

HM greetings to Chad

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno of the Republic of Chad for winning the presidential elections. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president wishing him success in leading the friendly people of Chad towards further progress and prosperity and wishing that the relations between the two countries see more progress and development. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:23 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:59 AM

DHUHR - 12:08 PM

ASR - 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:49 PM

ISHA - 08:08 PM



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AL SEEB GRABS
YOUTH BASKETBALL
LEAGUE, SALALAH
RUNNERS-UP



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BUY NOW PAY
LATER SERVICES
PREPPED FOR
LAUNCH IN OMAN



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AFTER FIVE
CENTURIES,
STARS RISE IN
ISTANBUL



SINGAPORE

SINGAPOREANS PRAISE OMAN'S ATTRACTIVE INVESTMENT CLIMATE

Several officials from Singaporean companies have praised the Sultanate of Oman for its attractive investment environment and the ease of starting businesses. Peter Koh, CEO of the Singaporean group Oceanus, explained that the group is looking to invest in Oman in several areas, including food security, especially in the distribution related to fish wealth. Dr S Naseem, President of the Singaporean group Meinhardt, said that the Sultanate of Oman has an attractive investment environment due to the ease of starting businesses, which is one of the most important aspects sought by investors. SEE P14

BRATISLAVA

SLOVAKIAN PM FICO IN STABLE CONDITION AFTER SECOND SURGERY



Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, who was critically injured in an assassination attempt on Wednesday, is in stable condition, Health Minister Zuzana Dolinková said on Saturday. After his second operation on Friday, there is cause for optimism, the minister said. However, Fico cannot yet be transferred to the capital, Bratislava, in the coming days, Defence Minister Robert Kalinak said. A panel of doctors is to decide on Monday whether he is to be transferred. The prime minister is currently recovering in the university hospital Banská Bystrica. SEE P6

Integrated public transport to come up soon



The Royal Decree on the Land Transport Law and its executive regulations is the cornerstone from which the regulatory role begins in terms of setting requirements for the provision of public transport services for passengers and goods to regulate the service provided.

THE MULTI-PRONGED SYSTEM INCLUDES IMPLEMENTING A PUBLIC TRANSPORT STRATEGY, ISSUING A TENDER TO STUDY PUBLIC TRANSPORT ROUTES IN THE GOVERNORATES, SETTING UP A SYSTEM FOR TRACKING LAND TRANSPORT TO CONTROL WEIGHTS OF BUSES AND TRUCKS

SUHAIL BIN NASSER AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

An integrated system for developing the public transport sector will be announced soon, a top official of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) said.

The multi-pronged system includes implementing a public transport strategy with partners from the relevant authorities, issuing a tender to study public transport routes in the governorates, setting up a system for tracking land transport to control weights of buses and trucks.

This was stated by Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport. He added that the public transport sector is one of the sectors that contribute to society development, leveraging the efficiency of the logistics system. The Royal Decree on the Land Transport Law and its executive regulations is the cornerstone from which the regulatory role begins in terms of setting requirements for the provision of public transport services for passengers and goods to regulate the service provided. He pointed to the important role of the

“Naql” platform which provides 13 online services.

Al Shammakhi pointed out that the ministry is currently working with Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) to establish a bus stop waiting area.

Regarding the establishment of integrated public transport stations, Al Shammakhi said: “We have directed the relevant authorities to activate these stations and the ministry is working with its partners to set up the stations by providing plots and tenders have been floated to implement them. In addition, a guide has also been prepared containing the requirements for the public transport

stations which aim to improve public transport services by providing the requisites to ensure a good experience for the beneficiary.”

The under-secretary pointed out that the ministry has recently launched the Aber initiative which aims to adopt smart applications for managing public taxis and announced its plan to implement the initiative on three stages the first of which began on October 1, 2023 to organise public taxis at Muscat International Airport. The second stage targeted Port Sultan Qaboos, hotels and commercial centres, and the third phase targeted roaming taxis.

800,000 forced to flee Rafah after Israel strikes

RAFAH: The head of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said on Saturday that 800,000 people had been “forced to flee” Gaza’s far-southern city of Rafah since Israel began military operations there this month.

“Nearly half of the population of Rafah or 800,000 people are on the road having been forced to flee since the Israeli forces started the military operation in the area on 6 May,” UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said in a post on social media site X. Israeli troops and tanks pushed on Saturday into parts of a congested northern Gaza Strip district that they had previously skirted in the more than seven-month-old war, killing and wounding dozens of Palestinians, medics and residents said.

Israel’s forces also took over some ground in Rafah, a southern city next to the Egyptian border that is packed with displaced people and where the launch this month of a long-threatened incursion to crush Hamas hold-outs has alarmed Cairo and Washington.

Israel has conducted renewed military sweeps this month of parts of northern Gaza where it had declared the end of major operations in January. At the time, it also predicted its forces would return to prevent a regrouping by the Palestinian Islamist group that rules Gaza.

One site has been Jabalia, the largest of



Palestinians carry the body of a person killed in an Israeli strike on a house in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip on Saturday. – Reuters



Gaza Strip’s eight historic refugee camps. On Saturday, troops and tanks edged into streets so far spared the ground offensive, residents said. In one strike, medics said 15 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded.

The Gaza health ministry and the Civil Emergency Service said teams received dozens of calls about possible casualties but were unable to carry out any searches because of the ongoing ground offensive and the aerial bombardment.

“Today is the most difficult in terms of the occupation bombardment, air strikes and tank shelling have going on almost non-stop,” said one resident in Jabalia, Ibrahim Khaled, via a chat app.

“We know of dozens of people, martyrs (killed) and wounded, but no ambulance vehicle can get into the area,” he said.

The Israeli military said forces have continued to operate in areas across the Gaza Strip including Jabalia and Rafah, carrying out what it called “precise operations against terrorists and infrastructure”.

“The IAF (air force) continues to operate in the Gaza Strip, and struck over 70 terror targets during the past day, including weapons storage facilities, military infrastructure sites, terrorists who posed a threat to IDF troops, and military compounds,” the military said in a statement. — AFP and Reuters

More people in Oman willing to donate organs

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

More people in Oman are expressing their wish to donate organs during life or after death.

As many as 19 kidney transplants took place in Oman in 2023 out of which 15 were from brain-dead people and 4 were from donors. Out of the 11 liver transplants that were carried out during the same period, one was from a donor and the rest from cadavers.

This is a nearly 20 per cent increase in 2023 against the previous year when the Ministry of Health (MoH) allowed 17 kidney transplants for patients with different kinds of renal diseases.

Al Shifa portal, an online platform for organ donation, has registered more than 20,000 willing donors, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

“We carried out nearly 19 kidney transplants in Oman in 2023 out of which 4 were from living donors. In liver transplants, we were able to conduct 11 such surgeries,” said Dr Qasim al Jahdhami of the National Organ Donation Programme, Ministry of Health (MoH).

He attributed the increasing willingness from people to donate organs to awareness and education.

“Organ donation should be encouraged and youngsters should spread awareness to save lives. Organ transplantation can be either during one’s life or after death but having a mindset for such a noble deed is what is required,” Dr Al Jahdhami said.

He further said comparing the lives of patients before and after organ transplant, it has been found out that organ donation doesn’t harm the donor. “Everyone should disseminate the ethics of donation, and that there is no harm in doing so,” said Dr Al Jahdhami.

He further said that it is vital to have a culture of organ donation and every step should be taken to spread awareness so that those who are in need of organs can dream of a new life.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 31°C

SALALAH: Max 34°C Min 29°C

NIZWA: Max 40°C Min 28°C

He explains that the process of training and breeding dogs is “not limited to importing them from abroad but has become localised in Oman, where dogs are trained and fully qualified, in addition to training individuals on how to use them in fieldwork”



Students collect bottle caps for the welfare of elderly

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 18

Don't be surprised if you find water bottles thrown in the garbage without caps in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Students collected these caps for a competition launched by Ihsaan Foundation to raise environment awareness among people. It engaged nearly 8,000 boys and girls from 196 schools across wilayats.

Those who collected 5,000 caps got prizes. These caps will be handed over to recyclers for money, which will be used for buying medical devices for the elderly in Nizwa hospital. This competition was launched by Ihsaan Foundation to raise environment awareness among students. It engaged nearly 8,000 boys and girls from 196 schools across wilayats.

Samira bint Salim bin Said Ambusaidiyah of Ihssan Association said: "The response



Students gather plastic bottle caps to protect environment and buy medical devices for the elderly in Nizwa

to the competition was beyond our expectations. This is a clear indication of the ability of young people to bring about change. The collection of 50 million water bottle caps underscores the importance of cooperation and social solidarity. The competition was not just an opportunity to win prizes but rather a platform to build environmental awareness for school students and enhance a sense of responsibility towards the

environment and society."

Marwa bint Khamis al Abriyah, member of the Student Environmental Council, says: "This competition contributes to reducing the harm caused by plastic to the environment because these plastic covers are very small and difficult to decompose. We collect them and deliver them to companies that recycle plastic materials such as Bea'h. We use the revenue

from these plastic covers to help patients in hospitals."

The closing ceremony of the "Ihsaan: Friend of the Environment" competition was held on Sunday in the presence of Abdulrahman bin Sulaiman al Shehhi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, at the Training and Studies Center at Nizwa Hospital.

Prizes were distributed to all participants including two tickets to Umrah, hotel packages, gold, bicycles, e-scooter and iPad.

Office bearers of Ihsaan Association said people are still continuing to collect water plastic caps voluntarily, in support of Nizwa Hospital and promoting environmental awareness, which reflects their true commitment to protecting the environment and society. They said Ihsaan is planning the next stage which may include collecting paper and plastic bottles.

BEWARE OF HIDDEN COSTS WHILE TRAVELLING TO EUROPE

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

While the European Union (EU) recently announced its decision to grant a five-year valid multiple-entry Schengen visa to citizens of the Sultanate of Oman and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, travellers should keep track of hidden costs, including taxes, to avoid uncomfortable experiences during the trip.

A large number of visitors from the Sultanate of Oman travel to cooler Europe to escape from peak summer temperatures in this part of the world. Over 17,500 visas were issued by the embassies of France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Italy in 2023, according to schengenvisa.info.com.

The new decision allows Omani citizens to visit the EU multiple times over five years with the same visa. During the visa validity period, holders of the visa enjoy travel rights equivalent to visa-free nationals.

However, according to reports curated by ForwardKeys, many countries have raised their fees for tourists this year, which implies that tourists will be charged for overnight stays in some places for overnight stays as per the type of hotel rooms.

Visitors to Paris will pay up to €14.95 a night and a 5 per cent charge on room fees in Berlin.

Venice has introduced a trial for visitors to pay a €5 entry fee to the city during daytime hours, including additional costs for anyone staying in the city overnight.

ForwardKeys cited Quotezone.co.uk report which said that the new and increasing tourist fees across Europe will allow cities to fund measures to attract more holidaymakers, support the local infrastructure and businesses, and prevent damage from over-tourism.

Tourism taxes range anywhere between less than EUR1 and almost EUR15 and can be charged per person per night.

Many fees are based on the hotel rating or the type of accommodation, and charges vary from city to city depending on whether individuals are charged each night or for the whole trip.

Tourists visiting Venice for the day must pay a €5 entry fee to enter the city between 8.30 am and 4 pm. The pilot scheme is expected to come fully into force in 2025. Anyone staying overnight in Venice on holiday is charged a fee between €1 and 5 within the accommodation price.

As for Barcelona, visitors pay 3.25 euros for those staying in official accommodation while Lisbon charges two euros for every night tourists stay, but this applies to a maximum of seven nights per person.

Tourist tax in Athens varies depending on the hotel category and the time of year. The Greek government introduced the Climate Crisis Resilience Fee, which charges tourists between 0.50 euros and 10 per room per night.

The French government charges visitors a tourist tax depending on their accommodation type. The most expensive charge is €14.95 for stays in palaces. The lowest tax is 0.65 euros at one or two-star campsites per person per night. Those staying in a typical four-star hotel are charged around €8.

While tourist tax on visitors to Prague has increased from 0.82 euros to 1.97 euros (based on current rates), tourists staying in Budapest are charged an additional four per cent each night, based on the room's price. Hungary only enforces a tourist fee in the capital city.

Berlin has recently increased its city tax. Tourists must now pay five per cent of the room price, excluding VAT and service fees.



The new decision allows Omani citizens to visit the EU multiple times over five years with the same visa

FIVE NEW GARDENS TO COME UP IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has started work on five residential neighbourhood gardens in the Muscat Governorate. Three gardens will be developed in the Wilayat of Al Seeb with a total area of 20,690 square metres, one in the Wilayat of Al Amerat with an area of 6,461 square metres and another in the Wilayat of Qurayat with an area of 3,726 square metres.



Citizen gets fine, imprisonment for house theft

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Nizwa Court of Appeal recently upheld six rulings issued by the Court of First Instance in Bahla convicting the accused citizen of theft at night punishable under Articles 340/A and 342/B of the Omani Penal Law.

The first ruling stipulated that the accused be punished for the first with one year's



imprisonment and a fine of RO300, while the second ruling stipulated three months' imprisonment, provided that

the two penalties against him are combined and the more severe is implemented.

It also obliged the accused to return the stolen goods to the victims and compensate them with an order to suspend part of the prison sentence.

Public Prosecution investigations revealed that Bahla Police Station received a case from victims about their homes being robbed before an unknown person using the same

method.

The accused entered the house at night and removed doors with an iron tool to reach rooms to commit burglary.

Following search operations and during investigations, the accused admitted to committing the offence.

After investigating the cases, the Public Prosecution concluded that the accused be referred to the court for the crimes charged against him.

COME TO COOL COMFORT AT DIMA W'ATTAYEEN

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Dima W'attayeen, one of the wilayats of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, is about 170 km away from Muscat. Its terrain varies between mountainous environments, caves, valleys, and springs.

Al Jabal Al Abyadh or The White Mountain, Buhban Cave, Wadi Dayqah, Ain al Murr, Ain al Sukhna, Ain al Misfah, Ain Ajama, Ain al Ajaf, Ain Tamah, Ain Maqta', Ain al Zarqa, Ain Qabat and Ain al Zam are some of its major attractions. Dozens of people visit springs to recover from some skin diseases.

Dima W'attayeen attracts visitors to it for its beauty and



Dima W'attayeen attracts visitors to it for its beauty and splendor with its many wadis that flow throughout the year

splendor. The wilayat has many wadis that flow throughout the year. A few years ago, many tourist places were developed, including Samoot Natural Park, Al Ghubra Natural Park, and Al Shakhra

Natural Park. These sites are frequently visited by tourists from various governorates, especially during official holidays.

Samoot is ranked as one of the most beautiful tourist areas,



where tourists find psychological comfort in harmony with nature and tranquility. This area has many natural pools in which some people practice swimming.

For those who love climbing

high mountains, Al Jabal Al Abyadh has recently been connected by a dirt road. Recently, one of the large caves called Abu Habban Cave was discovered in the village of Soot.

Its residents depend on Aflaj to irrigate their farms, which produce dozens of varieties of local vegetables and fruits. There are nearly 224 active aflaj in this wilayat. There are historical sites like Al Hamam fort, Khaba fort and Al Hounn fort.

The residents of this wilayat are also into herding, blacksmithing and pottery making. Its residents are famous for breeding Arabian horses and they take part in Al Razha, Al Azi during the social, religious and national occasions.

Although the weather temperatures have begun to rise, the waters of the valleys of this wilayat contribute to cooling the atmosphere and provide the opportunity to spend time in the lap of nature.



BEWARE OF MOSQUITO BORNE DISEASES

1,000,000

THEY KILL
MORE THAN
A MILLION
ANNUALLY
WORLDWIDE

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Mosquitoes thrive soon after heavy rains as stagnant water is ideal for its breeding. Mosquitoes are known for spreading some of the world's worst diseases including malaria, yellow fever, encephalitis and dengue. Only female mosquitoes actually bite. They use their mouth, which looks like an upside-down funnel with the narrow end pointing down, to pierce the victim's skin and draw blood or plant sap. Mosquitoes bite places where blood is closest to the surface of the skin like face, neck, arms, wrists, legs and feet. In the transitional phase from winter to summer, mosquitoes and insects spread widely due to some environmental and behavioural factors. Climatic conditions,

as high temperatures with high humidity, promote the rapid reproduction by growth and formation of larvae. High growth of plants and trees in the summer, which increases the shade, provides hiding places for mosquitoes. Accumulation of waste water and garbage due to rapid urbanisation provides a suitable environment for mosquitoes. Reducing mosquitoes' spread, especially in the summer, requires joint cooperation between government and the community. Awareness campaigns must be activated about the importance of draining stagnant water and cleaning the surrounding environment, in addition to using preventive means such as anti-mosquito sprays and insect nets. People must use mosquito repellents and wear protective clothing to reduce exposure to mosquito bites. They must

High
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make sure doors and windows are closed before sunrise and after sunset, when mosquitoes are most active. In the event of exposure to bites and presence of symptoms such as fever or severe swelling, one must see a doctor immediately. According to a new study, "mosquitoes represent a serious threat to human health due to a substance found in their saliva, which may cause death, as mosquito-borne diseases cause more than a million deaths annually. Saliva, which carries the virus that causes dengue fever, also contains a substance that may suppress the immune system response in humans, which causes about 400 million people to be infected each year and re-infection is possible. Symptoms include fever, nausea and rash, and in some cases, it can lead to internal bleeding or death."



INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY

Govt museums receive over 600,000 visitors in 2023

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Sultanate of Oman celebrated International Museum Day on Saturday, aimed at underlining the importance of such dynamic institutions that promote learning, discovery, cultural awareness and understanding.

It may be noted that 11 government museums received 605,440 visitors in 2023, compared to 110,690 visitors by 19 private heritage houses and museums.

The total number of visitors to museums at the Natural History Museum in 2023 was 16,957, followed by 10,790 visitors to Fateh Al-Khair Centre in Sur and Museum of the Land of Frankincense (86,79) during the same period. International Museum Day is a global platform for enhancing the role of museums in cultural exchange and development. Museums around the world join forces to organise events, exhibitions and educational programmes centred around this topic, emphasising the effective



11 government museums received 605,440 visitors in 2023, compared to 110,690 visitors by 19 private heritage houses and museums

and valuable participation of museums in society.

Since the beginning of the Blessed Renaissance, the Sultanate of Oman has focused on the importance of promoting museums, which resulted in the presence of several archaeological missions in various sites, to uncover the most important archaeological collections in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, represented

by the General Directorate of Museums, is working on several projects related to the development of the museums, including upgrading the facilities at the Museum of the Land of Frankincense to keep pace with the major updates in the field of museums, including introducing new interactive display and security system.

The Ministry is also working on implementing a project to establish museum exhibition halls in several castles and forts

to introduce visitors to the historical and archaeological treasures, in addition to supporting museums and private heritage houses that face some operational challenges.

The Suhar Castle Museum rehabilitation project is one of the most prominent development projects undertaken to highlight the history of the city of Suhar, its historical landmarks and its cultural relations with the world.

OMAN TO HOST UN TOURISM MEETING

MUSCAT: The 50th meeting of the Regional Committee for the Middle East of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the 'Investment in Tourism' conference will commence on Wednesday, May 22.

The event, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will be held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel and will last for three days.

The opening ceremony of the meeting will be under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

Oman's hosting of the meeting is of significant importance in promoting its tourism sector and its cultural assets, while enabling the Omani tourism sector to strengthen relationships with its counterparts in the region.

The accompanying conference, titled 'Investment in Tourism:



Opportunities and Challenges of Sustainable Financing,' provides an opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to sustainably financing the tourism sector.

It aims to raise awareness of the importance of directing funds towards tourism projects that contribute to economic and social growth in sustainable ways.

Additionally, it will explore innovations and new solutions in tourism financing and enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable development goals in the tourism sector.

— ONA

Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
12/2023	HVAC system works - Mussanah Airbase	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	448/- R.O
16/2023	Building works - Adam Air Base	First and above	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	310/- R.O
03/2024	Building works - Mazyonah	First and above	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	146/- R.O
05/2024	HVAC system works - Thumrait	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	275/- R.O
08/2024	Electrical tapping from network at varicose location	Specialist in electrical works & registered with grad (B) in DCRP	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	1,400/- R.O
09/2024	Electromechanical works - WUDAM	Specialists in electromechanical (LPG System)	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	100/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as SOFT COPY only, and (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

EVENT PROMOTES AWARENESS ON TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN SUR

STAFF REPORTER
SUR, MAY 18

'Horizons', a timely initiative aimed at fostering awareness on self-employment and entrepreneurship in tourism, was held at the Sinesila Fort Sur last week. The event is held under the auspices of Harith bin Mohammed al Salti, Assistant Director of Sur Municipality, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, and Hana bint Juma al Sulaimiyah, Head of the Mass Communication Department at University of Technology and Applied Sciences Sur.

The event, supported by Al Sharqiyah South's Heritage and Tourism Department and OMIFCO Sur, is part of the ongoing 'Legacy' campaign organised by the public relations students at UTAS Sur. The campaign aims to promote tourism prospects of the Wilayat of Sur that has been declared the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2024.

Salem bin Khamis al Qalhati of Al Sharqiyah South's Heritage and Tourism Department, and Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Operational Manager of Darbak platform, spoke on various

opportunities in the tourism sector. Maya bint Amur bin Mohammed al Sulaimiyah, a public relations student at the university was the anchor of the programme. "The tourism sector has many opportunities, including investment opportunities and tourism promotion, in addition to becoming a tourist guide," Al Qalhati said. He added that the support for projects includes helping to identify suitable locations to establish a tourism project along with incentives from the government to take the land, fix rental value and a tax exemption. The event is a vibrant mix of activities, featuring an art exhibition showcasing the works of local artists from Sur, and a photo gallery highlighting the creative talents of photography enthusiasts. The photographs for the gallery were selected from a competition held under the theme of 'beauty of the city of Sur'. The top three winners, Abdullah al Sabti, Hamad al Rashidi and Abdullah bin Salem al Rashidi, were awarded prizes. The exhibition also had dedicated corners for heritage handicrafts, adding a cultural touch to the event.



The campaign aims to promote tourism prospects of the Wilayat of Sur that has been declared the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2024

TENDER NOTICE

The Department of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Muscat Governorate announces the invitation to the following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for submission of documents
833/2022/ MAFWR/ HQ-83 - Recall - 2	Removal of mesquite trees in AL- Jifnain Area, Wilayat of Seeb the first stage	25/-	Fourth	Wednesday 12-06-2024	Thursday 20-06-2024

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (In the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- Preference will be given to companies whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of national products.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtct.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Oman Cancer Association invites the experienced and specialized, Excellent and First Grade Contractors to participate in the tender process and submit their best offers, for the construction of the Oman Cancer Association's New Headquarters at Airport Heights ("Project"). The Project encompasses a full built-up area of approximately 30,200 square meters, and the selected bidder will assume the role of the main contractor.

The following are the tender purchase details in relation to the Project:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Day for Purchase of the Tender Documents	Last Day for Proposal Submission	Tender Document Fee
LV2024/ OCA/T/01	Construction of Oman Cancer Association's New Headquarters	23/05/2024	04/07/2024	1,000 OMR

- Interested bidders are to submit an official "Expression of Interest" letter (EOI) to the following email addresses, indicating their willingness to participate in the said tender:
 - To: Tender@linesandvisions.com
 - Cc: info@oca.om
- Interested bidders shall transfer the aforesaid Tender Fee to the following bank account and must attach the fee transfer receipt with the EOI letter and NO CASH will be accepted:
 - Account Number: 0315004093350018
 - Bank: Bank Muscat
 - Account Name: Oman Cancer Association
- THE BID SUBMISSION AND ANY INQUIRIES AND CLARIFICATIONS, please contact:
 - Technical Inquiries: Tender@linesandvisions.com
 - Submission: tender@oca.om
- Full Tender Documents will be issued to the interested bidders via email as a link (digital copy) and the bidder must acknowledge the receipt of the same. Bidders to note that the Oman Cancer Association is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested bidders will be requested to sign an NDA after purchasing the tender.



Fighting rages in Rafah as US aid via pier begins

RAFAH: Heavy clashes and bombardment on Saturday rocked Gaza's southern city of Rafah as the first humanitarian aid had entered the besieged territory via a US-built pier.

More than 10 days into what the Israeli military called a "limited" operation in Rafah that sparked an exodus of Palestinians sheltering there, fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian groups has also flared again in Gaza's north.

The Kuwaiti hospital said an overnight Israeli strike killed two people in a displacement camp in Rafah, with witnesses reporting heavy gunfire and shelling in the city's southeast and jets bombarding its eastern areas.

Correspondents, witnesses and medics said there were intense battles overnight in the northern Jabalia refugee camp, after the Israeli army reported on Friday "perhaps the fiercest" violence in the town in more than seven months of war.

The Israeli incursion into Rafah, launched despite overwhelming international opposition and as mediators were hoping for a breakthrough in stalled truce talks, has worsened



Children walk with bags of objects found in garbage piled up near tents set up by displaced Palestinians in Khan Younis. — AFP

The Kuwaiti hospital said an overnight Israeli strike killed two people in a displacement camp in Rafah, with witnesses reporting heavy gunfire and shelling

an already dire humanitarian crisis, aid groups say.

With key land crossings closed or operating at limited capacity due to the fighting, some relief supplies began flowing into war-ravaged Gaza via a temporary, floating pier constructed by the United States. The Israeli army said 310 pallets began moving ashore in "the first entry of humanitarian aid through the floating pier".

In the coming days, around 500 tonnes of aid are expected to be delivered to Gaza through the pier, according to US Central Command.

But UN agencies and humanitarian aid groups have warned sea or air deliveries cannot replace far more efficient truck convoys into Gaza, where the United Nations has repeatedly warned of looming famine.

The European Union welcomed the first shipment from Cyprus to the Gaza pier, but called on Israel to "expand deliveries by land and to immediately open additional crossings".

The Rafah crossing has been closed since the Israeli Rafah operation began early last week.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 35,386 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to data provided by the Palestinian territory's health ministry.

The toll includes at least 83 deaths over the past 24 hours, said a ministry statement on Saturday.

Amid the aid shortages, the Israeli army said "dozens of Israeli civilians" set fire to a Gaza-bound aid truck in the occupied West Bank on Thursday night, in the second such attack in a week.

The looming Israeli assault has prompted nearly 640,000 of the 1.4 million people who had been sheltering in Rafah to flee to other areas, the UN humanitarian office said. — AFP

French troops try to restore order in New Caledonia

NOUMEA: Hundreds of French security personnel tried to restore order in the Pacific territory of New Caledonia on Saturday, after a fifth night of riots, looting and unrest.

Bands of heavily armed French marines and police patrolled the capital Noumea, where streets were filled with debris from another night of violence.

Reporters in the city's Magenta district saw vehicles and buildings burned, with a phalanx of riot police on the scene trying to reassert government control.

One more person was killed on Saturday and two injured in France's Pacific territory of New Caledonia as security personnel tried to restore order after a fifth night of riots and looting that has now claimed six lives.

The incident occurred in the archipelago's northern Kaala-Gomen area, General Nicolas Mattheos said. An informed source said the dead man and one of the injured were a father and son trying to cross a barricade erected by rioters.



Police patrol a street blocked by debris and burnt out items following overnight unrest in the Magenta district of Noumea. — AFP

The unrest has been blamed on economic malaise, social tensions and — above all — a political fight between mostly Indigenous pro-independence activists and Paris authorities.

French officials have accused a separatist group known as CCAT of being behind the riots.

Ten activists accused of organising the violence have been placed under house arrest, according to authorities.

The territory is "on a destructive path" warned local minister Vaimu'a Muliaiva on Saturday, telling those involved "you are only punishing yourselves."

Pro-independence groups say that would dilute the vote of Indigenous Kanaks, who make up about 40 per cent of the population.

French authorities have called

for talks and insist the situation is now "calmer" and being brought under control.

"Reinforcements will control areas that have got out of our hands in recent days," said high commissioner Louis Le Franc, the highest-ranking state official in New Caledonia.

They began landing on Thursday at the French army-controlled La Tontouta International Airport and could be seen moving through Noumea in red berets, toting rifles, gas masks and riot shields.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said on Thursday that about 1,000 extra security forces were being deployed — adding to the 1,700 already present. Efforts to negotiate peace have so far stumbled.

President Emmanuel Macron cancelled a video conference with local political leaders on Thursday for lack of willing participants, but began contacting pro- and anti-independence officials individually on Friday, his office said. — AFP

SLOVAKIA'S OFFICIALS SAY PM FICO IN SERIOUS CONDITION



Supporters bring flowers and gifts as they gather near the F.D. Roosevelt University Hospital, in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia. — Reuters

BRATISLAVA: Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico remains in serious condition and still faces risks of complications but has stabilised, officials said on Saturday, following Wednesday's assassination attempt. The prime minister, 59, was shot at five times at point-blank range in an attack that sent shockwaves through Europe and raised concerns over the polarised state of politics in Slovakia, a central European country of 5.4 million people.

"We have not won yet, that is important to say," Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kaliinak said, giving an update on Fico's condition in front of the hospital in the town of Banka Bystrica where the prime minister is being treated.

The Slovak Specialised Criminal Court ruled on Saturday that the suspect, identified by prosecutors as Juraj C., would remain in custody after being charged with attempted murder.

Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok has said the suspected attacker, who was detained on the spot, acted alone. The suspect had previously taken part in anti-government protests, he said on Thursday.

Kalinak said there was no need to formally take over Fico's official duties while some communication with the premier was taking place.

Fico underwent a two-hour operation on Friday that improved prospects for his recovery.

"We are succeeding in gradually nearing a positive prognosis," Kalinak said. "In the initial hours, the prognosis was very, very bad, you know that shots into the abdomen are basically fatal, in this case (the doctors) managed to overturn this state and further stabilise the condition."

Fico still faced a "big risk" of complications, Kalinak said. "The body's reaction to a shooting wound is always very serious and brings (the risk of) a number of complications, which lasts for 4-5 days." He said it was unlikely Fico could be transferred to the capital, Bratislava, in coming days.

About 100 Fico supporters, some carrying flowers, gathered on Saturday outside the F.D. Roosevelt University Hospital where the premier was being treated.

Local news media say the suspect is a 71-year-old former security guard at a shopping mall and the author of three collections of poetry.

The court ruled he would remain in custody pending an investigation because of the risk of escape or criminal activity. The decision is subject to appeal. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

WARSAW

Poland to spend \$2.5 bn on securing border

Poland will invest \$2.55 billion in a programme to secure its east-border, the prime minister said on Saturday, in a bid to bolster its defences against what it says is a rising threat.

"We have decided to invest 10 billion zlotys in our security, and above all in a secure eastern border," PM Donald Tusk said.

"We are starting a major project to build a secure border, including a system of fortifications as well as landscaping and environmental decisions that



will make this border impossible to pass for a potential enemy." Tusk did not give further details of what kinds of fortifications would be built. — Reuters

VERONA

Pope leads forum for peace in Italy's Verona

Pope Francis presided over a forum for peace on Saturday during a visit to Verona. "Peace will never be the result of mistrust, of walls, of weapons pointed at each other," the 87-year-old told the audience gathered in Verona's Arena, a 1st-century Roman amphitheatre.

"We sow death, destruction, fear. Let us sow hope!" he told some 12,500 people present in the northern Italian city.

It was Francis' first trip since a visit to Venice in April where he



presided over mass in St Mark's Square. Despite the pope's health concerns, the Vatican is planning an ambitious 12-day trip to Asia in September. — AFP

FRANKFURT

Germany stages a major clean-up after floods

German emergency workers were on Saturday starting a clean-up after heavy rains triggered massive flooding in the southwest of the country, while parts of Belgium and the Netherlands were also hit.

Officials said it was the worst flooding in the area in nearly 30 years, with the capital Saarbruecken badly affected and reports saying that a breach in a dyke led to a power station in the state being shut down.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, visit-



ing a village in the affected area, said that "we can see here what violence nature can cause and how much we have to constantly prepare for such events." — AFP

Struggling Ukraine strikes at Russian energy



Andrés R. Martínez

The author is an editor for *The New York Times*, based in Seoul, responsible for breaking news coverage



Constant Méheut

The author is a reporter for *The New York Times*, currently covering the war in Ukraine

Ukraine has increasingly been striking Russian oil facilities in what military analysts say is an attempt to complicate the Russian military's logistics by hitting facilities that supply fuel for its tanks, ships and planes

Struggling to contain Russian advances on the battlefield, Ukraine is increasingly taking the fight to Russia beyond the front lines in an effort to disrupt its military operations and put pressure on its economy — targeting airfields, logistics hubs and critical energy facilities with missiles and drones. That strategy was on full display early on Friday when a series of explosions struck fuel depots, oil facilities and a power station in southwestern Russia and Crimea. Just a day before, Ukrainian missiles hit an airfield in Crimea, destroying at least three jets.

Russia's defence ministry said it had shot down more than 100 Ukrainian drones, a figure that would represent one of Ukraine's largest air assaults against Russia in months. A Ukrainian security official said Ukraine was behind the attack.

Although the full extent of the damage was unclear, Russian authorities reported that an electricity substation was hit in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, leading to rolling blackouts.

Just 70 miles east of Crimea, on Russia's Black Sea coast, fires broke out at several oil facilities, including in the port of Novorossiysk, which operates an important oil terminal.

Crimea, which Russia illegally seized a decade ago, and nearby Russian Black Sea ports have long been a prime target for the Ukrainian military.

Attacks there have three main objectives: reducing Russia's capacity to use Crimea as a launchpad for missile and drone attacks; disrupting supply lines that funnel fuel and ammunition to the battlefield; and degrading the Russian fleet docked in the region to ease the pressure on Ukrainian operations in the Black Sea, such as exporting grain.

Ukraine has increasingly been striking Russian oil facilities in what military analysts say is an attempt to complicate the Russian military's logistics by hitting facilities that supply fuel for its tanks, ships and planes.

Ukrainian officials also hope the strikes can undermine the Russian energy complex, which is at the core of the country's economy and war effort — accounting for about a third of Russia's federal budget revenue — although they do not appear to have had any serious effect yet.

The attack on Novorossiysk could mark an escalation in the Ukrainian strategy.

While Ukraine had previously attacked warships in Novorossiysk, the assault on Friday was the first time it had targeted the oil facilities there, said Damien Ernst, an energy expert at the University of Liège, Belgium.

Novorossiysk is a major Russian port for oil exports, with about 1.5 million barrels of Russian oil passing through each day, Ernst said. It's also the terminal for one of the world's largest pipelines, which exports most of Kazakhstan's oil, or about 1.3 million barrels a day.

Verified footage of the attack showed a large explosion above the city's oil terminal, although it was unclear whether the attack caused any serious damage to the terminal.

But it may raise further concerns in the United States, where the Biden administration has urged Ukraine to stop



Ukrainian police help a resident evacuated from Vovchansk, Ukraine, at a staging point on the route towards Kharkiv.

attacking Russian oil refineries out of concern about global oil markets.

In addition, American oil companies have a stake in the terminal. Chevron, for instance, is a significant shareholder in the pipeline transporting oil from Kazakhstan. The company did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ukrainian attacks on Crimea, an important logistical and military hub for the Russian army, have been more frequent.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Russian-backed governor of the Crimean city of Sevastopol, home to about half a million people, said on Telegram that schools had been closed across the city as a result of the attack. He added that repairs to the substation that had been hit would take about a day and that the resulting power shortages would force the authorities to introduce rolling blackouts.

It was the third attack in two days against Sevastopol. A day before, local authorities reported Ukrainian missile attacks on the Belbek military airfield outside the city.

Satellite images verified by *The New York Times* showed that three Russian jets had been destroyed and another had been damaged.

Ukrainian officials have long maintained that targeting Russian assets and operations in Crimea is critical to their war effort. It "is extremely important for us, because it's the way for us to reduce the number of attacks from that region," President Volodymyr Zelensky said earlier this year.

That objective appears to be even more important now that Ukrainian troops are losing ground on the battlefield.

Russia last week launched a new offensive in the northeast, quickly capturing several settlements in the Kharkiv region and forcing Ukraine to rush troops to the area.

Zelensky told Ukrainian journalists on Friday that Russian troops had advanced up to 6 miles from the Russian border into Ukrainian territory, but had not reached the stronger defensive lines in the region. He added that the situation in the area had stabilised.

Accustomed to disasters, Houston didn't see this one coming



J. David Goodman

The writer is the Houston bureau chief for *The New York Times*, reporting on the people and politics of Texas and Oklahoma

The storm that hurtled through Houston late on Thursday surprised a city long accustomed to bouts of serious weather. The Astros kept playing baseball, even as rain and wind whipped into the team's closed-dome stadium. Many people, following their evening routines, were caught unaware on bikes or at the gym.

By Friday, all across town — but particularly in the dense and verdant inner loop neighbourhoods that radiate from the city's skyscrapers — Houstonians confronted a cityscape of debris left by winds of up to 100 mph, as strong as some of the hurricanes that have hit the city in recent years.

Decades-old oak and pecan trees were ripped in two or knocked over at the roots, flattening fences or blocking roadways. Stop signs leaned at sharp angles. Highway billboards buckled, including the Car Wreck Cowboy, a local lawyer whose sign, usually towering over Interstate 45 near downtown, had been flattened into an empty lot.

At least seven people died as a result of the storm, and about 1 million people on the Gulf Coast lost power. The seriousness of the moment was underscored when Houston Mayor John Whitmire, a moderate Democrat, and the top county official, Lina Hidalgo, a progressive, put aside their differences and held a joint news conference on Friday — their first since Whitmire was elected last

year. Residents spoke of horizontal rain and detritus swirling into the air, and wondered whether a tornado had passed through.

"It was like we were in the middle of a blender," said Martha Rosas, who sat outside her home with her sister on Friday, surrounded by citronella candles. They provided light to the powerless home the night before, and now ward off swarms of attacking mosquitoes.

Throughout Friday, the city hummed to life in its post-disaster posture, one earned from calamities past: Hurricane Ike, Hurricane Harvey, the 2021 winter freeze. With city services overwhelmed, neighbours with chain saws emerged to help neighbours. Those with power offered their refrigerators to those without. Stoplights remained dark into the afternoon at many intersections. The city's drivers, often aggressive on its fast-flowing highways, were also transformed, now courteously trading turns at the unregulated intersections.

Lines formed at gas stations with working pumps and also at local doughnut shops that had opened their doors.

The storm surprised her and many Houstonians. "We were here for Ike — but we had days to get ready for that," Cantu said of the 2008 hurricane that hit the city. "We had time to prepare. For this, I don't think that anybody did."

As the power failures stretched into the



Dan Beagen tapes a broken window after a pecan tree fell on cars and his home during a wind storm the night before in Houston.

Houstonians confronted a cityscape of debris left by winds of up to 100 mph, as strong as some of the hurricanes that have hit the city in recent years.

afternoon, some residents began to worry. The weather was cool on Friday, but a heat wave was predicted for the weekend, with temperatures reaching 90 and a heat index near 100. And then there was the matter of all those groceries quickly going bad.

Behind him, four men, including one with a chainsaw and another with an ax, cut up a tree that had fallen across the road. A fifth man had been helping earlier — someone not from the neighbourhood who had just stopped to lend a hand.

Not far from his home, a large tree had crashed onto an SUV, killing a woman inside in her driveway on Avenue O. On Friday, the tree remained, with the driver's side door frame bent into a semicircle from the force of the fall. The rear door hung open, a child's car seat leaning out.

Family members told news station Telemundo that the woman was a mother of several children and had gone outside to move the car, worried that it would be damaged in the storm.

The storm also chopped through million-dollar homes, including many of those nestled between crooked live oaks planted more than a half-century ago.

In the Woodland Heights neighbourhood, a large tree fell onto an old bungalow, narrowly missing a home that had just been constructed and sold. The bungalow was also being renovated.

Psychological factors pave way for stalking



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Baby Reindeer — a British series inspired by real events experienced by the writer and main actor — tells the story of Danny, a young Scotsman living in London who aspires to be a comedian but lacks talent so he is forced to work in a bar where he meets Martha, a middle-aged overweight woman to whom he offers a free cup of tea. She becomes attracted to him, visiting him at the bar daily, and talking to him about her work as a lawyer.

Events become intertwined as she pursues him, desiring marriage even though he doesn't reciprocate her feelings. However, she continues to pursue him, sending over forty-one thousand emails, commenting on his Facebook photos, attending his comedy shows and seeking his sympathy by waiting outside his apartment in the cold and rain for hours just to see him.

When he finally takes pity on her and takes her to her flat, he discovers how lonely she is. Over time, their relationship oscillates between friendship, animosity and attraction, then turns

into hostility once again.

The series presents a deep portrayal of the relationship between the stalker and the victim, illustrating how some victims develop unhealthy relationships with their stalker despite the psychological and sometimes physical harm they endure. In this series, there's no clear distinction between good and evil so the viewers may find themselves sympathising with both parties and wondering why people behave in such ways.

Psychology defines stalking as an unwanted pattern of behaviour that includes pursuit, tracking and surveillance, causing distress, anxiety or fear for the victim's safety. Stalking behaviour persists despite requests from the victim to stop and may escalate to sexual assault or murder.

Social media has arguably exacerbated stalking and online harassment, adding further difficulties for victims. A research study from the United States in 2020 on men tracking women online revealed that some participants tended to downplay the risks of stalking or consider it romantic or a form of innocent flattery.

STALKING IS AN UNWANTED PATTERN OF BEHAVIOUR THAT INCLUDES PURSUIT, TRACKING AND SURVEILLANCE, CAUSING DISTRESS, ANXIETY OR FEAR FOR THE VICTIM'S SAFETY

Psychology tells us that the loneliness experienced by many people in our modern societies and the drastic changes that have occurred to social relationships have created a group of individuals who lack feelings of love, affection and care. They become victims of attachment and addiction to communication with strangers and may end up remaining in toxic or unhealthy relationships for fear of abandonment.

We can't solely blame social media, as there are many psychological factors at play, such as early childhood experiences, poor personal relationships and lack of self-confidence, which create an environment fertile for stalking and harassment.

Perhaps Baby Reindeer is a bold representation of this complex phenomenon yet what makes it more interesting is that we are told it was a real story, not just based on a real story. The author and protagonist may have used the show as a form of catharsis, giving him a way of healing from a very traumatic life event, as for the media reaction to the real Marthas and how Piers Morgan exploited the story, that's for another column.

Slovakia plunged into uncertainty after PM shooting

LASZLO JUHASZ

The shock attack on Slovakia's leader has put a question mark over the direction of his Russia-friendly government, which some analysts believe could respond by clamping down on critics.

Political analyst Tomas Koziak said members of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's Smer party were "horrified" because he runs a "one-man party."

"They do not know what will happen to their party," said Koziak. "If Fico's injury were to disqualify him from political activity, this would mean a really huge problem for Smer."

Fico's closest ally is defence minister Robert Kalinak, who is also one of four deputy premiers. Asked who would fill in for the leader, he offered no name to reporters.

Kalinak is "the obvious candidate to take over from Fico for at the least the next few months," said Marcin Zaborowski from the Globsec think tank.

"He is a moderate but he won't do anything to distinguish himself from Fico in foreign policy," the expert said.

Fico is a veteran politician whose remarks on Ukraine — including questioning its sovereignty — have soured ties between Slovakia and its neighbour. After he was elected last year, Slovakia stopped sending weapons to Ukraine, attacked by Russia in 2022. Were Fico to recover quickly, analyst Pavol Babos said he would likely take on a conciliatory tone that could woo new voters and strengthen Smer.

But "Fico is a politician of many faces, so it is very difficult to predict," Babos said.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Friday said he was praying for political ally Fico.

But "even if the prime minister recovers, he will be out of work for months and precisely in the most important months," Orban told public radio.

"We are facing an election in Europe that... I believe will decide, together with the US election, the question of war and peace in Europe."

Orban, like Fico, advocates peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. Fico has previously called for Kyiv to cede territory to Moscow to end the war — something Ukraine has repeatedly ruled out.

Zaborowski said the government could capitalise on public sympathy for Fico by ploughing ahead with a media clampdown.

"I think the next step here will be to speed up the pacification of public media and their takeover by those close to Fico," he warned.

"I think we can expect the government to rush to pass legislation on NGOs that it will use to limit their freedom."

The shooting has prompted fears of further violence in the polarised nation, although some analysts blame Fico's camp for having generated the atmosphere of hatred. — AFP

Invading Rafah doesn't help Israel



NICHOLAS KRISTOF

Now that President Biden is pressuring Israel to back away from an all-out invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, some supporters of Israel feel betrayed.

They ask: How can Israel protect itself and ensure its security if it can't eliminate Hamas leaders hiding in tunnels under Rafah? Why sacrifice thousands of lives, Palestinian and Israeli alike, but stop short of a definitive end to the war that would lay the groundwork for rebuilding Gaza? They raise legitimate questions, but I think they misunderstand Biden's motivations as purely humanitarian and intended simply to avert a blood bath in Rafah. Saving lives is an important factor — and for my part, I wish Biden would apply more pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to protect Palestinian civilians — but even if you put aside humanitarian concerns, many observers also believe that Israel itself would be better off if it showed restraint.

It may be in Netanyahu's interest to flatten Rafah, because anything that prolongs the war keeps him in office, but it's not in Israel's interest.

For starters, the premise of those favouring a Rafah invasion is that the assault might be bloody but would enable the complete destruction of Hamas. But I've been arguing since the beginning of this war that Israel is unlikely to eradicate Hamas, any more than the United States eradicated the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Vietcong in Vietnam or violent militias in Iraq.

Gadi Eisenkot, a former chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces and a member of the current Israeli war cabinet, also warned earlier this year that talk of the "absolute defeat" of Hamas is a "tall tale." Likewise, Secretary of State Antony Blinken argued that invading Rafah will not eliminate Hamas fighters or end the insurgency — so it looks as if the demolition of Rafah would mostly just kill more Palestinians, risk the lives of Israeli hostages, further inflame Gazans to seek vengeance and advance the growing isolation of Israel in ways that undermine its long-term security. Israel has always gotten Hamas wrong. In the 1980s, the Israeli government nurtured the rise of Hamas in Gaza because it thought religious figures would spend their time praying in mosques rather than firing



Children stand near a crater caused by Israeli bombardment in a street in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday. — AFP

CHILDREN WHO ARE BOMBED AND STARVED BY ISRAEL TODAY MAY BE AMONG THOSE WHO ATTACK ISRAEL A DECADE ROM NOW.

rockets. And in the run-up to October 7, Netanyahu helped prop up Hamas financially because he thought that it would split Palestinians and reduce pressure for a Palestinian state.

Acting against one's own security interests is not peculiar to Israel. The United States believed it needed to protect itself by fighting in Vietnam and Iraq. Russia insisted on fighting in Afghanistan. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and in the process midwived Hezbollah, now one of its great enemies. I opposed the US war in Iraq not because I was anti-American but because I believed it would cost many lives while undermining American security. In the same way, opposing Israel's invasion of Rafah does not make me (or Biden or anyone else) anti-Israel. Indeed, Biden may be the most pro-Israel president in American history.

One reason to be sceptical of the Israeli plan to deal with Rafah is that there isn't one. The Israel Defense Forces previously waged war in northern Gaza and appeared to defeat Hamas there, but without a strategy to hold the territory. So Hamas rose there once more, and Israel's lack of any coherent plan for Gaza suggests that this could go on indefinitely.

An important reason I doubt that invading Rafah is in Israel's security interest is a lesson the US forces learned in Iraq: Pay attention not only to the number of fighters you kill, but also to the number you create. "It is likely that the Gaza conflict will have a generational impact on terrorism," Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence, warned in March. That seems right to me, partly because of reporting that I've done over the years in Gaza before October 7. Gazans, like all people, have diverse views.

I talked to Ahmed Jundiya, then a 14-year-old boy, who told me that he aspired to massacre Israelis.

"War made us feel we will die anyway, so why not die with dignity," Ahmed told me. He added: "Maybe we can kill all of them, and then it will get better." I have no idea what became of Ahmed, but I wonder if angry kids like him grew up to be those who brutalised Israeli civilians on October 7. I likewise fear that children who are bombed and starved by Israel today may be among those who attack Israel a decade from now.

Republicans accuse Biden of betraying America's friendship with Israel by pausing the transfer of 2,000-pound bombs and taking other steps to discourage a full invasion of Rafah. I'd say it's the opposite, a measure of Biden's concern for Israel's own interests. On balance, it seems to me that Biden is more clearly on Israel's side than Netanyahu is.

— The New York Times

An educational concept that works

In the County Durham town of Newton Aycliffe, an educational establishment that had its beginnings in 2016, is gaining a genuine reputation in the education sector, with a concept I believe, has significant merit in any society.

The University Technical College — UTC South Durham — is a state-funded, purpose-built school for 14-19 year old students that specialises in science, technology, engineering and maths. Its focus is on engineering and advanced manufacturing, and by their 6th form year, students will elect either STEM focused academic qualifications (A-Levels), an advanced technical qualification (T-Levels), or a pre-apprenticeship programme with the focus on specialist technical knowledge and skills.

The strength of its core educational objectives, and the recent 'Good' rating by Ofsted, demonstrate that UTC is delivering on that potential. This concept appears to be the perfect model to embrace, given the distinctly progressive science and technology 'future-proofing' which is a key element of the current government's pledge to support new age technologies and opportunities.

Learners, parents, communities, staff, industry partners, and school trustees all have a voice in implementing a curriculum with the objective of producing career-ready young people, many of whom commit to apprenticeships and employment while still at the UTC, such is its burgeoning reputation. According to Principal Tom Dower, "The success of the UTC lies in creating a culture where students see themselves as young professionals and staff and the rest of the community are there to support them in preparing themselves for their career." The UTC education focuses very much on its 'Student Leaver Profile' – a community model – which is a student self-assessment of their academic and technical knowledge, their core employability skills, and the professional and career experiences they will require by graduation.

Linked to these are 'student led



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The writer is a media consultant

A TRADITIONAL EDUCATION DOES WELL PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR AN ACADEMIC CAREER BUT CLEARLY, FALLS WELL SHORT OF THEIR BEING WORK-READY.

conferences,' which are prepared for and managed by the learners themselves, during which they will present to their parents and teachers regarding their career readiness.

Further, two weeks every year are programmed as 'work placements,' where students apply to workplaces to work with a view to affirming, or otherwise, their career choices.

This activity is managed by Deputy Principal Catherine Purvis-Mawson, who explains "Employers are always looking for a talent pipeline of young people who are enthusiastic and have a great attitude. Enabling our students to have meaningful experiences with these employers, allows our students to have a clear understanding of an employer and their expectations. This is mutually beneficial as employers have the opportunity to learn more about our students and their education, and allows them to build connections with the students and UTC, through an Industry Employer Group that meets regularly to shape a Professional and Career Experience (PaCE) curriculum, co-created to ensure our students leave the UTC career and life ready."

Can you imagine the value of such a programme to your young people, for whom, bridging the gap between school and the workplace is a massive challenge? Tom Dower has nothing but empathy for those caught there, saying "It's hard for teenagers to look ahead and make good decisions when they don't have a clear understanding of the options open to them and where they might lead. A traditional education does well preparing young people for an academic career but clearly, falls well short of their being work-ready. The UTC style of education ensures that they have the skills and confidence employers are looking for, alongside first-hand experience of the workplace so that they can make the right decisions for them and their future careers."

So much of education today is about teachers, and what they want, need, and prioritise. Here is a genuine option that meets the needs of societies, and in a unique and relevant way, the learners... perfectly.

FIGHT FOR CLEAN WATER



Surfers and swimmers take part in a mass 'Paddle Out' protest, to demonstrate against the continued dumping of untreated sewage by water companies, off the coast of Brighton, Britain, on Saturday. – AFP

Only public-private cooperation can boost decarbonisation

As countries around the world experienced record temperatures last year, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres declared, "We must turn a year of burning heat into a year of burning ambition." But to move away from fossil fuels and unlock the green transition's economic benefits, such as job creation and universal access to clean energy, industry leaders and policymakers must work together to translate the commitments made at the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28) into actual renewable gigawatts.

COP28 marked a historic turning point in the battle against climate change. Rallying around the UAE Consensus, world leaders pledged to move away from fossil fuels, agreeing to triple renewable power capacity to at least 11,000 gigawatts and double energy efficiency by 2030.

But ambition alone is not enough to achieve these targets and limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius. Governments must invest in mature, cost-competitive renewable technologies that can be rapidly deployed at scale. When integrated with long-duration energy storage, green hydrogen, and system optimisation, these technologies represent the most



FRANCESCO LA CAMERA



BRUCE DOUGLAS

WORLD LEADERS HAVE PLEDGED TO TRIPLE RENEWABLE POWER CAPACITY TO AT LEAST 11,000 GIGAWATTS AND DOUBLE ENERGY EFFICIENCY BY 2030.

reliable and flexible way to accelerate the energy transition.

Renewables will undoubtedly shape the global energy landscape in the coming years. Both solar and wind power are expected to grow significantly, with hydropower serving as the backbone of grid flexibility. Consequently, renewables are poised to become the twenty-first century's dominant source of global electricity.

But as a joint report released by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the Global Renewables Alliance (GRA) ahead of COP28 noted, tripling renewable capacity will require cooperation between the private and public sectors. Partnerships should focus on initiatives that deliver immediate results, such as mobilising low-cost financing, accelerating permitting processes, clearing grid connection backlogs, reforming government auction mechanisms for renewable-energy projects, and diversifying global supply chains. A strong commitment to inclusivity and the active participation of developing economies must be at the heart of these efforts. IRENA and GRA are demonstrating this

commitment by collaborating on the annual reports commissioned by the COP28 Presidency to monitor progress towards the global tripling target and facilitate the energy transition.

We must, however, move faster, especially if we aim to ensure that progress is equitably distributed around the world. While renewable power capacity rose by 473 gigawatts in 2023, the economic benefits of the energy transition did not reach every country. Remarkably, 83 per cent of these increases were concentrated in China, the European Union, and the United States, leaving many countries in the Global South behind.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

In fact, the shift to renewables is alarmingly slow in many parts of the world. Opportunities to address development and access challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 500 million people still lack access to electricity, are being squandered. This sluggish transition can be attributed largely to the lack of affordable financing, adequate planning, and the policy and market frameworks needed to support the adoption of

renewable energy. Tellingly, public fossil-fuel subsidies reached \$1.3 trillion in 2022 – roughly the annual investment needed to triple renewable capacity by 2030.

A critical first step towards fostering greater public-private cooperation in pursuit of COP28's ambitious targets is to reform the global financial architecture. Africa, for example, accounts for 17 per cent of the world's population but has received less than 2 per cent of global investments in renewable energy over the past two decades, underscoring the need to reduce capital costs and attract private investors. Developing industrial clusters and initiating grant programmes could also help foster environments conducive to innovation and private-public partnerships.

Recent commitments by world leaders offer glimmers of hope. African leaders at the September 2023 Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, for example, pledged to increase the continent's renewable capacity to at least 300 gigawatts by 2030. This effort aims to reduce energy poverty and boost the global supply of cost-effective clean energy suitable for industrial use.

In the words of Kenyan President William Ruto, a key advocate of the Nairobi agreement, today's energy crisis is "a wake-up call that fossil fuels are the opposite of freedom, yet the world has become shackled to them. We need to break free from those chains." To this end, Ruto established the Accelerated Partnership for Renewables in Africa, an African-led international alliance of governments and stakeholders that aims to accelerate renewable-energy deployment, increase access, promote green industrialisation, and strengthen economic and societal resilience.

Governments and business leaders should harness the current political momentum to foster cooperation between policymakers and private investors. As governments develop appropriate policy and market frameworks to facilitate the transition to renewables, the private sector — historically responsible for 86% of global investments in renewable energy — is poised to lead the charge. Together, we can achieve a clean, secure, and just energy future. But to realise this vision, we must act fast.

Sport

Al Seeb grab Youth Basketball League, Salalah runners-up

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Al Seeb Club was crowned as champion of the Youth Basketball League for the 2023-24 sports season, while Salalah won second place, and Nizwa finished third.

The ceremony was held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, under the auspice of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, President of the OBA, and was attended by Vice-President Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, Secretary-General, along with club representatives.

As part of the celebration, the OBA organised an exciting 3x3 basketball tournament for the clubs that won the league. This was in line with the OBA's plan to promote 3x3 basketball among clubs, develop players' skills, and provide opportunities for competition and showcasing players' abilities. Four teams participated in the tournament, representing the three winning clubs in the Youth League: Al Seeb (A), Al Seeb (B), Nizwa and Salalah. The single-round competition resulted in Salalah's team, consisting of Sufyan Beit Tawfiq, Saeed Ghassan, Qaisar al Balushi and Abdulrahman al Balushi, winning first place after defeating Nizwa's team, consisting of Akram



al Rashidi, Younis al Shariqi, Dia al Anqoudi and Saud al Sabah, in the final match with a score of 11-10. Nizwa came in second place, while Al Seeb (B) team, consisting of Mu'ayed al Battashi, Salem al Masroori, Ayoub al Jabri and Mohammed al Wahaibi, won third place after defeating Al Seeb (A) team, consisting of Abdulrahman al Mamari, Al Qasim al Zahaibi, Azed al

Bahlani and Ozan al Ajmi, with a score of 9-5. Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, President of the OBA, presented the awards to the winners of the top positions. Al Seeb was awarded with trophy and gold medals, Salalah was awarded trophy and silver medals, and Nizwa was awarded the bronze medals. In the individual awards, Abdulrahman al

Mamari of Al Seeb Club won the Most Valuable Player (MVP) and Top Scorer awards, while Qaisar al Balushi of Salalah Club won the Best Playmaker award, and Dia al Anqoudi of Nizwa Club won the Most Three-Point Scorer award.

Al Naabi said: "Focusing on supporting age groups and tournaments is one of the important windows that contributes to raising the efficiency and technical levels of players. OBA is making great efforts, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, to enhance the work of the athletes preparation centres that have been launched in several clubs in the Sultanate of Oman by a joint plan with the ministry."

"The league was successful and witnessed different levels, and it produced several promising talents that can be a real support for the teams and future age groups," he said. "The athlete preparation centres aim to spread the game in all the governorates of Oman, as the project represents a real gateway for preparing athletes, and provides a good environment to attract talents from the age group, which contributes to strengthening the game and feeding clubs and national teams with talented players," he said.



SAHAM CLUB



IBRI CLUB

AL ZAABI CLINCHES JUNIOR TT TITLE



NASSER AL ZAABI AND ALI AL AJMI

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The youngster paddler, Nasser al Zaabi from Saham Club clinched the title of the 2024 Junior Singles Table Tennis Championship, after he defeated his team-mate Ali al Ajmi from Saham Club 3-0.

Meanwhile, Ibri Club won the Junior Teams Championship after they topped the tally by securing 10 points while Saham Club came in second by nine points and Salalah Club positioned in third place by eight points.

As many as 27 players took part in the singles category event at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The participants were divided into seven groups, the top two players from each group advanced to the round of 16 knockout stage. Champion Nasser al Zaabi defeated Ali al Rawahi in the semifinals before overcoming Nasser al Balushi in the quarterfinals.

While in the teams category, six clubs participated in the event namely: Ibri, Sohar, Qurayat, Rustaq, Salalah and Seeb.

The potential paddler Nasser al Zaabi delivered an impressive show during the tournament as he won the singles events, and assisted his team to end as the runners-up in the teams category. Oman's table tennis head coach Omid Shams and women's

head coach Fatemeh Kivani attended the tournament to note their technical points for the participated players from different clubs representing the governorates across the Sultanate of Oman.

The head coach Omid went to Iraq alongside with national team player Muhannad al Balushi who is taking part currently in the West Asia qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

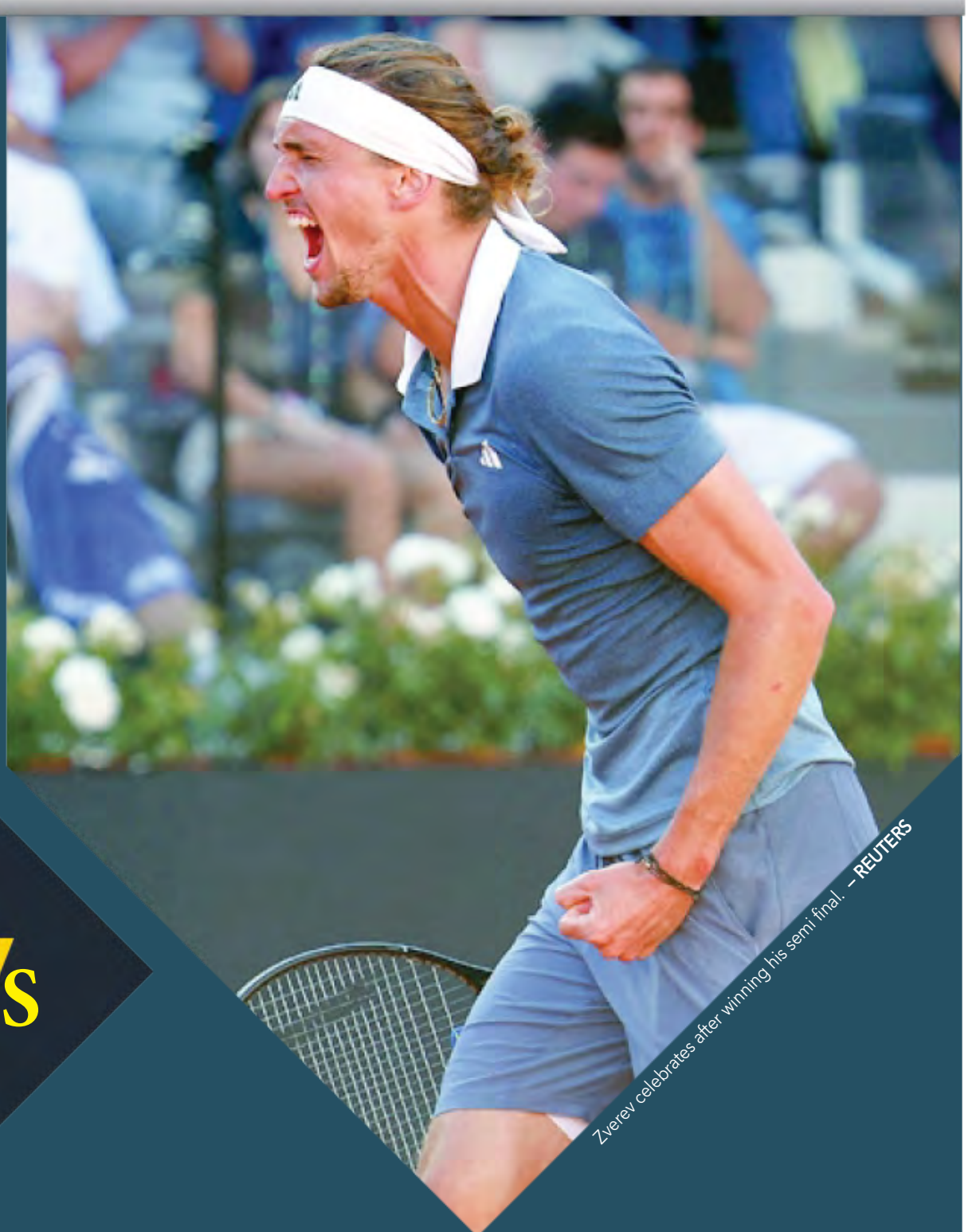
Saham's player Nasser al Zaabi managed to win the title after tough competitions throughout all stages of the tournament, particularly in the final match. He maintained a high level of technical performance despite continuous efforts by his opponent Ali al Ajmi who worked hard to overcome him but al Zaabi managed to end the game for him. In the third and fourth play-off game, Moayyed al Mutawa from Salalah Club edged Ali al Rawahi from Ibri Club 3-0 to claim the third position award.

In the team competition, Ibri Club won the championship title by securing 10 points from five matches.

Ibri Club players won all their matches as they began their campaign with defeating Saham 3-1, and then Qurayat Club 3-0, Seeb Club 3-0, and both Salalah and Rustaq clubs with the same score. Saham Club finished second with nine points, and Salalah Club came third with eight points.



ZVEREV EQUALS BECKER RECORD TO SET UP ROME FINAL WITH JARRY



Vs

ROME: Germany's Alexander Zverev equalled compatriot Boris Becker's record by reaching an 11th Masters final on Friday when he ended the Rome Open giant-killing run of Alejandro Tabilo to set-up a title showdown against Nicolas Jarry.

World number five Zverev, who lifted the Rome trophy in 2017, battled back to see off Tabilo 1-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 to tie Becker's record for the most Masters finals by a German since the series began in 1990.

Third seed Zverev looked like he would become the latest high-ranking victim of an unusual men's tournament when he was battered in a sensational opening set.

But Zverev battled back and after coming through a tight second set his class eventually showed, making the final at the Foro Italico for the third time.

"I was just hanging on in the second set. I brought my energy up. I was really just hanging on and waiting and the patience was kind of good today," Zverev said on court.

"He hit me off the court in the first set and I did not play well at all, but he was a big reason why. He gave me no rhythm and I am happy I turned it around in the tie-break and ran away in the third set."

Tabilo's run to the last four had become one of the stories of a

tournament which was shed of a host of top men players either to pre-event injuries or shock early eliminations.

The 26-year-old Chilean had defeated world number one Novak Djokovic in the third round and the 32nd-ranked player showed little fear of Zverev until he began to play more passively in the second set tie-break.

Jarry ends Paul's hopes

Zverev will be a big favourite to win Sunday's championship match when he faces Tabilo's countryman Jarry, who won his first Masters 1000 semi-final against Tommy Paul 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

Jarry is guaranteed to move up to a career-high number 17 in the world rankings after reaching his seventh ATP

final.

The 28-year-old is hunting his fourth tour title after coming through a more prosaic encounter with American Paul than Zverev had with Tabilo.

Jarry took the first set after breaking in game eight.

Paul fought back and won a more eventful second set, but instead of pushing on he missed the chance to become the first American to reach the Rome final since Andre Agassi 22 years ago.

Jarry sealed the deal after wasting four match points in the most dramatic game of the contest, setting up the biggest match of his career.

"I was able to come back with

my tennis in the third set, play very aggressive. To finish the match is never easy but I made it through and it's an amazing feeling," said Jarry.

"I think that in those moments I play my best tennis, when I have to give it all and I go for it."

Italian fans will have something to cheer for on Sunday after Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini reached the women's doubles final where they will face Coco Gauff and Erin Routliffe.

Home supporters were denied the chance to see world number two Jannik Sinner and former Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini who pulled out before the event started.

— AFP

OGA discusses forthcoming events

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Oman Golf Association (OGA) board directors held their first meeting under chairmanship of HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of (OGA) in presence of the board members. In its inaugural meeting, the OGA board discussed ongoing and enhanced efforts to elevate the sport of golf to the highest levels. The meeting focused on positioning golf among the prominent sports that contribute to the enhancement of both sports and social aspects in Oman.

The board expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, headed by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, for its support to the golf sport. The board also thanked the General Assembly members for their trust and election to lead the association for the term 2024-



2028. They emphasised their commitment to strengthening relationships with golf clubs in Oman to promote the sport and expand its base.

The board celebrated the recent achievements of the youth golf teams in the GCC Youth Games in UAE as they won silver medal beside finishing in second-place in the under-18 category in Qatar.

The board approved the external participation calendar for this season, including Arab Men's Championship and Arab Junior and Youth Championships. Oman will host the Gulf Junior and Youth Championships for under-16 and girls later this year.

Pacers pummel Knicks to stay alive

LOS ANGELES: The Indiana Pacers produced another big win on their home court on Friday, routing the New York Knicks 116-103 to force a decisive game seven in their NBA Eastern Conference semi-final series.

Pascal Siakam scored 25 points to lead Indiana's scoring. Tyrese Haliburton added 15 with nine assists and Myles Turner had 17 points as six Pacers players scored in double figures.

On the brink of elimination after an embarrassing game five defeat in New York, the Pacers played with desperate aggression, out-scoring the Knicks 62-38 in the paint and winning the rebounding battle.

They hustled after loose balls, blocked eight shots and handed out 35 assists to keep their offense firing, and kept Knicks talisman Jalen Brunson in check for much of the night as they improved to 6-0 at home in this post-season.



New York Knicks (5) shoots the ball while Indiana Pacers forward Jalen Smith (25) defends. — USA TODAY Sports

They'll have to follow up on the road, however, if they want to book a clash with the Boston Celtics in the Eastern Conference finals, with the Knicks hosting game seven on Sunday at Madison Square Garden.

"Now it's a one game series, and it's for all the marbles," Haliburton said. "Where better to have a game seven than the Garden? 'No team's won a game on the road in this series, so we've got to be ready to go from start to finish in 48 minutes.'"

The Pacers broke open a close game with a 17-2 scoring run that pushed their lead to 13 points late in the second quarter.

Donte DiVincenzo stopped the rot for New York, draining a three-pointer from the corner that cut the Pacers' lead to 10, 61-51, at halftime.

Brunson was limited to five points on 2-of-13 shooting in the first half. He found his range after the break, scoring 14 points in the third and finishing with 31.



Lukas Hradecky lifts the trophy after winning the Bundesliga and going unbeaten. – Reuters

LEVERKUSEN, Germany: Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday became the first team in Bundesliga history to go through an entire season unbeaten after a 2-1 home win against Augsburg extended their undefeated streak in all competitions to 51 games.

Crowned Bundesliga champions for the first time in April, goals from Victor Boniface and Robert Andrich put Leverkusen — who play the Europa League final against Atalanta and the German Cup final this week — on course for victory.

Elsewhere, Leverkusen's rivals Cologne were relegated after a 4-1 loss at Heidenheim.

Union Berlin scored in stoppage time against Freiburg to win 2-1 and beat the drop, leapfrogging Bochum who will play a two-legged relegation play-off against second-division Fortuna Duesseldorf after losing 4-1 at Werder Bremen.

Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen took the lead after 12 minutes when Amine Adli forced Augsburg goalkeeper Tomas Koubek into an error, winning possession before squaring for Boniface to tap in from close range.

Midfield star Andrich doubled Leverkusen's lead, backheeling in a rebound after 27 minutes.

Augsburg teenager Mert Komor pulled one back on his first start for the visitors with a stunning strike on the 62nd-minute mark, but Leverkusen held on to win ahead of what could be a historic week.

At the other end of the table, Union — who were playing Champions League against the likes of Real Madrid as recently as December — were locked 1-1 at home to Freiburg in stoppage time and headed for a relegation playoff clash with Duesseldorf.

Union had been reduced to 10 men when Michael Gspurning was red carded with four minutes remaining but won a penalty just into stoppage time.

Kevin Volland missed the

LEVERKUSEN COMPLETE BUNDESLIGA SEASON UNBEATEN, COLOGNE RELEGATED

spotkick but Janik Haberer was there to turn in the rebound and save Berlin.

Bochum, who looked to have secured top-division football with a 4-3 win at Union Berlin two weeks ago, will now need to beat Duesseldorf in a home and away playoff.

The loser of that playoff will play second division football with Cologne as well as Darmstadt who were relegated earlier in the season.

Serhou Guirassy scored a brace as Stuttgart won 4-0 at home against Borussia Moenchengladbach, leapfrogging Bayern Munich, who lost 4-2 to a Andrej Kramaric-inspired Hoffenheim, into second spot.

Without the injured Harry Kane, Bayern were 2-0 up after just six minutes thanks to goals from Mathys Tel and Alphonso Davies.

Maximilian Beier, selected as part of Germany's Euros squad on Thursday, cut the deficit two minutes later, capitalising on a Manuel Neuer error to make it 2-1.

Kramaric then scored three goals in 20 minutes to turn the match on its head. Bayern finished outside the top two for the first time since 2010-11.

Borussia Dortmund veteran Marco Reus signed off in impressive style in his last home match, scoring a goal and laying on another in a 4-0 win over Darmstadt.

In Dortmund's last competitive outing before June's Champions League final clash with Real Madrid at Wembley, Reus set up Ian Maatsen for the opener after 30 minutes, then added one of his own from a free kick eight minutes later.

Julian Brandt and Donyell Malen added second-half goals to seal the win.

Eintracht Frankfurt came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at home with RB Leipzig, while Mainz came from behind to win 3-1 at Wolfsburg. — AFP



Leverkusen fans celebrate after the winning. – AFP



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Panel discussion on investment between Oman and Qatar at the 33rd Doha International Book Fair.

Volume of investments between Oman and Qatar reaches \$1.4 billion

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The volume of investments between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar has amounted to \$1.4 billion as of end-2023, according to Zahra bint Ali al Siyabiyah, Head of the Commercial Representation Office of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

In a panel discussion at the 33rd Doha International Book Fair held in Qatar last week, Al Siyabi shared that Qatar ranks as the sixth biggest investor in Oman with investments amounting to \$69 million by 2023.

Al Wisal Radio, which reported on the panel discussion, quoted the official as saying that there are currently 184 Qatari companies in Oman and 14 investment projects supported by the Oman Investment Authority and the Qatari Investment Authority. Meanwhile, the Board Member of the Qatari Chamber of Commerce, Eng Ali bin Abdullatif al Misned, revealed that the number of Omani companies investing in Qatar has reached around 400.

“Several joint ventures have been established between Oman and Qatar, including Karwa Motors, which established a factory in Oman, the Qatar Oman Investment Company. The number of Omani investment companies in Qatar has reached 400, underscoring the close cooperation between investors in both countries.”

According to the board member, the strong relationship between the two nations in the field of investments has been strengthened by a number of mutual agreements, the Qatari-Omani Business Council, mutual delegations and visits, and cooperation opportunities between the two nations. However, he believes that more can be achieved, and that both countries must focus on expanding globally.

“The volume of trade between the two countries is substantial, but the vision aspires for even more cooperation. We should not focus only on the markets of the two countries but also move towards global markets as allies,” he stated.

According to data shared by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, exports from Oman to Qatar amounted to \$8 million, while imports from Qatar were valued at \$5 million. The majority of traded items consisted of oil and oil derivatives, food products, pharmaceuticals, wood, iron, building materials and other products.

OMAN’S TRADE SURPLUS REACHES RO 1.693 BILLION



MUSCAT: The trade balance of the Sultanate of Oman recorded a surplus of RO 1.693 billion at the end of February 2024 compared to the same period in 2023, which registered a surplus at RO 1.378 billion, according to preliminary statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics indicated that the value of commodity exports at the end of February reached RO 4.414 billion, rising by 19.5 per cent from the same period last year at RO 3.695 billion. The value of commodity imports registered for the Sultanate of Oman was RO 2.721 billion, up by 17.4 per cent at the end of February 2024 compared to the same period last year at RO 2.317 billion.

The increase in the value of exports is mainly attributed to the increase in the value of Oman’s exports of oil and gas to RO 2.566 billion, a 7.2 per cent increase over the end of February 2023 at RO 2.394 billion.

The value of Oman’s exports of crude oil reached RO 1.905 billion, registering a 21.5 per cent increase

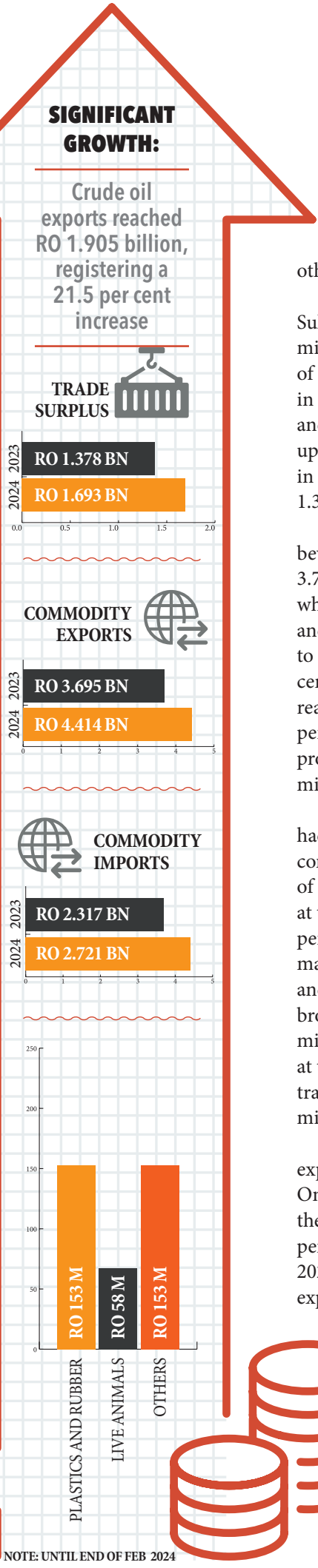
from the same period last year.

Meanwhile, the value of refined oil exports decreased to RO 210 million by 19 per cent, and the value of Oman’s exports of liquefied natural gas decreased to RO 451 million by 20.5 per cent compared to the end of February 2023.

The statistics revealed an increase in the value of non-oil commodity exports by 49.1 per cent at the end of February 2024, reaching RO 1.601 billion, compared to the end of February 2023 at RO 1.074 billion.

Metal products had the highest value of non-oil commodity exports, reaching RO 839 million, up by 142.7 per cent from the same period in 2023. Ordinary metal products and their products at RO 232 million, an increase of 16.3 per cent, then chemical industries and related industries with exports value of RO 167 million, a 12.1 per cent decrease.

The value of exports of plastics and rubber products increased to RO 153 million by 9.5 per cent, while exports of live animals and animal products increased by 2.8 per cent to reach RO 58 million. The value of exports of



other products was RO 153 million.

The value of re-exports from the Sultanate of Oman reached RO 247 million, up by 8.9 per cent at the end of February 2024, with re-exports in machinery, electrical equipment, and parts reaching RO 62 million, up by 13.4 per cent, while re-exports in transport equipment decreased by 1.3 per cent to reach RO 60 million.

The value of re-exports in food, beverages, and liquids decreased by 3.7 per cent to reach RO 24 million, while the re-export of live animals and animal products increased to RO 23 million, up by 9.1 per cent. Re-exports of metal products reached RO 18 million, up by 12.6 per cent, and the value of other products’ re-exports was RO 61 million.

Conversely, metal products had the highest value of non-oil commodity imports for the Sultanate of Oman, reaching RO 897 million at the end of February, up by 47.5 per cent. This was followed by machinery, electrical equipment and parts, and sound recording and broadcasting equipment at RO 404 million, a growth of 17.1 per cent at the end of February 2024, then transport equipment at RO 226 million, an increase of 4.6 per cent.

Saudi Arabia topped non-oil export trade in the Sultanate of Oman, reaching RO 170 million at the end of February 2024, up by 7.6 per cent from the end of February 2023, while the UAE topped re-export trade from the Sultanate of Oman, with a value of RO 71 million. Also, the UAE ranked first in the list of top countries exporting to the Sultanate of Oman with a value of RO 667 million, up by 8.1 per cent from the end of February 2023.

— ONA

Buy Now Pay Later services prepped for launch in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Draft regulations to support the introduction of ‘Buy Now Pay Later’ (BNPL) services – short-term credit to enable online and offline purchases of all kinds of consumer goods and services – have been published by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

In a post, the Central Bank said the publication of the Draft Guidelines on the Licensing & Regulatory Framework for ‘Buy Now, Pay Later’ is aimed at eliciting public feedback on the provisions of the new initiative, before it can be fine-tuned and finally approved.

When eventually enacted, the

‘Buy Now, Pay Later’ initiative has the potential to spur consumer spending and impart a much-needed boost to the consumer retail sector in the country.

The apex bank describes Buy Now Pay Later as a “short-term financing facility availed by customers to purchase goods or services and defer the payment for a later date, often in monthly instalments”.

The concept of BNPL services, while having existed for years under conventional banking systems, has burgeoned in the wake of the growth of fintech, offering consumers unmatched ease-of-use when shopping online or offline.

A robust regulatory framework,



the Central Bank noted, is key to fostering the growth of BNPL services “in a safe and sound manner aimed at ensuring fair and transparent practices that protect customers from over indebtedness and unfair lending practices”.

Companies seeking a licence to operate BNPL services must have a minimum capital of RO 250,000 and have a physical presence within Oman, according to licencing criteria stipulated by the Central Bank.

Licenced BNPL providers can offer their services either through a merchant store (online or offline) or over the BNPL provider’s digital platform that services multiple merchants.

BNPL services can be offered either at the time of checkout or as an upfront credit limit which can be used at participating merchants in return for goods or services only. Not permitted for credit under BNPL guidelines are any types of investment products, virtual assets, goods prohibited in Oman and other products or services prohibited by the Central Bank. Additionally, cash cannot be disbursed by BNPL providers to customers. Furthermore, BNPL services can be either conventional

or sharia-compliant, according to the Central Bank.

Significantly, the maximum period for repayment of BNPL-linked products or services shall not exceed 12 months. All credit facilities extended by the BNPL provider shall be reported to the Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a).

In the Middle East, markets that have embraced Buy Now Pay Later services have typically witnessed an uptick in investment inflows from players operating in the BNPL space. BNPL schemes also open up opportunities for investment for businesses looking to monetise the receivables from BNPL products. Job creation is a significant spin-off as well.

Singaporeans praise Oman’s attractive investment climate

SINGAPORE: Several officials from Singaporean companies have affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys an attractive investment environment and encouraging laws and procedures for investment in several economic fields, along with the ease of starting businesses.

Dr S Naseem, President of the Singaporean group Meinhardt said that the Sultanate of Oman has an attractive investment climate due to the ease of starting businesses, which is one of the most important aspects sought by investors.

He added that the Meinhardt Group is among the companies working on the Sultan Haitham City project, which is considered one of the most significant projects capable of attracting investors, noting that there is considerable interest from Singaporean investors in this project.

He confirmed that there is continuous communication with many government agencies in the Sultanate of Oman to discuss future projects that can be worked on in various fields related to infrastructure.

Dr S Naseem pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman has many advantages, especially in the



There is considerable interest from Singaporean investors in the Sultan Haitham City project.



Dr S Naseem
President of Meinhardt Group

tourism sector, due to its diverse natural beauty. Continuing to work on providing tourist facilities would significantly contribute to attracting foreign investments.

On his part, Asang Kyung,



Peter Koh
CEO of Oceanus

Deputy CEO of the Singaporean company Crimson Logic, said that the Sultanate of Oman is characterised by encouraging laws and procedures for investment.

He indicated that the company

is investing in Oman in the field of information technology and is currently working on establishing a platform to facilitate the documentation of commercial transactions and contribute to providing value-added services to various institutions using the platform. There are many available fields that the company looks forward to working on in Oman.

Meanwhile, Peter Koh, CEO of the Singaporean group Oceanus, explained that the group is looking to invest in Oman in several areas, including food security, especially in the distribution related to fish wealth.

Al Maskaan Village partners with Oman’s largest indoor vertical farm



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

In a move that significantly contributes to Oman’s food security goals, Al Maskaan Village (AVM) has signed a strategic agreement with Trufud, Oman’s largest indoor vertical farm.

This partnership ensures a steady supply of fresh, organic leafy vegetables for both Al Maskaan Village residents and, more specifically, Al Maskaan Catering.

This collaboration between Al Maskaan Village and Trufud goes beyond simply securing a reliable source of vegetables.

It signifies a commitment to supporting Oman’s vision for a self-sufficient and sustainable food system.

Trufud’s innovative indoor farming techniques use significantly less water and land compared to traditional agriculture, making them a perfect partner for AMV’s environmentally conscious approach.

“We are thrilled to partner with Trufud,” said Ryan Maxwell, Business Development Manager at Al Maskaan Village.

“This agreement aligns perfectly with our vision of creating a sustainable and healthy community.

By supporting Trufud’s innovative farming methods, we are not only ensuring a steady supply of fresh produce for our residents and catering service, but also contributing to Oman’s food security goals.”

Oman Business Forum to discuss investment environment and digital transformation

MUSCAT: The Oman Business Forum will be held on Monday, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, to discuss the latest developments in the future of energy and industries across all sectors and address issues of interest to companies and investors.

The forum, organised by “The Business Year” in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, brings together a number of Omani businessmen from various sectors of local trade and economy to review the investment environment,

digital transformation, energy transition and the role of new technologies in banking services and logistical transport.

It includes two working sessions. The first session will discuss empowering technology-based businesses in the Sultanate of Oman and the key enablers for digital transformation in the Omani business environment.

The second session will revolve around navigating sustainability and will highlight initiatives focused on environmental conservation, social care, and business practices. — ONA

Sohar International introduces instant international money transfers

MUSCAT: Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, has collaborated with ‘Mastercard Send’ to enable its retail banking customers to transfer funds internationally to more than 35 countries instantly. This strategic partnership aligns with the bank’s Digital Transformation strategy by providing customers with seamless and convenient banking experiences.

Leveraging the ‘Mastercard Send’ platform, Sohar International’s customers can now experience instant fund transfers directly from the bank’s mobile app, eliminating the need to visit a branch.

These initiatives, especially for international transactions, empower customers to benefit from favourable exchange rates while promoting financial accessibility and convenience. Consequently, this initiative aligns with the Sultanate’s broader Digitalisation goals and delivers tangible benefits to customers who transact through Sohar



International’s innovative Digital channels.

Upon introducing this platform, Abdulqader al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated, “Our commitment to customers extends beyond traditional banking services. Through our partnership with ‘MasterCard Send’, we are dedicated to empowering our

customers and providing them with a seamless banking experience at their convenience.

This collaboration marks a significant expansion in our ecosystem of banking and beyond banking services, available at the customers’ fingertips through our mobile banking app.

The capabilities of ‘MasterCard Send’ align perfectly with our

commitment to delivering exceptional banking experiences to our customers. By offering instant international transfers, we not only support the Digitalisation goals of the Sultanate of Oman but also provide tangible benefits to our customers, empowering them to thrive in their financial journeys.”

Sohar International’s mobile app serves as a secure and user-friendly platform for customers to conduct various financial transactions. With a wide range of premium features and ongoing offers, the app ensures that banking is not only quick and convenient but also easily accessible to customers, allowing them to manage their finances effortlessly.

With the enhanced features in its mobile app, Sohar International is putting a world of services at the customers’ fingertips, where they can plan their flights, make hotel reservations, pay all their bills, send gift cards to their beloved ones and explore exciting experiences, all in one place.

Oman celebrates International Maritime Women’s Day

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, joins the global celebration of World Maritime Women’s Day, observed annually on May 18.

This year’s theme, “Safe Horizons... Women Shaping the Future of Maritime Safety,” aims to highlight the remarkable achievements of women in the maritime sector, recognising them as essential partners in the journey of giving and building to drive development forward.

This occasion aligns with the International Maritime Organization’s (IMO) December 2021 resolution designating May 18 as World Maritime Women’s Day to acknowledge women’s vital role in the maritime industry and

empower them in this critical field across various specialities.

Khadija bint Mubarak al Siyabiyah, a Maritime Safety Specialist at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, stated that the current phase of the renewed renaissance witnesses the distinction of Omani women and their emergence in various sectors.

Women have assumed significant leadership positions in all fields, including the maritime sector, ranging from marine navigation and marine engineering to port management and logistics, alongside conducting advanced scientific research in this sector.

This underscores the broad attention given to empowering women in the maritime sector



The event aims to highlight the remarkable achievements of women in the maritime sector, recognising them as essential partners in the journey of giving and building to drive development forward.

through the adoption of various initiatives aimed at providing training and qualification programmes for Omani women in different maritime fields to equip them with the necessary skills and

experience.

The government also encourages companies and institutions, both public and private, to involve and offer job opportunities for women in

the maritime sector, providing incentives and benefits to encourage them to engage in this field.

She added that the empowerment women have received in the maritime sector in the Sultanate of Oman has significantly contributed to the maritime economy. The sector today plays a fundamental role through national work axes, and the continuous expansion of women’s involvement in this sector directly enhances this aspect by positioning women prominently in maritime work.

Basima bint Hamad al Hashimiyah, Chief Officer of Maritime Navigation at Asyad Group, explained that working in the maritime sector is a great source of pride for Omani women

and receives widespread attention from stakeholders in various related maritime sectors, whether governmental or private.

She noted that she and her colleagues feel proud to have a dedicated day for women working in the maritime sector, as designated by the IMO.

She said that celebrating this occasion in the Sultanate of Oman highlights its significance and contributes to enriching women’s capabilities, reflecting the role they play in their maritime work.

There is wide recognition of women, which has been reflected in the practical levels they have reached in the maritime sector, enriching their capabilities and continuously enhancing their potential to progress in this field.

— ONA

New southern runway to boost Oman’s global air connectivity

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) marked a significant milestone in Oman’s aviation sector with the commencement of commercial operations on the new southern runway on Thursday at Muscat International Airport.

The upgrade aligns with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regulations, promising to bolster international air traffic and elevate the airport’s operational standards.

The southern runway, extending 4 kilometres in length and 45 metres in width, is designed to accommodate all types of aircraft, including the Airbus A380.

This modernised runway introduces several advanced features that enhance airport services, such as reduced noise levels in surrounding areas, increased speed and flexibility in take-off and landing operations, and improved energy efficiency through the use of LED lighting.

The refurbishment project, which began in mid-May 2022, was executed in three comprehensive phases.

The first phase involved resurfacing the runway with fresh tarmac and integrating it with nine new taxiways on the northern side and seven lanes on the southern side, along with the construction of new service roads connecting various airport facilities.

The second phase focused on resetting automated landing system devices and meteorological equipment essential for aircraft landing in emergency conditions. Additionally, ground lighting for navigation on the airport apron was installed.

The final phase entailed rigorous testing of the new systems in coordination with airport operators and service providers, a crucial step for obtaining the



The first Oman Air departure flight from the new southern runway is given a shower at the Muscat International Airport.



Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports Management Co, Naif al Abri, President of Civil Aviation Authority and a number of executive management officials made a final inspection tour, prior to the commercial operation, of the new southern runway at the Muscat International Airport. © Oman Airports

runway’s operational licence from the Civil Aviation Authority.

Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports Management Company, expressed his enthusiasm about the project’s completion. “This significant milestone marks the completion of the refurbishment that began in 2022, with the runway now meeting the highest international standards.

The original southern runway, in operation since the airport’s opening in 1973 as Seeb Airport, served for over 31 years before this modern upgrade. Today, as we saw the first aircraft take off smoothly from this advanced runway

capable of accommodating even the Airbus A380, we celebrate the enhanced operational capabilities and reduced noise impact on nearby communities, paving the way for a sustainable future in airport operations.”

The advanced southern runway is a pivotal development for Muscat International Airport, significantly enhancing its capacity to handle increased air traffic. It promises to streamline take-off and landing operations, offering higher speed and flexibility, which are crucial for maintaining efficient airport operations.

Moreover, the runway’s ability to accommodate large aircraft like the Airbus A380 positions Muscat International Airport as a competitive hub in the region, capable of attracting more international airlines and passengers.

In addition to operational improvements, the runway’s design emphasises sustainability. The implementation of LED lighting systems reduces energy consumption, aligning with global trends towards greener, more eco-friendly airport operations.

The reduction in noise levels also addresses environmental concerns, ensuring that the airport’s expansion does not negatively impact nearby residential areas.

The successful launch of the southern runway is expected to have a ripple effect on Oman’s aviation industry, stimulating economic growth and enhancing the country’s connectivity with the rest of the world.

With the upgraded infrastructure, Muscat International Airport is well-positioned to support Oman’s tourism sector, attract international business travellers, and serve as a strategic transit point for global air traffic.

Nama PWP announces round II of Dhofar Wind IPP I auction

MUSCAT: Earlier this year, Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP) successfully sold I-REC(E) to Sohar Aluminium Company, following its first round of auction for the Dhofar Wind IPP I-REC(E). This sale marks an important milestone for Oman as it embarks on its energy transition and decarbonisation journey.

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and Oman’s commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050 and following the success of the first round of the Dhofar Wind IPP I-REC(E) auction, PWP is pleased to announce the initiation of the second round of Dhofar Wind IPP I-REC(E) auction.

PWP invites interested entities to participate in the auction to purchase wind power I-REC(E) from the energy generated from the 50-megawatt (MW) utility scale wind power project located in Dhofar, in 2023.

Asyad Group opens commercial office in Singapore to enhance global presence

SINGAPORE: Asyad Group, represented by Asyad Shipping Company, has opened a commercial office in Singapore.

This strategic move aims to strengthen Asyad’s global presence and operational capabilities in one of the world’s key shipping hubs, providing effective maritime shipping solutions to various global companies and connecting them with major commercial markets.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping and Dry Dock Company, confirmed that the Asyad Group continues to implement its strategy of diversifying and renewing its maritime fleet in line with the maritime sector’s requirements and global trade trends.

He pointed out that Asyad Shipping Company owns and manages 85 multipurpose vessels, ranking 18th globally in crude oil tanker ownership, 21st in LNG and oil tanker ownership, and 51st



Asyad Shipping Company owns and manages 85 multipurpose vessels, ranking 18th globally in crude oil tanker ownership, 21st in LNG and oil tanker ownership, and 51st in container shipping.

in container shipping.

Kevin Ng, the director of Asyad Shipping’s commercial office in Singapore, stated that the office represents a strategic step to diversify the company’s commercial operations and expand its global presence by offering effective and reliable maritime shipping services to its global clients to support their

business growth and meet their needs.

He added in a statement that the opening of the commercial office in Singapore comes amid global trends towards improving and developing maritime shipping services and enhancing global trade. Singapore plays a pivotal role in this sector as one of the largest maritime and logistics

OQ signs pact to establish \$23 million polymer plant in Sohar Industrial City



Representatives of OQ and Multi Bond Metal Company during the signing ceremony.

SHANGHAI: OQ Group has signed a strategic partnership with Multi Bond Metal Company to establish a plant for producing advanced polymer compounds for heat resistance and surface protection at the Polymer Industries Complex in Sohar Industrial City with an investment cost of \$23 million.

This partnership is part of OQ Group’s efforts to localise industries based on polymer products and attract foreign direct investment to the Sultanate of Oman, enriching the industrial sector with products that achieve self-sufficiency and export potential.

The agreement was signed by Sadiq bin Hassan al Lawati, Executive Director of Marketing at OQ Group, and Wei Feng, Chairman of Multi Bond Metal Company, during the group’s participation in the China International Plastics Exhibition held in Shanghai, People’s Republic of China.

Hilal bin Ali al Kharusi, CEO of the Commercial, Refining, and Petrochemicals sector at OQ Group, stated this project will be the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman and the Middle East. It will



Hilal bin Ali al Kharusi, CEO of the Commercial, Refining, and Petrochemicals sector at OQ Group.

produce innovative products such as fire-resistant plastic compounds, heat-dissolvable polymers, plastic wraps, and protective plastic coatings for metal compounds.

He added that this joint project is the tenth factory in the Ladayn Polymer Complex in Sohar Industrial City and represents a qualitative leap for the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman, enhancing the production chain and industrial capabilities.

The Ladayn Polymer Industries Complex, covering an area of over one million square metres, is a key site for polymer manufacturing in the Sultanate of Oman. It aims to attract investments in various sectors, including construction, healthcare, and packaging. — ONA



Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping and Dry Dock Company.

commercial hubs in the world.

He explained that the office manages various maritime shipping vessels to transport products and oil derivatives to global destinations.

He noted that the office began its initial operations in 2023 by managing nine vessels. With the growth of commercial operations and the increasing reliability of the company’s global clients, the number of vessels managed by the office has currently risen to 15, transporting oil products and raw

materials.

He explained that recent times have seen growing and increasing demand for the shipment of various petrochemical products from Duqm Refinery to many global markets, including Singapore, promising more opportunities for commercial cooperation between the two parties in several sectors such as LNG and crude oil.

Kevin Ng emphasised that the office enjoys support from the Singaporean government, offering various incentives related to economic aspects and the exchange of expertise.

He noted that Asyad Group continues to affirm its commitment to providing innovative and effective maritime shipping solutions, enhancing its global commercial presence as one of the leading maritime transport companies in the world and promoting Oman as a global logistics centre. — ONA

13F filings reveal Wall Street’s growing appetite for Bitcoin, driving market surge



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The recent crypto market rebound has ignited optimism for a sustained growth trajectory, potentially leading to new all-time highs in the near future.

This surge in confidence is supported by a wave of institutional adoption, as revealed by the latest 13F filings.

A 13F is a quarterly report that institutional investment managers in the United States, who manage over \$100 million in assets, are required to file with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The report discloses the

manager’s holdings in publicly traded securities, including stocks, ETFs, and certain other financial instruments.

In the context of crypto, 13F filings are significant because they reveal which institutional investors are buying Bitcoin ETFs (and how much). This information can be a strong signal of institutional confidence in the crypto market, which can influence other investors and drive prices.

Essentially, 13F filings provide a snapshot of what the “smart money” is doing in the market, which can be a valuable tool for understanding market trends and sentiment.

Over 900 institutional entities, including prominent investment firms and major banks like Morgan Stanley, have disclosed significant holdings in spot Bitcoin ETFs, with total investments reaching \$10.7 billion in the first quarter of 2024 alone.

This institutional embrace of Bitcoin, particularly through regulated ETFs, has injected substantial capital into the market and broadened its appeal to traditional investors. Leading

the charge is Millennium Management, a major asset manager, with a stake exceeding \$1.8 billion across various Bitcoin ETF funds.

Other notable players like Susquehanna International Group and Horizon Kinetics have also made substantial investments, further solidifying the growing institutional confidence in Bitcoin.

While Grayscale’s Bitcoin Trust (GBTC) has experienced significant outflows since converting from an ETP in January, institutional holdings still represent a substantial portion of its assets, totalling \$4.05 billion.

BlackRock’s iShares Bitcoin Trust (IBTC) has also garnered significant interest, with institutional investors accounting for \$3.2 billion of its \$18.1 billion in assets under management.

The increasing institutional involvement in the crypto market, coupled with the positive macroeconomic news of core US inflation hitting a 3-year low in April 2024, has fuelled a broader market rally. Bitcoin has surged past \$65,000, and other major cryptocurrencies like Ether

(ETH) have posted increases of over 3%, while Solana (SOL) soared by nearly 8%.

This recent wave of institutional adoption may only be the tip of the iceberg if the current institutional allocations represent a mere down payment before a full-fledged embrace of this emerging asset class.

With many firms expected to gradually increase their exposure to crypto, the market could experience a significant influx of capital in the coming years, further driving prices upwards and potentially setting the stage for new all-time highs.

This institutional confidence in the crypto market’s potential is further bolstered by growing mainstream acceptance. Major companies are increasingly integrating crypto payments, offering crypto-related services, and even adding digital assets to their balance sheets.

This widespread adoption is not only normalising crypto but also expanding its use cases, further solidifying its position in the global financial landscape.

Interestingly, this recent price spike has seen a shift in the usual dynamic between Bitcoin and

Ether.

Historically, during market rallies, Ether tended to outperform Bitcoin due to its lower market capitalisation and faster price movement.

This is because Bitcoin’s massive market cap often requires a larger influx of capital to significantly move its price compared to Ether.

However, this time around, the gap between the two has widened in the opposite direction, with the Ether-Bitcoin ratio sliding to its lowest point since April 2021.

This suggests that Bitcoin is outperforming Ether in the current market rebound.

Several factors contribute to this unusual phenomenon. One key factor is the uncertainty surrounding the approval of spot ETH ETFs in the US.

While the SEC has greenlit several Bitcoin spot ETFs, the regulatory landscape for Ether ETFs remains unclear. This regulatory uncertainty has dampened investor enthusiasm for Ether, leading to reduced demand for Ether-based exchange-traded products (ETPs) and contributing to its under performance compared to

Bitcoin.

Another factor is the rise of competing layer-1 blockchains like Solana, which are attracting developers and users away from Ethereum due to their faster transaction speeds and lower fees.

This increased competition has chipped away at Ethereum’s dominance in the decentralised application (dApp) space, further impacting Ether’s price performance.

The recent Ethereum upgrade, Dencun, while successful in lowering transaction fees and enhancing scalability, has inadvertently introduced a new trilemma for ETH.

The trilemma refers to the challenge of balancing three key factors: low fees, scalability, and ETH price appreciation. It seems that Dencun prioritised the first two factors, potentially at the expense of the third.

***Disclaimer:** The information provided in this article should not be considered financial advice. The cryptocurrency market remains dynamic and carries risks. It’s essential to conduct your own thorough research and consult with qualified professionals before making any investment decisions.*

Biden’s China tariffs are the end of an era for cheap Chinese goods



JIM TANKERSLEY

The author writes about economic policy at the White House and how it affects the country and the world.

For the first two decades of the 21st century, many consumer products on America’s store shelves got less expensive. A wave of imports from China and other emerging economies helped push down the cost of video games, T-shirts, dining tables, home appliances and more.

Those imports drove some American factories out of business, and they cost more than 1 million workers their jobs. Discount stores and online retailers, like Walmart and Amazon, flourished selling low-cost goods made overseas. But voters rebelled.

Stung by shuttered factories, cratered industries and prolonged wage stagnation, Americans in 2016 elected a president who vowed to hit back at China on trade. Four years later, they elected another one.

In separate but overlapping efforts, former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden have sought to revive and protect American factories by making it more expensive to buy Chinese

goods. They have taxed imports in legacy industries that were hollowed out over the past quarter-century, like clothes and appliances, and newer ones that are struggling to grow amid global competition with China, like solar panels.

Biden’s decision this past week to codify and escalate tariffs imposed by Trump made clear that the United States has closed out a decades-long era that embraced trade with China and prized the gains of lower-cost products over the loss of geographically concentrated manufacturing jobs.

A single tariff rate embodies that closure: a 100% tax on Chinese electric vehicles, which start at less than \$10,000 each and have surged into showrooms around the world but have struggled to crack government barriers to the US market.

Democrats and Republicans once joined forces to engage economically with Beijing, driven by a theory that America would benefit from outsourcing production to countries that could manufacture certain goods more cheaply, in part by paying their workers low wages.

Economists knew some American workers would lose their jobs, but they said the economy would gain overall by offering consumers low-cost goods and freeing up companies to invest in higher-value industries where the United States had an innovation advantage.

The parties are now competing to sever those ties. Lawmakers have taken increasingly hard lines on China’s labour practices, intellectual property theft from foreign businesses and generous



A worker on the electric vehicle assembly line at the Zeekr plant in Ningbo, China. – The New York Times

subsidies for factories that produce far more than Chinese consumers can buy.

It is unclear what new era of policymaking will emerge from those political incentives: Biden’s brand of strategic industrial policy, Trump’s retrenchment to a more self-contained domestic economy, or something else entirely.

It is also not clear whether the American public, still reeling from the country’s most rapid burst of inflation in 40 years, will tolerate the pains that could accompany the transition.

“The old consensus has been blown apart, and a new one has not arisen,” said David Autor, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who helped lead the pioneering research into what has come to

be known as the China Shock of the early 2000s, when China’s acceptance into the World Trade Organization helped wipe out manufacturing jobs across the developed world.

But consumers and voters, Autor cautioned, “can’t have it both ways. You can make a trade-off. All the world is trade-offs. If you want to get to the point where the US maintains and regains leadership in these technological areas, you’re going to have to pay more. And it’s not clear it’ll work.”

Despite their mutual embrace of forms of protectionism, Biden and Trump are offering voters contrasting views of how the American economy should engage with China in their rematch election.

Trump wants to tear down the

bridges of commerce between the world’s two largest economies and drastically restrict trade overall.

He has pledged to raise tariffs on all Chinese imports, by revoking the “most favoured nation” trade status that Congress voted to bestow on China at the end of the Clinton administration, and ban some Chinese goods entirely. He would impose new taxes on all imports from around the world.

Biden rejects Trump’s proposals as too broad and costly. He wants to build a protective fortress around strategic industries like clean energy and semiconductors, using tariffs and other regulations. Biden is also showering companies in those sectors with billions in government subsidies, including

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Observer



LIFESTYLE

Volunteer farmer Floriberto Ambrosio Matias works to relocate and save wild bee hives, protecting them from the lack of flowering caused by drought and attacks by people who consider them aggressive, in Santa Ana Zegache, Mexico. — Reuters



CULTURE

A Kurdish man presents a traditional outfit during an ethnic costume festival in the northern Iraqi city of Zakho, near the border with Turkiye in the autonomous Kurdistan region. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

British-US actress Anya Taylor-Joy attends a press conference for the film "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" during the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



ART

Queen Mathilde of Belgium (L) visits the exhibition "Rodin, a modern Renaissance" at the Musee des Beaux-Arts in Mons. — AFP



FASHION

Fashion designer Bob Mackie attends a premiere for the documentary "Bob Mackie: Naked Illusion" in Los Angeles, California, US. — Reuters

art & life

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BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY KHAIRZAD

Traditional performances in Oman are not merely artistic expressions but are living histories of interactions between individuals, communities, and their environment. Each art form represents a part of the Omani culture and heritage.

Fans of these performances can easily tell the Omani's love for their traditional clothing, as men participate in wearing the Omani dishdasha, Mussar (a distinctive type of turban that Omanis are known for), and Khanjar. They sometimes accompany it with swords and occasionally guns, especially for performances that are based on Omani history with wars and the hardships they overcame throughout the ages. Women, meanwhile, dress in various Omani costumes reflecting different regions wearing silver and gold jewellery with it.

There, in the far reaches of southern Oman, where beauty, tradition, and art intertwine, women indulge wonderfully in one of the most splendid forms of festivity: the drum performance. They gather in sessions filled with delight and happiness, singing the most enchanting melodies.

This particular art is among the traditional musical arts that set Dhofar



Governorate apart from other governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. It has made the governorate a distinct musical entity in Omani traditional singing. Women's drumming is predominantly a feminine art, practiced by women of the region during social gatherings and national celebrations.



The singing is accompanied by a feminine dual dance, where women participate fully adorned in charming clothes ranging from the distinctive Dhofari robe to various types of shining jewelry. In the realm of drum performance, musical ensembles typically comprise a lead singer or vocalist, two



percussionists who are adept at playing the rahmani and kasser drums, and a chorus of women engaged in both singing and dancing amidst applause. Modern musical instruments have made their way into this art form, finding common usage, including the violin, organ, oud, and

qanun, alongside a diverse array of both ancient and contemporary drums and tambourines. This is a wonderful form of Musical composition's contribution to the proliferation of modern musical ensembles.

In the drum dance, women step forward to perform in pairs, executing graceful and synchronised movements. Each one gracefully holds one end of the cloth covering her head. Their feet move in short, deliberate steps, while their movements harmonise, intertwining as if they were two halves of a whole. After completing their dance around the courtyard where the band sits, they sit down, making way for two other dancers to take their place.

As for singing, many Dhofari artists, such as Awadh al Qaiti, Jamaan Diwan, Omar Jabran, and others, have excelled in this art form, known for its beautiful melodies and captivating vocals.

Recently, amidst the sands of the Arabian Peninsula, this art has blossomed into a celebrated phenomenon, ignited by the radiant performance of a Dhofari enchantress girl. With each precise movement and dulcet note, she weaves a tapestry of beauty, capturing the collective imagination and igniting a fervent admiration that echoes through the dunes, inviting all to join in a harmonious dance to its celestial melody.

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COPPOLA’S LONG-AWAITED EPIC ‘MEGALOPOLIS’ DIVIDES CANNES

HOLLYWOOD TITAN FRANCIS Ford Coppola returned to the Cannes Film Festival on Thursday to unveil his enormously hyped, wildly experimental and deeply divisive “Megalopolis”.

The 85-year-old director’s arrival at the world-famous movie festival —

where decades earlier he twice scooped the top prize Palme d’Or — has been the frenzied talk on cafe terraces in the swanky Cote d’Azur city.

Would the epic \$120-million project that he self-funded, and that has been gestating for some 40 years, be another

masterpiece emerging from chaos, like “Apocalypse Now” all those decades ago?

Or would the film that Coppola sold part of his California wine estate to create be a chaotic mess?

One early press screening attended by AFP was greeted with both jeering boos and enthusiastic applause, and it seems certain the philosophical and unconventional movie will leave many casual viewers deeply confused.

“Megalopolis” takes place in New Rome, a parallel and decayed version of modern-day New York filled with bacchanalian parties, crumbling ancient statues, and a Madison Square Garden that hosts chariot races and Greco-Roman wrestling bouts.

Adam Driver stars as Caesar Catalina, a cape-twirling and Nobel Prize-winning architect who is hell-bent on using his seemingly magical powers to rebuild the collapsing urban sprawl into a utopian and futuristic Garden of Eden.

Standing in his way is Frank Cicero, played by Giancarlo Esposito (“Breaking Bad”), an old-fashioned mayor who bitterly envies his visionary rival.

The ensemble cast features Aubrey Plaza as a social-climbing journalist, Jon Voight as a mega-billionaire patriarch and Shia LaBeouf as a bratty scion with a penchant for populist politics.

PROPHETS

Coppola, one of Hollywood’s most revered and mythologised directors, was greeted on the Croisette red carpet with a grand reception befitting an old master.

Straw hat and cane in hand, he entered the packed world premiere — the festival’s hottest ticket — having promised a film of operatic scale.

As the lights dimmed it quickly became clear that “Megalopolis” was certainly his most ambitious film.

He recently reeled off a list of influences that included Voltaire, Plato,

Fremaux.

FAIRY TALE

“Megalopolis” is one of 22 films competing for the Palme d’Or, facing a jury led by “Barbie” director Greta Gerwig, who will announce their verdict on May 25.

Also on Thursday, British director Andrea Arnold returned to Cannes with “Bird”, chronicling a 12-year-old girl as she navigates a world of domestic violence, teen pregnancies and broken families.

Channelling similar themes to her award-winning “Fish Tank”, “Bird” adds fantastical, metaphorical and playful elements, including a flamboyant turn from Barry Keoghan (“Saltburn”) as the girl’s young father.

A day earlier “Wild Diamond” — also



Shakespeare, Hitchcock, Kubrick, Kurosawa, “Moses and the prophets all thrown in”.

And, indeed, the movie is packed with endless quotes and references from the Ancient Classics to Enlightenment philosophers and modern novelists.

Dialogue flits from modern English to Shakespearean verse, and even Latin, and the drama is interspersed with archive footage ranging from the cosmos to Nazi rallies.

At one highly unorthodox moment, events on the screen interact with those in the real-life theatre.

Although Coppola has created several duds since his 1970s heyday, many still believe in his genius.

“Cannes is important to him and he is important to Cannes. He comes as an artist,” said festival head Thierry

about a fragile teenage girl, but this time desperate to find fame on social media and reality TV — was hailed by movie magazine *Variety* as “the arrival of a major film-maker” in first-time French director Agathe Reidinger.

There were also great reviews for “The Girl with the Needle”, a bleak period drama about a factory worker desperately trying to get an abortion — with a murderous twist.

Still to come are a Donald Trump biopic, “The Apprentice”, and new films from arthouse favourites David Cronenberg (“The Shrouds”) and Italy’s Paolo Sorrentino (“Parthenope”).

Former Palme d’Or winner Jacques Audiard will present “Emilia Perez”, billed as a musical about a Mexican cartel boss, starring Selena Gomez. — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

Pyramids built along long-lost river, scientists discover

SCIENTISTS HAVE discovered a long-buried branch of the Nile river that once flowed alongside more than 30 pyramids in Egypt, potentially solving the mystery of how ancient Egyptians transported the massive stone blocks to build the famous monuments.

The 64-kilometre-long river branch, which ran by the iconic Giza pyramid complex among other wonders, was hidden under desert and farmland for millennia, according to a study revealing the find on Thursday.

The existence of the river would explain why the 31 pyramids were built in a chain along a now inhospitable desert strip in the Nile Valley between 4,700 and 3,700 years ago.

The strip near the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis includes the Great Pyramid of Giza — the only surviving structure of the seven wonders of the ancient world — as well as the Khafre, Cheops and Mykerinos pyramids.

Archaeologists had long thought that ancient Egyptians must have used a nearby waterway

to move the giant materials used to build the pyramids.

“But nobody was certain of the location, the shape, the size or proximity of this mega waterway to the actual pyramids site,” lead study author Eman Ghoneim of the University of North Carolina Wilmington in the United States said.

The international team of researchers used radar satellite imagery to map the river branch, which they called Ahramat — “pyramids” in Arabic.

Radar gave them the “unique ability to penetrate the sand surface and produce images of hidden features including buried rivers and ancient structures,” Ghoneim said.

Surveys in the field and cores of sediment from the site confirmed the presence of the river, according to the study in the journal *Communications Earth & Environment*.

The once mighty river was increasingly covered in sand, potentially starting during a major drought around 4,200 years ago, the scientists suggested.

THE GREAT PYRAMID MYSTERY

The Giza pyramids stood on a plateau roughly a kilometre from the banks of the river.

Many of the pyramids had a “ceremonial

raised walkway” which ran alongside the river before ending at the Valley Temples which served as harbours, Ghoneim said.

This indicates that the river played “a key role in the transportation of the enormous building materials and workmen needed for the pyramid’s construction,” she added.

Exactly how ancient Egyptians managed to build such huge and long-standing structures has been one of history’s great mysteries.

These heavy materials, most of which were from the south, “would have been much easier to float down the river” than transport over land, study co-author Suzanne Onstine of the University of Memphis in the US state of Tennessee said.

The banks of the rivers could have been where the funeral entourages of pharaohs were received before their bodies were moved to their “final burial place within the pyramid,” she suggested. The river may also indicate why the pyramids were built in different spots.

“The water’s course and its volume changed over time, so fourth dynasty kings had to make different choices than 12th dynasty kings,” she said.

“The discovery reminded me about the intimate connection between geography, climate, environment and human behaviour.” — **AFP**

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AFTER FIVE CENTURIES, STARS RISE IN ISTANBUL

Early this May, Cinili Hamam, a 500-year-old public bathhouse, reopened in Istanbul after a 13-year, \$15 million-plus restoration. Named for its original cobalt-and-turquoise cladding (cinili is the Turkish word for "tiled"), the hamam is the jewel of the Zeyrek district, a historic neighbourhood in Istanbul that is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

Visitors can enjoy a traditional Turkish bath under soaring domes pierced with star-shaped skylights that send shimmering rays into the rooms. A typical hour-long bath costs 95 euros (about \$101) and includes an exfoliation scrub and a massage accompanied by the soothing sound of water splashing into marble basins.

Just as in Ottoman times, anyone who can afford the entrance fee is welcome, regardless of faith, class or profession.

Restoring the bathhouse, which was built from 1530 to 1540, was Bike Gursel's self-described obsession. Fourteen years ago, as a board member of the Marmara Group, a privately held real estate investment firm, Gursel decided that a classical Turkish hamam was just the thing to diversify the company's offerings.

"I was looking to buy a hamam for a long time, and when I couldn't find one, I began collecting hamam artefacts such as embroidered towels and mother-of-pearl inlaid clogs made for the bath," she recalled. "I was already thinking about a museum."

In 2010, at Gursel's urging, the Marmara Group bought the Zeyrek Cinili Hamam, even though it was a near ruin. "The architect said it would take three years to restore," she recalled. "Not 13."

Restoration specialists KA-BA Architecture in Ankara, Turkey, supervised the project and its team of archaeologists, engineers, scholars and artisans. The long and complicated process began with a survey of the bathhouse, which had been badly damaged over the centuries by earthquakes, fires and neglect.

The 30,000-square-foot building was completely unstable.

"We had to excavate 36 feet down to find solid ground," said Cengiz Kabaoglu, KA-BA Architecture's founder. A subterranean structure of steel and concrete was built to reinforce the compound. This allowed the builders to repair the roof and walls, install gas furnaces to replace the former wood-burning ones, replace the wood beams and tie the domes with ribbons of steel.

Antiques surfaced during the excavations: ancient coins, fifth-century Roman glass bottles, Byzantine oil lamps, terra-cotta vessels and tile fragments. They are on view in a new museum next to the bathhouse.

What didn't turn up were the resplendent 16th-century Iznik tiles that once covered the walls. Gursel learned that, in the 1870s, an Ottoman antiques dealer took possession of the tiles and spirited them off to Paris. Some ended up in the Louvre, others in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and others in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. All were

reassembled virtually in a display at the hamam's museum.

Now the hamam walls are covered in pale-gray Marmara marble. The rooms are minimal, elegant and serene. On the rebuilt exterior, the roofs have been resurfaced in lead, with handblown glass "elephant-eye" hats protecting the skylights. A roof terrace offers views of the magnificent domes.

When Gursel retired in 2021, she passed her Marmara Group board seat and restoration responsibilities to her daughter, Koza Gureli Yazgan, a business school graduate.

Gureli Yazgan described the restoration project as thrilling but not easy. "We value cultural preservation, but this project was like opening a Pandora's box," she said. "Every discovery led to a delay. At one point, the board said, 'Stop digging.' But we couldn't. It was the story that kept us going."

The hamam's original patron was Hayreddin Barbarossa, grand admiral of the Ottoman Empire who was also known by the Italian translation of his name: Redbeard. Born on the island of Lesbos in the late 1400s, Barbarossa was part of a family of pirates who roamed the Mediterranean at the time of Spain's conquest of Grenada. As privateers, they ferried Muslim immigrants forced to leave Spain to North Africa; captured Rhodes and Tunis; attacked the Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese fleets; and briefly conquered Algiers in 1516.

Barbarossa's successful naval campaigns attracted the attention of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, who appointed him his grand admiral in 1534.

Before Barbarossa died in 1546, he commissioned the bathhouse from Mimar Sinan, a former slave who became the chief imperial architect of the Ottoman Empire at the height of its political and cultural power in 1538.

The bathhouse is a rare "double hamam," with separate areas for men and women.

"In addition to the functions of physical and spiritual purification and cleansing, hamams also provided their frequenters with the opportunity to socialise, keep up with daily events, gossip and celebrate many milestones of life together," writes Leyla Kayhan Elbirlik, a visiting scholar at Harvard University, in a new book on the bathhouse restoration, "Barbarossa's Cinili Hamam: A Masterpiece by Sinan." Those milestones included circumcision baths for boys, premarriage baths for men and women, and postnatal baths for mothers and their newborns.

The bathhouse was also notable for its address — the "Fifth Avenue" of an affluent Ottoman neighbourhood, home to palace officials and military commanders. Barbarossa presumably picked the spot because it overlooked the Bosphorus, allowing him to view the sultan's shipyards that he supervised on the opposite shore.

Now, 500 years later, the Zeyrek Cinili Hamam may again be the anchor of a fashionable area. Across the street, a large new hotel is under construction. — **NYT**