fourth degree				
117/2024	General maintenance work for the building of the Department of Social Development at Khaboura	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the third or fourth degree	Sunday 7-4-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 2-5-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
118/2024	Preparation of corridors and facilities at Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Salalah	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting / design of interior decoration implementation / construction and maintenance of gardens and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree				

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Sunday 17/3/2024.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



Gaza truce efforts revived as sea aid unloaded



Palestinians gather near the rubble of a destroyed house following overnight Israeli bombardment west of the Nuseirat refugee camp. — AFP

GAZA: Efforts towards a truce in the Gaza war appeared to rekindle on Saturday after a new proposal from the Palestinian groups which also called for more aid into the enclave, where the first food shipment by sea reached shore.

Israel said it would send a delegation to Qatar for another round of talks on a possible deal. It also advanced plans for a military operation in Rafah, where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge from more than five months of war and deprivation.

The US charity World Central Kitchen (WCK) on Saturday said

its team had finished unloading almost 200 tonnes of food, the first shipment to arrive on a new maritime aid corridor from Cyprus.

"All cargo was offloaded and is being readied for distribution in Gaza," WCK said in a statement.

WCK's partner, the Open Arms vessel which towed the aid on a barge, had sailed from Larnaca port on Tuesday.

The United Nations has reported particular difficulty in accessing the besieged Gaza Strip's north for deliveries of food and other aid.

The United Nations has reported particular difficulty in accessing the besieged Gaza Strip's north for deliveries of food and other aid

Residents say they have resorted to eating wild plants and animal fodder, and some have stormed the few aid trucks that have made it through.

"Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies," Dominic Allen, of the United Nations Population Fund, said after visiting Gaza's north.

With the situation increasingly dire, donors have turned to the air and sea.

Multiple nations have begun daily aid airdrops over Gaza. Germany's air force said on

Saturday it successfully made its first delivery over north Gaza.

The new maritime corridor is to be complemented by a temporary pier which United States troops are on their way to build.

In negotiations aimed at securing a truce and captives deal, Hamas has put forward a new proposal for a six-week ceasefire and the exchange of about 42 Israeli captives for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, an official from the Palestinian group said.

Israel has carried out relentless bombardment and a ground

invasion that has killed at least 31,553 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry.

Until Friday Palestinian groups had insisted no further captives would be exchanged without a permanent ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Now they are saying that, during a six-week truce, Israeli forces would need to pull out of "all cities and populated areas" in Gaza, according to the officials.

The proposal also calls for ramped up humanitarian aid, the officials added. — AFP



A man reacts as supporters of a ceasefire in Gaza gather to protest, in Ontario, Canada. — Reuters

Advocates denounce 'systemic abuse' in Israeli prisons

GENEVA: In the shadow of the war raging in Gaza, record numbers of Palestinian detainees are filling Israeli prisons, where they face "systemic abuse" and torture, rights advocates warn, calling for international action.

Members of several Israeli NGOs travelled to Geneva this week to raise concerns before the United Nations about a major "crisis" inside the country's prisons.

"We are extremely, extremely concerned," said Tal Steiner, the executive director of the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI).

"What we're looking at is a crisis," she said.

She said nine people had allegedly died behind bars since

October 7, according to Israeli sources.

And "there are almost 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli custody right now... a 200-per cent increase from any normal year".

While the UN and others have long raised concerns about conditions for Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, Steiner said the situation had worsened dramatically since war erupted in Gaza.

"During the military onslaught on Gaza, there's been a crisis within Israeli detention facilities and prisons that has been really left ignored," said Miriam Azem of the Adalah legal centre.

The centre is dedicated to protecting the rights of Israel's

Palestinian citizens.

Her organisation had managed to document "19 clear cases" of torture within the Israeli prison system just since October 7, including physical violence, she said.

"We're seeing really widespread and systemic use of many, many tools in order to inflict torture and ill-treatment on Palestinians."

The NGOs also voiced alarm at reported conditions inside the military camps holding those detained inside Gaza.

At least 27 Palestinians have reportedly died in such camps since October, Steiner said, adding that this was "unprecedented and extremely severe". — AFP

UN agency says many children acutely malnourished

GAZA: One in three children under age 2 in northern Gaza is now acutely malnourished and famine is looming, the main UN agency operating in the Palestinian enclave said on Saturday.

"Children's malnutrition is spreading fast and reaching unprecedented levels in Gaza," the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said in a social media post.

More than five months into Israel's air and ground campaign in Gaza, much of the enclave is in ruins with most of its 2.3 million population displaced and facing a major humanitarian crisis.

Hospitals in Gaza have reported some children dying of

malnutrition and dehydration.

The international food insecurity watchdog, the IPC, is expected to report soon on the extent of the hunger crisis in Gaza after saying in December there was a risk of famine in the projection period through May.

For the IPC to declare famine, at least 20% of the population must be suffering extreme food shortages, with one in three children acutely malnourished and two people out of every 10,000 dying daily from starvation or malnutrition and disease.

Western countries have called on Israel to do more to allow in aid, with the UN saying it faced "overwhelming obstacles"

including crossing closures, onerous vetting, restrictions on movement and unrest inside Gaza. Israel says it puts no limit on humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza and blames slow aid delivery on incapacity or inefficiency among UN agencies.

Air and sea relief deliveries into Gaza have started, but aid agencies say these are no substitute for bringing in supplies by land.

A first delivery into Gaza by the World Central Kitchen, pioneering a new sea route via Cyprus, arrived on Thursday and was off-loaded, the charity said.

Israel has accused UNRWA of complicity with Palestinian groups, saying some staff

members took part in the October 7 attack and calling for the agency to be dismantled. Several major donors have paused funding over the allegations.

UNRWA denies complicity with the groups and said in February that it had dismissed 12 of its 13,000 staff in Gaza shortly after Israel accused them of involvement.

The UN oversight body and UNRWA itself have launched investigations that have yet to report. European Union humanitarian chief Janez Lenarcic said on Thursday he had seen no evidence from Israel yet to back up its accusations.

— Reuters



World Central Kitchen (WCK) barge loaded with food arrives off the Gaza coast, on March 15. — Reuters



In brief

■ BERLIN



TRAIN DRIVERS UNION HALTS STRIKES TO NEGOTIATE

Germany's Deutsche Bahn railways and the GDL train drivers' union announced they had returned to the negotiating table on Saturday after a wave of strikes demanding better pay.

The talks were "intensive and constructive" and taking place in "small committees and behind closed doors," a statement said.

Both sides agreed they were "confident of being able to announce a result next week".

While the negotiations go on, the union said it would halt further strike action. The train drivers have walked out six times since November, including a 24-hour stoppage last Tuesday, causing major travel disruption for thousands. — AFP

■ SOFIA



THOUSANDS ESCORT PATRIARCH NEOPHYTE TO HIS FINAL REST

Thousands of Bulgarians joined Orthodox Christian priests on Saturday in a procession carrying late Bulgarian patriarch Neophyte to a Sofia cathedral where he was laid to rest following his death on Wednesday aged 78 after a long illness.

Top Orthodox Christian clergy and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Churches worldwide, led the mass and funeral service for the softly spoken theologian in the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia. Hundreds of worshippers attended the mass, some laying flowers and crying while bidding farewell. — Reuters

■ ISLAMABAD



ATTACK ON PAKISTAN SECURITY POST KILLS 7 SOLDIERS

Seven Pakistani soldiers and six assailants were killed on Saturday in an attack on a security post close to the border with Afghanistan, according to the military.

An armed group attacked the security post near Mir Ali in the early hours of Saturday, the army's communication service (ISPR) said in a statement. "The terrorists rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the post, followed by multiple suicide bombing attacks, which led to the collapse of a building," the statement said.

Clashes followed, a 39-year-old colonel and a 23-year-old captain died. — AFP

Ukrainian strikes rock Russia in election days

MOSCOW: Ukrainian bombardments killed two people and set an oil facility ablaze in Russia on Saturday, officials said, on the second day of elections guaranteed to cement President Vladimir Putin's hardline rule.

Presidential polls opened this week but voting has been marred by an uptick in fatal Ukrainian aerial attacks and a series of incursions into Russian territory by pro-Ukrainian sabotage groups.

Fresh bombardments prompted authorities to close schools and shopping centres in the Belgorod region bordering Ukraine, undermining the Kremlin's efforts to isolate Russians from its conflict in its neighbour — particularly during the highly touted elections.

Putin, who cast his vote online, vowed a harsh response to the assaults and accused Kyiv of trying to "disrupt" his bid for another six-year mandate.

The governor of the Belgorod region said air defence systems had downed eight Ukrainian missiles but that two residents were killed and others injured.

"A man was driving a lorry when a shell hit him, after



A view shows aftermath of fresh aerial attacks on Belgorod, Russia. — AFP

which the vehicle crashed into a passenger bus," Vyacheslav Gladkov wrote on social media.

"Another woman was killed in a parking lot where she and her son came to feed the dogs. Medics are fighting for her son's life," he added.

In a separate post, Gladkov announced that schools and shopping centres in the

city of Belgorod and some surrounding districts would close temporarily over the coming days, the second time this month.

Russia's defence ministry earlier said it had downed rockets, missiles and drones in the border regions of Belgorod and Kursk that have suffered an uptick in fatal attacks in recent

weeks.

The ministry later said it had fought off more "attempts to infiltrate into the territory of the Russian Federation by Ukrainian group sabotage and reconnaissance groups".

The border attacks were a concern for voters hundreds of kilometres away in the town of Sergiev Posad outside Moscow,

Fresh bombardments prompted authorities to close schools and shopping centres in the Belgorod region bordering Ukraine

famous for its ornate Orthodox monastery with golden onion domes.

Putin said this week in televised comments that the spate of aerial and ground assaults by Kyiv's forces "will not go unpunished".

The Kremlin has cast the election as an opportunity for Russians to show they are behind Moscow's full-scale military campaign in Ukraine, where voting is also being held in occupied territory.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday hailed Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula — where voting is also taking place — 10 years ago from Ukraine.

"The peninsula is an integral part of the Russian Federation," Lavrov said in a statement.

— AFP

Thai PM vows to curb air pollution in Chiang Mai

CHIANG MAI: Thailand's prime minister promised on Saturday to tackle air pollution as he visited tourism hotspot Chiang Mai, which had among the world's worst air quality for the second day in a row.

The picturesque historic city is hugely popular with visitors but annually suffers dire air quality in the early months of the year when farmers burn crops.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who is on a four-day northern tour, acknowledged his government needs to tackle the smog.

"Even if the pollution level is lower than last year at this time, we are still concerned and will find solutions to improve the livelihood of the people," he told reporters.

His visit came as Chiang Mai topped air monitoring website IQAir's list of the world's most-polluted cities for the second consecutive day.

Levels of PM 2.5 pollutants — small enough to enter the bloodstream through the lungs — were at 224 on Saturday afternoon, 20 times higher than the World Health Organization's guidelines.

Earlier, Srettha visited the Command Centre for Wildfires

and PM 2.5 Prevention in the city's Mae Taeng district.

After meeting with workers, he told reporters he was working with local authorities to study the impact of transnational haze. He added that he would impose regulations on farmers who burnt stubble, without giving further details. Earlier this year, Srettha's cabinet approved a Clean Air Act aiming to tackle the issue.

It follows a government body warning this month that more than 10 million patients sought treatment for pollution-related diseases last year in Thailand.

Srettha's visit to Chiang Mai coincided with that of ex-PM and controversial billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, as well as opposition MP and former Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat.

Thaksin — on his first public outing since his release from a jail sentence following his return from self-exile — also spoke about PM 2.5, calling it "the biggest problem".

Last year, sky-rocketing levels of pollution saw international tourists discouraged from visiting, with vendors despairing for business, as the Thai Hotel Association Northern Chapter also warned domestic visitors were cancelling bookings. — AFP



Thailand's PM Srettha Thavisin (3rd L) is greeted by officials before a meeting to combat air pollution at a government office in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai. — AFP

India to hold marathon election from April 19



India's Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar speaks as Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and S S Sandhu look on during a press conference in New Delhi. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: India announced on Saturday that national polls would begin on April 19, with nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi strongly favoured to win a third term in the world's biggest democracy.

Nearly a billion people are eligible to cast ballots in what will be the largest exercise of the democratic franchise in human history, conducted over six weeks.

Modi's opponents have been hamstrung by infighting and what critics say are politically motivated legal investigations aimed at hobbling any challengers to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"We will take democracy to every corner of the country," chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar said at a press conference in New Delhi announcing the voting dates.

Voting will be staggered over seven stages between April 19 and June 1.

Ballots from around the country will be counted all at once on June 4 and are usually announced on the same day.

Nearly a billion people are eligible to cast ballots in what will be the largest exercise of the democratic franchise in human history, conducted over six weeks

Modi, 73, has already begun campaigning as he seeks a repeat of his landslide wins of 2014 and 2019.

The opposition Congress, which led India's independence struggle and ruled the country almost uninterrupted for decades after its conclusion, is meanwhile a shadow of its former self and out of office in all but three of the country's 28 states.

Its leaders have sought to stitch together an alliance of more than two-dozen regionalist parties to present a united front against the BJP's well-oiled and well-funded electoral juggernaut.

But the bloc has been plagued by disputes over seat-sharing deals, suffered the defection of one of its members to the government and has so far been unable to publicly agree which of its leaders will be its prime ministerial candidate.

Published opinion polls are rare in India but a Pew survey last year found Modi was viewed favourably by nearly 80 per cent of Indians.

A February poll of urban voters conducted by YouGov showed the BJP comfortably leading India's manifold opposition parties among 47 per cent of those surveyed, while Congress was a dismal second at 11 per cent.

A total of 970 million people are eligible to vote in the election — more than the entire population of the United States, European Union and Russia combined.

There will be more than a million polling stations in operation staffed by 15 million poll workers, according to the election commission. — AFP

Let’s cancel this woke ideology. Now!



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

One feels the time has finally come, for the silent majority to speak out, and reclaim their histories, their cultures, their traditions, and indeed, their futures, from the woke pestilence that has insidiously, without mandate, assumed both our identities and our dignity, and we, the silent, let it happen.

The origins of the socio-political use of woke, a passive voice past-participle of wake, lie in the United States of America, in the 1800’s as the abolition of slavery split the nation, with Abraham Lincoln’s short-lived triumph prior to his assassination, a small, though bitterly accepted, step forward in America’s cultural awakening.

The word was re-awakened as a subtle element in the mid-20th century struggle of African Americans against institutional prejudice and racial discrimination with Martin Luther-King and the Klu Klux Klan the most high-profile antagonists.

The term ‘woke,’ re-emerged as a catchphrase by its supporters, and more negatively as a pejorative by its detractors, some ten or fifteen years ago as, it would seem, millennials raised on a wave of marketing and consumerism appropriated it as their media tagline.

It is touted as a rallying call for social issues and action, including white privilege (possibly), racial prejudice (again), gender (perpetually), and (so-

called) systemic sexism. More recently, even those objectives have been very much subjugated by the all-consuming movements.

To prioritise one’s dignity or offence over another is not the way social change should happen, yet here we are, in a world where to say one wants to be something else, something it’s not, is not a genuine sociological reality.

It is surely not a concept we should be wasting our time and energy on, let alone having our families, communities, and societies assaulted so heinously. None of us can be something we are not simply by saying so!

I understand that we are not all the same, in fact I celebrate it, but there is a limit! Some of these social anarchists, for example, are saying they want to identify as men when they are women, or men identifying as women, as either, neither, or both, or whatever.

None of these are sustainable perspectives to take when thought through practically, and the chinks in the woke armour must surely be widening.

We have seen several cases of criminals, only after they are caught, identifying as women, to get access to female companionship when they are incarcerated. We have seen males in female changing facilities, and females in male changing

THE TERM ‘WOKE,’ RE-EMERGED AS A CATCHPHRASE BY ITS SUPPORTERS, AND MORE NEGATIVELY AS A PEJORATIVE BY ITS DETRACTORS

rooms, enough to make ordinary, run-of-the-mill, everyday people hesitant about using public conveniences, gymnasium changing facilities, and the like.

And please don’t get me started about males competing in female sports events simply because they identify otherwise.

Again, simply, I don’t believe these are genuine transitions. Without exception, these are male athletes and participants who have tried and failed against their peers and have now found a way in which they can get on the podium.

The image widely circulated on ‘some’ media last week of one such athlete, a basketballer, throwing a young female to the floor as they tussled for the ball only looked to me like bullying! And why? For an ego trip that must surely carry the stench of dishonesty, and all for a moment of fame, or more accurately, as a moment of shame.

We know, for example, that most of us can tell the difference between a sheep and a wolf, and if a sheep wants to dress up as a wolf (though only the sheep knows why), then they take the consequences, and if the woodsman lops their head off, he may well say “Oooooops!”

But it’s not his fault, is it? This folly has been given more time, space, and attention than it deserves. Let’s ‘woke’ up, and ‘woke’ out. Let’s cancel this scourge... We sure don’t need it!

Rapid-charging battery train trial launched in Britain

ALLISON WILLIAM

A rapid-charging battery train trial, which could help end diesel operations on branch lines, has been launched in Britain.

Great Western Railway (GWR) is conducting a 12-month pilot of the technology on the two-and-a-half-mile Greenford branch line in west London.

The system involves batteries fitted to a former London Underground District line train being topped up during four-minute turnarounds at West Ealing station.

This is quick enough for the train to run to the usual timetable and is expected to provide enough power to ensure the batteries have more than a third of their power left at the end of service each day before they are recharged in a depot overnight.

In track testing, the train has achieved a range of 86 miles, which is the longest distance travelled by a battery train on a single charge in the UK.

GWR managing director Mark Hopwood said the technology will be a “vital” part of the industry’s efforts to phase out diesel-only trains by 2040. He told the PA news agency: “In an environment where people are buying electric cars and electric buses are coming out, if we’re still running branch lines with diesel trains that are pumping fumes into the air that’s not going to add to our credibility around rail being environmentally-friendly.”

The train’s batteries are recharged by a trackside battery bank that is trickle charged from the National Grid, meaning there are no spikes in demand on the grid and large electrical infrastructure is not required.

The system is designed to be much cheaper and simpler than installing electric overhead wires or third rails. Hopwood said: “There’s a reluctance in Government to invest in particular routes that don’t have an overwhelming business case.

“I would like to see more electrification happening, but I think it’s being made clear that we’re not likely to see Government funds available to electrify the whole network.

“I think it’s right and proper that we look at emerging technology.” Rail minister Huw Merriman said: “This trial proves the potential for battery technology to accelerate decarbonisation of our railways and deliver real environmental benefits through removal of harmful diesel emissions at pace. — dpa



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Living with obsessive-compulsive disorder

The couple who attended my clinic a few weeks ago were in their early thirties. The wife spoke first “I am only trying to keep the house clean, all I am asking is that he showers every time he gets home so am assured that no germs get into the house, and he drags me to see a psychiatrist for this?”

The husband interrupted, “You are doing more than that. The whole time you are worried about germs, and the house smells like a hospital from the strong cleaning detergent. Doctor, can you believe that I am not allowed to have a key to our house?”

She insists on observing me have a shower the moment I step into the house and change into clean clothes then wash the old ones and every time. “I touch something she comes behind me and cleans it with sterilising wipes. I cannot take it anymore”.

The wife explained that she has thoughts about keeping the house clean all the time and she is unable to rest or do anything apart from cleaning because of these thoughts.

According to psychology, an average person can have four thousand thoughts a day, and not all of them are useful or rational.

Sometimes irrelevant words, phrases, names, and images flash into our minds, or we remember songs or musical tunes that get played repeatedly in our heads.

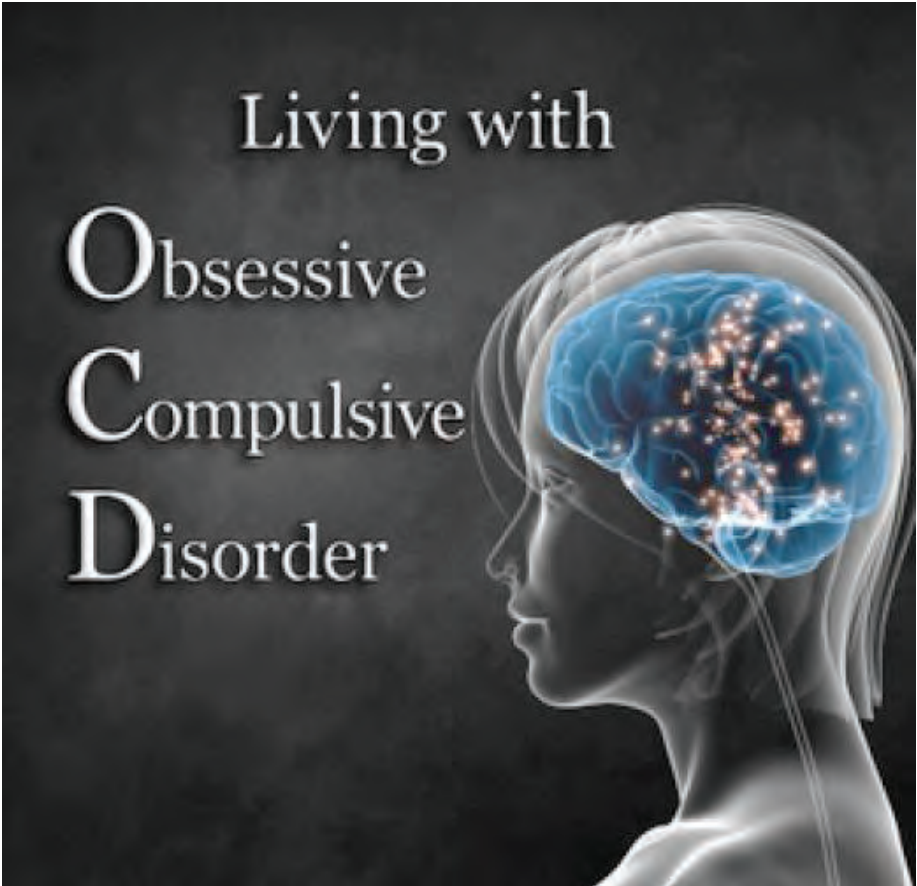
Such things are usually experienced when performing a routine task such as driving long distances.

Some people are preoccupied with the seductive question ‘What if?’.

What if I were to jump in front of that bus? What if I were to punch that person?

These thoughts are more common than we realise yet they can be temporary and do not impact our daily life.

Obsessive-compulsive



PEOPLE WITH OCD HAVE TIME-CONSUMING SYMPTOMS THAT CAN CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS OR INTERFERE WITH DAILY LIFE

disorder (OCD) is a serious condition in which a person experiences uncontrollable and recurring thoughts (obsessions), engages in repetitive behaviours (compulsions), or both.

People with OCD have time-consuming symptoms that can cause significant distress or interfere with daily life.

OCD is the fourth most common mental disorder and according to the WHO.

Its impact is worse than diabetes since it begins usually in the early teens or late adolescence and early adulthood and affects the person’s ability to study, work, or enjoy life in general.

People with severe OCD are

more likely to be unemployed and single and if do get married they are more likely to divorce.

The theme of the obsessions varies but most commonly revolves around contamination and germs where a person has recurrent thoughts that he is not clean or the place around him/her is not clean and ends up cleaning for a long time.

Obsessing about religious matters is also common when a person doubts that he is not clean enough to pray or that he did not pray well so he ends up washing for hours before prayers or repeating his prayers.

Other themes include fear of leaving the door unlocked or not disconnecting the iron.

OCD is a treatable condition, and most patients can live a normal life with the help of medication and behavioural therapy.

Yet one needs to seek professional help early before the symptoms impact their daily functioning.



Seeb defeat Majees, take on Al Salam in final



Seeb Club and Majees

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Seeb Club defeated Majees 3-1 on Friday, in a semifinal match of the Oman Ministry Volleyball Shield, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The match began in the first set evenly, where Seeb managed to take a two-point lead, but Majees returned to score a point, making the score 3-1. Seeb then scored four points while Majees

scored two. The exchange of points continued between the two teams, with Majees eventually winning the first set 25-22.

Entering the second set, Seeb regained momentum and controlled the game better.

The intense competition continued in the third set, but Seeb showed resilience and outperformed their opponent, winning 26-24.

In the fourth and final set, Seeb maintained its momentum and

Oman won the first set with a score of 25-23, and also won the second set with a score of 25-20. However, Al Salam Club didn't back down and delivered a strong performance in the third set to win 25-20.



Al Salam Club with Oman Club

confidently outperformed Majees, securing the win with a score of 25-20, thus qualifying for the final match.

This marks Seeb's second victory over Majees in less than a week, as they previously qualified for the final of the Omani First Division League last Wednesday.

AL SALAM DEFEAT OMAN
Additionally, Al Salam Club defeated Oman Club with a score of 3-2 on Friday at the

Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, in a semifinal match of the Oman Ministry Volleyball Shield.

Oman won the first set with a score of 25-23, and also won the second set with a score of 25-20.

However, Al Salam Club didn't back down and delivered a strong performance in the third set to win 25-20. The fourth set witnessed an exciting comeback as Al Salam Club turned the tables and won 26-24.

In the fifth set, Al Salam managed to dominate confidently, by winning with a score of 15-9, thus securing a place in the championship final.

With this result, Seeb will face Al Salam Club in the championship final next Wednesday. It's worth mentioning that Seeb Club has also qualified along with Al Salam Club for the final match of the First Division Volleyball League for this season, which will conclude this Monday.

Oman gear up for vital World Cup qualifiers under Silhavy

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Czech coach, Jaroslav Silhavy, is a busy man these days as he fine-tunes the Oman national team ahead of their crucial games against Malaysia in the double qualifiers for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027.

Friday night training and technical workout was a continuation of the team's preparations for the Malaysia match, which will be held in Muscat on March 21, Thursday, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex at 10 pm (local time). The away game takes place in Kuala Lumpur on March 26.

The Red Warriors are underway in their domestic camp, which began on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. They have completed five successful training sessions featuring a mixture of physical,



technical, and tactical exercises. This was held under the watchful eyes of Silhavy and his assisting coaching staff, which comprised national coach Ali al Khanbashi, Chytry Jiri, and Venglarick Peter.

All the players in the squad took part in the session with goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini and Adbulah Fawaz who joined late in

the camp. All the players attended the workout, which was full of enthusiasm and seriousness ahead of the crucial forthcoming assignments.

Oman will look to exploit home conditions when it hosts Malaysia in group D of the joint qualifiers on Thursday. They are currently second in the pool



with three points from two games while Malaysia leading the table with six points from the same games. The national team's campaign started in the double qualifiers event with a 2-0 win against Chinese Taipei but then shocked with a 1-0 defeat against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek in their second match.

The forthcoming match against Malaysia on Thursday will be the first official match under the supervision of the newly appointed national football team head coach, Jaroslav Silhavy, who began his tasks as technical manager last month as replacement of the Croatian coach Ivankovic

Branko. The 62-year-old coach called many former players to return to the national team's squad including the striker Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Hatim al Roushdi and the defender Mohammed al Musallami.

OMAN SQUAD: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Mohammed al Musallami, Ghanim al Habsi, Khalid al Ghatrefi, Hassan al Ajmi, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Kaabi, Abdulaziz al Shamoosi, Harib al Saadi, Hatim al Roshdi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaee, Omar al Malki, Zaher al Aghbari, Arshad al Alawi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri, Musaab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Esam al Subhi.



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The match began in the first set evenly, where Seeb managed to take a two-point lead, but Majees returned to score a point, making the score 3-1. Seeb then scored four points while Majees

scored two. The exchange of points continued between the two teams, with Majees eventually winning the first set 25-22.

Entering the second set, Seeb regained momentum and controlled the game better.

The intense competition continued in the third set, but Seeb showed resilience and outperformed their opponent, winning 26-24.

In the fourth and final set, Seeb maintained its momentum and

Oman won the first set with a score of 25-23, and also won the second set with a score of 25-20. However, Al Salam Club didn't back down and delivered a strong performance in the third set to win 25-20.



Al Salam Club with Oman Club

confidently outperformed Majees, securing the win with a score of 25-20, thus qualifying for the final match.

This marks Seeb's second victory over Majees in less than a week, as they previously qualified for the final of the Omani First Division League last Wednesday.

AL SALAM DEFEAT OMAN
Additionally, Al Salam Club defeated Oman Club with a score of 3-2 on Friday at the

Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, in a semifinal match of the Oman Ministry Volleyball Shield.

Oman won the first set with a score of 25-23, and also won the second set with a score of 25-20.

However, Al Salam Club didn't back down and delivered a strong performance in the third set to win 25-20. The fourth set witnessed an exciting comeback as Al Salam Club turned the tables and won 26-24.

In the fifth set, Al Salam managed to dominate confidently, by winning with a score of 15-9, thus securing a place in the championship final.

With this result, Seeb will face Al Salam Club in the championship final next Wednesday. It's worth mentioning that Seeb Club has also qualified along with Al Salam Club for the final match of the First Division Volleyball League for this season, which will conclude this Monday.

Oman gear up for vital World Cup qualifiers under Silhavy

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Czech coach, Jaroslav Silhavy, is a busy man these days as he fine-tunes the Oman national team ahead of their crucial games against Malaysia in the double qualifiers for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027.

Friday night training and technical workout was a continuation of the team's preparations for the Malaysia match, which will be held in Muscat on March 21, Thursday, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex at 10 pm (local time). The away game takes place in Kuala Lumpur on March 26.

The Red Warriors are underway in their domestic camp, which began on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. They have completed five successful training sessions featuring a mixture of physical,



technical, and tactical exercises. This was held under the watchful eyes of Silhavy and his assisting coaching staff, which comprised national coach Ali al Khanbashi, Chytry Jiri, and Venglarick Peter.

All the players in the squad took part in the session with goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini and Adbulah Fawaz who joined late in

the camp. All the players attended the workout, which was full of enthusiasm and seriousness ahead of the crucial forthcoming assignments.

Oman will look to exploit home conditions when it hosts Malaysia in group D of the joint qualifiers on Thursday. They are currently second in the pool



with three points from two games while Malaysia leading the table with six points from the same games. The national team's campaign started in the double qualifiers event with a 2-0 win against Chinese Taipei but then shocked with a 1-0 defeat against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek in their second match.

The forthcoming match against Malaysia on Thursday will be the first official match under the supervision of the newly appointed national football team head coach, Jaroslav Silhavy, who began his tasks as technical manager last month as replacement of the Croatian coach Ivankovic

Branko. The 62-year-old coach called many former players to return to the national team's squad including the striker Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Hatim al Roushdi and the defender Mohammed al Musallami.

OMAN SQUAD: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushdi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaee, Omar al Malki, Zaher al Aghbari, Arshad al Alawi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri, Musaab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Esam al Subhi.

Sakkari thwarts Gauff rally to book Indian Wells title clash with Swiatek

INDIAN WELLS: Maria Sakkari needed three sets and four match points to get past US Open champion Coco Gauff on Friday, setting up a title clash with world number one Iga Swiatek at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters.

In a match halted twice by rain, Greece's ninth-ranked Sakkari squandered three match points in the second set but pulled away in the third to win 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2.

For the second time in three years, she'll take on Swiatek for the title after falling to the Polish star in 2022.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek needed just 69 minutes to clinch her return to the championship match, beating 32nd-ranked Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk 6-2, 6-1.

There would be no easy victory for Sakkari, who trailed 4-3 in the opening set when light rain stopped play for 20 minutes.

Sakkari returned and held serve before gaining the only break of the opening set, converting her fifth break point.

The second set had barely begun when heavier rain halted play for two hours. When it resumed, Sakkari struck first, breaking an error-prone Gauff for 2-1 and again for a 5-2 lead.

But the world number three, playing in the Indian Wells semifinals for the first time, responded.

Gauff broke Sakkari handily to claw back to 5-3.



Greece's Maria Sakkari hits a forehand return to USA's Coco Gauff. — AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a forehand return to Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. — AFP

Two games later, Sakkari battled back from 15-40 down but couldn't convert her three match points, sailing a forehand long on the first before Gauff

saved two more with winners on the way to a service break that knotted the set at 5-5.

The tiebreaker was all Gauff as the American roared to a 6-2

lead, finally levelling the match with a service winner on her fourth set point.

They exchanged service breaks to start the third set, but Sakkari won the next three games to take control and broke Gauff a final time to seal the win after two hours and 41 minutes.

"I don't want to disrespect Coco but it would've been amazing if this match was over an hour ago," Sakkari told the hardy fans who braved the cold night air and rain.

"I'm going to take this win, even though it was in three sets," she added. "That was an amazing win. Coco is such an amazing opponent. She's incredible. She fights every point. I'm just so happy I'm in the final once again here." Sakkari said sheer determination was key.

"I didn't give up," she said. "You can easily lose your head when you lose that second set from being match point up.

"Things go wrong and I was down a break. Things didn't look right, but I just kept believing and kept fighting."

Swiatek, meanwhile, was in complete control throughout against Kostyuk.

"I think it was the cleanest match I played here," said Swiatek, who hit 14 winners with just six unforced errors and didn't face a break point. "I didn't really have any moment today in the match where I didn't feel confident. — AFP



Qurum Thunders - D50 Champions

Qurum Thunders claim D50 Championship

MUSCAT: The inaugural edition of Oman Cricket's Oman D50 concluded recently. The 14 day extravaganza of top-quality cricket played between top 5 premier division teams saw Qurum Thunders beat Ruwi Rangers by 31 runs to lift the coveted trophy at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

The Qurum Thunders, co-owned by Khimji Ramdas LLC, won the title finishing second in the league stage below ruwi rangers winning 4 out of 4 in the league. The tournament was played in a single round-robin format followed by Qualifiers and an Eliminator for the Final.

Winning the toss and playing to their strengths, Qurum Thunders batted first. Kaleemullah swept through the Thunders top-order with overcast conditions as they were five-down in the powerplay. Shoaib Khan's resilient 60 of 95 balls and Samay Shrivastava's gritty 51 of 111 balls not out helped Qurum Thunders reach 156 in 50 overs. Kaleemullah ended with 4 wickets while Umair Shakeel and Mohammed Nadeem picked 2 wickets each. In response, Khalid Kail's 78 of 94 gave Ruwi Rangers a seamless start however fell prey to Samay Shrivastava's 4-wicket haul to bundle down for a mere 125. Ayaan Khan and Afreidh KT picked 2 wickets each to restrict the Ruwi Rangers chase.

Madhu Jesrani, Director, Muscat Cricket Team, reflecting on the team's performance said, "We did not start this season on an up, failing to qualify for D20 and D10. The boys were not looking switched on initially, however as the season progressed, we peaked at the right moments and started showing character at crucial stages of the matches which helped us gain momentum as well as gave confidence to the boys. We availed missing



Mohammed Adeeb Usmani - Player of the Tournament



Samay Shrivastava - Player of the Match

services of our Muscat CT backbone, Jatinder Singh in the latter half of our season which boosted the team morale gave us the right combination into the games. I also commend Samay Shrivastava's outright performance this year to carry Muscat CT along his shoulder when the team needed him. We congratulate each and every member involved with Muscat CT backed by Khimji Ramdas to win the inaugural edition of the Oman D50 claiming the title of the Premier Division 2023-24".

In the closing ceremony, Samay Shrivastava was handed the Player of the Match while Mohammed Adeeb Usmani was adjudged Player of the Tournament for his 348 runs and 5 wickets in 5 matches handed by Maqbool bin Moosa al Lawati, Board Member of Oman Cricket. Mohammed Nadeem, skipper of the Ruwi Rangers collected the Runners Up trophy and Sandeep Goud, skipper of Qurum Thunders collected the Champions trophy from Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket.

Djokovic withdraws from Miami Open

MIAMI: World number one Novak Djokovic withdrew from next week's ATP-WTA Miami Open on Saturday in the wake of his shock exit at Indian Wells.

The 36-year-old Serbian star said in a statement on social media he had opted to skip Miami for scheduling reasons.

"Unfortunately I won't be playing the @MiamiOpen this year," Djokovic announced on X, formerly Twitter.

"At this stage of my career, I'm balancing my private and professional schedule. I'm sorry that I won't experience some of



Serbia's Novak Djokovic. — Reuters

the best and most passionate fans in the world. "I'm looking forward competing in Miami in future!" The 24-time Grand Slam champion returned to play the early season US hardcourt swing at Indian Wells in California, only to suffer a shock third-round exit on Monday to lowly ranked Italian Luca Nardi.

Djokovic said after that defeat he still planned to play in Miami despite the loss.

Djokovic's statement on Saturday gave no indication of where he next expects to play. — AFP

10th Oman Desert Marathon to be held in January 2025

MUSCAT: The 10th edition of the Oman Desert Marathon, a 165 km five-stage desert self-sufficient race will be held in the Sultanate of Oman from January 18 to 22 in 2025.

With an average high temperature of 25 degrees during the day, and an average low temperature of 17.3 at night. January offers to the participants of the Oman Desert Marathon the perfect conditions to enjoy the race to the fullest.

The Oman Desert Marathon is a race held since 2013, has now run up nine previous editions and in 2025 presents a 165-kilometre route in five stages through one of the most spectacular deserts in the world. The course in which the sand is present in every stage,



offers the discovery of a very rich country in culture and landscape, while still being a tough challenge for those who want to enjoy a race through the desert.

In this next edition, the stage distances will be 42, 32, 40, 30 and 21 kilometres, thus offering the runners a spectacular route, an epic stage of a marathon



distance, followed by a more relaxed but still challenging 32 km stage, to continue with a 40 km, to later experience a night stage of 30 km and finalising with the shortest

distance of 21 km on the last day.

After the last edition in 2024, in which Rachid El Morabity stood on the first step of the podium, and Omani champions,

Saleh al Saidi and Ghaith al Saidi came in 2nd place and 3rd place respectively, the Oman Desert Marathon will be back offering for its 10th anniversary, a new distance for hikers. The 100 km Oman Desert Marathon Hiking Experience, will be a multi-day hike that offers the opportunity to explore endless rolling sand dunes, and investigate the desert on foot. For those who are not ready for a self-sufficient adventure but still want to challenge themselves, the Oman Desert Marathon will be back offering races for locals, residents and companions of the international participants with a marathon, a half marathon, 10 km, 5 km family run and 2 km for kids.



PAMPLONA: Vinicius Junior struck twice to earn Real Madrid a commanding 10 point lead at the top of La Liga in a 4-2 rout of Osasuna on Saturday.

The Brazilian forward mesmerised for Los Blancos and reached 18 goals across all competitions this season, while Dani Carvajal and Brahim Diaz also found the net in an entertaining romp for Carlo Ancelotti's side.

Girona, second, visit Getafe later Saturday, while third-place Barcelona, 11 points behind Madrid, travel to face Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

Madrid were without top goalscorer Jude Bellingham, completing a two-match suspension but, with Vinicius in full flow, barely missed the England international at El Sadar in Pamplona.

Vinicius' name made headlines this week after Real Madrid filed a legal complaint over alleged racist insults aimed at the Brazilian by Atletico Madrid and Barcelona fans, but on the pitch the forward's quality continues to speak for itself.

The 23-year-old dispossessed Alejandro Catena, who was dawdling on it, ran through and calmly rolled the ball past Sergio Herrera to break the deadlock after four minutes.

Osasuna were quickly back level through Ante Budimir, who finished from close range after Jorge Herrando nodded a corner back into his path.

Vinicius should have restored Madrid's lead moments later after being sent in on goal again by

Antonio Rudiger, but this time Herrera denied him, keeping his balance well as the forward tried to throw him off with step-overs.

Madrid captain Carvajal put his side in front again in the 18th minute, finishing sublimely with the outside of his boot after Fede Valverde cleverly hooked the ball into his path in the box.

Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin made a good save at full stretch to push away a fierce Jose Arnaiz effort from the edge of the box.

Vinicius was booked just before half-time for dissent, his fifth yellow card of the season in La Liga — meaning he is now banned for Athletic Bilbao's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu at the end of March.

Diaz stretched Madrid's lead after an hour with a clinical finish after running on to a long ball was flicked on by Valverde.

Vinicius grabbed his second a few minutes later with a subtle poked finish after Valverde sent him hurtling in on goal — his 12th league goal of the season.

The Brazilian could have completed his hat-trick just a couple of minutes later but fired wide after another dart into the box past Osasuna's crumbling back line.

Herrera denied Madrid forward Rodrygo in the final stages as the visitors sliced mid-table Osasuna open at will.

Home fans whistled Vinicius as he was substituted in the final stages but Ancelotti gave the forward a hug as thanks for taking Madrid one step closer to the Spanish title. — AFP

VINICIUS

AT THE DOUBLE AS LIGA LEADERS MADRID THRASH OSASUNA



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Oman continues its efforts for zero carbon neutrality by 2050



MUSCAT: Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured), confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is steadily advancing towards producing no less than 30 per cent of electricity or consuming electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030.

He added that the oil and gas sectors are currently working to stop routine burning operations, while some industrial areas and cities are seeking environmentally friendly energy alternatives, giving more competitiveness to local products in global markets.

Al Aufi pointed out that studies are being conducted on alternative energy, its costs, and the changes factories need to adopt modern technology to keep up with it, clarifying that the sectors producing carbon emissions by around 95 per cent are industry, electricity production, oil, gas, transportation, and others.

He explained that some governmental institutions have made efforts as part of Oman's plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, while others are still searching for projects to reduce carbon emissions.

Several electricity production projects have been announced, including the Manah 1 and Manah 2 stations, preparations for the Ibri 3 station, in addition to announcing 5 new wind power stations: Dhofar 2 station, Sadah station, Duqm station, Mahout station, and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali station. — ONA

Oman LNG to produce synthetic methane to cut carbon emissions

MUSCAT: Oman LNG intensifies its efforts towards finding the best mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions through strategic partnerships with various global companies in the fields of innovation, sustainability, research for alternative energy sources and reducing its carbon footprint.

The company aims to leverage the opportunities of producing synthetic methane to reduce carbon emissions from its operations by developing cooperation with energy companies worldwide.

In this context, the memorandum of understanding signed by Oman LNG with the Japanese companies Hitachi Zosen and Hitachi Innova to provide the necessary consultations for establishing a project to reduce carbon emissions and produce synthetic methane.

Synthetic methane is the industrial production of natural gas through a chemical reaction where carbon dioxide (first or second) is fused with hydrogen to produce methane gas, which is the main component of natural gas, in addition to its contribution to combating climate change and energy storage challenges.

The production of synthetic methane will capture carbon dioxide emissions from Oman LNG's operations, reuse them, and convert them into clean methane.



The production of synthetic methane will capture carbon dioxide emissions from Oman LNG's operations, reuse them, and convert them into clean methane.

Eng Hamed bin Abdullah al Maamari, Decarbonisation and New Energy Senior Manager at Oman LNG stated that with Oman's focus on renewable energy, the production of synthetic methane provides an opportunity to store surplus renewable energy by converting it into methane, which can be stored and transported more easily than electricity and used to enhance the current infrastructure of natural gas, providing greater flexibility in energy systems and helping integrate renewable energy sources.

The cooperation agreement between Oman LNG and Hitachi Zosen and Hitachi Innova emphasises the central role that Oman plays in providing energy to Japan, with the aim of assessing the technical, economic, and environmental feasibility of producing synthetic gas from carbon dioxide and hydrogen emissions.

Oman LNG will collaborate with Hitachi Zosen and Hitachi Innova to develop a pilot synthetic methane project to evaluate the technical, economic, and environmental feasibility of producing synthetic gas from carbon dioxide and hydrogen emissions, which can be reutilised in the company's operations either to produce liquefied natural gas or consume it as fuel.

This initiative represents an opportunity to enhance the joint efforts between Oman and Japan to benefit from Oman LNG's expertise and resources to enhance sustainable energy solutions.

The pilot project will include extensive research and development activities, including experimental testing, data analysis, and technology improvements.

Al Maamari stated that the carbon emission reduction and

synthetic methane production project is a strategic project, offering the chance to discover a new technology that aids in the green transition, recycling carbon dioxide emissions from factories into cleaner energy with lower carbon emissions.

The successful implementation of this pilot project will achieve numerous benefits, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing energy efficiency, diversifying revenues, and income sources for the Sultanate of Oman.

Roni Arajji, General Manager for the Middle East at Hitachi Zosen and Innova, confirmed that the agreement signed with Oman LNG to build a carbon emission reduction and synthetic methanol production project will be implemented after the completion of studies that will last for 10 months, explaining that the project will be established at Oman LNG's plant and is a



The production of synthetic methane provides an opportunity to store surplus renewable energy by converting it into methane, which can be stored and transported more easily than electricity and used to enhance the current infrastructure of natural gas.

ENG HAMED AL MAAMARI

Decarbonisation and New Energy Senior Manager
Oman LNG

joint Omani-Japanese-Swiss project.

He pointed out that several countries are currently moving towards using clean energy as part of their plans to achieve carbon neutrality, stating that the memorandum signed with Oman LNG represents an opportunity that will yield positive results, whether for Oman specifically or various countries worldwide in general. — ONA

Oman's automobile fuel production soars by 57.4%

MUSCAT: The production of automobile fuel by refineries and petroleum industries in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 57.4 per cent by the end of January 2024, compared to the same month in 2023, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Statistics indicated that the production of regular automobile fuel M-91 decreased by 17.9 per cent at the end of January 2024, compared to an increase of premium automobile fuel m-95 by 12.7 per cent.

The production of automobile fuel M-91 reached about 1.184 million barrels, while its sales amounted to 1.175 million



Statistics indicated that the production premium automobile fuel M-95 increased by 12.7 per cent.

barrels.

The production of M-95 automobile fuel recorded about

951,000 barrels, with sales recording 993,000 barrels.

Diesel gas oil production

decreased by 26.1 per cent, recording 2.101 million barrels, and its sales recorded 1.137 million barrels.

Aviation fuel production also increased by 39.7 per cent, recording 1.077 million barrels, and its sales recorded 383,000 barrels.

The production of liquefied petroleum gas recorded 672,800 barrels, while its sales reached 808,000 barrels.

With regard to petrochemicals, statistics showed that gasoline production increased by 17.6 per cent, recording 13,500 metric tonnes, while the production of paraxylene reached 55,300 metric tonnes, an increase of 56.5 per cent.

Polypropylene production

decreased by 16.4 per cent, recording 18,600 metric tonnes, but its sales increased by 64.8 per cent, recording 2,700 metric tonnes.

Oman's exports of M-91 fuel increased by 14.6 per cent to reach 227,300 barrels, while no exports of M-95 fuel were recorded until the end of January 2024.

Exports of diesel gas oil reached 709,400 barrels, and of aviation fuel 707,400 barrels, while exports of liquefied petroleum gas reached 102, 200 barrels.

Paraxylene exports reached 60,400 metric tonnes, gasoline exports reached 6,600 metric tonnes, and polypropylene exports reached 9,900 metric tonnes. — ONA

Malabar Gold & Diamonds gears up to celebrate Arab Mother’s Day

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 340 showrooms across 13 countries, is all set to celebrate Arab Mother’s Day with exquisite jewellery crafted in gold & certified diamonds, ideal for gifting.

Arab Mother’s Day is celebrated on March 21 every year to honour and pay tribute to the unconditional bond of motherhood.

By commemorating this special occasion, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is underscoring the role of Mothers in an individual’s life and her role in nurturing future generations to create happier and healthier societies.

As part of the campaign, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also launched special Umami pendants in 18K gold.

The unique design of this jewellery pays special homage



to the bond between a mother and child and is a perfect gifting option for everyone looking to



express their unconditional love. In addition to the special collections, an innumerable array

of jewellery in both traditional and contemporary styles is also available across the brand’s showrooms.

In line with the ever-changing jewellery preferences of its multicultural and multinational customer base, Malabar Gold & Diamonds constantly takes measures to update its portfolio of designs, which also includes setting up of stand-alone store exclusively for local customers of the respective region.

A pioneer in delivering exceptional quality and crafting customer-centric policies, all purchases from Malabar Gold & Diamonds are safeguarded with the ‘Malabar Promise’, which includes 100% exchange value for Gold & Diamond jewellery, guaranteed buyback, tested and certified diamonds, assured lifetime maintenance on jewellery, responsibly sourced products and much more.

BMW Group Middle East announces change in leadership management



MUSCAT: BMW Group Middle East announces a significant leadership change effective from April 1, 2024. Karim-Christian Haririan will assume the role of Managing Director, succeeding Dr Hamid Haqparwar who departs the BMW Group after 18 years with the company and holding the position as Managing Director of BMW Group Middle East since 2018.

Karim-Christian Haririan brings extensive automotive industry experience exclusively with the BMW brand. Starting his career with the company as a sales executive in 1991, he progressed through various roles globally. Notably, he drove regional sales of BMW Group products in diverse global markets, before becoming CEO of BMW Group Greece in 2015.

As CEO and Managing Director of BMW Group Poland from 2020 onwards, his achievements include significantly expanding the brand’s growth in various model categories, such as the GKL 7 Series and the high-performance M models.

Under his leadership, BMW Group Poland went from 17,000 cars sold in 2020 to 24,000 in 2022. Karim-Christian Haririan will maintain his current role in Poland until April 1, 2024, at which point he will take on the duties of Managing Director at BMW Group Middle East.

“I am thrilled to welcome Karim-Christian to his new position, and I am certain that with our shared principles, trust and commitment, we will continue the success story of BMW Group in the region,” says Jean-Philippe Parain, Senior Vice President Sales for Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa at BMW Group.

“Karim-Christian brings with him a wealth of experience in the automotive industry, and his expertise gained in diverse markets will be invaluable in his new role.”

Dr Haqparwar has been a driving force in the company, guiding business and sales across 13 markets in the Middle East.

He joined the BMW Group in 2006 and since held several key positions in the Middle East, Germany and India, culminating in his role as Managing Director of BMW Group Middle East since 2018.

His tenure has been marked by exceptional results and a transformative mobility approach. Under Hamid’s leadership, BMW Group Middle East experienced some of the most successful years in the company’s history. His leadership was also invaluable during the challenging trials that the company has faced, particularly during the Covid pandemic.

Hamid and team have also set the strategic direction for the transformation of BMW Group towards sustainable mobility, in addition to corporate and social responsibility in the region.

Reflecting a forward-thinking approach and his own expertise, Hamid has extended BMW Group’s presence in the realm of esports and blockchain technologies in the region, underscoring the company’s dedication to innovation and engagement with contemporary trends.

“As we welcome a new chapter, we also bid farewell to a highly respected colleague, Dr Hamid Haqparwar. Since joining BMW Group in 2006, Hamid has made significant contributions across the board at BMW. His unwavering commitment to sustained growth and innovation have left an indelible mark on the company,” Parain says.

“I extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr Hamid for his outstanding service and dedication and his impact on our company will not be forgotten. We wish him every success as he embarks on his next journey.”

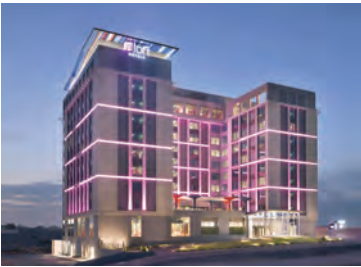
Immerse yourself in the Ramadhan atmosphere at Aloft Muscat

MUSCAT: As the sacred month of Ramadhan commences, Aloft Muscat unveils enticing iftar offerings to cherish and celebrate this blessed time with your loved ones. Indulge in a delectable Iftar experience at Backstage.

Immerse yourself in a distinctive Ramadhan ambiance at Backstage, where the soothing melody of the oud accompanies an array of exquisite dishes. From live cooking stations to gourmet desserts and beverages, there’s plenty to relish.

Details & Timings: Available from sunset until 22:00 | RO 12 per person (adults), inclusive of Ramadhan juices, still water, regular coffee, and tea.

In addition to the sumptuous iftar buffet, Aloft Muscat presents an exclusive room rate of RO 35 per night, offering guests the opportunity to unwind in



comfort and style.

Hotel patrons will also receive a complimentary iftar for two and enjoy a 20% discount on food and beverages.

“We are entirely dedicated to catering to the needs of our valuable guests, particularly during this significant time of the year,” stated Ramy Hamdoun, General Manager of Aloft Muscat.

“We eagerly anticipate welcoming them to enjoy our unique fusion of youthful vibrancy, modern design, and unmatched functionality.”

Omantel unveils ‘The Story has Changed’ Ramadhan campaign

MUSCAT: Building on its previous successful Ramadhan campaigns, Omantel — the leading provider of integrated telecommunications and ICT services in the Sultanate of Oman — has launched its Ramadhan campaign for 2024 under the slogan “The Story has Changed,” reflecting the sincere efforts and positive change brought about by the company’s previous “Change the Story” campaign.

This year’s campaign tells inspiring real-life stories that urge others to do good and change their own stories, as well as those of the people surrounding them.

It also includes community activities in which community



members participate, reflecting the company’s commitment to community involvement and collaboration.

A visual work (video) has also been published on Omantel’s social media channels, explaining the message and goals of the Ramadhan campaign.

The campaign will highlight the ‘Maqroo’ initiative, the world’s

Bank Muscat Shukran Visa prepaid card: Earn Shukran points on every spend



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, launched its Bank Muscat Shukran Visa Prepaid Card in partnership with Landmark Group and Visa.

The card was developed to provide customers with a one-of-a-kind shopping experience by offering a variety of benefits, including discounts from partner stores and other rewards such as RO 15 worth of gift vouchers, discounts on flights, hotels and cinema. The Bank Muscat Shukran Visa Prepaid card is secure reloadable card intended for everyday use when shopping in stores and online.

Bank Muscat is keen to expand its services and products to satisfy customers’ expectations by adopting innovation and tailoring benefits to fit their specific needs.

Earn Points on Every Purchase

Customers will earn 1 Shukran Point for every RO 1 spent at Landmark Stores and 1 Shukran Point for every RO 2 spent outside Landmark Group chain of stores

The total points accumulated through the prepaid card spends is added to the Shukran points gained from their Shukran membership.

Points can be redeemed across Landmark Group stores in Oman, the GCC, Egypt and online on more than 15 brands across Fashion, Home, Electronics, Hospitality and Leisure, at Landmark Group stores such as Centrepoint, Babyshop, Splash, Shoemart, Lifestyle, Max, Shoexpress, Home Centre, Home Box and Emax.

Easy Application and Management

The Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app and Internet Banking services offers simple and convenient application and management of the prepaid card, customers can utilise the online services to top up the card, check available balance, view transaction history and block the card if it is lost or stolen.

The prepaid card is linked to the cardholder’s Shukran membership, allowing them to earn and redeem Shukran points in stores and online.

Customers who do not already have a Shukran membership will have it automatically generated during the card application.

In line with its vision “To Serve You Better, Everyday”, the bank has launched recently its complimentary courier delivery service for prepaid cards. Customers no longer have to visit the branch to pick up the card.

Omantel is keen on involving its employees in its social initiatives.

This year, as in previous years, the company’s employees will participate in the ‘Fak Kurbah’ initiative through financial donations. Similarly, Omantel’s Ma’an Volunteering Team will distribute food parcels to deserving families in cooperation with the Omani Food Bank ‘Daima.’

It is worth noting that Omantel collaborated with the Dar Al Atta’a Association to restore 194 homes. It has also collaborated with the Omani Lawyers Association to release 160 financially distressed individuals and reunite them with their families.

Google misquoted Malaysia ringgit's exchange rate



People look at the exchange rate at a money changer displaying posters of US dollars, Chinese yuan and Malaysia ringgit in Singapore. — Reuters

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's central bank said on Saturday that Google had misquoted the ringgit's exchange rate, undervaluing the currency against the dollar, and that it would seek an explanation from the tech giant.

The ringgit, which declined to a 26-year low last month, has weakened about 2.44% this year. Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) has said the currency is undervalued and does not reflect Malaysia's positive economic fundamentals.

The bank said in a statement that Alphabet Inc's Google published "inaccurate" information on Friday and had also done so on February 6.

"As this is the second instance of misreporting, BNM will be engaging Google for an explanation of how the inaccurate reporting occurred and the corrective measures taken given that this is a recurring issue that has afflicted Malaysia and other countries in the past few months," BNM said in a statement.

Google was not immediately available for comment outside of US business hours.

The search giant does not verify data provided by financial exchanges and other content providers, and disclaims any obligation to do so, according to disclaimers on its website.

Google quoted the ringgit at 4.98 to the dollar on Friday, BNM said, while the Malaysian currency's weakest level on official data was 4.7075.

BNM quoted the ringgit at 4.7015 at 9 am and 4.7045 at 5 pm on the onshore interbank market. For comparison, LSEG data used by many international market participants quotes a Friday close of 4.7020.

BNM Governor Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour said Malaysia's government and central bank were taking coordinated action to further increase flows into the foreign exchange market to ensure the ringgit remains stable.

— Reuters

Chinese importers cancel, postpone Australian wheat buys amid global surplus

SINGAPORE: Chinese wheat importers have cancelled or postponed about one million metric tonnes of Australian wheat cargoes, trade sources with direct knowledge of the deals said, as growing world stockpiles drag down prices.

News of the moves comes after the US government reported cancellation of more than 500,000 metric tonnes of US wheat exports last week to China, the world's No 1 buyer, with international prices trading close to three-and-half year lows.

China increased wheat imports last year after adverse weather damaged its crop, buying mainly Australian, US, French and Canadian cargoes.

However, prices subsequently plunged as Russia, the No1 exporter, began flooding the global market with cheap wheat as it draws down inventories ahead of an expected bumper harvest, which could mean China will look to buy again to lock in lower prices, traders said.

"Chinese buyers have cancelled some deals for Australian wheat, and they are also moving the shipping time from the first quarter to the second quarter,



A farmer harvests a field of wheat stalks in Wimmera, Australia. — AFP

third quarter," said one Singapore-based trader at an international trading company, which sells Australian wheat to Asia.

A second Singapore trader said trading companies have vacated shipping slots across several Australian ports, which were booked for cargoes due for China. Both traders declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Benchmark Chicago wheat futures have fallen more than 14% in 2024 to their lowest since August 2020, thanks to ample world supplies. The market was trading down 1.4% at 0906 GMT on Thursday.

China, the biggest buyer of Australian wheat, may have booked the cargoes four to five months ago when prices were higher, said Andrew Whitelaw at

agricultural consultants Episode 3 in Canberra.

"Cancelling cargoes is a bearish indicator," Whitelaw said. "Whether they are doing it to buy again cheaper or because there's less demand, it is still a bearish view on the market."

Refinitiv data shows benchmark Russian wheat export prices slipped below \$200 a metric tonne (\$5.44 per bushel)

this week for the first time since August 2020, marking the lowest early March price since 2017.

Russia is projected to export a record 51 million metric tonnes of wheat in the crop year that ends on May 31, up from 47.5 million a year ago, the US Department of Agriculture says.

One million metric tonnes of wheat would require about 15 Panamax-size vessels of 68,000 tonnes each to ship, and amounts to more than 4% of Australia's expected total wheat exports of 23 million metric tonnes in 2023-24.

The second trader in Singapore said some of the Chinese importers who cancelled or postponed purchases have agreed to pay penalties in the form of carrying cost to Australian suppliers.

A Dubai-based grain trader, who declined to be named, said one miller in the Middle East bought a cargo of Australian wheat for shipment in early April without having to wait.

"It wouldn't have been possible before China's move to postpone shipments, as Australian shipping slots were fully taken up," the trader said. — Reuters

Argentina court in key lithium region halts new permits

BUENOS AIRES: An Argentine court in the northwestern province of Catamarca has suspended the issuance of new mining permits, demanding fresh environmental impact studies be carried out looking at local lithium projects, a judgment showed.

The ruling involves the Los Patos River-Salar del Hombre Muerto area, where global lithium giant Arcadium Lithium Plc, formerly Livent, has a project. It comes after tensions over water use with local communities in the region.

Argentina, inside South America's so-called "lithium triangle", is one of the world's top producers of the metal that is key for the batteries needed to power electric vehicles. A local company spokesperson declined to comment.

The ruling comes after a case presented in 2021 by a chief of the Atacameños Native Community, which alleged the province



Livent's Fénix lithium project in Catamarca, Argentina. — Reuters

authorised mining projects in the Salar del Hombre Muerto basin without informing the population or carrying out an environmental impact assessment.

The case said that local mining operations impacted water supply due to the use of "huge quantities of fresh and salt water", which they alleged had caused a local river to dry up.

A source from Catamarca's mining ministry, told Reuters that the province was evaluating the ruling to determine next steps.

The court ordered the local government to "refrain from granting new permits/authorisations" in relation to operations in the Los Patos River — Salar del Hombre Muerto area "until the new environmental impact study is complete".

Sources in the industry said the sector would have to work on the impact studies to define how they would be able to develop the projects, although in principle the decision would not impact current production. — Reuters

Malaysia's Petronas Q4 profit falls, flags market uncertainty in 2024

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's state energy firm Petroliaam Nasional (Petronas) said on Friday it expects oil and gas markets to face continued uncertainties this year, as it reported a drop in fourth quarter profit due to lower energy prices.

The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have led to heightened supply risks, while slowing global growth has hampered demand, Petronas Chief Executive Tengku Muhammad Taufik Tengku Aziz said.

"Despite this volatile backdrop, which shows no sign of subsiding or receding, Petronas remains resolute in its commitments to firstly monetise resources responsibly for economic growth," Muhammad Taufik said in a press conference.

Petronas posted a profit of 16.6 billion ringgit (\$3.5 billion) in October-December 2023,



A logo of Petronas is seen at their office in Kuala Lumpur. — Reuters

down from 24.4 billion ringgit in the same quarter the previous year.

Revenue in the quarter fell 12% to 91.7 billion ringgit, due to lower average realised prices for all products in line with declining benchmark prices, Petronas said.

For 2023, it recorded revenue of 343.6 billion ringgit, while profit after tax was at 80.7 billion ringgit.

Petronas is ramping up investments in clean energy as part of its net zero carbon emissions goals. — Reuters

FAA investigates United Boeing 737 flight missing panel

WASHINGTON: The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating how a United Airlines Boeing 737-800 lost an external panel before landing safely in Oregon on Friday.

United Flight 433 landed at Medford Airport around 1:45 pm PDT (2045 GMT) carrying 139 passengers and six crew after departing from San Francisco, the FAA and airline said.

The FAA said a post-landing airline inspection of the 25-year-old airplane revealed a missing panel. United said it will also

investigate and said no emergency was declared because there was no indication of the damage during flight.

"We'll conduct a thorough examination of the plane and perform all the needed repairs before it returns to service," the airline said in a statement. Boeing did not comment, directing questions to United Airlines.

According to FAA records, the plane was built in late 1998. *The Rogue Valley Times* posted a dramatic photo of the airplane



A gaping hole where the door panel had been on the Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max 9. — Reuters

with the missing panel.

Traffic was briefly halted at the airport to search for the panel.

In the aftermath of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 mid-air emergency prompted by a door plugblowout, US aviation incidents are getting more attention. Boeing has been under heavy regulatory scrutiny following the January 5 Alaska Airlines incident, with probes into the company's safety and quality standards in its production process.

Last week a United Airlines-operated Boeing 737 MAX

rolled onto the grass and off the runway in Houston, prompting investigations. Also last week a United-operated Boeing 777-200 bound for Japan lost a tire after takeoff from San Francisco and was diverted to Los Angeles where it landed safely.

A United Boeing 737 on March 4 bound for Florida departing Houston returned to the airport shortly after takeoff after the engine ingested some plastic bubble wrap that was on the airfield prior to departure.

— Reuters

Bitcoin overtakes silver as an asset class



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Bitcoin’s remarkable recent rise continues as it solidifies its position within the upper echelons of global assets.

By overtaking silver in market capitalisation, Bitcoin now unofficially ranks as the 8th largest asset worldwide.

This momentous achievement underscores its growing influence as a digital asset and its increasing acceptance within mainstream financial circles and institutions.

The crypto sector overall is attracting massive attention, with global crypto investment products pulling in a record-breaking \$12 billion in inflows during the first quarter of 2024 alone.

This figure surpasses the entirety of 2021’s inflows, emphasising the surge in demand.

Institutional adoption is playing a critical role in fuelling with cash this crypto “bull run” momentum.

MicroStrategy’s bullish strategy consistently makes headlines, with the company repeatedly raising funds specifically to acquire additional Bitcoin.

Their recent \$800 million senior notes offering is a clear evidence to their conviction in BTC’s long-term prospects.

This follows their initial offering, originally slated for \$600 million, which was later upsized to \$700 million due to overwhelming investor interest, further confirming the appetite for crypto exposure within the institutional landscape.

The desire for diversification within the cryptocurrency space is clear. While Bitcoin maintains its dominance, holding a diversified crypto portfolio offers the potential for improved

risk-adjusted returns compared to single-asset exposure, such as holding only Bitcoin or Ethereum.

A thoughtful allocation strategy, taking into account an investor’s individual risk tolerance and objectives, can be a powerful tool when exploring the broader range of opportunities now presented by the cryptocurrency sector.

Alongside Bitcoin’s dominance, technological innovation is essential for the continuous evolution of cryptocurrencies. Ethereum, at the heart of much of the Web3 space, recently implemented its transformative ‘Dencun’ hard fork.

This landmark upgrade introduces a dedicated data channel, significantly reducing transaction fees for layer-2 scaling solutions.

Cost reductions are estimated to fall within a range of 5-10x, making it more affordable than

ever to interact with decentralised applications built on Ethereum.

Greater scalability paired with this affordability paves the way for increased accessibility and unlocks the potential for a new wave of decentralised application growth.

Stablecoins, designed to bridge the gap between traditional finance and the dynamic crypto landscape, are also experiencing renewed growth.

Their total market capitalisation surged to a staggering \$146 billion after seeing a low in August of last year. This revitalisation signals the importance of ‘stable’ assets within the crypto ecosystem.

Newer stablecoins like Ethena’s USDe and Curve’s crvUSD are attracting attention, offering investors unique features like significant yields and yield-focused mechanisms alongside the traditional benefits of stability.

As the cryptocurrency world

matures, the regulatory landscape is evolving to ensure investor protection and foster broader confidence in the market.

The European Banking Authority (EBA), alongside the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), is proactively establishing comprehensive guidelines for stablecoins.

These guidelines will outline standardised processes for resolving complaints and ensure that these vital assets are backed by robust safeguards, a critical step for long-term adoption.

****Disclaimer:**** *The information provided in this article should not be considered financial advice, but as mere news reporting and market analysis.*

The cryptocurrency market remains dynamic and carries significant risks. It’s essential to conduct your own thorough research and consult with qualified professionals before making any investment decisions.

Joe Biden out-MAGAs Donald Trump



A video of US President Joe Biden is seen on a screen as former US President Donald Trump speaks during a rally ahead of the midterm elections, in Miami, Florida, in this file photo. – Reuters

BY JONATHAN GUILFORD

US President Joe Biden is outdoing 2024 presidential election

rival Donald Trump on his own terms. On Thursday, Biden said he has “the backs” of union workers vying against United States Steel’s \$14 billion takeover by Japan’s Nippon Steel.

Add that to his support of a bill to force the divestiture or ban of TikTok. Such ad hoc approaches to controversial safeguards for national security and commercial interests are a dangerous precedent.

Much of this, coupled with Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act which was meant to reward companies for moving manufacturing onshore, is a somewhat inevitable culmination of a breakdown in the American consensus on trade. The revolt against the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal, through which former President Barack Obama sought to unite a US-aligned commerce bloc, gave way to Trump’s “make America great again” agenda of heavy tariffs. Balancing homegrown unrest with key allies’ and national commercial concerns has only grown harder, as uproars over foreign rivals’ place in the United States catch Biden at a delicate moment. Unions are a key political faction of his Democratic Party.

The United Steel workers’ opposition to Nippon’s deal risks their support ahead of November elections. Republican presidential candidate Trump has seized the issue, saying he

would block the transaction. Biden’s statement that US Steel must remain “domestically owned and operated,” though short of an outright promise to block, sent the company’s shares tumbling.

In theory, banning TikTok should be easy to support. Officials have warned that TikTok poses risks from surveillance or seeding divisive narratives. But Biden has a balancing act there, too.

Trump has lately been less emphatic about ridding the social media app, controlled by Chinese parent ByteDance, from US phones. Support from the Democratic party is mixed.

Kneecapping a challenger to the likes of Meta Platforms weakens a domestic antitrust push. It also puts US companies operating in China at risk.

Similarly, rebuffing Japanese interests could alienate an ally in dealing with China, while pushing US Steel into the arms of a buyer that industries like automakers find intolerable.

The Biden administration’s embrace of America-first policies has caused consternation among European partners. Turning inward is more than just a bad look for a country that has used open trade to build some of its biggest companies. The \$2.7 trillion Apple, opens new tab depends on a Chinese supply chain; Tesla, the uneasy lynchpin of Biden’s electric-vehicle push, is deeply embedded in China. Every circumstance has its own set of considerations.

But embracing protectionism won’t make America great again.

— Reuters

Oman charges ahead: A road-map to electric mobility



ALENA DIQUE

The author is an ESG advisor, specialising in SDGs and economic diversification, and is a certified UNCTAD Youth Network coordinator. She also serves as Associate Director at Gulf Intelligence, driving impactful change in energy transition.

Our planet faces a growing challenge – climate change.

The transportation sector contributes significantly to overall carbon emissions with the UN putting its contributions at 13 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions and 23 per cent of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions. Of these, three-fourths come from road traffic alone.

In response, many countries are looking towards electric vehicles (EVs) as a cleaner and more sustainable alternative. Oman is no exception.

Oman is embarking on a transformative journey towards a greener future, with electric vehicles (EVs) serving as the driving force. This ambitious vision hinges on a three-pronged approach: building a robust charging infrastructure, implementing supportive government policies, and fostering strategic partnerships.

Infrastructure expansion

The Omani Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is spearheading the country’s EV revolution. One of the key challenges to widespread EV adoption is range anxiety – the fear of running out of power



Many countries are looking towards electric vehicles (EVs) as a cleaner and more sustainable alternative.

THE AMBITIOUS TARGET OF 22,000 EVS ON THE ROAD BY 2030 IS A CLEAR AND MEASURABLE MARKER OF PROGRESS. WITNESSING OMAN TAKE THE LEAD IN THE MIDDLE EAST’S EV REVOLUTION IS NOT MERELY HOPEFUL - IT’S A DEMONSTRABLY ACHIEVA

before reaching a charging station.

To address this concern, Oman is witnessing a rapid expansion of its EV charging network. Leading the charge is EVO, a prominent provider with an existing network of over 80 stations strategically placed across the country.

This foundation will be further strengthened by the government’s ambitious target of establishing 300 charging stations by 2025.

This rapid growth will significantly alleviate range anxiety, paving the way for a more seamless transition to electric mobility.

While battery-powered EVs are at the forefront, Oman is also exploring innovative solutions to push the boundaries of clean transportation.

A noteworthy example is the collaborative study with the Netherlands to investigate the feasibility of a liquid hydrogen corridor. This has the potential to revolutionise long-distance transportation.

Imagine a future where heavy-duty trucks and long-haul

buses travel on clean hydrogen, significantly reducing emissions and enhancing Oman’s position as a leader in clean energy technology.

Additionally, Indian EV start-ups like Planet Electric are setting their sights on the region’s commercial vehicle market, offering new options for businesses seeking to reduce their environmental footprint.

Electrifying all sectors

The Omani government is playing a pivotal role in promoting EV adoption by offering attractive tax breaks to consumers. These incentives make EVs a more financially viable option, enticing individuals and businesses to make the switch.

This, coupled with the entry of new players in the market, like Vietnamese automaker VinFast partnering with Bahwan Automobiles, is expected to diversify the EV landscape and offer Omani drivers a wider range of choices.

Oman’s commitment to EVs goes beyond personal transportation. Recognising

the need for a comprehensive approach, the government has signed a deal to develop the country’s EV infrastructure for all types of electric vehicles.

This includes not only passenger cars but also commercial vehicles like buses, trucks, and even delivery vans.

By electrifying these sectors, Oman can significantly reduce emissions across its transportation network, leading to a cleaner and more sustainable future. Oman’s commitment to electric mobility is unshakable.

The ambitious target of 22,000 EVs on the road by 2030 is a clear and measurable marker of progress.

Witnessing Oman take the lead in the Middle East’s EV revolution is not merely hopeful – it’s a demonstrably achievable vision for a cleaner future.

This future, built on a foundation of strategic partnerships, government incentives, and a rapidly expanding charging network, will see sustainable transportation become the norm.

The road-map is well-defined, the commitment unwavering. The positive impact of this vision will extend far beyond Oman’s borders, paving the way for a healthier planet for all.

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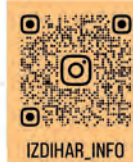
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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Huraira and Abu Sa'ïd (Allah be pleased with both of them) reported Allah's Messenger (as saying):

Allah, the Exalted and Majestic, said: Fast (is exclusively) meant for Me and I would give its reward. There are two (occasions) of joy for the observer of fast. He feels joy when he breaks the fast and he is happy when he meets Allah. By Allah in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.

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QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

Say, "I take refuge with the Lord of Daybreak. From the evil of what He created. And from the evil of the darkness as it gathers. And from the evil of those who practice sorcery. And from the evil of an envious when he envies.

(al Falaq)



Ramadhan

SUNDAY | MARCH 17, 2024 | RAMADHAN 6, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER f x o t l y o www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MASS IFTARS IN OMAN



BY STAFF REPORTER

Imagine this: a large gathering of people from different walks of life sitting together in the wide spaces next to a mosque. Whether it's in front of the popular Al Zawawi Mosque in Al Khuwair or a small village mosque hidden in the corners of Bausher or Barka, mass iftars have always been a beautiful sight to see every Ramadhan.

For a better context, mass iftars refer to large communal meals where Muslims break their fast together at sunset during the month of Ramadhan. These events are significant because they bring together families, friends, and communities to share the blessings of the holy month.

In Oman, mass iftars have become a beloved trend for several reasons. Firstly, they foster a sense of unity and solidarity among the people, as everyone comes together regardless of their background or social status to share a meal. This communal spirit is deeply ingrained in Omani culture, and Ramadhan provides an opportunity to strengthen these bonds.

Additionally, mass iftars in Oman often involve charitable initiatives where individuals and organizations sponsor meals for those in need. This reflects the values of generosity and compassion emphasized during Ramadhan, and it allows people to actively participate in acts of charity and goodwill.

Beyond this, these gatherings provide a platform for cultural exchange and understanding. Oman is known for its diverse population, comprising people from various ethnicities and backgrounds. By coming together for iftar, individuals have the chance to learn about each other's traditions, customs, and cuisines, thereby promoting tolerance and harmony within society.

The beauty of mass iftars came to a stop during the

COVID-19 pandemic primarily due to concerns about public health and safety. Ramadhan typically involves large gatherings for iftar meals, where people come together in mosques, community centers, or public spaces to break their fast. However, with the spread of the coronavirus, health authorities around the world recommended avoiding large gatherings to prevent the transmission of the virus.

In Oman, like in many other countries, authorities

tions in Oman have turned to alternative ways to observe Ramadhan while adhering to safety guidelines. This could include smaller, family-centered iftar gatherings at home, virtual iftars via video calls, or distributing iftar meals to those in need in a safe and controlled manner.

Now that the pandemic is over and life has returned to normal, it would be amazing to see once more the beautiful mass iftars happening across Oman during the holy month. As all the Muslims in Oman started to ease into



implemented measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, including restrictions on gatherings and social distancing protocols. These measures were necessary to protect the population from the risk of infection, especially during a time when people traditionally come together in close proximity for iftar.

Given the importance of mass iftars in Omani culture, the decision to suspend these gatherings during Ramadhan was difficult. However, it was deemed necessary to prioritize public health and prevent the further spread of the virus.

Instead of mass iftars, individuals and organiza-

their daily routine for Ramadhan, it will be an amazing sight once more to see the group gatherings that showcase what Oman is truly all about — a melting pot of different cultures and backgrounds but united under humanity and understanding.

In case you're new to Oman and find yourself in a mosque during iftar, seeing hundreds of people gather, don't be shy to attend at least once. By partaking in this group activity, you will deepen your spiritual connection during Ramadhan, providing an opportunity to partake in the collective observance of the faith's rituals and teachings.

CULTURE

Skiing Afghans determined to keep sport alive

FROM THE EDGE OF A slope in the province of Bamiyan, rivals cheer as they take turns to race down the mountainside, united in keeping skiing alive in Afghanistan.

While it is home to spectacular mountain ranges, including the mighty Hindu Kush, the

country does not have a widespread culture of skiing, with gear also costly and scarce.

That has not, however, stopped the growth of a thriving ski cohort, which is eager to keep developing the sport in Afghanistan, despite the loss of sponsors and prominent skiers who left the country after the Taliban takeover in 2021.

"Ski races have lost a bit of their colour" in Afghanistan since the Taliban authorities returned to power, said 23-year-old Esmatullah Haidari, who captains a local ski team.

But, he added, "there are still enthusiastic skiers who don't want skiing to fade away".

Shah Agha Rezayee, a trainer and long-time skier, said fans of the sport have "revived the spirit" of skiing.

"We should work for it because it is our motivation, interest and love," said Rezayee, who dreams of seeing Afghan skiing represented at the Olympics.

Today, there are teams in at least six provinces, with hundreds of members, a chunk of whom took to the Bamiyan slopes earlier in March for the federation's first formal race

of the season.

Wearing a hodge-podge of warm clothes and neon pinnies, a long line of competitors shouldered their skis as they marched up the Bamiyan piste, which lacked a lift. A handful of men gathered to watch, joining in spirited applause as each adult and child racer zipped through the finish line.

Women no longer participate since the Taliban authorities effectively banned women from all sports, despite previously making up a large number of skiers in Bamiyan, according to the federation.

"We feel their absence," said Haidari. "Everyone should be free, and should be able to study and to ski, it's not important whether you're a girl or boy," he added.

"We miss our sisters a lot."

- 'WON'T LET SKIING DIE' -

Foreign women do not face the same restrictions and visitors have continued to join Afghans on the slopes, including at events organised by the charity-backed Bamiyan Alpine Ski Club.

One such event was the well-attended

Afghan Peaks Ski Race, which was also sponsored this year by a local TV station.

Tourists with the adventure travel company Untamed Borders brought with them about 130 kilograms (285 pounds) of gear into the country to donate.

Many skiers get by with donated equipment and handmade wooden skis.

"We have a very limited budget for the sport," said Mohammad Daud Kargar, president of the Afghanistan Ski Federation.

"In the past, some organisations cooperated with us but in the previous three years, we haven't received any help."

Nasratullah Nasrat, who learned to ski from YouTube videos, said he hopes to one day ski for Afghanistan, but voiced concern about the "very limited resources" available to skiers.

"Unfortunately, the government is not paying much attention, slopes have not been prepared and recently, there has been less snowfall," the 20-year-old from Wardak province told AFP, citing the late snow arrival this year in the drought-hit country.

Haidari echoed the challenges, but was



determined to carry on the baton from two Olympic-hopeful Afghan skiers Sajjad Husaini and Sayed Alishah Farhang, who left the country after the US-backed government collapsed in 2021.

Even "if we don't get resources, we will make wooden skis and we won't let skiing die in Afghanistan, especially in Bamiyan", he said. — AFP

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF
MUSLIM FAITH

624

Battle of Badr: Prophet
Mohammed’s forces win

The Battle of Badr was the first large-scale confrontation between Muslims and the Quraysh. More than a thousand men engaged in the battle, which lasted hours and resulted in a decisive Muslim victory. Six years later, the Quraysh in Mecca peacefully surrendered to an army led by Prophet Mohammed.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE
WORLD

BANGLADESH



The history of Muslims in Bangladesh is deeply rooted in the region’s past, dating back to the 13th century when Islam arrived through Arab traders and Sufi missionaries. Over time, the local population gradually embraced Islam under the influence of various Muslim dynasties, including the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. During British colonial rule, Islam continued to thrive, shaping society and culture. In 1947, Bengal became East Pakistan after the partition of British India, eventually gaining independence as Bangladesh in 1971. Today, Bangladesh is home to approximately 90 per cent Muslim population, making Islam the predominant religion in the country.

Ramadhan, the holiest month in Islam, is observed with great enthusiasm in Bangladesh. Muslims fast from dawn till dusk, engaging in special prayers like Taraweeh and increasing acts of charity. Iftar, the evening meal to break the fast, is a communal affair with traditional Bangladeshi dishes shared among families and communities. Ramadhan serves as a time for spiritual reflection, self-discipline, and strengthening communal bonds, embodying the core values of Islam in Bangladeshi society.

RAMADAN
TRIVIA

HOW WELL DO YOU
KNOW THE HOLY MONTH



WHAT DID
THE PROPHET
MOHAMMED
(PBUH) BREAK
HIS FAST WITH?

HEALTH
TIPS

TO GUIDE YOU
THIS RAMADHAN

MODERATE EXERCISE

Engage in light to moderate physical activity during non-fasting hours to promote circulation, improve mood, and maintain muscle mass. Opt for activities like walking, yoga, or stretching, and avoid strenuous exercise during peak fasting times to conserve energy. Vigorous exercise, especially during fasting hours, can lead to dehydration, fatigue, and even injury. It’s best to choose low-impact activities and exercise during non-fasting hours whenever possible.



HOW GOOD
SAMARITANS FILL
THE GAP IN SOCIAL
IFTAR GATHERING

BY KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Around 5 in the evenings these days, as labourers head towards the nearest social iftar centres, vehicles adorned with corporate names and holograms halt at industrial areas, offering iftar kits and a timely meal. This provision has proven to be a great boon for those who previously relied on social iftars.

These diverse iftar kit distributions, organised by either individuals or corporations across the country, have already provided significant relief for not only labourers but also travellers and individuals



iftar time. We are happy to distribute iftar kits to passersby,” said Subrahmaniom, General Manager of Global Money Exchange, which feeds up to fifty labourers every day.

These collective iftars organised by corporations as part of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives instil a sense of being cared for and foster unity, which is the essence of any social iftar. Men from diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultural origins, clad in different attires, come together, bound by commonalities. They share their first meal of the day from a single platter, assisting each other with drinking water, dates, and other delicacies of breaking the fast.



engaged in menial jobs. This comes at a time when organised iftar camps at mosques are scarce.

By around 5 to 5.30, people assemble near the distribution points well in advance of the suppliers arriving with bundles of iftar packs. These packs typically include dates, water, laban, a fruit, a snack, and nuts, which are then randomly distributed among those in the queue.

Overall, blue-collar workers, commuters, passersby, and individuals stuck in traffic or elsewhere find it incredibly

convenient to break their fast with these small kits due to the significant meaning they hold for them.

“Today marks the third day of Ramadhan fasting, and since day one, there have been some corporations bringing iftar kits and meal packets to us inside the industrial areas,” said Noor al Deen, a worker from the Wadi Kabir Industrial Area.

Labourers often express that they truly experience the beauty of iftar only when they are back home with their loved ones every two years or more. At workplaces, they are confined within the four walls of

the building they work in, cherishing whatever little food they have with colleagues and friends.

For many labourers, the chance to break their fast amidst the ceremonial festivities below the Ramadhan lantern, surrounded by friends and relatives, is rare. The lavish iftars hosted by hotels on behalf of corporations, which symbolise camaraderie, remain distant from reality for many.

“We have been providing iftar kits to labourers since the beginning of the holy month, not only to our customers but to anyone who comes to us at

These men on the move rely solely on those who provide dates and laban to break their fast, as social iftars are not as prevalent this year. Thanks to the generosity of these good Samaritans distributing food at iftar time, they can relax as they religiously end their fast.

By sunset, several blue-collar workers, commuters, and travellers stand together in perfect unison for prayers after satisfactorily breaking their day-long fast, all thanks to the corporations and good Samaritans who have extended a helping hand to them.





A skeleton lies exposed to the elements as turquoise Caribbean waters lap the shores near a shattered tomb -- a grisly reminder that the Colombian city of Cartagena is slowly being swallowed by the sea.

With low-lying communities worldwide on the front lines of the climate crisis fight, Cartagena is conspicuously vulnerable.

On Tierra Bomba, a small island in the bay of Cartagena, the cemetery once built at a safe distance from the shore has been devastated by repeat-

melts polar ice caps and glaciers -- had combined with erosion and the "sinking of the land... due to tectonic factors" and the presence of submarine volcanoes, to hasten rising sea levels in the region.

These volcanic formations "are muddy, and little by little gravity puts pressure" on them, causing the terrain to flatten and the city to sink, Tosic added.

- NEW ENEMY, NEW FORTRESS -

The study, published in 2021 by the scientific journal Nature, said the sea

America's most extensive military fortification around the city.

The historic old town, massive fortress and gorgeous beaches have made Cartagena a tourist drawcard.

Now, machines are hard at work building a new fortress -- 4.5 kilometers (2.7 miles) of seawall to protect the city from encroaching waters.

seawall protects luxury hotels and tourist spots, but is changing the sea current and doesn't offer a safeguard to areas where the most vulnerable live.

Over decades, the sea "has devastated 250 homes in the community, the health center, docks... it took away several community halls, electrical



Along the shoreline, high-rise buildings stand just meters from the ocean.

According to the mayor's office, some 80 percent of neighborhoods in the largely flat and sea-level city would be at risk of flooding without this protection.

- FLEEING THE SEA -

Tosic warned that poor populations had fewer tools to protect themselves from the forces of nature.

Mauricio Giraldo, a representative of local fishermen, complains that the

ed flooding, while houses have tumbled into the waves.

Kelly Mendoza has seen two of her neighbors lose their homes, and at night the 31-year-old hears the surf crashing against her bedroom wall.

"I get scared when the wave hits the wall because I think it is going to fall," and "I will find myself in the sea, in my bed."

Cartagena, a tourist hotspot in the north of the country, could find itself almost a meter underwater by the end of this century, experts say.

"The increase in sea levels in the coastal area of Cartagena is due to two factors," said Canadian environmental scientist Marko Tosic, one of the authors of a study showing waters there were rising faster than the global average.

He said global warming -- which

level in Cartagena has risen by about 7.02 millimeters (0.27 inches) per year since the beginning of the 21st century, "a rate higher" than the global average of 2.9 millimeters.

Researchers said the sea in the bay could rise 26 centimeters by 2050 and 76 centimeters by 2100.

It is a "very small change, we are talking about millimeters over the years, but... the flooding will be felt," said Tosic.

On the mainland, AFP recently saw workers at a flooded restaurant scrambling to try to remove water lapping at their clients' feet.

Cartagena, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is a colonial-era city that was once a hotspot of conflict between European powers vying for control of the "New World" -- resulting in the Spanish building some of South

Will She Make the Next Birkin?



"THE BAG, IT CARRIES your things and carries your secrets," Priscila Alexandre Spring said. The 43-year-old creative director of leather goods at Hermès sat in her office in Pantin, just outside of Paris, explaining what she liked about designing bags -- in particular, the relationship between "your private life and your exterior life."

Alexandre Spring joined the Hermès leather goods métier in 2015, and in 2020 she was appointed to her current role. Hermès, which began in 1837 as a saddle maker, is a name that comes with intimations of money (bags often sell for more than \$10,000), scarcity (if you can get your hands on one) and craftsmanship (each is handmade by a single craftsman). Most people have heard of the Kelly bag (named for Grace Kelly) or the Birkin (named for Jane Birkin) and the myriad celebrities who tote them.

It is Alexandre Spring's job to make the next big one.

Born in Canada, Alexandre Spring grew up in the south of Portugal. Her Portuguese father and Mozambican mother were both teachers who wanted their daughter to be curious about the world and have a classic education. She learned five languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian) and studied piano, flute, violin and ballet. At 13, she switched to basketball, which she played until she was 25. "Maybe this is why, for me, it's really important to work within a team," Alexandre Spring said. She keeps an Hermès baseball glove in her office alongside stacks of art books -- "Margiela: Les Années Hermès," Jamel Shabazz's "A Time Before Crack."



She studied fashion design at the Lisbon School of Architecture, then moved to Paris and bounced around design houses, working first for Portuguese designer Felipe Oliveira Baptista, then designing men's ready-to-wear for Louis Vuitton, then as an accessory stylist for Balenciaga. She moved to New York in 2008 to join Proenza Schouler.

In New York, she lived mostly in the East Village and freelanced, designing shoes for Marc by Marc Jacobs. "Downtown New York, it's like a small town," she said. Soon enough, she ran into Humberto Leon and Carol Lim of the erstwhile cool-kids boutique Opening Ceremony, who hired her in 2010.

When Leon and Lim became the designers of Kenzo, Alexandre Spring joined them in Paris as an accessory stylist, splitting her life between France and the United States, 15 days at a time. After a year of back and forth, she moved back to Paris full time.

Alexandre Spring, who lives with her American husband and two children in the Marais, likens the design process to a pingpong game: a dialogue between her fellow designers and artisans. As a first step, she'll do a sketch, which she then takes to prototype makers, whose workshop is just a few steps away. They discuss size, functionality, even things like the sound the hardware makes when the bag closes.

For the Arçon bag, Alexandre Spring was inspired by the shape of the flap of a saddle. But then another inspiration came to her, she said.

"I was looking at a book that was talking about pockets in the 19th century, how men had about seven pockets in their jackets, pockets in their little vests and pockets in their pants, and women could have only one pocket that they had to hide under their skirt. And that was kind of the beginning of emancipation of women. When skirts became smaller and tighter to the body, they just took the pocket up from under the skirt and put it outside."

"So that's how this pocket came here," she said, pointing to an angled zip pocket, reminiscent of a slash pocket on a skirt or trousers, on a chocolate brown Arçon. A hook was added for keys or gloves.

Another bag Alexandre Spring designed, the Petite Course, which means a little errand in French or a little ride, was smaller, more ergonomic -- "for a sports car," she said. "You put your wallet and your keys in it and you go."

Once Alexandre Spring and her team are satisfied with a design, they make it out of salpa, a material that is similar to leather, a process she compares to Frankenstein's monster. "We make them small, we make them big," she said.

The bag is then produced in one of 22 Hermès leather workshops in France. Among them is Maroquinerie Saint Antoine, a workshop in the 12th arrondissement of Paris, where more than 100 apron-clad employees assemble bags. They are mostly longtime craftspeople but include a class of about a dozen trainees whose prior careers included barnmaid, sheep breeder and bus driver.

Among moments of office whimsy (bowls of candy and photos of parties are pasted to the desks), there is the occasional crocodile Birkin or a Haut à Courroies made of Volynka leather salvaged from a 1786 shipwreck, which gave the space a pungent, smoky beef jerky scent.

When asked about potential designs on the horizon, Alexandre Spring demurred. In one corner of a workshop was a decades-old doctor bag she took from the Hermès archives for potential inspiration. Elsewhere in the workshop, ropes were coiled on a table. "Everything is a work in progress," she said. -- NYT