

HM sends message to UAE President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The message deals with the fraternal relations between Oman and the UAE. The message was handed over to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed by Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Oman's Ambassador to the UAE, when Shaikh Mohammed received him at the Sea Palace in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.



P12

OMAN FINISH THIRD IN CAFA NATIONS CUP 2023



P13

OMAN'S GDP AT CURRENT PRICES UP BY 7.4%



P18

BYADI AQRA: MAKING MORE READING MATERIALS ACCESSIBLE TO THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED



Eid holidays from June 27 to 29

MUSCAT: Eid Al Adha holiday 1444 AH for employees in the State's Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments of the private sector will start on Tuesday, Dhul Hijjah 9, 1444 AH, corresponding to June 27 (Tuesday). Work shall be resumed on July 2 (Sunday). The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday — if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work — provided they compensate the workers for the holiday. — ONA

HM RECEIVES AMBASSADORS' CREDENTIALS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received credentials from Guillermo Emilio Nielsen, Ambassador of Argentina to Oman, at Al Barakah Palace on Monday. His Majesty the Sultan also received credentials of ambassadors of Lithuania, Estonia, Ireland, Ghana, Finland, Uruguay and Sweden. REPORT ON P2

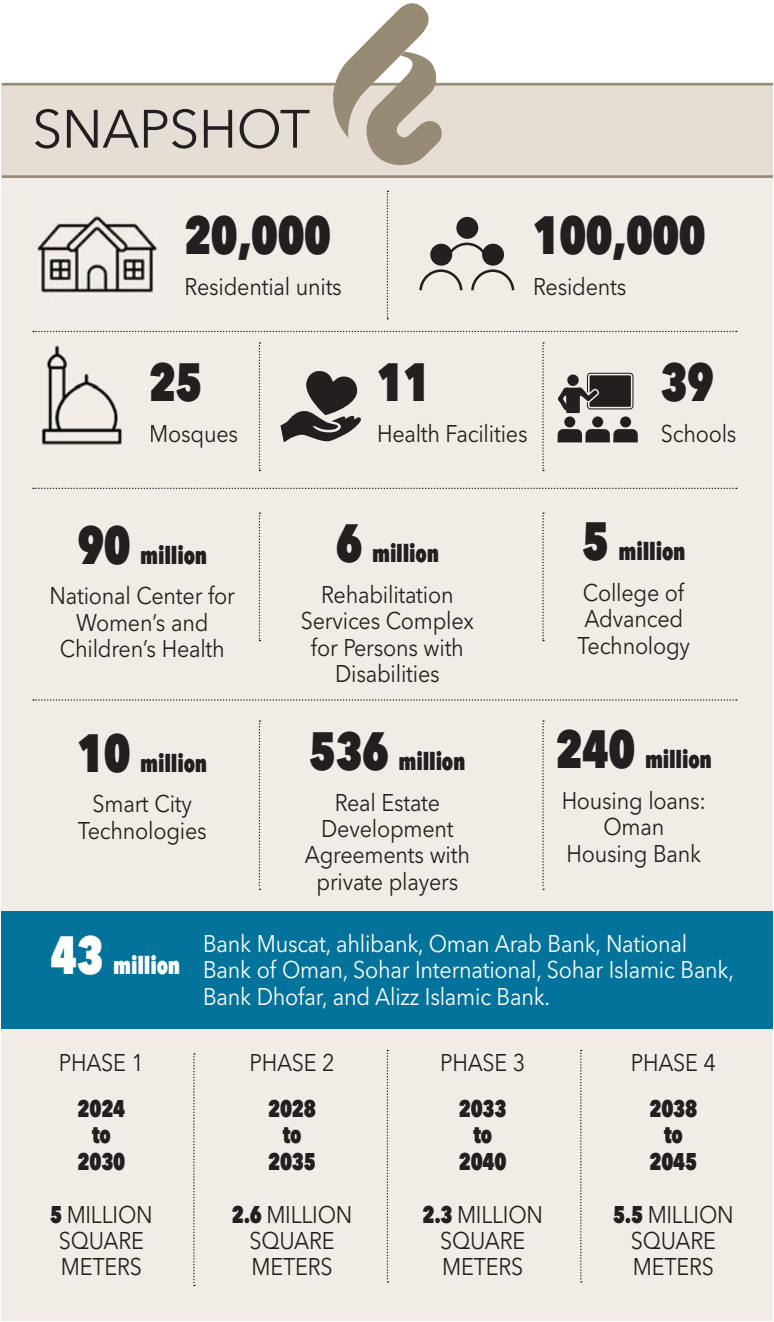
SULTAN HAITHAM CITY FIRST PHASE IN 6 YEARS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Sixty per cent of the contracts of the first phase of Sultan Haitham City have been approved, said Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning during the three-day media dialogue which started at Royal Opera House Muscat on Tuesday.

The event, which marked the commencement of a remarkable journey toward the creation of Sultan Haitham City, kicked off under the auspices of Dr Al Shueili, and Dr Abdullah Al Harrasi, Minister of Information. It showcases the ministry's commitment to sustainable urban development and prosperity for future generations, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The first day of the event witnessed a captivating media dialogue on Tuesday, an enlightening exhibition, and momentous signings of development and partnership agreements. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in collaboration with local and regional developers and institutions, embarked on the inaugural phase of Sultan Haitham City. This groundbreaking initiative will occupy an impressive 14.8 million square meters , featuring



sustainable urban planning that embraces the utilization of green spaces spanning 2.9 million square meters. Al Shueili underscored the city's commitment to embracing

all members of society, celebrating their diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and providing easy access to its wide range of social and recreational facilities, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

The master plan of Sultan Haitham City has been meticulously designed to offer a comprehensive array of housing options for Omani citizens.

To enhance ease of access and promote seamless mobility, Shueili highlighted the city's extensive network of connecting roads. This includes the incorporation of 23 different access points through the Muscat Expressway and Sultan Qaboos Street, ensuring efficient entry and exit while minimising congestion.

Moreover, the expansion of the existing main access points from Sultan Qaboos Street, the addition of bridges and underground sections, and the introduction of new intersections will facilitate smooth traffic flow. Notably, a new link will be established at the Muscat Expressway intersection towards Barka, and access will be improved through the construction of new intersections with Halban, developed in conjunction with Al Salam Street, and enhanced access from Mabela.

HM issues three Royal Decrees

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued three Royal Decrees reading as follows: Royal Decree No 40/2023 promulgates the Water and Wastewater Sector Regulation Law, after presenting the same before the Council of Oman.

Article (1) states that the provisions of the Water and Wastewater Sector Regulation Law attached to this decree shall be enforced.

Article (2) instructs the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) to issue the bylaws/regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the attached law. It states that, till such time, the existing bylaws/regulations shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of this law.

Article (3) stipulates that all those practicing any activities whose regulation is subject to the provisions of the attached law shall adapt their conditions to the law's provisions within 6 months from the date of its enforcement. This period may be extended for a further 6 months under a decision by the Board of

Royal Decree No (42/2023) on the issuance of first-class licence to Starlink Muscat Company for setting up and operating a satellite communications system to provide fixed public communication services.

Directors of APSR.

Article (4) cancels all that contradicts this decree and the attached law or contravenes their provisions.

Article (5) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing.

Royal Decree No (41/2023) on ratifying the Sultanate of Oman's joining the general agreement of railway linking the GCC countries.

Article (1) ratifies the Sultanate of Oman's joining the general agreement of railway linking the GCC countries according to the version attached to this decree.

TURN TO P4



HM receives ambassadors’ credentials



Eitydas Bajarūnas, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania



Ingrid Amer, Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia



Gerard Cunningham, Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received, separately, at Al Barakah Palace today credentials of Ambassadors of several countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors: Guillermo Emilio Nielsen, Ambassador of the Argentine Republic, Eitydas Bajarūnas, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania, Ingrid Amer, Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia, Gerard Cunningham, Ambassador of the Republic

of Ireland, Mohammad Habibu Tijani, Ambassador of the Republic of Ghana, Anu Eerika Viljanen, Ambassador of the Republic of Finland, Nelson Yemil Chaben Labadie, Ambassador of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay and Petra Menander, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Sweden.

During their sidelines meetings with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries’ leaders and their best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty. They

also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

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

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors,

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

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



Mohammad Habibu Tijani, Ambassador of the Republic of Ghana



Anu Eerika Viljanen, Ambassador of the Republic of Finland



Nelson Yemil Chaben Labadie, Ambassador of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay



Petra Menander, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Sweden



Copies of credentials of ambassadors received



David Velasquez Caraballo, Ambassador of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.



Bulgan Enkhtuvshin, Ambassador of Mongolia appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.



Mogobo David Magabe, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.



Archbishop Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin, Ambassador of the Vatican appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, received on Tuesday copies of credentials of ambassadors of several countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

The under-secretary received the following ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry in Muscat: Bulgan Enkhtuvshin, Ambassador of Mongolia, David Velasquez Caraballo, Ambassador of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela, Mogobo David Magabe, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa, Liselotte Plesner, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark, and Archbishop Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin, Ambassador of the Vatican. — **ONA**



Liselotte Plesner, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

HH Sayyid Bilarab leaves for Swiss Confederation

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of Promising Omani Start-ups Programme, left on Tuesday heading for the Swiss Confederation on a visit lasting several days.

The visit embodies the depth of trade and investment relations between Oman and Switzerland. The two countries' relations are marked by trends of cooperation and partnership developed over the ages in various business sectors.

The visit offers an opportunity to have a close look at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its affiliate institutions, notably the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC). HH Sayyid Bilarab and his accompanying delegation will develop further knowledge about the roles of those institutions and the measures of support and cooperation in their repertoire that can benefit Oman.

The visit also provides greater scopes for broader discussions with the ITC so that it could expand its cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on foreign trade and export issues. The ITC has a potential to consolidate Oman's export capacity, build relevant competencies and attract more investments to various promising sectors.

During the visit, HH Sayyid



Bilarab and his delegation will get in direct contact with a group of industrial companies, particularly those specialised in healthcare and pharmaceutical industries and the improvement of life quality. Partnership and investment opportunities will be discussed with some of those companies. The visit will help explore means of establishing joint projects in Oman.

In addition, the Omani delegation will study programmes of start-ups based in the Swiss Confederation and their experience in the field of business incubators and accelerators, notably in information technology and innovation sectors. It will conduct field visits to start-ups and their research centres. The delegation will also visit advanced technology centres where it will

discuss knowledge transfer from those companies and centres.

HH Sayyid Bilarab will be accompanied during the visit by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Halima bint Rashid al Zar'ee, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), and owners of Omani start-ups whose business is based on innovation and technology.

The delegation will also comprise working teams from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, ASMED, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development. — **ONA**

Sultan Qaboos Cancer Research Centre obtains international accreditation



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre has been awarded the certificate of international accreditation by the Joint Commission International (JCI). The certificate was issued after the centre succeeded in meeting conditions for international accreditation. The evaluation process comprises more than 250 basic criteria, along with more than 1,000 sub-components on measuring the quality and safety of a health service. — **ONA**

Council of Ministers appoints spokespersons

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said that the Council of Ministers decided to appoint spokespersons for service units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal persons/entities.

The minister pointed out that the step seeks to present, through the media, the visions of government departments in matters related to the services they render to society. He said that a spokesperson answers queries made by the press about

public services, besides dealing with issues raised in the media.

In a press statement, the minister said that a spokesperson would work in accordance with specific terms of reference to consolidate the relationship between his/her respective institution and the media. A spokesperson portrays the typical image of a government institution by appearing on all media and various platforms, the minister added.

Dr Abdullah affirmed that the Ministry of Information would



work towards developing training plans to enhance spokespersons' skills in dealing with the media. This is in addition to promoting all that relates to skills of high

professionalism, thus enabling the spokespersons to convey appropriate messages to the society and inform the media about the latest developments within the scope of a government unit where deemed necessary, said the minister.

Dr Abdullah explained that the appointment of spokespersons will contribute to informing the media and public opinion about the roles entrusted to government units in a manner that realises the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

— **ONA**

RO 200 fine: Cutting trees without permission is illegal

KABEER YOUSUF
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Cutting any tree, or uprooting green trees, saplings or living plants without permission is an offence. It will invite legal proceedings against the person involved, according to the Environment Authority.

"Anyone who needs to cut a tree should get official permission to do so, failing of which will attract jail between 10 days to three months, and a fine between RO 30 and RO 5,000 for either of these offences depending upon the nature and frequency of the same," a source from the Environment Authority (EA) said.

The statement followed an incident in Bidiya on Tuesday where the Royal Oman Police (ROP) apprehended some people

who cut several trees to sell without proper documents. The incident went viral on social media.

"No issue in cutting a tree if that is necessitated but they need to obtain a permit before going for cutting or selling." According to a circular issued by the EA, a fine of RO 200 will be imposed on all who cut green trees or gather and transport dry wood without a permit. Those who disobey the conditions of the permit are also subject to a fine of RO 50. Fines will be increased if the nature of the offence is recurrent.

Activities banned under the protection of trees and green plants also include, but not limited to, any act of cutting, uprooting or causing damage to any tree, shrub or herb from public forests without permission from the Authority is a



crime.

Removing any stone or uprooting trees, shrubs and herbs, or transporting soil and sand from watercourses, beaches, valleys, ponds, swamps, or public water drains, except with a permit from the Authority, is illegal and will attract action.

Anyone found to be engaged in any activity that harms the quantity or quality of the vegetation cover in any area that leads to desertification or distorts the natural environment will be subject to legal proceedings.

However, there is an exception to this. Cutting a tree is allowed in case a tree is to be cut for maintenance and sample collection work that is carried out in coordination with the Authority, the statement added.



Khareef season begins in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Salalah, known as the ‘Jewel of Gulf,’ is poised to captivate visitors with its natural splendour, vibrant culture and warm hospitality during the much-anticipated Khareef.

Starting on Wednesday, the Khareef season blankets the coastal regions of the Dhofar Governorate, creating a unique ambience until September 21.

The fall of Khareef is distinguished by characteristics like cloudy and rainy weather, accompanied by moderate temperatures. The high mountainous areas, enveloped in fog and gentle showers, create an ethereal atmosphere that sets Dhofar apart from other Arab Gulf states.

Organised by Dhofar Municipality, an exciting line-up of events and activities awaits visitors during the Khareef. Entertainment options are abundant, from the lively “Ateen Square” in the Ateen Plain to nostalgic activities in the Hafah area and the family-friendly “Kiddy Time” at Awqad Public Park. Nature and tourist sites will also host various engaging activities, ensuring a delightful experience for everyone.

Beyond the Khareef festivities, the Dhofar Governorate boasts a treasure trove of natural wonders and tourist attractions. With its diverse terrain encompassing marine, agricultural, mountainous, and desert landscapes and its inclusion of archaeological and historical sites on the prestigious



World Heritage List, Dhofar offers a captivating tapestry of experiences.

Dhofar is renowned for its agricultural bounty, featuring tropical delights like coconuts, bananas, fava beans and sugar cane. The region’s abundance of creeks, natural water sources, and cascading waterfalls during the rain-rich Khareef season, particularly in August, adds to its allure. Moreover, Dhofar is home to thriving natural reserves teeming with diverse animal and marine life.

To make the most of the Khareef season, planning a visit

to Salalah between July and August is advisable. During this period, the weather is ideal, with temperatures ranging from 20 to 25 degrees Celsius and humidity levels around 75 per cent.

Indulge in Salalah’s culinary delights by dining at the renowned Ittin Mountain Restaurants, where local cuisine takes centre stage. Specialities such as camel meat offer a taste of the region’s unique flavours and culinary traditions.

Adding to the allure of Salalah during the Khareef season is the Salalah Tourism Festival, organised by Dhofar Municipality. This immersive cultural event

showcases a plethora of festivities and celebrations across different locations in Salalah, offering a glimpse into the region’s rich heritage and traditions.

During the Khareef season, Salalah is an enchanting destination brimming with natural wonders, cultural festivities and warm hospitality. Whether you seek awe-inspiring landscapes, tantalising cuisine, or vibrant festivals, Salalah promises an unforgettable experience for all. Plan your visit during the Khareef season and let Salalah mesmerise you with its irresistible charm.

His Majesty issues three Royal Decrees

FROM PAGE 1

Article (2) stipulates that the departments concerned shall deposit the document of joining the abovementioned agreement as per its provisions.

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

Royal Decree No (42/2023) on the issuance of first-class licence to Starlink Muscat Company for setting up and operating a satellite communications

system to provide fixed public communication services.

Article (1) states that a first-class licence shall be issued in favour of Starlink Muscat Company for setting up and operating a satellite communications system to provide fixed public communication services according to the provisions of the licence attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Oman to host Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds

MUSCAT: Represented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate of Oman won the race to host the annual meeting of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF), scheduled to be held in the last quarter of 2024.

The host of the forum affirms the significance of OIA’s membership at the IFSWF, which is headquartered in London. The event offers an opportunity for attracting investments to Oman, since it brings together heads of the world’s largest sovereign wealth funds having a portfolio exceeding \$8 trillion, constituting 80 percent of the assets of sovereign wealth funds in the world.

The forum will generate prospects for building a network of relations with the funds and introduce them to the investment advantages offered by Oman. This enhances Oman’s global stature, brings in foreign capital and opens up vistas for building long-term investment relationships that will contribute positively to economic diversification.

The meeting will include discussions and points of view that benefit national human resources operating in the field of investment. The discussions will outline major investment

strategies, risk management and governance techniques and other technical and operational issues.

Nasser bin Suleiman al Harthy, Vice President of the Oman Investment Authority for Operations, said that the selection of Oman to host the meeting was unanimously approved by the forum members attending the annual meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan. It reflects the success of OIA’s efforts, which asserted its active participation in the meetings, hosting delegations and organizing workshops, said Al Harthy.

He explained that the meeting will be hosted by Oman for the first time, and it will be the first of its kind in the Middle East region after about 10 years since the forum’s last meeting in the region held in Qatar in 2014.

Oman’s membership in the forum enhanced OIA’s position among global sovereign funds and underlined its keenness on applying the norms, principles and rules of such international entities, he added.

OIA’s success stems from the fact that it obtained recognition from the forum due to its commitment to best governance practices, especially the “Santiago Principles”. — ONA

Japanese delegation visits Maritime Security Centre

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Ministry of Defence in Japan, headed by Miura Jun, Director-General for International Affairs of the Bureau of Defence Policy in the Japanese Ministry of Defence, visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) on Tuesday. During the visit, the delegation was briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety



of the maritime environment. The delegation also toured the

centre’s facilities and viewed its latest equipment and

technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA

Sultan Haitham City first phase in 6 years; will be built in four distinct phases

FROM PAGE 1

Sultan Haitham City will be built in four distinct phases. The first phase, spanning from 2024 to 2030, will witness the development of the city center, encompassing approximately 5 million square meters. This phase will feature six modern and integrated neighborhoods, covering a construction area of approximately 2.2 million square meters. The centerpiece of the city center will be the central park, spread over 1.6 million square meters to serve as a gathering place for residents and visitors alike. With more than 35,000 people, the city center will offer world-class facilities, including 6,743 housing units comprising detached villas, semi-detached villas, townhouses, and apartments. It will also house chapels, a private hospital, a fuel-filling station, school sites, and numerous social, cultural, and service facilities, catering to the diverse needs and aspirations of its residents.

The second phase, slated for implementation from 2028 to 2035, will cover an area of 2.6 million square meters, accommodating over 23,000 people. This phase will incorporate



4,200 housing units, with a total construction area of approximately 1.4 million square meters. The third phase, spanning from 2033 to 2040, will occupy an area of 2.3 million square meters and cater to more than 21,000 individuals. It will feature 3,500 housing units, covering a construction area of 1.3 million square meters.

The fourth and final phase, scheduled from 2038 to 2045, will encompass an expansive area of approximately 5.5 million square meters, accommodating over 26,000

people. This phase will introduce 4,500 housing units, spanning a construction area of approximately 1.9 million square meters.

Al Sueili indicated that the details of each stage have been determined, including the land area, the expected number of residents, housing units, and others. On Wednesday, more than 15 agreements worth RO 1.2 billion will be signed.

Anticipated to accommodate 100,000 residents, Sultan Haitham City will encompass a wide array of residential units. With meticulous



attention to architectural excellence and design, the city aspires to become a true landmark and a cherished gift from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to all segments of society, particularly the youth.

Comprising 19 neighborhoods equipped with comprehensive facilities and services catering to residents’ needs, Sultan Haitham City will have 25 mosques including a grand central mosque. The city will have 11 health establishments including two health centers accommodating 20,000 patients

each; six health centers for 10,000 patients each; a reference hospital with 1,200 beds; a private hospital and a specialized center for individuals with disabilities and the elderly. Education will also be a priority, with 39 schools spanning governmental, private, and inclusive institutions covering all educational levels.

The city’s master plan has been evaluated based on 12 international standards of quality of life and luxury living, ensuring a reasonable cost of living, integrated facilities, a modern

lifestyle, and sustainable systems.

On Wednesday, the “Seize Life Opportunities” investment and development forum will be held, offering a platform for fruitful discussions surrounding investments in cities and real estate.

The ministry will host a youth forum on Thursday, titled “Where Dreams Bloom.” This forum seeks to acquaint young individuals with the Sultan Haitham City, its architectural grandeur, and the tremendous opportunities it presents for their aspirations and growth.



Naseem Circus all set to mesmerise in Al Amerat

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

A circus is all set to open with spectacular performances, adventure acts and magic shows in Al Amerat. It is likely to open by the weekend, as preparations for it are in the final stages.

The circus will have a duration of 20 days at the Al Amerat Public Park. After that, it will move to Salalah for 40 days.

Naseem Circus will unveil mesmerising shows after its opening. “The circus’s line-up will feature an array of captivating performances, including thrilling displays by predatory animals including even majestic lions, under the expert guidance of renowned world champion trainer Muhammad Ali Kahramani. He will grace the stage alongside other creatures. Additionally, the acrobatic teams will showcase astonishing art forms, ensuring a show brimming with surprises,” said Al Naseem Group sources which is organising the circus.

The event is the brainchild of the Group’s CEO Dr Musab al Hinai. The innovative project promises to be a game-changer in the realm of entertainment.

He is the owner of Al Naseem Park Bahla, the village of Bilad Seet, which includes a zoo and a water park. He is working on two more zoo projects, one in Salalah and one more in Muscat, which, according to



company sources, will be the most diverse, massive and largest in the Gulf.

Very soon, he will open Salalah Water Park, which is the largest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

“In the course of my visits to countries, I explored their tourism projects, looked for

exceptional ideas and translated them into reality to support tourism in my country. Circus is among my priorities,” said Dr Al Hinai.

Acrobatic troupes and artists are carefully chosen from Iran, Portugal and South Africa.

MoE implements Central Training Programme for the Scientific Olympiad

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Innovation and the Scientific Olympiad, is implementing a central training programme for the Science Olympiad, which started on June 16 and ends on Thursday, June 22, with the participation of 43 students from the eighth and ninth grades in mathematics and science, to prepare them to participate in international competitions in the field of Olympiads through central training, and local competitions represented in the National Olympiads in the Sultanate of Oman.

The training period is a competitive time for students, as they are arranged according to the scientific level in each subject separately by the national trainers, through attendance, participation, homework assignments, accompanying activities and short tests. Students also receive 10 hours per day as an intensive training at this stage for a week in each subject. At the end of the training, a qualifying test is carried out to select outstanding students in each Olympiad, and to form national teams that



compete at the regional and global levels.

The training programme includes scientific tests dealing with non-stereotypical, innovative questions at the level of higher abilities in the four fields of mathematics (algebra, number theory, geometry and combinations) and in the fields of science (chemistry, physics and biology), in addition to practical training.

These training programmes aim to raise the achievement level of students, increase their demand for scientific disciplines, and form national teams of students from the

Sultanate of Oman that possess high skills and capabilities.

The central training programme for the Scientific Olympiad aims to contribute to the development of science and mathematics curricula, discover talented students at science and mathematics, invest their abilities, train them on higher skills questions to participate in regional and international Olympiads, and exchange knowledge and experiences in scientific subjects between schools and educational governorates in the Sultanate of Oman.

Competition protection to ensure growth

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JUNE 20

An awareness seminar discussing the roles of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre was held in the Nizwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry hall.

The seminar was held under the auspices of Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiab al Rubaie, Wali of Nizwa. It was organised by the Centre for Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention (CPMP) at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation with the OCCI Al Dakhiliyah branch.

The seminar comes as part of the centre’s awareness campaign ‘Protecting competition for a competitive economy’, which is touring the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. The campaign targeted businessmen, owners of small and medium enterprises, owners of factories, and owners of national products in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The media campaign aims to raise awareness of the role of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre and introduce the services it provides. It also covered provisions of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law and its executive regulations and spread



The campaign targeted businessmen, owners of small and medium enterprises, owners of factories, and owners of national products in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate

the legal culture to protect competition and prevent monopolies. The campaign also seeks to educate the public, including consumers, merchants and investors, on the provisions of the law and the principles of the free market in general for competitive markets for a competitive economy.

Zahrán bin Salím al Mahrouqi, Director-General of the Centre for Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention (CPMP) at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: “The symposium discusses the importance of competition and the risks of monopolies

as well as encouraging fair competition between companies and institutions. It also sheds light on the ministry’s efforts to protect monopolies and open competition for all.” Al Mahrouqi also pointed out the importance of the centre’s role in preparing statistical indicators, opening the market, preventing negative practices and monopolies, protecting competition and combating dumping in international trade.

The symposium featured various working papers that began with defining the services provided by the centre, presented by Marwa bint Rashid al Alawi, a legal affairs researcher at the centre. She defined the provisions of the Competition Protection Law and its executive regulations and presented a working paper on the prohibited practices in the Competition Protection Law.

Hazaa bin Nasser al Maamari, Director of the Center’s Economic Focus Department, presented a working paper on the acquisition and merger law. Bader bin Mubarak al Hajri, Head of the Anti-dumping Department at the Centre, presented a working paper defining and Harmful Practices Law. This was followed by a discussion and questions from the audience, moderated by Falah bin Ahmed al Ruqaishi, Director of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Royal Hospital first institution to perform rare rectal cancer surgery

KABEER YOUSUF
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With the introduction of colorectal surgery, the Royal Hospital has become the first institution to successfully perform a laparoscopic ultra-low resection with lateral pelvic lymph node dissection for a low-lying advanced rectal cancer utilising indocyanine green (ICG) and 3D technology.

This innovative surgical technique used by Dr Manar Nassr (pictured), Colorectal Surgeon, marks a significant advancement in the field of rectal cancer treatment.

The Laparoscopic ultra-low resection of rectal cancer with lateral pelvic lymph node dissection using ICG and 3D technology is performed for the first time in the Royal Hospital.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Manar said the colorectal unit is advancing in a minimally invasive approach for rectal cancer for complete curative resection and to overcome challenges related to the nature of the disease, narrow pelvic space, the proximity of major blood vessels with preservation of microscopic nerve fibres that affect the patients lifestyle after surgery.

“What sets this procedure at the Royal Hospital different is the integration

of two cutting-edge technologies, namely, indocyanine green (ICG) and 3D imaging,” said Dr Manar.

ICG is a fluorescent dye. When injected into the patient’s bloodstream, it selectively accumulates in cancerous and viable tissues. Surgeons use near-infrared light and special cameras to visualise the cancerous tissues and assess vascularisation of the colon highlighted by ICG, enhancing precision and accuracy during resection.

“Furthermore, the implementation of 3D technology provides surgeons with a detailed, three-dimensional view of the surgical site, enhancing their depth perception and spatial awareness. This helps to navigate complex anatomical structures and improve surgical outcomes,” Dr Manar added.

Furthermore, the colorectal surgery unit continues to achieve a significant milestones in keyhole surgeries using, where Dr Manar also performed several transanal minimal invasive surgery (TAMIS).

This approach has revolutionised the treatment of rectal growth and specific indication of early-stage cancer, leading to complete and safe resection, reduced pain, shorter hospital stays and faster recovery times.

اَجِيَال

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Notice and Invitation to Attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG (the “Company”) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Sunday at 03:00 PM on 09/07/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Extraordinary General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Extraordinary General Meeting shall be held on Wednesday at 03:00 PM on 12/07/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following agenda:

Extraordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve the proposal to commence bankruptcy proceedings in accordance with Article 69 and/or Article 71 of the bankruptcy law (Royal Decree No. 53/2019) (the Oman Bankruptcy Law) (as per the Explanatory Note).

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on
Telephone No. **99219419** or email: salah.farsi@soharpower.com

Chairman

Legal Advisor

External Auditor



Paris air show: India centre stage as another big jet deal lands

PARIS: India dominated the Paris Airshow for a second day on Tuesday, as Air India finalised a huge order for 470 planes from Airbus and Boeing.

The agreement, when sketched out in February, was the largest ever plane deal by number of aircraft. But it was surpassed on day one of the Paris show by Indian rival IndiGo's order for 500 Airbus narrowbody jets.

Finalising the deal puts it in the aerospace industry's order backlogs as firm orders. Until now, it was only a preliminary deal.

Efforts by Indian airlines to keep pace with the world's fastest-growing aviation market, serving the largest population, have sent industry records tumbling even though manufacturers are struggling to meet output goals due to supply chain snags.

Air India's deal includes 250 planes from Airbus and 220 from Boeing.

The buying spree by Indian airlines adds to signs of strong global demand for civilian aircraft as travel rebounds from the pandemic and airlines look to reduce their environmental impact with more fuel-efficient new models.

Demand has been hottest for short and medium-haul narrow-body jets, but engine maker Rolls-Royce said on Tuesday the market for long-haul wide-bodies was also coming back strongly.



Rahul Bhatia, Managing Director of IndiGo, and Guillaume Faury, CEO of Airbus, attend a news conference at the 54th International Paris Airshow at Le Bourget Airport near Paris. — Reuters

However, planemakers and their suppliers remain concerned about their ability to meet bulging order books amid rising costs, parts shortages and a scarcity of skilled workers.

Air India, with its maharajah mascot, was once known for its lavishly decorated planes and stellar service, but its reputation declined in the mid-2000s as financial troubles mounted.

Its renaissance under the Tata conglomerate aims to capitalise on India's growing base of fliers and large diaspora, currently mostly served by foreign rivals such as Emirates.

The mega-order will also put Air India on a stronger footing to compete with budget rival IndiGo, which has a majority share of the Indian market and a strong position in regional flights. — Reuters

West Bank toll rises with deaths of two Palestinians

JENIN: A Palestinian died on Tuesday from gunshot wounds sustained in an earlier Israeli raid, the Palestinian health ministry said after announcing another man was killed elsewhere in the occupied West Bank.

Amjad Aref Jaas "died from critical wounds to the abdomen sustained from live occupation (Israeli) fire" in the northern West Bank city of Jenin, a ministry statement said.

The 48-year-old's death raises to six the number of Palestinians killed in Monday's hours-long raid by Israeli troops, which wounded more than 90 Palestinians according to health officials.

Eight Israeli security personnel were wounded in Jenin, the military said.

Jaas's body was shrouded in a Palestinian flag in a Jenin mosque, before dozens of mourners including masked gunmen gathered for his funeral.

After the firefight ended on Monday, the Palestinian health ministry announced Israeli troops killed a 20-year-old near the West Bank city of Bethlehem.

Zakaria Mohammed al Zaoul was "martyred by live occupation (Israeli) bullets to the head, in the town of Husan", the ministry said.

The Israeli military said troops were "on routine activity" in the town when "a suspect hurled Molotov cocktails" at them.

"The soldiers responded with live fire. A hit was identified," it added.



Israeli military vehicles are seen in clashes with Palestinian gunmen during an Israeli raid in Jenin. — Reuters

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported the military used live fire, tear gas and stun grenades during the clashes with young Palestinians.

Meanwhile, a shooter killed four people on Tuesday near a settlement in the occupied West Bank, Israeli medics said.

"Four confirmed deceased by MDA paramedics" while four others were wounded in the shooting near Eli settlement, in the northern West Bank, the Magen

David Adom emergency services said in a statement.

UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland warned against changes decided upon by the Israeli government relaxing the procedures to authorise settlements in the occupied West Bank.

"I am deeply concerned by the Israeli Government's decision yesterday to alter settlement planning procedures that have been in place since 1996, which is expected to expedite settlement

expansion," a statement from Wennesland's office said.

Israel's planning authority meanwhile published on Sunday its agenda for a June 26 meeting, in which it is due to advance plans for the construction of over 4,500 new units in the West Bank.

The US State Department said it was "deeply troubled" by the announcement, and that it was "similarly concerned" by proposed changes to the settlement authorisation process. — AFP

International donors pledge \$1.5 billion in Sudan aid

GENEVA: International donors made pledges on Monday of close to \$1.5 billion in aid for Sudan and the surrounding region, about half of estimated needs for a deepening humanitarian crisis that has driven some 2.2 million people from their homes.

Though a 72-hour ceasefire has brought a lull in fighting in Khartoum since Sunday, residents reported that looting had surged as clashes subsided and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said gunfire had prevented the transfer of wounded soldiers to hospital.

In El Geneina, the worst hit city in Darfur, desperate residents have been trying to flee groups attacks, but face murder, detention as they set out on foot for the nearby border with Chad, witnesses and

aid workers say.

A fundraising conference in Geneva hosted by Germany, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and the United Nations was meant to drum up pledges to support relief efforts that have been hampered by ceasefire violations, looting and bureaucratic controls.

Donors announced close to \$1.5 billion in pledges, UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said, though it was not immediately clear if all the money was new or when it would be disbursed.

That included 200 million euros from Germany and \$171 million from the United States. The European Union said it had committed 190 million euros, and Qatar pledged \$50 million.

"This crisis will require sustained financial support and I



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk (C) delivers a speech at the opening of the 53rd UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. — AFP

hope that we can all keep Sudan at the top of our priorities," Griffiths said.

USAID chief Samantha Power said the US had contributed more than half the funding for Sudan.

The ceasefire that began on Sunday is the latest in a series of truce deals that have allowed for

the delivery of some humanitarian aid but failed to prevent the conflict from intensifying.

"Since the truce began, there has been a big increase in the rate of theft and looting of homes," Mohamed Motasem, a 34-year-old resident, said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was especially concerned by ethnic violence in Darfur. UN human rights chief Volker Turk said his office had received reports of violence against at least 53 women and girls. Turk said the RSF had been identified as the perpetrator "in almost all cases" and also named them in relation to looting, large-scale attacks in West Darfur and enforced disappearances, of which 394 cases had been reported in the Khartoum area alone — Reuters

DOHA

Qatar inks long-term gas supply deal

Qatar announced a second 27-year supply deal with a Chinese company on Tuesday as it expands production from the world's biggest natural gas field.

The agreement, to supply four million tonnes annually to the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), matches the terms of a November deal with China's Sinopec as the longest ever seen in the industry.

"Qatar will supply four million tonnes annually of natural gas from the North Field East



Expansion Project to China over a period of 27 years," Kaabi said.

Earlier this month, QatarEnergy agreed a 15-year supply deal with Bangladeshi state firm Petrobangla, and last month it awarded a \$10-billion contract to France's Technip Energies. — AFP

CAPE TOWN

Genocide fugitive Kayishema to seek asylum

Fulgence Kayishema, one of the fugitives sought over the 1994 Rwanda genocide, will apply for asylum in South Africa, where he has been living for two decades, his lawyer said.

Kayishema, one of four remaining fugitives sought by UN investigators for their role in the genocide, was arrested last month in the town of Paarl in South Africa's Cape. "My instructions are to apply for asylum in the Republic of South Africa which will indeed be



attended to before close of play today," lawyer Juan Smuts said.

The asylum application is likely to delay Kayishema's trial and "will suspend his extradition as envisaged," said the lawyer.

There have not been any formal extradition requests so far. — AFP

KAMPALA

Police arrest 20 in massacre of 42 dead

Police on Tuesday arrested 20 people, including the headmaster of the school in which 42 people, mostly children, were killed in a massacre, they said.

The detainees are suspected of collaborating with extremists, the police said. Uganda's police blamed rebels of the Congolese militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is said to have links to the Central African offshoot.

Almost all of the fatalities were children. Eight other pupils suffered serious burns



and gunshot wounds. Some of the students were killed with machetes, the military said.

In addition, the attackers abducted 15 girls and boys. Their fate is still unknown.

The military said it had pursued the attackers across the border into the DRC. — dpa



In brief

■ VIENNA



90 REPTILES FOUND IN LUGGAGE AT AIRPORT

Customs officers found almost 90 reptiles in the luggage of a passenger at Vienna airport. The 85 geckos, two snakes and two scorpions had a total retail value of \$51,400, the Ministry of Finance reported on Tuesday. The 50-year-old had flown from the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to Vienna. When he wanted to use the exit for travellers without goods to declare, he was checked. To their shock, the officials found an initially unmanageable amount of reptiles in three transport boxes, the ministry added. The animals, were handed over to Schönbrunn Zoo. — dpa

■ MADRID



COURT CHARGES PARCEL BOMB SUSPECT

A Spanish judge has charged a 74-year-old man suspected of sending several parcel bombs targeting government, diplomatic and defence industry institutions in late 2022 with two counts of aggravated terrorism, a high court document showed on Tuesday. Pompeo Gonzalez Pascual was arrested in January after allegedly sending six parcels with homemade explosives addressed to Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Defence Minister Margarita Robles, the embassies of Ukraine and the United States in Madrid. — Reuters

■ WASHINGTON



HUNTER BIDEN TO PLEAD GUILTY TO TAX CRIMES

US President Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden has agreed to plead guilty to two charges of wilfully failing to pay income taxes and to enter into an agreement that could enable him to avoid a conviction on a gun-related charge, according to a court filing on Tuesday. The federal charges against Hunter Biden resulted from an investigation by David Weiss, the US attorney in the Democratic president's home state of Delaware, who was appointed by Republican then-President Donald Trump. According to court filings, Hunter Biden received taxable income in excess of \$1.5 million in 2017 and 2018, but he did not pay income tax those years despite owing in excess of \$100,000. — Reuters

Germany's Scholz after meeting China's Li: Talks more crucial than ever

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Tuesday it was more important than ever to hold direct talks with China given the pile-up of global crises, but Germany would continue to seek to diversify trade away from Asia's rising superpower. Scholz has come under fire for hosting intergovernmental talks in Berlin with a large Chinese delegation led by Premier Li Qiang in the first face-to-face summit since the pandemic. Critics say these are not appropriate anymore given growing geopolitical tensions between the West and China. The talks came the same day the European Union's executive launched a bid to convince the bloc's 27 member states to agree to stronger controls on exports and outflows of technologies that could be put to military use by rivals like China.

Scholz defended his decision at a joint news conference with Li in Berlin — itself contentious for not allowing any questions from journalists. "Direct dialogue, personal talks, a real discussion — all of that is more important than usual in this unusual time full of global challenges and crises," the Social Democratic chancellor said. The Covid-19 pandemic,



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Chinese Premier Li Qiang hold a press conference during German-Chinese government consultations in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

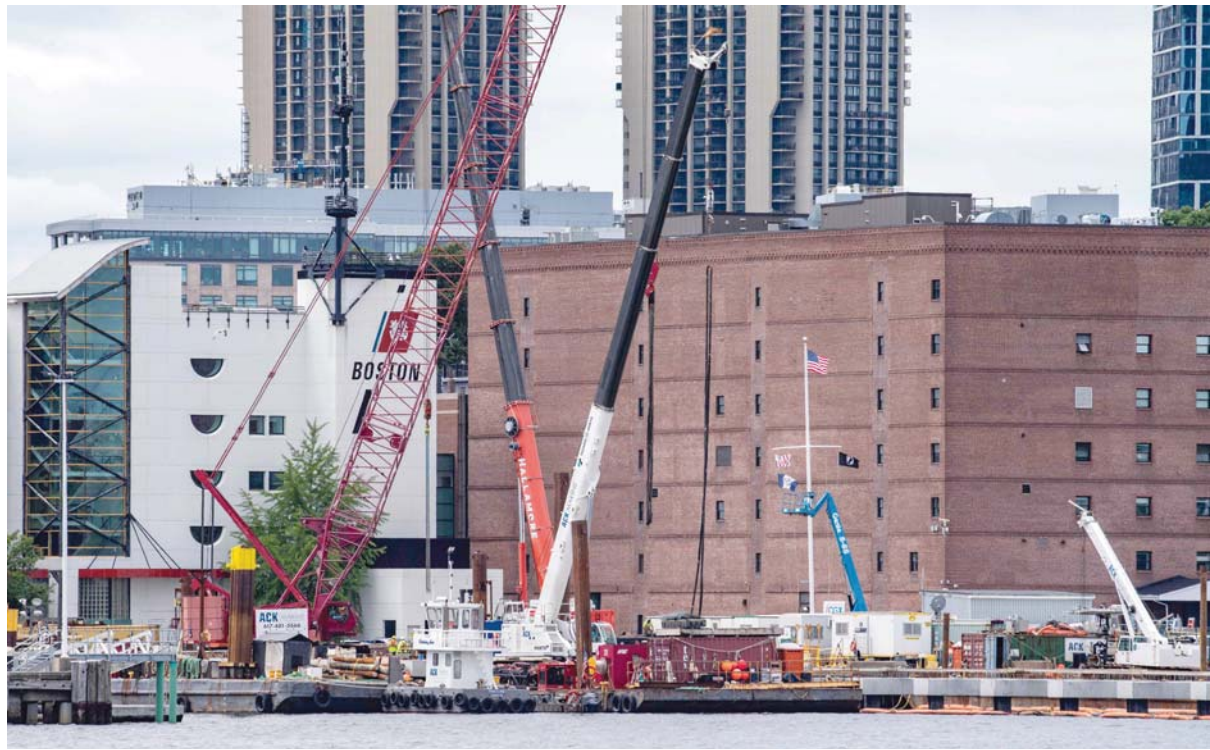
which disrupted supply chains worldwide, showed that Germany needed to work closely with China on a range of issues also including health, Scholz added. China is willing to work with Germany to take bilateral relations to a new level, said Li, noting the countries signed more than 10 cooperation agreements in areas including advanced

manufacturing and environmental protection during his visit. A third high-level Chinese-German dialogue on global financial matters will take place in Berlin later in the year, Scholz said — noting China had a key role to play in global finance given it was the world's largest bilateral creditor. "It allows us to discuss questions directly with one

another where we have different opinions and differences," he said. The talks come after a rare visit to Beijing by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was seeking to de-escalate US-Chinese tensions. Scholz said he had urged China to exert more influence on Russia over its attack of Ukraine, and to improve market access and fair competition for German

companies in China. China became Germany's single biggest trade partner in 2016 and is a core market for top German companies including Volkswagen, BASF and BMW. Companies, not governments, should take the lead on managing risk, Li told a meeting of top German CEOs on Monday. — Reuters

Titanic tourist sub still missing as rescuers race against time



Equipment and boats fill the docks at the the US Coast Guard Station Boston in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

BOSTON: Rescuers were in a race against time to find a missing submersible on Tuesday, two days after it lost communication while taking wealthy tourists to see the wreckage of the Titanic in deep waters off Canada's coast. One pilot and four passengers were on board the submersible that disappeared on Sunday. The operating company said it had the capacity to stay underwater for up to 96 hours — giving those aboard until early on Thursday before air ran out. US Coast Guard Rear Admiral John Mauger in television interviews on Tuesday said rescuers continued their efforts overnight and were expanding their search into deeper waters, telling NBC News that authorities were prioritising the area where the vessel was operating. Those aboard the submersible, the highlight of a tourist expedition that costs \$250,000

per person, included British billionaire Hamish Harding and Pakistani businessman Shahzada Dawood with his son Suleman. The 77-year-old French explorer Paul-Henri Nargeolet and Stockton Rush, founder and CEO of the vessel's US-based operating company OceanGate, were also reported to be on board. Authorities have not confirmed the identity of any passenger. "We are very grateful for the concern being shown by our colleagues and friends and would like to request everyone to pray for their safety," Dawood's family said on Tuesday. US and Canadian ships and planes have been sweeping the area about 1,450 km east of Cape Cod, some dropping sonar buoys that can monitor to a depth of 3,962 meters. Rescuers face significant challenges both in finding the Titan and in saving the people

aboard, according to experts. If the submersible experienced an emergency in mid-dive, the pilot would likely have released weights to float back to the surface, according to Alistair Greig, a professor of marine engineering at University College London. But absent any communication, locating a van-sized submersible in the vast Atlantic could prove challenging, he said. If the Titan is on the ocean floor, a rescue effort would be difficult due to the extreme conditions more than two miles below the surface. The Titanic lies 3,810 meters underwater, where light does not penetrate. Only specialised equipment can reach those depths without getting crushed by the massive water pressure. "It's really a bit like being an astronaut going into space," said Tim Matlin, a Titanic expert. — Reuters

EU proposes 50 bn-euro package to support Ukraine

BRUSSELS: Brussels on Tuesday asked EU member states to back a 50-billion-euro package to support Ukraine over the next four years, as part of a boost to the bloc's budget. "This financial reserve will allow us really to calibrate our financial support according to the evolution of the situation on the ground," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said. The proposal from the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, is aimed at helping prop up Kyiv's finances and covering immediate reconstruction costs caused by Russia's war. The money, 33 billion euros in loans and 17 billion in grants, is part of the review to plug gaps in the EU's budget for the period 2024-2027 left by the fallout of the Covid pandemic and the conflict. Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmygal thanked von der Leyen "for such steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine". The amount still could represent less each year than the 18 billion euros the EU has committed towards Ukraine government expenditures in 2023. Overall, the EU has already committed 30 billion euros from its budget to support the country since Russia's all-out attack in February 2022. The money for Ukraine is expected to be dependent on reforms to strengthen its



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gives a press conference at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

judiciary and tackle corruption that are intended to spur Kyiv along the path to joining the EU. The proposal comes ahead of a major donor conference in London this week on paying for Ukraine's reconstruction. The World Bank in March estimated Ukraine's long-term reconstruction costs at over 380 billion euros. As part of its budget review, Brussels is also asking for 15 billion euros more to help manage immigration and 10 billion euros to subsidise key industries. But the demands for a fresh injection of money will face some serious headwinds from EU countries still grappling with the consequences of the pandemic and war. All 27 member countries have to agree to increasing the budget. Leaders are set to kickstart the discussions at a summit next week. — AFP

The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Strategic and national visions are great examples of this yearning for a collective movement towards making socio-economic progress a new comfort zone from an older, less effective way of doing things. Progress in Oman Vision 2040's 12 national priorities is an impressive case in point as within 3 years it succeeded in setting 50 government agency plans in motion, monitored by 50 vision offices, 59 international benchmarks, 679 Key Performance Indicators or KPIs, 245 sub KPIs, in addition to 6 national programmes. At the citizen level, a closer look at this positive movement towards the 12 national priorities, and 6 national programmes show

Along with the 12 national priorities the vision

While internal, or interagency alignment is crucial for starting a vision, movement out of the comfort zone for public interest is even more crucial in making a real impact. Just as billions of animals around the world move out of their comfort zone to co-create a new comfort zone every day for their needs, I believe that vision implementers need to move forward, together and with even more confidence, all around world benchmarks to turn visions like Oman Vision 2040 into real impact. This could be in the form of an up 6-month international fellowship for vision implementers that can serve as a reminder that what really matters then of visions is its impact on our quality of life.



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Living with a chronic condition

Although all chronic diseases are not fatal, some of them do kill and persist throughout life causing long-term suffering to people who live with them. They may never go away but on the other hand, disrupt and change our life in a number of ways.

We are witnesses to how chronically ill patients face those challenges like disabilities, pain, distress, anger, hopelessness, frustration, anxiety, and in some cases social isolation and loneliness, in addition to the high expenditure involved in the treatments. Some diseases like diabetes linger over time and need intensive care.

But unfortunately, the prevalence of chronic disease is growing globally, not just because people everywhere are living longer than ever but due to increased disease prevalence among children and younger adults. People of all age groups, regions and countries are affected by NCDs.

A new report by World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that chronic diseases also known as non-communicable diseases or NCDs are claiming around three-quarters of all lives lost globally each year.

According to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, chief of the UN health agency, “The number sends a stark message on the threat of NCDs, which take an immense and increasing toll on lives, livelihoods, health systems, communities, economies and societies”.

At the global level, NCDs, which include heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes, claim the lives of around 41 million people each year, accounting for 71 per cent of the total deaths.

What makes it more alarming is that the NCD crisis, fueled by changing social, economic and structural factors including more



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The writer is a freelance journalist and author with nearly four decades of experience in newspapers and magazines in India and GCC

UNFORTUNATELY, THE PREVALENCE OF THE CHRONIC DISEASE IS GROWING GLOBALLY, NOT JUST BECAUSE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE ARE LIVING LONGER THAN EVER BUT DUE TO INCREASED DISEASE PREVALENCE AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNGER ADULTS

people moving to cities and the spread of unhealthy lifestyles, kills 15 million people prematurely every year. Modifiable behaviours, such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol, all increase the risk of these diseases.

The growth in the number of individuals with chronic diseases is likely to continue at the same existing trajectory. Over the next several decades, it is expected to worsen among all age groups.

The increasing toll of NCDs means that if the trend were to continue, says the WHO report, by around 2050, chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and respiratory illnesses will account for 86 per cent of the 90 million deaths each year.

This means a staggering 90 per cent increase in absolute numbers, since 2019! During the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, we found how the virus put a dangerous strain on the lives of people with chronic diseases. They faced worse clinical outcomes than an average patient!

During the period of the pandemic, people living with NCDs experienced difficulties even in accessing their routine medicines.

Hence there should be a long-term goal that can direct the health systems towards prevention. Instead of waiting until people have acquired irreversible conditions due to smoking, diet or lack of exercise, health personnel can help children and adults maintain a healthy lifestyle and address issues before they become incurable.

As reports suggest, physical inactivity is a key risk factor for NCDs. Recent estimates show that approximately 31 per cent of the world’s population does not get enough physical activity to protect their health.

A disease and consequent death of a loved one, especially if one dies prematurely, can create numerous psychological issues, particularly if the loss is unexpected!

NOT A BIRD, IT IS A TAXI



The VoloCity air taxi is seen flying during a demonstration at the Paris Le Bourget Airport, on Tuesday. – AFP

Your brain has tricked you into thinking everything is worse



Adam Mastroianni

BUT I BELIEVE THERE’S A BUG — A SET OF COGNITIVE BIASES — IN PEOPLE’S BRAINS THAT CAUSES THEM TO PERCEIVE A FALL FROM GRACE EVEN WHEN IT HASN’T HAPPENED

We first collected 235 surveys with over 574,000 responses total and found that, overwhelmingly, people believe that humans are less kind, honest, ethical and moral today than they were in the past. People have believed in this moral decline at least since pollsters started asking about it in 1949, they believe it in every single country that has ever been surveyed (59 and counting), they believe that it’s been happening their whole lives and they believe it’s still happening today.

Respondents of all sorts — young and old, liberal and conservative, white and Black — consistently agreed: the golden age of human kindness is long gone.

We also found strong evidence that people are wrong about this decline. We assembled every survey that asked people about the current state of morality: “Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?”, “Within the past 12 months, have you volunteered your time to a charitable cause?”, “How often do you encounter incivility at work?” Across 140 surveys and nearly 12 million responses, participants’ answers did not change meaningfully over time.

When asked to rate the current state of morality in the United States, for example, people gave almost identical answers between 2002 and 2020, but they also reported a decline in morality every year.

Other researchers’ data have even shown moral improvement. Social scientists have been measuring cooperation rates between strangers in lab-based economic games for decades, and a recent meta-analysis found — contrary to the authors’ expectations — that cooperation has increased 8 percentage points over the last 61 years. When we asked participants to estimate that change, they mistakenly thought cooperation rates had decreased by 9 percentage points. Others have documented the increasing rarity of the most heinous forms of human immorality, like genocide and child abuse.

Two well-established psychological phenomena could combine to produce this illusion of moral decline. First, there’s biased exposure: People predominantly encounter and pay attention to negative information about others — mischief and misdeeds make the news and dominate our conversations.

Second, there’s biased memory: The negativity of negative information fades faster than the positivity of positive information. Getting dumped, for instance, hurts in the moment, but as you rationalise, reframe and distance yourself from the memory, the sting fades. The memory of meeting your current spouse, on the other hand, probably still makes you smile.

When you put these two cognitive mechanisms together, you can create an illusion of decline. Thanks to biased exposure, things look bad every day. But thanks to biased memory, when you think back to yesterday, you don’t remember things being so bad. When you’re standing in a wasteland but remember a wonderland, the only reasonable conclusion is that things have gotten worse.

That explanation fits well with two more of our surprising findings. First, people exempt their own social circles from decline; in fact, they think the people they know are nicer than ever. This might be because people primarily encounter positive information about people they know, which our model predicts can create an illusion of

improvement. Second, people believe that moral decline began only after they arrived on Earth; they see humanity as stably virtuous in the decades before their birth. This especially suggests that biased memory plays a role in producing the illusion. If these cognitive biases are working in tandem, our susceptibility to golden age myths makes a lot more sense. Our biased attention means we’ll always feel like we’re living in dark times, and our biased memory means we’ll always feel like the past was brighter. Seventy-six per cent of Americans believe, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center poll, that “addressing the moral breakdown of the country” should be one of the government’s priorities. The good news is that the breakdown hasn’t happened. The bad news is that people believe it has. As long as we believe in this illusion, we are susceptible to the promises of aspiring autocrats who claim they can return us to a golden age that exists in the only place a golden age has ever existed: our imaginations.

— The New York Times

sport

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SAKA TREBLE HELPS ENGLAND THRASH NORTH MACEDONIA 7-0 IN EURO QUALIFIER

England's Bukayo Saka celebrates scoring their fifth goal and his hat-trick. — Reuters

MANCHESTER: England's Bukayo Saka netted a hat-trick in a 7-0 rout of North Macedonia as they tightened their grip atop Group C in Euro 2024 qualifying on Monday with a fourth consecutive victory.

Captain Harry Kane, with his 57th and 58th goals for his country, Marcus Rashford and Kalvin Phillips all scored at Old Trafford in a game the hosts dominated as predicted.

"This is a feeling I can't really put into words. There's nothing I can say to describe it. I'm just so happy," Saka told Channel 4.

Manager Gareth Southgate revealed that Saka's tremendous performance had come despite a nagging Achilles injury.

"He's had it for a few weeks," Southgate told a news conference. "It is an injury that just needs managing... when you've had one of the best nights of your life, it's a reminder that it's worth going through these things."

England look set for next year's finals after amassing a perfect 12 points, having also beaten Ukraine, who are second on six points from three matches, Italy and Malta.

Saka's scoring heroics came in a flurry straddling halftime.

His first goal in the 38th minute was an angled shot into the top corner. His second just after the break came after he chested the ball down and struck a left-foot volley.

Saka completed his treble in the 51st after running on to a through ball from Kane and then was swamped by joyous team mates.

Southgate wrapped the grinning 21-year-old in a bear hug when he was substituted minutes later.

Saka, who left the pitch after the final whistle clutching the game ball, is the first Arsenal player to score a hat-trick for England, and the youngest since Theo Walcott in 2008 against Croatia.

On the heels of a brilliant season for Arsenal, Monday also marked a high after he missed the decisive penalty kick in a shootout loss to Italy in the 2020 Euro final — held in 2021.

"It's been a really long season. I couldn't have ended it in a better way," Saka said. "Time to relax and have a break. We're really

happy with the way the fans turned out and supported us."

Kane opened the scoring in the 29th minute and the Tottenham star added a second with a second-half penalty kick. Rashford tapped in a cross from Jordan Henderson just before halftime, while Manchester City's Phillips scored in the 64th minute.

"Tonight was a really special display that we put out," Saka said. "Of course, with me and (Rashford) running down the wings, we were really direct and they couldn't really handle us. I enjoyed playing out there today."

Three days after their 4-0 away win over Malta, the thrashing of North Macedonia added to England's dominant run of Euro qualifying that stretches back to 2016. They have won their last 12 home qualifiers by an aggregate score of 47-4.

England next play Ukraine on Sept. 9 when fourth-placed North Macedonia, who are struggling to match their qualifying high of Euro 2020 and have three points from three matches, host Italy. The Italians are third with three points from two games.

— Reuters

Record-breaker Mbappe leads France to 1-0 win over Greece

PARIS: France striker Kylian Mbappe scored to set another milestone as his side maintained their perfect record in Euro 2024 qualifying Group B with a 1-0 home victory against Greece who finished with 10 men after a late sending off on Monday.

Mbappe netted a second-half penalty to become the all-time leading French scorer over a season with 54 goals for club and country, beating the mark set by Just Fontaine in 1957-58.

It also helped the Paris St Germain forward to move level with Manchester City striker Erling Haaland, who has the chance to finish as top scorer among those playing in the five main European leagues when Norway face Cyprus on Tuesday.

The result left France top with 12 points, six ahead of second-placed Greece, who had Konstantinos Mavropanos sent off in the 69th minute after Mbappe's 55th minute spot kick.

"It was a long season for the players," said France coach Didier



France's forward Kylian Mbappe (R) reacts as Greece's midfielder Manolis Siopis falls during the UEFA Euro 2024 group B qualification football match between France and Greece at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, in the northern outskirts of Paris. — AFP

Kounde's volley to be tipped away by Odysseas Vlachodimos.

The hosts were finally awarded a penalty early in the second half after Antoine Griezmann, looking to connect with a cross from the left, was hit in the head by Mavropanos.

Vlachodimos parried Mbappe's spot kick but it had to be taken again as the keeper had left his goal line too early.

Mbappe found the top corner on his second attempt to score his 40th goal in his 70th international and Greece's hopes were further dashed when Mavropanos picked up a straight red card when he took down Kolo Muani, who was rushing towards goal.

After Saturday's win over Gibraltar, France have now scored nine goals and kept clean sheets in all four qualifying games.

They next face third-placed Ireland, who have three points from three games, at home on September 7 when Greece travel to the Netherlands, who are fourth with three points from two matches.

— Reuters

Deschamps. "We did what we had to to win this game even if we can regret we did not score another because you never know what can happen late in the game.

"We wanted to follow up on our

win against Gibraltar, in front of our crowd," said midfielder Eduardo Camavinga, referring to France's 3-0 win on Friday.

"We knew they were a tough nut to crack but we did the job, three

points without conceding a goal. Now, straight to holidays."

Randal Kolo Muani had a clear chance in the 25th minute with a downward header from Mbappe's cross but his attempt went just wide.

It came after earlier opportunities for Mbappe and Kingsley Coman but the offensive trio hit a brick wall.

After having three penalty claims denied, Les Bleus had another chance to score, only for Jules

Broad revives England’s victory bid in Ashes opener

BIRMINGHAM: England’s Stuart Broad took two late wickets on Monday to pile pressure on Australia as the opening Ashes Test at Edgbaston headed for a dramatic finish.

Australia were making steady progress at 78-1 in pursuit of a victory target of 281 when veteran paceman Broad removed both Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith — the world’s two top-ranked Test batsmen — to leave the Ashes holders 89-3.

At stumps, the world Test champions were 107-3, still needing a further 174 runs to win on Tuesday’s final day.

But Usman Khawaja, who ended his decade-long wait for an Ashes hundred in England with 141 in Australia’s first-innings 386, was still there on 34 not out.

The left-handed opener is now set to become only the second Australian, after Kim Hughes against England at Lord’s in 1980, to bat on all five days of a Test.

Broad said he was optimistic conditions on Tuesday would favour England’s quicks.

“I think there is supposed to be a bit of cloud around tomorrow,” he told Sky Sports. “We saw how much it zipped around when there was the cloud the other day.”

Broad, who has taken 2-28 in nine overs, added: “We feel pretty confident we can go and get seven (more) wickets.”

Khawaja should have been out to just the fifth ball of the innings when he edged James Anderson



but neither wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow or first slip Joe Root moved for the catch.

Together with fellow opener David Warner he then settled in on a pitch previously dubbed “soulless” by Broad.

But the breakthrough England needed came when Warner fell for

36, with Ollie Robinson’s superb seaming delivery taking the outside edge on its way to Bairstow.

Labuschagne, out for a golden duck in the first innings, reverse-swept fours off successive deliveries from off-spinner Moeen Ali. Broad, however, proved his undoing on 13 when he poked

Cricket’s oldest rivalry

England	Australia
108 wins	140 wins
92 draws	92 draws
903-7 The Oval 1938	729-6 Lord’s 1930
364 Len Hutton, The Oval 1938	334 Don Bradman, Leeds 1930
12 Jack Hobbs	19 Don Bradman
3,636 Jack Hobbs	5,028 Don Bradman
131 Stuart Broad	195 Shane Warne



outside off stump and was caught behind. Smith fell in similar fashion for just six to the raucous delight of the crowd.

Australia sent in Scott Boland rather than specialist batsman Travis Head and the nightwatchman was 13 not out at the close. Cummins and Lyon strike. Earlier, Australia captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon took four wickets each in England’s second-innings 273. There were times when England looked as if

they might build an impregnable lead. But their desire to bat in the aggressive ‘Bazball’ style that has proved destructive to opponents in a run of 11 wins in 13 Tests cost them several wickets on this occasion. England were also up against an impressive attack, fast bowler Cummins leading the way with 4-63 and off-spinner Lyon taking 4-80.

Lyon’s haul included the key scalps of Root and Harry Brook, both out for 46, as he closed in on

500 Test wickets.

England had resumed on 28-2, with both Ollie Pope and Root, who made an unbeaten 118 in the hosts’ first-innings 393-8 declared, yet to get off the mark.

Root signalled his intentions from the very first delivery, when he failed to make contact with an audacious reverse scoop off Cummins, the ball just missing his off stump.

The former England skipper was undaunted and reverse-ramped seamer Boland for six in the next over. But Cummins hit back when he bowled Pope (14) with a thunderbolt yorker.

“As a felder, it looks a bit nerve-racking, but the bowlers held their nerve and hit their lengths,” Warner told the BBC.

“Their batters are going to make some errors at times and I think our bowlers did a fantastic job today.” Lyon struck when the advancing Root slogged and missed, with wicketkeeper Alex Carey completing a neat legside dismissal as the star batsman was stumped for the first time in his Test career.

Australia were then rewarded for keeping Brook tied down when he miscued a pull off Lyon to midwicket.

Stokes also fell in the 40s, lbw to Cummins for 43.

Australia were now into England’s tail but the last two wickets added 44 runs before Anderson edged behind off Cummins. — **AFP**



New Warriors GM says ‘we have to have’ Green next NBA season

SAN FRANCISCO: New Golden State Warriors general manager Mike Dunleavy Jr. said on Monday the club wants four-time NBA champion Draymond Green to return after reports he will opt out of his contract.

Green will decline his player option for a \$27.6 million deal next season, ESPN and The Athletic reported, in order to become an unrestricted free agent.

Dunleavy Jr., a former Warriors player whose father was an NBA player and coach, was named on Friday to replace Bob Myers, who said last month he was stepping down after assembling a squad that won NBA titles in 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2022.

“Until we get the paperwork and the file, we can’t really comment or say too much,” said Dunleavy, who then made it clear that keeping Green is a priority, something Warriors coach Steve Kerr has already declared.

“We really want Draymond back,” said Dunleavy. “What he means in terms of this

organisation and this team, winning at the highest level, we feel like we have to have him. So that’s very important.”

Green, a 33-year-old forward, is a four-time NBA All-Star and 2017 NBA Defensive Player of the Year. He punched teammate Jordan Poole at training camp in a spat that hung over the club much of the season.

Green averaged 8.5 points, 7.2 rebounds, 6.8 assists and 1.0 steals a game last season, when defending champion Golden State lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in the second round of the playoffs.

Dunleavy likes the Warriors’ chances of remaining competitive despite an aging roster and salary cap issues, citing the desire of majority owner Joe Lacob to put a winner on the floor.

“A lot can be made of all the challenges that are coming our way, whether it be aging roster, the new CBA (collective bargaining agreement) with some of the limitations there, anything else you can bring up,” Dunleavy said. — **AFP**

Kontaveit to retire at 27 after Wimbledon

PARIS: The former second-ranked women’s tennis player Anett Kontaveit announced on Tuesday that she would be retiring in July after Wimbledon because of a back injury.

“Today I am announcing that I am ending my career as a competitive athlete,” the 27-year old Estonian posted on Instagram.

“After several doctor’s visits and consultations with my medical team, I have been advised that I have lumbar disc degeneration in my back. This does not allow for full-scale training or continued competition. Therefore, it is impossible to continue at the top level in such a highly competitive field,” she wrote

Kontaveit, ranked 79th in the world, reached the WTA’s No. 2 ranking in June 2022. Her best



FILE PHOTO: Poland’s Magda Linette in action during her second round match against Estonia’s Anett Kontaveit. — **Reuters**

performance in a Grand Slam event was a quarterfinal at the 2020 Australian Open.

“Tennis has given and taught

me a lot, and I am very grateful for that,” she wrote. “It has been important for me to bring the Estonian flag to the tennis courts

and to be able to play in front of my supporters and fans all over the world.”

Kontaveit made her debut in the main draw at a WTA tour event in Miami in 2013. She won six tournaments including four in 2021. Her last title was in St Petersburg in 2022.

Since losing the final in Tallinn last October, she has not progressed beyond the second round in eight tournaments.

She will bow out at Wimbledon, where she has never advanced beyond the third round. The tournament starts on July 3.

“I am ready for new challenges after my last effort as a professional tennis player — to enjoy the game and compete as hard as I can at Wimbledon,” she wrote. — **AFP**

Pakistan footballers to play in India

KARACHI: Pakistan’s national team players have been given visas for India, officials said, where they will take on the hosts on Wednesday in their first match on Indian soil since 2014.

The South Asian neighbours will kick off the South Asia Football Federation (SAFF) Championship.

The two countries rarely play home matches against each other in any sport due to long-running political tensions made worse by the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008.

The participation of Pakistan in the Bengaluru event has raised hopes Islamabad will take part in the ICC World Cup cricket tournament hosted by India later this year, having earlier threatened to boycott the event.



“As devoted sportsmen, we understand the power of sports in transcending political boundaries and fostering strong relationships between nations,” Pakistan captain Yousaf Butt said.

He was speaking from Mauritius, where Pakistan has

taken part in a four-nation event.

“We will put in a worthy performance despite zero sleep and jetlag — and off the field will try to win hearts to ease the tension.” The 32-strong touring party only received their visas late on Monday.

The last time Pakistan played football in India was in 2014, when they drew a two-match series, but they also faced off in the SAFF Championship in Bangladesh in 2018, with India winning 3-1.

Football is popular in both nations but dwarfed by cricket. Despite the millions in revenue bilateral cricket matches would earn, the last time they played on home soil was when Pakistan toured India for five limited-overs matches in 2012.

The eight-nation SAFF Championship kicks off on Wednesday, with Pakistan in Group A alongside India, Kuwait, and Nepal, and Group B featuring Lebanon, Maldives, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. The final is scheduled for July 4. — **AFP**

Oman finish third in CAFA Nations Cup 2023



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Oman placed in the third position at the Central Asian Football Association (CAFA) Nations Cup 2023, after defeated Kyrgyzstan 1-0, on Tuesday at Pakhtakor Central Stadium in the third and fourth playoff.

The match goal was scored

by Arshad al Alawi in the 71th minute of the match. With the triumph, Oman team players bagged the bronze medals in the tournament which ended in Uzbekistan on Tuesday after ten days of thrilling competitions. The goal registered by Al Alawi as he received a golden pass inside the box from Salah al Yahyaee and then he converted the ball into the net before the

match end by 19 minutes. The head coach of the Oman national team, Branko Ivankovic, began the third and fourth playoff fixture against Kyrgyzstan with a starting line-up that featured slight changes including Ibrahim al Mukhaini as goalkeeper. Mahmood al Mushaifri, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi and Ahmed al Kaabi were in the back side

as defenders. The experienced Harib al Saadi was monitoring the middle line besides Abdullah Fawaz, Arshad al Alawi and Salah al Yahyaee. Al Mohsin al Ghassani and Abdul Rahman al Mushferi were the two attackers in the front. Red Warriors finished the group stage as runners up with four points from one victory against Turkmenistan 2-0, a



1-1 draw with Tajikistan and suffered to a 3-0 loss against the hosts Uzbekistan in the opener. The CAFA Nations Cup 2023 acted as a golden opportunity for preparing to the forthcoming crucial assignments including in AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals and the qualifiers for Asian teams on road to the Fifa World Cup 2026 as well as the AFC Asian Cup 2027. The

conclusion of the CAFA Nations Cup, Oman team will be in a break during the summer. The players will report back to their training in August as the new season of 2023/2024 will begin before August end. The next abroad camp of the Red Warriors will begin in September as Oman will meet with USA team on September 12.

Chelsea sign France forward Nkunku from RB Leipzig



LONDON: Chelsea sealed their swoop for France forward Christopher Nkunku from RB Leipzig in a deal worth a reported £63 million (\$80 million) on Tuesday. Nkunku had already agreed a pre-contract with the Premier League club in December and has now rubber-stamped his move to Stamford Bridge. The 25-year-old has put pen to paper on a lucrative six-year contract with the Blues, who are embarking on a close-season overhaul as they look to bounce back from a dismal campaign. "Chelsea is delighted to announce Christopher Nkunku will join the club from RB Leipzig ahead of the 2023/24 season," a statement on the Blues' website said. Nkunku is one of the rising stars of European football and scored 23 goals in 36 games for Leipzig last season. He is the first major signing since Mauricio Pochettino was confirmed as Chelsea's new manager at the end of May.

"I am incredibly happy to be joining Chelsea. A big effort was made to bring me to the club," Nkunku said. "I am looking forward to meeting my new coach and team-mates and showing the Chelsea supporters what I can do on the pitch." Nkunku, a graduate of the famed French national football academy at Clairefontaine, spent four years at Paris Saint-Germain before moving to Leipzig in 2019. He made his name with the German club and was voted Bundesliga player of the season in 2021-22 after scoring 20 goals and providing 15 assists in the league. The versatile forward bagged a further 23 goals this season to help Leipzig secure a third-place finish in the Bundesliga and scored in their German Cup final win against Eintracht Frankfurt. Creativity and versatility Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley, Chelsea's co-sporting directors, said: "Christopher has proved himself one of the

standout attacking players in European football over the past two seasons and will add quality, creativity and versatility to our squad." Nkunku earned his France debut last year and has been capped 10 times. He was ruled out of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar with a leg injury. "Having played in Ligue 1 and the Bundesliga, I now want to play in the Premier League, one of the strongest leagues in the world," Nkunku said. "I am very excited for this challenge and will be proud to wear the Chelsea shirt." Bidding farewell to Leipzig, Nkunku wrote a heartfelt message on the club's website: "Now it's time for me to say 'Au Revoir' Leipzig. I am incredibly grateful to RB Leipzig and everyone at the club - my team, the coaching staff, the staff and most importantly the fans. I had four years in Leipzig which I will never forget," he said. — AFP

Venus Williams rolls back the years to win Birmingham opener

BIRMINGHAM: Venus Williams clinched her first victory over a top-50 opponent in four years as the former world number one defeated Camila Giorgi in the WTA event in Birmingham on Monday. Ignoring a knee problem that needed treatment in the first set and left her close to tears, Williams won a singles match for the second time in nearly two years. The 43-year-old battled to a 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) first round win over world number 48 Giorgi in three hours and 16 minutes. Williams had played a grass-court event in the Netherlands last week for her first tournament appearance since January and she was understandably rusty at times against Giorgi. But the five-time Wimbledon champion also hit her stride in spells during an enthralling

encounter. She converted her second match point in the final set tie-break, holding her arms aloft and repeatedly pumped her fist as the crowd roared in delight. Williams might be well into the twilight of her glittering career, but the seven-time Grand Slam champion still relishes the feeling of winning a hard-fought match. "This one is especially sweet because I have been away from the tour for so long," she said. "The last couple of years I've had little to no matches and that's very challenging. "I almost feel like when I'm on the court I'm reminded of things I used to do that worked really well, so there's a lot of memories and deja vu." Williams faces a last-16 tie against the Czech Republic's Linda Noskova or Latvian second seed Jelena Ostapenko. "Tennis is awesome. There's

so many people that would love to do what I'm doing right now so I don't take it for granted," Williams said. "I faced some huge challenges in the match. I think that brought the emotion out." There were different emotions for another former top-10 player returning to grass, with Elina Svitolina beaten 6-2, 6-0 by Czech 18-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova in less than an hour. Svitolina made a brilliant comeback on clay following the birth of daughter Skai last October, reaching the quarter-finals of the French Open, but the 28-year-old was unable to find her feet on the grass. "I was struggling at the beginning and obviously on the grass you have no time to adjust. For me, it didn't happen today but I'll go on the practice court and try to do better next time," she said. — AFP





Oman signs LNG supply pact with Bangladesh

By signing this agreement, both Sultanate of Oman and Bangladesh affirm their commitment to enhancing collaboration in the energy sector.

This increase was also supported by the growth of oil activities with 6.1 per cent at the end of Q1 2023, amounting to RO 3.585 billion, compared to RO 3.379 billion at the end of Q1 2022.

Auction No.	Description	Location/ Inspection	Last Date for Obtaining Auction Documents	Deadline for submission of Offers	Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)	Deposit Amount (RO)
01/2023	Sale of Scrap	Different Locations	12/07/2023	01/08/2023	26/250	1,000/-

- The interested company should provide Copy of Valid **CR & Be'ah Registration** Showing activity in the same field.
- Interested companies may obtain Documents from Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC) at Al Mawaleh against the non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document and deposit to OETC account after getting approval.
- Interested Company should deposit the above mentioned amount for each Auction OETC Bank account and enclose the receipt along with the auction documents. Failing to do so the offer will be rejected.
- The Offers should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to Chairman of the Minor Tender Committee mentioning Auction Number and subject on the top of the envelope. No other writing or any reference should be mentioned on the envelope. The offer shall be valid for 90 days from the date of submission.
- The deposit amount will be returned to the unsuccessful bidders after awards announcement and to the successful bidders after receiving full payment and removal of Equipment within in time limit as mentioned below.
- The Winning Bidder shall pay for the value of the Scrap materials by transfer to OETC bank account within **One Week** of the date of notification to him.
- The Winning Bidder is bound to transfer the materials no later than **One Week** from the date of sale notification and payment. In case of its failure to transfer the materials in the period specified the bidder company is not entitled to claim compensation and the bank deposited amount will be forfeited.
- OETC is not responsible for the sold materials after the payment and expiration of the deadline for delivery.
- OETC is not bound to sell the entire materials to a single buyer.
- The Winning Bidder shall be responsible for all risks during transfer or reuse of the materials.
- The Auction area shall be cleaned after transfer the materials.
- The Offer should be deposited in the Tender Box (1) of the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department at the Company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission.



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Malabar Gold & Diamonds renews association with NTR Jr as brand ambassador

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 320 showrooms across 11 countries, has signed mass superstar Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao Jr also known as NTR Jr as its newest brand ambassador.

NTR Jr will be featured in the upcoming consumer campaigns of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. A prolific actor and a pan-India mass superstar attracting global attention, NTR Jr reflects the core values of the group i.e., trust, transparency, and excellence with his affable and grounded persona.

The second innings of NTR Jr as the brand's ambassador will make Malabar Gold & Diamonds 30th anniversary even more glittering.

Signing the super-star is in line with the group's aim to further expand its customer base and build a stronger consumer-connect in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana region as well as across India and around the world. Speaking about the association,

NTR Jr shared, "I am happy to be associated once again with Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Apart from being one of the most trusted jewellery brands, they are actively showcasing Indian designs, art & culture at the global stage.

Their customer-centric promises and ESG initiatives have established their leadership in the industry. I see great synergy between the values I believe in and what the brand stands for."

Commenting on associating with NTR Jr, MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group said, "We are excited to renew our time-tested association with NTR Jr. He has emerged as a one of the widely admired movie stars in India across regions.



His outstanding filmography underlines his command over the crafts of acting. He is an actor par excellence, and his impressive personality will further elevate our brand proposition.

We had an amazing association in the past with NTR Jr and the revival of the relation will help accelerate the acceptance of the brand globally in our ambition to be the no. 1 global jewellery retailer.

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary this year, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to offering our valued customers excellence in transparency, jewellery variety and craftsmanship along with world-class jewellery shopping experience".

Malabar Gold & Diamonds boasts of an extensive retail network in India, UAE, KSA, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Malaysia, Singapore, the US & the UK. The group has plans to foray into new markets such as Australia, Canada, South Africa, Egypt, Bangladesh, Turkiye and New Zealand as well as major cities in India.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds is known for providing an exceptional jewellery shopping experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies, known as the 'Malabar Promise.' This promise assures customers of unmatched quality, transparency, and service assurance.

Bank Nizwa promotes Islamic banking principles in Buraimi

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, conducted an enlightening 'Islamic Finance Knowledge Session' (IFKS) at Al Buraimi University. Shaikh Dr Majid al Kindi, Chairman of the Shariah Board, Bank Nizwa, presented the programme to a large audience, aimed at raising awareness about Islamic finance among the university's faculty, students and representatives from General Directorate for Awqaf and Religious Affairs at Al Buraimi Governorate.

Islamic finance has gained significant prominence globally as an ethical and sustainable alternative to conventional banking. Shaikh Dr Majid, renowned for his



deep understanding of Islamic principles and their application in finance, shared his invaluable insights during the knowledge session.

Participants had the opportunity to learn about the fundamental principles of Islamic

finance, its key features and its role in promoting economic stability and social welfare.

"We take great pride in our efforts to educate communities about the principles, choices and benefits offered by the Islamic financial industry through our

Islamic Finance Knowledge Series.

Bank Nizwa firmly believes in fostering financial inclusion and providing local communities with unparalleled options for Islamic banking and finance. Through IFKS, our aim has been to empower individuals with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions in accordance with their beliefs and financial aspirations.

We remain dedicated to our mission of promoting awareness and accessibility of Islamic finance, as we continue to serve as a trusted ally in our customers' financial well-being and contribute to the growth of Oman's economy," said Shaikh Dr Majid.

Bank Muscat organises two seminars on leadership skills for employees and customers

MUSCAT: In line with its keenness to develop leadership skills, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently organised two special seminars for its employees and customers.

The events covered the basics of successful business leadership and work-related values and strategies such as integrity, ensuring good role models, developing talent, customer satisfaction, and maintaining a competitive advantage.

The seminars were held at the Hormuz Grand Hotel at Airport Heights and were presented by Dr Marshall Goldsmith, an eminent author, executive coach and global leadership consultant.

Dr Goldsmith, who has been ranked as the world's #1 Executive Coach and among



the Top 10 Business Thinkers, has been featured extensively by prestigious business magazines and management-research organisations like INC, Fast Company and Global Gurus.

The seminars touched on a number of topics related to the development of future leaders, including: the importance of the unique skills and qualities for

future leaders as well as challenges and how to deal with them through leadership guidance.

Participants also learnt through group discussions about the qualities of a good global leader and well-known international practices with proven positive results for qualified employees to be a leader at the personal level as well as the

organisational level.

These qualities include integrity, role models, clear vision, motivation of people, development of talents, ensuring customer satisfaction and maintaining competitive advantage.

The seminars were conducted as a part of the bank's ongoing commitment to provide its employees and customers with the information related to the various trends in leadership and the ways to enhance their skills, especially those related to the banking sector.

Such events are important as they address globalisation-related challenges faced by young leaders and provide them with new learnings and experiences, which will enable them to face new and emerging challenges.

All-new Mazda CX-60 Japanese Luxury officially arrives in Oman

MUSCAT: The all-new Mazda CX-60 Japanese Luxury has officially arrived in the Sultanate of Oman. We are excited to give you a sneak peek and are confident that the launch of the Mazda CX-60 will satisfy your expectations.

It is a stylish and luxurious SUV that is equipped with a powerful engine, comfortable seats, and a spacious interior to make your driving experience enjoyable.

The new CX-60 takes driving to the next level with its innovative design and state-of-the-art features. The car is built on a scalable platform that provides a smooth and adaptable ride, making it perfect for long journeys or quick errands. The longitudinally mounted engine optimises the balance of the car, providing a seamless and thrilling driving experience.

The front-engine rear-wheel-drive layout of the CX-60 has been purposefully designed to achieve the better weight distribution, while its 8-speed Activmatic SkyActiv transmission with a



clutch instead of torque converters ensures faster, smoother, and more responsive gear shifting, making it feel more like driving a manual gearbox.

The Mazda CX-60 is a practical and stylish SUV option for drivers who want performance and looks. Its exterior has impressive features, such as shiny silver alloy wheels and a commanding

signature grill.

The front wipers are timing adjustable, and rain sensors make driving in bad weather comfortable & safe. The LED headlamps and rear fog lamp increase safety at night, while keyless entry and a power back door add to convenience and security. The CX-60 is available in a variety of colours, including

Soul Red Crystal, and Rhodium White Metallic, amongst others.

The Mazda CX-60's interior is packed with features that enhance the driving experience. The car's steering wheel is wrapped in luxurious leather and equipped with audio controls, sport mode controls, and paddle shifters for optimal performance. In addition, the stylish shift knob is also wrapped with leather, adding to the luxurious feel of the vehicle.

You can stay connected to your smartphone with ease using the Apple CarPlay and Android Auto which is seamlessly integrated with the 12-inch multimedia display & eight dynamic speakers.

Not only this, but also you can navigate across various features using the commander switch, which adds to the effortless and enjoyable experience of driving. Other handy features include Cargo net, USB ports, and a power outlet socket at the rear providing practicality. The auto-dimming rear view mirror and cloth door trims lend an air of luxury.

NBO strengthens leadership team with assistant general manager promotions



Mustahil al Maamari



Dr Ali al Shukaili

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) announces the promotion of two team members, Mustahil bin Ahmed al Maamari and Dr Ali bin Salim al Shukaili, who have been promoted to the positions of Assistant General Manager. These promotions demonstrate NBO's commitment to fostering internal talent and investing in the growth and development of its employees.

With an impressive track record in multiple areas, Mustahil al Maamari and Dr Ali al Shukaili bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their new role.

As Assistant General Managers, Mustahil al Maamari will assume a key role as Head of Strategy & Transformation, while Dr Ali will assume the role of Head of Digital & E-Channels, both driving strategic initiatives

and play an integral part in shaping NBO's future.

Mustahil holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from Coventry University, and an Executive Certificate in Digital Business Strategy from MIT Sloan Executive Education. He has more than 15 years of experience across, Information Technology, Project Management, Marketing, and the banking sector overall.

Dr Ali holds a PHD in Digital Banking Management from Binary University and a Master's degree in Business Administration from Coventry University and has more than 15 years of experience across the financial sector. He joined NBO in December 2019 as the Head of Sales - Point of Sales Machines and Merchants Relationships in the Retail Group.



Oman's GDP at current prices up by 7.4%

FROM PAGE 13

Crude oil activities grew by 6 per cent, recording RO 3.084 billion, while natural gas activities increased by 6.5 per cent, recording RO 500.600 million. The oil sector's growth was attributed to an increase in crude oil production, which rose by 2.6 per cent year-on-year to reach 95.7 million barrels in Q1 2023.

The total industrial activities recorded a growth of 4.6 per cent, reaching RO 1.922 billion, compared to RO 1.839 billion by the end of Q1 2022. The activities in agriculture, forestry and fishing recorded a growth of 8.4 per cent from RO 215.700 million to RO 233.900 million.

Meanwhile, the service activities recorded a growth of 7.4 per cent, from RO 4.533 billion to RO 4.869 billion. Oman's strong economic performance in Q1 2023 is a positive sign for the country's overall economic outlook.

The government's ongoing investments in infrastructure development and the implementation of Oman Vision 2024 are expected to support economic growth and attract foreign investments.

Oman seeks consultant to design National Innovation Platform

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Leading local and international consultants are lining up to bid for a contract to support the Omani government in the development of a National Innovation Platform, which will drive the growth of an innovation-based ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

Also known as the Oman Tabtakir Platform project, the initiative is the brainchild of the Ministry of Higher Education Research and Innovation (MoHERI).

But its development and implementation are being overseen by a partnership of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and ITHCA Group (Oman Information and Communication Technology Group) – part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The platform initiative stems from an agreement reached by MoTCIT and ITHCA in March to oversee the management of the Government Digital Transformation Programme.



DTM, an entity created out of this strategic partnership, will not only provide executive management services in the delivery of the programme, but also serve as the investment arm of MoTCIT with a commitment to delivering on all objectives by 2025.

Now, as a first step in the development of the Oman National Innovation Platform (Tabtakir), the Ministry of Higher Education Research and Innovation is preparing to appoint a suitable consultant to undertake a comprehensive study covering the design and implementation aspects of the

platform.

"The Oman Tabtakir Platform project includes, but is not limited to, the strategic plan, operation plan, its business processes: internal and external, services, IT systems, operation framework, etc to guide the fruition of an effective and unique innovation platform for the National Innovation Ecosystem as part of its digital transformation journey," the DTM partnership noted in an overview on the project.

The Innovation platform, when fully operational, will support the uptake of modern digital technologies and create

the underpinnings of a future digital economy in Oman.

Significantly, the Innovation Platform project adds to a growing portfolio of initiatives being supported by ITHCA Group as part of the government's digital transformation goals.

These projects harness the power of ICT to stimulate the growth of the national economy, drive modernisation and globalisation of the economy and create the conditions for the optimal participation of all section of the Omani population. The final submission date for bids for the consultancy tender is July 3, 2023.

New national Real Time Gross Settlement System now online: CBO

FROM PAGE 13

The processes of regional integration are planned during the next phase. Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, said: "This project is a continuation of CBO's efforts to modernise the infrastructure of the banking and financial sector in the Sultanate of Oman to ensure its flexibility in accommodating the needs of banking and financial institutions and improve their efficiency."

He added: "The launch of the new system is a strategic achievement for the banking and financial sector in Oman, as it provides many features and functions, and Sultanate of Oman is considered one of the few countries in the region that operates 24/7 RTGS system."

The CBO will continue its endeavours to strengthen and enhance the national payment systems in line with global developments and meeting market needs."

The first version of the RTGS system in the Sultanate of Oman was operated in 2005, and underwent several improvements during the operational period to meet the needs of the banking and financial sector. On a daily average, the system was settling over 2,600 transactions with value exceeding RO 650 million, according to 2022 statistics.

CMA issues first ever 'market maker' licence to Ubhar Capital

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Ubhar Capital (U Capital) has been granted the licence by the Capital Market Authority to be the first company to provide Market Making and Liquidity Providing services (MM & LP) on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The Market Making and Liquidity Providing licence is in line with Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) plan to expand market depth, promote its role in raising capital and create a benign investing environment that will promote public offerings and induce domestic as well as foreign investment flows.

MSX strategy to encourage investment through multiple means will prompt the return of capital markets to the centre stage of economic development supporting Oman Vision 2040.



Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Khalifa al Saadi, CEO, U Capital commented: "Ubhar would like to express its sincere thanks to the Capital Market Authority for the continuous support and guidance of companies operating in the capital market. The impact of this license will be reflected in the work environment of the Stock Exchange and enhance our ability to serve the national economy in the expected manner during the coming period."

It is worth noting that U Capital has qualified and trained an integrated work team in partnership with Al Ramz Corporation PJSC in the United Arab Emirates.

Ubhar also possesses all the basic requirements to start working in the aforementioned activity in terms of the practical and technical staff and technology for the implementation of this activity. The work team has experience in the field of securities for more than 25 years.

SalamAir to lease three Airbus A330neo aircraft from Avolon

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Omani budget carrier SalamAir has announced a commitment to leasing three Airbus A330neo aircraft from Avolon, the international aircraft leasing company. A letter of intent was signed at the Paris Air Show on June 19, of June 2023 and the first delivery is expected to be in October 2023.

The introduction of three new Airbus A330neo wide-body aircraft will bring significant advantages to SalamAir and support the airline's fleet and network expansion plans.

These modern aircraft feature a dual-class configuration with 365 economy seats and 12 premium flatbed seats, allowing for enhanced passenger comfort and capacity.

The A330neo offers a substantial increase in distance compared to SalamAir's existing fleet. One notable advantage of the A330neo is its improved fuel



efficiency, resulting in reduced fuel consumption and lower CO2 emissions when compared to previous generation aircraft. This contributes to a decrease in operational costs for the airline, aligning with their commitment to environmental sustainability.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said, "The decision to introduce the Airbus A330neo

complements the existing fleet of Airbus aircraft, which includes the A320neo, A321neo, and an A321 freighter.

By adding the A330neo to the fleet, SalamAir aims to enhance its capacity, meet the growing demands of the market, and attract more inbound tourists, aligning with the objectives of Oman's Vision 2040."

GCC-based entrepreneurial reality television comes to Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

A GCC based entrepreneurial reality television show is accepting applications from entrepreneurs in Oman, according to the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority.

The third season of Bahrain-based 'Beban', will allow entrepreneurs to pitch their businesses to a panel of investors in exchange for equity investments and potential business opportunities.

Qais Rashid al Tob, General Supervisor of the Promising Omani Startups Programme at the Authority, shared the following, "This collaboration expands the potential for Oman's startups, by utilising the programme's widespread success, promising opportunities, and connections to investors in various industries."

During its first two seasons, the show resulted in investments worth over \$6 million.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of Hope Fund, the producing entity behind the show,



added: "This cooperation with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority will provide entrepreneurs and existing project owners in the Sultanate of Oman with the tools they need to develop their projects while highlighting them regionally through the programme. It will also enhance knowledge exchange between entrepreneurs."

Potential candidates will undergo a five-step evaluation process before being selected to be featured in the show.

This will include a screening process to ensure the viability of businesses, an evaluation stage overseen by field experts, an intensive training bootcamp, followed by the selection of candidates.

The show which has featured 62 business so far, was established by the investment subsidiary of Hope Fund "Hope Ventures".

The fund was originally established in 2020 under the directive of the Bahraini monarch to support local businesses and foster an entrepreneurial mindset.

Anti-money laundering practices need reviewing



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Financial institutions across London are plagued with a dirty money problem. The financial district of the capital – known as the ‘City’ – is well overdue a review (a ‘spring clean’, so to speak) of its anti-money laundering (AML)

practice. The distraction of Brexit has meant one has yet to see truly meaningful changes. It is time to rethink the approach. The Financial Conduct Authority is being inundated with whistle-blowers reporting AML control failures. More than 140 City staffers have reported poor AML practices since 2017, a damning picture for a city trying to change its perception as a hub for dirty money. There have been some tangible improvements across City firms, a result of fines that have alarmed financial institutions into bolstering their AML controls and ensuring adequate due diligence is performed on clients. Sanctions on individuals have also been placed from time to time and some oligarchies have been investigated. One such high-profile case is of

Roman Abramovich the former Russian owner of Chelsea Football club. His £2.3bn proceeds from the sale of Chelsea more than a year ago remains in a frozen UK bank account belonging to Fordstam, a company controlled by Abramovich, with the Foreign Office yet to give permission for the money to be transferred. While some argue that financial penalties are merely a drop in the ocean, it is more like a drop in a pond for UK firms, which don’t employ the same liquidity as their US counterparts. Research shows UK fines fell by 72pc in 2022 compared with 2021. While things are going in the right direction, the same research revealed that the UK is still the epicentre of financial crime in comparison to other regions – an eye-watering £155m in

enforcement actions in 2022 is not one for the City’s trophy cabinet. While there is no denying the City has a serious money-laundering problem, it is only through a global lens that London can work to weed out bad actors. AML is no longer a domestic issue and it must not be treated as such. The globalised nature of finance in recent years has highlighted that money laundering transcends borders and it just happens that the City’s lax regulation of late has made it an ideal place to rinse stained money. As Stella Fau Clarke, chief strategy officer at compliance software firm Fenengo says: to be successful, City regulators must consider a cross border, collaborative approach. If anything is learned from the past year, it is that governments, law enforcement businesses and

financial institutions must work together. This collaborative approach, using and keeping with technology and standardised data that informs and can be acted upon, will create a solid foundation for detecting and, crucially, preventing financial crime industry-wide. Without collaboration and standardisation, the regulatory landscape in London could become more complex and delay meaningful progress towards creating a framework to protect consumers and inventors. This is particularly true for organised crime that continues to exploit weak AML regimes in the digital asset space. The rapid rise of cryptocurrency is creating a new breeding ground for criminals in a largely unregulated market. The relative anonymity and somewhat hidden reputation of

crypto is naturally an attractive destination for organised criminals looking to hide their illicit wealth. What’s more, with the capital opening its doors to crypto, its more important than ever that regulators protect the wider industry from illicit activity. Calls for data privacy globally are increasing, meaning that it will become increasingly difficult for City regulators to share information. Regulatory supervision and enforcement action has forced most financial institutions in the City to change when it comes to AML, and the automation of processes. But getting rid of the UK capital’s tag ‘Londongrad’ will not happen overnight. City regulators and financial institutions must make the necessary changes.

Green alliance crisis is more than just a US drama

BY PAMELA BARBAGLIA

Global insurers are testing the limits of United Nations-backed green bodies. Back in March the Net-Zero Insurance Alliance (NZIA) boasted 30 members, representing about 15% of global premium volume. Now the NZIA, a key financial forum for insurers to set decarbonisation targets and a part of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net-Zero (GFANZ), has shrunk to just 13 companies. On the face of it, insurers are jumping ship because of the United States. A group of Republican state attorneys general have accused joint decarbonisation commitments made by GFANZ, which also encompasses the Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) and the Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance, of potentially breaching US antitrust laws. That’s a particularly big deal for insurers, given the sector is regulated at state level. Even those who choose to stay in the NZIA risk losing business due to state politicians pursuing a “war on woke”. But US exceptionalism is far from the whole story. While the European Union has vowed to ditch Russian oil and gas by 2027 and replaced around two-thirds of Russian gas last year, the 2022 energy security crisis means domestic politicians are far more focused on fossil fuels from other sources. Countries like Germany are boosting their reliance on coal to power their economies. Last year, coal-generated electricity in Europe’s biggest economy rose 8.4%, with the dirty fuel accounting for one-third of the country’s electricity production in 2022, according to Germany’s federal statistical office Destatis. This shift is important. Regardless of whatever their flowery corporate statements say, financial groups would rather do without new decarbonisation targets like the ones unveiled by the NZIA in January, because they make managers’ lives harder. The main reason European groups embraced them more than their transatlantic peers is buy-in from European politicians committed to goals like slashing EU emissions by 55% by 2030. Now the political pressure, if anything, is for insurers to keep coal companies as clients rather than ditch them. So far, non-insurance financial groups are broadly sticking with GFANZ. But that’s partly because it has become easier to do so. Last year the umbrella body had to drop a requirement for its members to sign up to the so-called Race to Zero campaign. Had it not distanced itself from proposals like a requirement to curb new fossil fuel projects, the NZBA might have seen the same sort of exodus as the NZIA. So long as politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are distracted by energy security concerns, grand-sounding climate alliances will look increasingly pointless. — Reuters

A GROUP OF REPUBLICAN STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL HAVE ACCUSED JOINT DECARBONISATION COMMITMENTS MADE BY GFANZ OF POTENTIALLY BREACHING US ANTITRUST LAWS.

China’s rebound hits a wall and there is ‘no quick fix’ to revive it



KEITH BRADSHER

The writer is the Pulitzer Prize-winning Beijing bureau chief for The New York Times.

When China suddenly dismantled its lockdowns and other Covid precautions last December, officials in Beijing and many investors expected the economy to spring back to life. It has not worked out that way. Investment in China has stagnated this spring after a flurry of activity in late winter. Exports are shrinking. Fewer and fewer new housing projects are being started. Prices are falling. More than 1 in 5 young people is unemployed. China has tried many fixes over the past few years when its economy had flagged, including heavy borrowing to pay for roads and rail lines. And it spent huge sums on testing and quarantines during the pandemic. Extra stimulus spending now with borrowed money would spur a burst of activity but poses a difficult choice for policymakers worried about the accumulated debt. “Authorities risk being behind the curve in stimulating the economy, but there’s no quick fix,” said Louise Loo, an economist specializing in China in the Singapore office of Oxford Economics. China needs to right its economy after closing itself off to the world for almost three years to battle Covid, a decision that prompted many companies to begin shifting their supply chains elsewhere. Xi Jinping, China’s leader, met Monday with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in an attempt by the two nations to lower diplomatic tensions and clear the way for high-level economic talks in the weeks ahead. Such discussions could slow the



Construction on a residential development in Nanchang, China. – The New York Times

recent proliferation of sanctions and counter measures. China’s halting economic recovery has seen only a few categories of spending grow robustly, such as travel and restaurant meals. And those have increased in comparison with extremely low levels in spring 2022, when a two-month lockdown in Shanghai disrupted economic activity across large areas of central China. The economy has been particularly weak in recent weeks. “From April to May to now, the economy has experienced significant unexpected changes, to the point where some people believe that the initial judgments may have been overly optimistic,” Yin Yanlin, a former deputy director of the Chinese Communist Party’s top economic policymaking commission, said in a speech at an academic conference on Saturday. Chinese government officials have been dropping hints that an economic stimulus plan may be imminent. “In response to the changes in the economic situation, more forceful measures must be taken to enhance the momentum of development, optimize the economic structure, and promote the continuous recovery of the economy,” the country’s State Council, or cabinet, said after a meeting on Friday led

by Li Qiang, China’s new premier. Beijing has taken some steps to revitalize economic growth. Tax breaks are being introduced for small businesses. Interest rates on bank deposits have been reduced to encourage households to spend more of their money instead of saving it. The latest government measure is expected Tuesday, when the state-controlled banking system is likely to reduce slightly its benchmark interest rates for corporate loans and home mortgages. But many economists, inside and outside China, worry about the effectiveness of the new measures. Consumers are hoarding cash and investors are wary of putting money into China’s companies. Private investment has actually declined so far this year compared with 2022. Housing remains in crisis, with developers borrowing more to pay existing debts and to complete existing projects, even as China suffers from an oversupply of homes. China’s housing market stands at the heart of its troubles. Construction has accounted for as much as a quarter of China’s economic output. But would-be homeowners have been put off as developers have defaulted on their debts and failed to finish apartments buyers had paid for in advance.

Housing construction has fallen nearly 23% in the first five months of the year, compared with the same months last year. That suggests the real estate sector has further to fall in the coming months. Chen Leiqian, a 27-year-old marketer in Beijing, started looking for an apartment with her boyfriend in 2021 after five years of dating. But they then decided to stay put in a rental apartment when they married. “Housing prices across the country are falling, and the economy is very bad — there are just too many unstable elements,” Chen said. Two-thirds of Chen’s co-workers in her department at an online tutoring company were laid off after China cracked down on the for-profit, private education industry in 2021. She also had a friend who could no longer pay a mortgage after losing a job in the tech sector, and lost the home in foreclosure. The caution of middle-class families like Chen’s may pose the biggest dilemma for policymakers as they search for an effective formula for another round of economic stimulus. “You can throw money on people but if they are not confident, they will not spend,” said Alicia Garcia-Herrero, chief economist for Asia-Pacific at Natixis, a French bank. — The New York Times

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Be Careful, Be Responsible!
 #Living_with_COVID19

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER



MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfallah al-Rumayh, and bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al-Haili (pictured), Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court and Sheikh Al Mubtar bin Abdullah bin Saad al-Haili took the oath of office at Al Mubtar Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

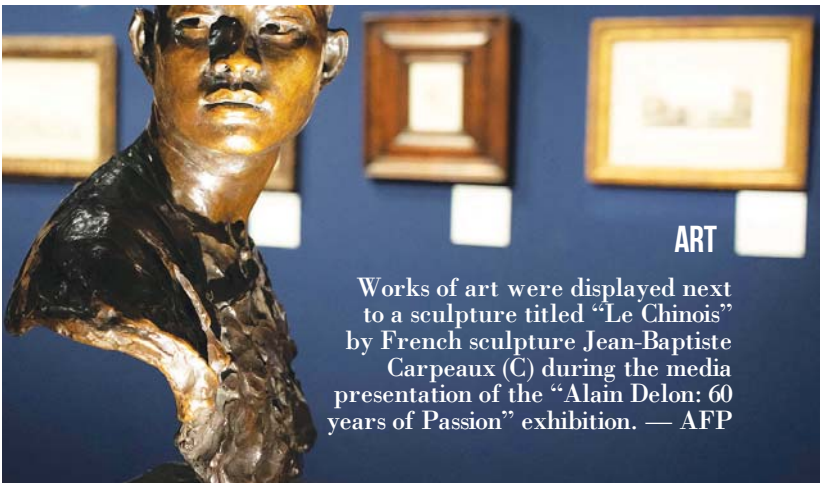
SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamad al-Wahabi, who stepped his car to scare away a group of people at a sidewalk in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his are, Hamad said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4



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Byadi Aqra: Making more reading materials accessible to the visually impaired

Byadi Aqra started as an initiative in 2015 with the aim of converting printed educational materials into Braille and making them available not just on printed books but also accessible digitally through a computer reader

FASHION

Prada-Simons duo provide elegance, comfort at Milan show for men

ICONIC DESIGNER Miuccia Prada teamed up with Raf Simons in Milan on Sunday to present their new men's collection, combining elegance and comfort with an aim to "free" men's bodies.

It was one of the most highly anticipated collections on the third day of Fashion Week, which focuses on the spring-summer 2024 period. Their show took place in the austere surroundings of the Prada Foundation, setting the scene for a sober but refined men's wardrobe.

The starting point was "the simplest white shirt". From this base, said Prada, "you can do whatever you want" and modify it according to the

individuality of each person.

The freedom of the body is reflected in the ubiquitous pair of shorts, available in an infinite variety of colours — black, white, beige or grey — matched with shirts and jackets in the same shade.

Ties appeared to have been banished, unlike at other labels that have been bringing them back. The Prada silhouette was streamlined, the cuts supple and the fabrics fluid, in cotton, denim or leather.

Shirts were tucked into shorts or trousers, and the waist was tightened, in contrast to the width of the shoulder pads.



REVISITING THE CLASSICS

The traditional shirt was dusted off — sometimes sophisticated, sometimes nonchalant — with ultra-long sleeves and whimsical touches such as floral motifs, fringes and a multiplicity of pockets.

"When you follow the show, you see a classic men's suit," said Simons.



But on closer inspection, he added, it turns out to be "completely different".

Instead, he said, it "allows the body, which is always moving and changing, to feel free".

This collection applied the same formula to a whole range of clothing, including mackintoshes, waistcoats and sportswear.



But Prada has not abandoned classics such as its loose-fitting double-breasted coats in white, topped with a small collar in the same colour, revisited for the occasion.

Simons, a 55-year-old Belgian designer who has already worked with Jil Sander, Dior and Calvin Klein, has been co-creative director of

Prada since 2020.

The label was founded in 1913 by Miuccia Prada's grandfather and is 80 per cent owned by her family.

In January, Andrea Guerra, former head of eyewear giant Luxottica, took over the reins of Prada for a transitional period until Lorenzo Bertelli, 35 — the eldest son of 74-year-old Miuccia Prada and former CEO Patrizio Bertelli, 77 — transitions into the role.

FIGHTING 'FAST FASHION'

Talking to AFP in January, Lorenzo Bertelli said he wanted to continue his mother's fight against "fast fashion" — the rapid renewal of clothes on sale. Miuccia Prada is instead an advocate of "sustainable" fashion.

The mass production of clothes by certain brands has harmful consequences for the environment, and the textile industry is one of the most polluting on the planet.

As for Prada's pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, Lorenzo Bertelli said the group hoped to make progress and interim targets were "on track".

The luxury house says it plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 29 percent by 2026 compared to 2019, for its production sites and vehicle fleet, as well as electricity and gas consumption. — **AFP**



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By Esraa al Saadi

It has been very difficult for visually impaired students to get access to books that can aid them not just in academic learning but even in pleasure reading. Thankfully, advancements in technology and the implementation of inclusive education policies made way for innovative solutions.

In Oman, there has been an effort to support visually impaired students' access to books. Even at the community level, people are coming together in order to make sure that Oman's programmes for the visually impaired become more responsive to the needs of these visually challenged individuals.

A voluntary group called Byadi Aqra was established by Sultan Qaboos University's College of Art and Social Sciences to prepare educational materials for the visually impaired students.

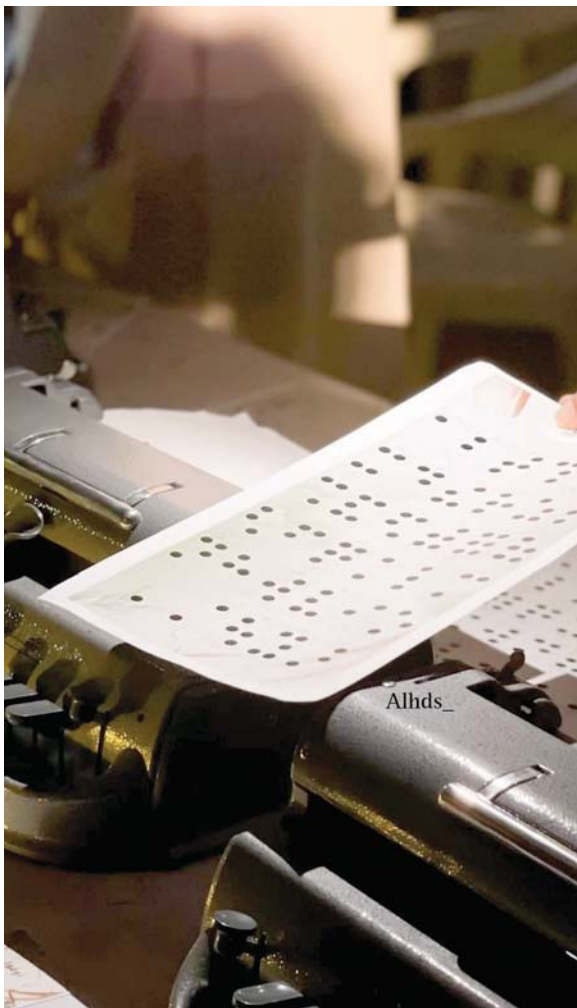
While Oman is a well-developed country, most of the books are targeted towards visual readers and while there are plenty of educational materials for those who are able to see, the same could not be said for the visually impaired.

Visually impaired individuals can only read and write using the Braille coding system — where raised dots are read by touching.

Byadi Aqra started as an initiative in 2015 with the aim of converting printed educational materials into Braille and making them available not just on printed books but also accessible digitally through a read-through computer screens.

The process of converting the educational materials into other forms that visually impaired students can read took several steps. First, the instructors of the visually impaired students would upload the educational materials onto the initiative's website.

Then, a group of volunteers would collect those materials, categorise them, and send them to another group of volunteers via email to retype them and send them back when finished. After that, the retyped materials would be revised, collected into one file, and uploaded again into the initiative's digital library that visually impaired students can get access to.



In 2018, the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University and Occidental Oman collaborated to release a free application that could be downloaded on any smart device.

The application allowed a bigger number of volunteers to join the team and work from anywhere and at any time, which made the process of preparing the materials a lot easier and

quicker than before.

The application also enables the instructors and the visually impaired students from Sultan Qaboos University and other Universities and colleges to upload an infinite number of pages and students can create their own libraries inside the application.

Since the establishment of the initiative, over 21,000 pages of textbooks have been processed, and there have been more than 5000 prepared books in the digital library.

Rayyan al Hadidi, a visually impaired student from the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, says that she is so thankful for the hard work the group

is doing as it helped her in reducing her study time and effort by preparing her books very quickly without having to refer to the instructors or officials.

She adds: "I can upload the documents in the application on my own, and then find the documents in the library after receiving a notification that the documents are prepared".

The group has won some awards such as winning 1st place in Ehsan Competition for voluntary works in 2019, 2nd place in the competition of the Deanship of Students' Affairs' Cup of Voluntary Groups at Sultan Qaboos University in 2018, and 5th place in the Al Roya Youth Initiatives Awards in 2019.

LIFESTYLE

Vogue's Anna Wintour, author Ian McEwan honoured by King Charles

VOGUE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Anna Wintour, author Ian McEwan and immunologist and geneticist John Bell were named Companions of Honour, an order limited to 65 people at any time, in King Charles' first birthday honours list on Friday.

Wintour, who has been editor of Vogue US since 1988, is one of the most powerful people in the fashion world and a philanthropist who has raised more than \$300 million for the US Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute.

McEwan, who was appointed to the order for services to literature, is the author of acclaimed



novels including "Amsterdam", "Atonement" and "Enduring Love".

Bell's three-decade-long mission to build vaccines research capability at the University of Oxford, where he is Regius Professor of Medicine, was vital to the development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, the government said.

More than 1,000 people were



rewarded in the king's birthday honours for service in education, healthcare, philanthropy and other areas.

King Charles, who was crowned in May, will celebrate his official birthday on Saturday with the "Trooping of the Colour" military parade.

The 74-year-old monarch's real birthday is on Nov. 14.

— Reuters

TRAVEL TALES

Rome to open ancient square where Julius Caesar was killed

HISTORY BUFFS will be able to stroll close to the spot where legend says Julius Caesar met his bloody end, when Rome authorities open a new walkway on the ancient site on Tuesday.

Accounts, embellished by William Shakespeare, tell how the Roman dictator was stabbed to death by a group of aggrieved senators on the Ides of March - March 15 - in 44 BC.

According to tradition, he died in the capital's central Largo Argentina square - home to the remains of four temples.

They are all currently below street level and up until recently could only be viewed from behind barriers close to a busy road junction.

From Tuesday, visitors will be able to move through the site at



ground level on the walkway and see the structures up close.

Italian fashion house Bulgari funded the work at a site that was first discovered and excavated during building work in Rome in the 1920s.

The area - close to where Caesar is supposed to have exclaimed "Et tu, Brute?" as he saw his friend Brutus among his murderers - is these days also home to a sanctuary for stray cats. Non-residents will pay 5 euros (\$5.50) to visit it. — Reuters



DINING

Afghan cook pours his heart into 'teapot' lamb stew

IN THE KITCHEN OF his Kabul restaurant, one of the last cooks to master the Afghan culinary art of "chainaki" stuffs chunks of lamb and fat into about 200 tiny teapots to simmer for hours atop a clay stove.

From dawn onwards, Waheed is a study in concentration as he checks the pots time and again — making sure each is marinating with the precise proportion of fat rendered.

Once the pots are bubbling to his satisfaction he adds salt and lentils, before bathing the contents in a tomato-coloured sauce and secret spices.

"The recipe has been the same for over 60 years, passed down to me by my father," says Waheed, 45, who prefers to give only one name.

"He himself inherited it from his father. I haven't changed a thing."

With the fire crackling, the teapots — many decades old, chipped or missing handles — are covered with a sheet as the contents simmer away.

The heat quickly fills the restaurant and the heady smell of stewed lamb hangs heavy in the air.

Only then can Waheed take a break to tell his story.

He dropped out of school at 13 to hang around the kitchens in his father's restaurants before being handed the secret recipe — which he worries may be revealed to his competitors through media coverage.

SOME LIKE IT FAT

The lamb stew he makes gets its name from the teapot — "chainak" in several local languages — in which it is cooked.

"I don't add any vegetable oil," he says, but the amount of lamb fat in each pot varies according to the taste of the customers arriving in a few hours.



Waheed took over the restaurant aged just 25 after his father died — and confesses his own dish isn't

quite as good. "No pupil can replace his teacher, just as we can't replace our father,"

he says.

But he expects the family business may end when he calls it quits, as none of his 10 children wants to follow on.

"They're studying at school. They don't have the patience to do this work," he says.

After five hours of closely supervised cooking the chainaki is ready and the customers — many already sitting cross-legged on platforms — can finally enjoy their meal.

The stew is poured onto plates, eaten with ubiquitous unleavened Afghan bread, and washed down with lashings of green tea.

It costs 200 Afghanis (\$2.30) a serving.

"When I eat it, I feel energetic until the evening," says Zabihullah, who has been a regular for 15 years, visiting up to three times a week.

"It's so delicious and tasty," adds Ghulam Usman Tarin, a more recent convert.

Over the years Waheed has served Afghan celebrities, politicians, as well as the few foreigners that seek out his humble restaurant — and he puts his money where his mouth is, eating it himself every day.

He is usually sold out shortly after lunch, but then it is straight back to work as he carves up a sheep carcass for meat and fat to make the next day's serving.

"I'll keep doing it as long as I am strong enough," he says. — AFP

CULTURE



New Zealand brings stolen, traded Indigenous remains home

SNATCHED BY GRAVE robbers or traded by settlers as macabre curiosities, the remains of New Zealand's Indigenous people are slowly being brought home after centuries overseas.

After British explorer Captain James Cook arrived in New Zealand in 1769, some European settlers developed a grim fascination with the remains of Indigenous Maori people and Morioris, who are native to the Chatham Islands.

To colonial traders, the biggest trophies to be had were the tattooed heads of Indigenous warriors and leaders.

In the name of crude scientific research, grave robbers also plundered Indigenous human remains from burial sites across the country, mostly during the 19th century, which is still a source of anger and grief for many New Zealanders.

Since 2003, experts from New Zealand's Te Papa national museum in Wellington have scoured the globe to locate them.

"It's important for all Indigenous people, whose ancestors were either traded or collected and taken overseas, that the remains come home," Te Herekiele Herewini, who manages the museum's repatriation programme, said.

He said the programme has retrieved the remains of nearly 900 Indigenous people, and estimates the remains of between 300 to 400 more are still housed in institutions around the world.

"We are working hard to bring them home," he said.

LIKE A CRIME RING

Last week, the remains of 95 ancient New Zealanders, along with six mummified tattooed heads, arrived home from seven institutions in Germany.

In Maori culture, the skulls, bones and other body parts are referred to as tupuna, or ancestral remains.

Getting the remains home is more than a matter of logistics.

Copenhagen-based Te Arikirangi Mamaku-Ironside, head of repatriation for Te Papa, works to find out which museums still have Indigenous remains and negotiate their release.

"It's a massive jigsaw puzzle trying to work out where New Zealand's ancestral remains are now kept — whether in state museums or private collections," he said.

"A grave robber may have taken from one location, but their collection could have been distributed to several museums in several countries or continents.

"As the programme goes on, the picture becomes a lot clearer."

Mamaku-Ironside explained that New Zealand's early colonial museums often exchanged artefacts with overseas collectors, with remains ending up in foreign museums.

"There was a network of exchange," he said. "It was kind of like a crime ring — except it wasn't actually considered illegal because it wasn't considered unethical back then to trade in human remains. They were viewed as specimens."

Mamaku-Ironside says his initial approach involves contacting institutions to ascertain what remains are stored in their collections.

Part of his role is to "establish and confirm" which items "were actually illicitly collected and traded from New Zealand".

HEALING THE TRAUMA

"It's very important not to approach as an angry Maori, but to say that in the spirit of friendship we are going to work together, so we understand each other," Mamaku-Ironside said.

The government-backed programme, which covers the logistics and costs of repatriation, is a delicate process with a spiritual aspect.

Before their release, Mamaku-Ironside will request time alone with the ancestral remains.

"We introduce ourselves — just so they know who we are — then we lay down our purpose, to help create a pathway for them to return home. It's very spiritual, very emotional," he said.

After they arrive in Wellington, the remains are returned to their iwi, or tribe, after a powhiri ceremony to mark their return.

That's when Mamaku-Ironside feels his job is done.

"It's about healing the trauma," he said, "having had ancestors stolen — ripped away from their homes."

"Even after they have passed away, their journey continues."

"It doesn't finish until they are returned to their communities." — AFP