

National Museum corner at airport

The National Museum on Wednesday inaugurated its corner at the departures hall at Muscat International Airport, as part of the existing cooperation between the National Museum and Oman Airports. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Shaikh Ayman bin Ahmed al Hosani, CEO of Oman Airports, and Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum. **DETAILS ON P3**



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MESSI'S PSG FUTURE IN DOUBT AFTER SUSPENSION OVER SAUDI TRIP



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SEAFOOD, SURFING, AND SERENITY: A SUMMER ESCAPE TO MASIRAH ISLAND



MUSCAT

2 OMANI SCIENTISTS FOR LINDAU MEETING

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has announced nominations for the representatives of the Sultanate of Oman at the 72nd Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings, which will be held from June 25-30 in Lindau, Germany. The ministry has nominated Dr Mohammed bin Salim al Alawi, Consultant of Liaison Psychiatry at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, and Dr Faris bin Abdullah al Farsi, Medical Doctor at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, to participate in this year's gathering. The two will get the chance to interact with about 40 Nobel laureates as well as 600 young scientists from over 80 countries. **DETAILS ON P5**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$73.57 A BARREL

Oman oil price for June delivery on Wednesday reached \$73.57, comprising a decline by \$4.98 from the price of Tuesday, which was \$78.55. The average price of Oman oil for May delivery has stabilised at \$78.49 per barrel, thus \$3.74 per barrel lower than April delivery. Brent crude, which dropped 5 per cent overnight, fell further and was last down about 3 per cent at \$73.04 a barrel. Gold hovered above \$2,016 an ounce, little changed on the day.

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FORUM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES CONCLUDES

The activities of the first forum for persons with disabilities, 'Integration and Empowerment', which was organised by the Ministry of Social Development, concluded on Wednesday evening with the participation of more than 65 government, private, local and international agencies and civil society institutions. HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, presided over the closing of the forum. **SEE ALSO P2**

TRA conducts trial of early warning service

AL MUSANNAH: Acting in cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authority and telecommunications service providers, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Wednesday conducted the first real trial of an early warning broadcast service in the Wilayat of Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate.

The service was launched via mobile phones. Sub-committees were distributed in various coastal areas of the wilayat to ensure that warning messages were received. The committee checked whether the warning messages reached the subscribers of Oman Telecommunications



Company (Omantel) and Omani Qatari Company (Ooredoo) in the same wilayat.

The experiment targets a number of coastal wilayats and governorates. It covers the governorates of Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam and Al Batinah North. As per the trial service, warning messages about a specific emergency situation are sent to subscribers' phones in record time and in accordance with international standards. They are sent in the form of specific tones that appear automatically on a subscriber's phone. — ONA

New laws to protect rights of workers

Impact of Covid-19 still felt on job market

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The fourth annual conference of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW) hopes the labour law will protect workers' rights apart from addressing the problems and challenges related to work environment.

The conference was held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Wednesday.

The federation also hoped that the new social protection law would ensure social security during work and retirement.

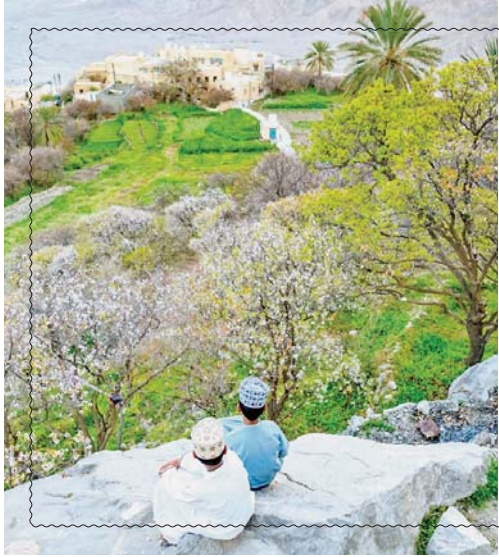
In its final communique, GFW said that it would submit proposals on raising the minimum wage, which will encourage more nationals to join the private sector, besides having awareness campaigns to explain the provisions of new laws to avoid disputes that may arise while trying to understand its implications and objectives.

Speaking to the media, Mostafa Saeed, Labour Activities Adviser at the Regional

Office for Arab Countries of the International Labour Organisation, said, "The Covid-19 crisis showed the importance of workers having their rights and the right to negotiate, and in countries without effective trade unions, the impact of the crisis on workers was very harsh."

The federation sought to strengthen the roles and competencies of unions in the legislations that regulate work to achieve their goals of protecting the interests of workers and preserving their rights. Currently, there are 327 trade unions in the Sultanate of Oman and seven federations representing various sectors.

Earlier, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer bin Shuwain al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, said, "The GFW has played an important role in drafting the terms of reference for the new Labour Law, which will keep pace with current and future economic, social, and developmental developments."



APRICOT CHARM OF WAKAN

Wakan in Wadi Mistal in the Wilayat of Nakhal witnesses a heavy turnout of visitors to enjoy apricot and peach season, which begins in January. The best time to visit Wakan is from mid-May to end of August. **SEE P3**

Recalled instant noodles not imported by Oman

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The Food Safety and Quality Centre (FSQC) said that the varieties of instant noodles (Indomie chicken flavour and Ah Lai curry flavour), which were recalled in some countries due to the percentage of ethylene oxide above the permissible limits, are not imported by Oman, and added that similar products are

subject to conformity procedures according to approved standard specifications, during inspections and controls at border crossings.

FSQC was clarifying on reports being circulated on social media about the recall and withdrawal by some countries of instant noodle products with curry flavours.

The centre directed the specialists at the outlets to



examine those products at a laboratory to ensure that they conform to the approved specifications before they reach

the market.

Ethylene oxide is a toxic, colourless and odourless gas used to sterilise medical equipment and spices. It can play a role in contracting cancer and is not allowed to be used on surfaces that come in contact with food. International technical regulations specify the permissible percentages of it, such as residues in food.

The parent company that

makes the popular Indomie instant noodles issued a statement on Friday defending the safety of their product after reports of finding carcinogens traces.

"We would like to emphasise that in accordance with the statement released by BPOM RI, our Indomie instant noodles are safe for consumption", said Taufik Wiraatmadja, Director of Indofood (ICBP), in a statement.

FORUM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CONCLUDES



The first forum for people with disabilities concluded on Wednesday evening under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. The forum focussed on the healthcare system and quality of life of people with disabilities, education and employability of people with disability. It also addressed the society's role along with the role of government entities and families.

Is 'Schengen-style' entry system for GCC states ideal?

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

With World Cup 2022 in Doha equally benefiting the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as partner countries, the need for long-term partnership unified policies was required to boost the tourist sector and share its benefits among GCC states.

In this regard, the concerned authorities are currently in talks to launch a 'Schengen-style' entry system, which will facilitate entry into all partner countries with one visa, said Fatima al Sairafi, Minister of Tourism, Kingdom of Bahrain.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Meet, Al Sairafi said, "We have a huge opportunity, the effort is in how to unify all the countries in the GCC. Bahrain had 9.9 million visitors in 2022. One key initiative that we started in 2022 was to co-promote Bahrain as a unified destination with the GCC. If all the GCC countries unified their efforts in promotion, the opportunities would be incredible."

Of late, the GCC countries have simplified the visa procedures for GCC residents who can avail of Visa on Arrival or E-visa.

According to the Arab Gulf Centre for Studies and Research (CSRGulf), all Gulf countries



benefited immensely from the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022, the first to be hosted in the Middle East and the Arab world.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is expected to introduce a unified visa that would allow tourists to visit all six member countries, which are Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman.

It may be noted that the authorities in the GCC have been working on a unified tourist visa to promote tourism in the region, including the economic and technical viability of such a visa, which would allow a tourist to use the visa issued in one GCC nation to visit all the others.

According to a source in the

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), such a system is a need of the hour because tourism cannot be promoted in isolation. "It is in the largest interest to share the economic benefits with member countries. There is no need for tourists to spend for separately for visas when each of these countries are connected by land or within a few minutes of flight times," OCCI official said.

He hoped that there will be some real progress because all countries have equally simplified their visa process in recent times making the population in these countries to travel freely and even at short notice.

Abdullah al Saleh, the UAE

Minister of Economy, said, "GCC countries believe that if they provide a good experience for visitors especially long-distance visitors coming to this region, instead of visiting one country, there will be a programme to maximise their visits to more than one country in the region. The visitors will be happier by visiting several countries without restrictions, facilitating cross borders travel, and having unified one package to visit different countries in GCC."

He said a unified GCC tourism strategy has been devised to increase the contribution of the sector to the GCC GDP, bolster the employment of nationals and boost competitiveness.

Nama launches RO 24 million water sustainability system in Musandam



KHASAB: Nama Water Services on Wednesday launched a water sustainability system in the Governorate of Musandam to the tune of more than RO 24 million.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam.

The new system will provide 70 seaside villages with fresh water to be

transported onboard ships (at a cost of RO 6.6 million), the opening of a desalination plant in the Wilayat of Khasab and the construction of desalination units in Musandam Governorate at a cost of more than RO 17 million.

The overall production capacity of the desalination units in the Governorate of Musandam stands at more than 18,000 cubic metres per day. — ONA



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Symposium looks at roles of student parents' councils

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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Tasks of a symposium on the roles of student parents' councils kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Wednesday under the theme of Social Partnership in Promoting Education.

As many as 580 participants took part in the sessions of the six sessions of the symposium, which was organised by the Ministry of Education.

The opening of the two-day symposium was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

The symposium presents 10 working papers that explore the experiences of leading models of parent councils, in the local front and the global arena. The sessions also include dialogue sessions with the departments concerned.

The parent councils' symposium, titled 'Community Partnership and Pioneering Roles in Education', seeks to enable parent councils to consider the best practices in activating their status as channels of communication between schools and society.

The symposium also studies means of enhancing integration between school communities and different establishments of local communities.



The symposium looks into ways of building positive attitudes in terms of collaboration and social partnership within the context of education. This calls for establishing direct communication and partnerships among student parent councils in Oman.

On the sidelines of the symposium, the ministry felicitated two Omani students for winning first place, at Arab world level, in the 'Competition of classical Arabic speaking, rhetoric, poetry recitation and intensive grammar study'. The competition was held in the Arab Republic of Egypt from 25 to 30 April, 2023.

Sharifa bint Mohammed al Shizawiyah, Chairperson of the

Parents' Council at Al Turaif School for Basic Education in the General Directorate of Education in North Al Batinah Governorate, gave a speech to the parents' councils. "Our councils have presented useful educational initiatives that are concerned with developing the talents and abilities of students in recitation, poetry, drawing, sports, scientific innovation, handicrafts and other fields, in cooperation with various community institutions, such as sports clubs, Omani women's associations, and private sector institutions," she said.

Meanwhile, Dr Amina bint Rashid al Rasbiyah, Head of

the School Administration Supervision Department, added: "The organisation of the parents councils' symposium is a community partnership and pioneering roles in education for all segments of the educational system, which is a clear indication of the Ministry of Education's interest in the vision and mission of the ministry regarding parents' councils to bring about positive change in carrying out roles and tasks in order to achieve the goals of the educational process. Also, a positive start in the field of developing and activating the roles of councils and strengthening the relationship between councils and schools."

National Museum opens corner at Muscat Airport

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The National Museum inaugurated on Wednesday its own corner in the Departures hall at Muscat International Airport, as part of the existing cooperation between the National Museum and Oman Airports.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Sheikh Ayman bin Ahmed al Hosani, CEO of Oman Airports, and Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum.

The Corner aims to enrich the cultural experience of the traveler and narrates stories of communication between Oman and its civilized surroundings to tell stories that highlight the importance of Muscat International Airport an important chapter in the history of the Sultanate of Oman's communication routes with the world.

Moosawi, said: "The inauguration of the National Museum Corner at Muscat International Airport comes in partnership with Oman Airports to transfer the distinctive cultural experience from the National Museum to the corridors of Muscat International Airport, as the airport is the first station that can be visited. Through it, travelers

can learn about the civilizational, historical, and cultural dimensions of the Sultanate of Oman, and encourage them to visit the tourist, archaeological, and cultural landmarks, which contributes to supporting the museum and tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman."

On his part, Hosani said, "We are pleased to add the corner of the National Museum in the departure hall of Muscat International Airport, Oman's first gate with the world so that this corner constitutes a supportive addition to the revitalisation of cultural tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, as the Sultanate has a great history and multiple treasures, and it is important for visitors coming to the Sultanate of Oman or travelers through transit flights to know what these treasures abound in the National Museum."

"There is no doubt that the promotion of cultural tourism brings a great impact on the tourism sector on the one hand, and the influx of tourists to the Sultanate of Oman to learn about the cultural heritage by inviting them indirectly through this corner to visit the National Museum and dive into its galleries that display a series of Oman civilization and historical treasures,"

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA COMMITTEE DISCUSSES PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS



MUSCAT: The Higher Committee for Majlis Ash'shura's 10th Term Elections held its first meeting on Wednesday. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Al Mokhtar bin Abdullah al Harthy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court, Chairman of the Committee. The committee discussed preparations for the elections and the tasks it will undertake in line with the terms of reference stipulated in the Majlis Ash'shura Elections Law. It also explored other options for practicing its functions as per the mission entrusted to it. – ONA



Apricot charm attracts tourists in Wakan in Wadi Mistal

BALQEES HAMOOD ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Wakan in Wadi Mistal in the Wilayat of Nakhl in the Governorate of South Al Batinah witnesses a great turnout of inbound and outbound visitors to enjoy apricot and peach season, which begins with flowering in January. The best time to visit Wakan is from mid-May to the end of August, the harvesting season for both fruits.

Tourism and trade flourish during this season, as this is one of the few areas in the Sultanate of Oman where apricots and peaches grow. High altitude and cool weather are suitable for the plantation of both fruits.

As the apricot trees bloom, the village turns into a place with fairytale scenes and stunning scenery. The cold winter and mild summer are good for apricot trees. Such a climate allows farmers to get better yields and market fruits commercially, which constitutes



a suitable income for them due to the high demand for it.

The small village is known for its exquisite apricot crops grown without chemical additives. The

dormancy and leaf fall season begins in early December, followed by the flowering stage in early February until the beginning of March. Apricot fruits start to

ripen in mid-April, and the apricot harvest continues for a month to a month and a half. Local farmers sell their crops to visiting tourists or in Souq Nakhl and nearby

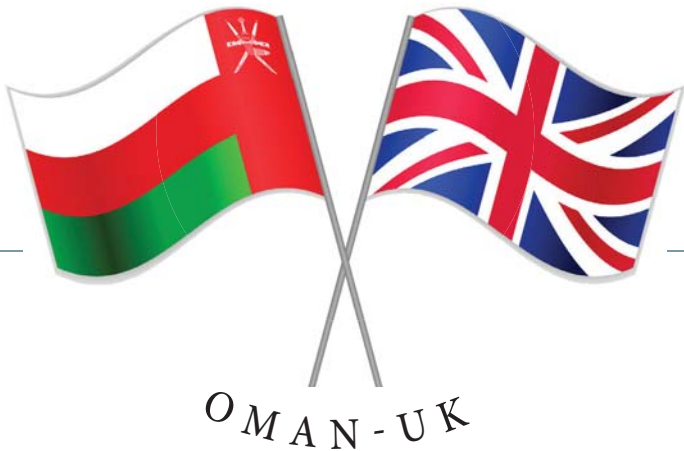
markets.

The area is characterised by moderate summer and low winter temperatures, making it suitable for growing various fruit trees.

Many agricultural terraces can be found in the village, and apricots are not the only fruit cultivated in this region. Grapes, pomegranates, lemons, palm trees, flowers, and mountain herbs used in folk medicine are also grown.

Wakan has recently become a popular tourist destination, especially during the apricot blossom season, when fields are covered in a sea of delicate pink and white flowers.

A pedestrian road with 700 ascending steps has been established in the village. It contains service areas, watchtowers in the form of castles and umbrellas, some councils, and a rest centre with a stunning view of the village and terraces. The descending falaj passes from the top of the village towards the agricultural terraces, and a mountain path links the village to the green mountain for hiking enthusiasts. June is the time to harvest apricots, which sell for RO 3 a kilo, according to farmer Suleiman bin Hamdan al Mayahi.



MAGGIE JEANS (OBE)

The relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom trace back over two centuries and the two sides always explore ways of improving them on various fronts, including but not limited to, diplomatic, trade and commerce, cultural and people-to-people relations.

In 1800, Oman and Britain signed a treaty expressing the hope that ‘the friendship of the two states may remain unshook till the end of time, and till the sun and the moon have finished their revolving career.’

The British Embassy in Muscat is planning a celebration for the coronation of King Charles III on Saturday (May 6), at the Al Bustan Ritz Carlton Hotel with the support of the Anglo-Omani Society in the UK and the British Business Forum and the community along with the citizens of Oman.

On the occasion of the coronation of King Charles III, Maggie Jeans OBE, a long-time resident of the Sultanate, recalls some of Oman’s special relationship with the UK.

“Many others in Oman and around the world will watch this historic event live on television. The UK does pomp and circumstance probably better than any nation. Lovers of pageantry will not be disappointed when the gold carriages, a gift from the people of Australia, are rolled out, surrounded by a retinue of liveried footmen.

In 2021, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik travelled to London and met with HRH Prince Charles, now King Charles III, himself a frequent visitor to Oman over the years. On Tuesday, December 15, 2021, Queen Elizabeth II presented His Majesty Sultan Haitham with the GCMG — a Knighthood — at Windsor Castle. They were accompanied on this visit by Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, and HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

There have been many Royal visits over the years in both directions.

The late Queen Elizabeth II last visited Oman in November 2010 with HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

More recent visitors include Prince William. Royal visitors from the UK across the years have also included Prince Harry, Prince Andrew and Princess Anne. Boris Johnson’s visit when he was Foreign Secretary was particularly memorable as shown in TV news clips at the time with late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Over the years, the style of visits has become less formal as this photo of Prince William with a group of Omani fishermen shows.

Many illustrious British explorers have also ventured to Oman. The late James (Jan) Morris accompanied His Highness Sultan Said bin Taimur on a journey from Salalah to Muscat for the first time by a motor car in 1955 as an official observer. Wilfred Thesiger crossed the Empty Quarter and published



Royal super fan Donna Werner from the US shows her celebratory handmade royal hat ahead of the Coronation of King Charles, in London, Britain. – Reuters

BRITISH EMBASSY IS PLANNING
A CELEBRATION FOR
THE CORONATION OF
KING CHARLES III

RELATIONS
OF OVER
200 YEARS



“Arabian Sands” in 1959. Tim Severin recreated the voyages from the mythical Tales of the Arabian Nights and sailed to China in a boat built in Qantab. His book “The Sinbad Voyage” was published in 1982. A large number of British artists, archaeologists, adventurers, sculptors, writers and musicians have spent time in Oman over the years.

Historic ties between Oman and Britain are explained in ‘Unshook Till the End of Time’ published in 2012 and written by two former British ambassadors, Robert Alston and Stuart Laing, and also available in Arabic.

The rare photograph from 1960 was published in the UK entitled “Foreign Students Taking Afternoon Classes in Art at Bitten High School”. The 4 students are seen in the UK with their art teacher.

The British Loan Service is still active in Oman and there have been several joint military exercises in recent years which are beneficial to both nations.

The Anglo-Omani Society was formed in 1975 by the first ambassador of Oman, Sir Donald Hawley, to provide some continuity for British expatriates who served or would serve Oman in the future under the patronage of the late Sultan Qaboos.



In 1991, AOS was involved in the formation of the Oman British Friendship Association and more recently with the establishment of the Oman British Business Council. Today, the AOS has established a Young Generation Group in 2013 to strengthen the friendship between the younger generations of both Oman and the UK. AOS also offers several outreach programmes and internships, including tuition in Arabic.

Many Omani students study in the UK, with over 3,000 currently enrolled in UK universities, and there is a large British Alumni Association organised via the British Council in Oman. There is cooperation in commerce and industry, specifically oil and gas and involvement in the development of Duqm as a major hub in the region. Britain is also one of Oman’s leading foreign investors.

The accession to the throne of King Charles III marks a new chapter in Omani-British relations at a crucial time in the region. Oman and Britain are two free spirits held together by a shared history, mutual trust and shared values. Oman’s foreign policy is second to none. In real terms this special relationship translates into investment and practical mutual support.



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Omani scientists to take part in Lindau Laureates meetings

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has announced the nominations for the representation of the Sultanate of Oman in the 72nd Lindau Nobel Laureates meetings, which will be held from June 25-30 in Lindau, Germany. MoHERI nominated Dr Mohammed bin Salim al Alawi, Consultant of Liaison Psychiatry at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, and Dr Faris bin Abdullah al Farsi, Medical Doctor at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, to participate in this year's gathering.

The two Omani representatives will get the chance to interact with about 40 Nobel laureates as well as 600 young scientists from over 80 countries. This unique annual gathering is exclusive for outstanding undergraduate, master and PhD students and post-doc researchers in the Physiology and Medicine fields.

The Lindau Nobel Laureate meetings aim to build the capabilities of Omani researchers, transfer knowledge and exchange experiences, refine the scientific



Dr Faris bin Abdullah Al Farsi



Dr Mohammed Salim Al Alawi

and research skills of the Omani youth, allow the Omani youth to get acquainted with Nobel Laureates closely and to know the latest scientific developments, and create partnerships and links with scientists from different countries of the world.

GCC SUPREME COUNCIL'S ADVISORY AUTHORITY DISCUSSES PROTECTION OF GULF VALUES



MUSCAT: The 2nd meeting of the 26th session of the GCC Supreme Council's Advisory Authority was held in Muscat on Wednesday under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Ahmed al Essa'ee, current chair of the GCC Advisory Authority. In its meeting, the authority discussed the reports from committees in charge of protection of Gulf values, consolidation of food and medicine supply chains and promotion of tourism integration among member states. The Advisory Authority assessed the reports in preparation for submitting them to the forthcoming meeting of the GCC Summit. — ONA

SQU Council reviews implementing decisions

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council on Wednesday held its 3rd meeting for the academic year 2022/2023 under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Chairperson of the Council.

HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU and Deputy Chairperson of the Council, was present at the meeting.

The council reviewed the



progress of implementing various decisions and recommendations undertaken by the council in the

previous meeting. It also approved several decisions, namely updating the

degree of Master of Art in Arabic Language and Literature, among other decisions. — ONA

Omani Haj delegation formed



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs issued a ministerial decision to form the Omani Haj delegation for 1444 AH, headed by Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the ministry. The ministerial decision also stipulates that Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, Assistant Director-General for Awqaf shall be deputy head of the delegation. — ONA

General federation of workers election results announced

MUSCAT: As many as 291 members of workers syndicates on Wednesday elected the chairman and members of the General Federation of Oman Workers Board of Directors for the term 2023-2027. The process was carried out through an e-election system.

The results of the election came as follows: Nabhan bin Ahmed al Battashi was elected as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers.

Meanwhile, the elected members of the board comprise the following: Ibrahim bin



Hamad al Balushi, Aida bint Shamis al Hashemi, Is'haq bin Juma al Kharousi, Ammar bin Salim al Ghufaili, Hamid bin Saleem al Maamari, Mahboob

bin Mohammed al Rahili, Suad bin Ali al Sulaimi, Mohammed bin Hamad al Hinai, Taiba bint Sulaiman al Hasani and Nasser bin Said al Araimi. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS



The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) (invites following tenders:

Tender No	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 11/2023	Extending of Power Supply in the feeder no.1 at Al-Khaimah Area in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate	50/=	"C" and Above	18/05/2023	08/06/2023
Tanweer - 12/2023	Supply Extension of HVLV Works to Feed Power Supply to Residential Plots at New Planned Area at Duqm Highest in AL Duqum Wilayat - AL Wusta Governorate		"B" and Above	18/05/2023	08/06/2023

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board (valid certificate), Tanweer and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824. SME's Ryida card holders are exempted form tender fee.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer). SME's Ryida card holders are exempted form tender bid bond.
- Offers Submission:**
 - Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tenders to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Minor Tender Committee**, Tanweer.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787



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Smoke billows during fighting in the Sudanese capital Khartoum. – AFP

UN seeks safe passage for humanitarian supplies in Sudan crisis

KHARTOUM: UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said on Wednesday that he was seeking assurances from the warring factions in Sudan to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian assistance hours after air strikes in Khartoum undermined a new ceasefire.

“We will still require agreements and arrangements to allow for movement of staff and supplies,” he said from Port Sudan, where many people have fled as the army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have battled for three weeks.

“We will need to have agreement at the highest level and very publicly and we will need to deliver those commitments into local arrangements that can be depended on,” he told reporters

via video link from Port Sudan.

Air strikes were heard in Khartoum on Wednesday, a witness said, even as warring factions agreed to a new seven-day ceasefire from Thursday, weakening chances for a lasting truce.

The conflict has created a humanitarian crisis, with about 100,000 people forced to flee with little food or water to neighbouring countries, the United Nations said.

Aid deliveries have been held up in a nation where about one-third of people already relied on humanitarian assistance.

A broader disaster could be in the making as Sudan’s impoverished neighbours grapple with the influx of refugees.

Previous ceasefire agreements between the army and a

paramilitary force, whose power struggle erupted into full blown conflict in mid-April, have ranged from 24 to 72 hours, but none have been fully observed.

Tens of thousands of people have left Khartoum area and its adjoining cities, fearful of both airstrikes and soldiers from the paramilitary RSF. Caught between army airstrikes overhead and RSF soldiers on the ground, many citizens feel forced to take sides.

THIRD WEEK OF FIGHTING

South Sudan’s foreign ministry said on Tuesday that mediation championed by its president, Salva Kiir, had led both sides to agree a week long truce from Thursday to May 11 and to name envoys for peace talks. — **Reuters**

On landmark visit, Raisi signs a memoranda with Assad

DAMASCUS: Visiting Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi hailed Syria’s Bashar al Assad on Wednesday for keeping government control on the country.

“Syria’s government and people have gone through great difficulties, and today we can say that you have overcome all these problems and achieved victory despite the threats and sanctions imposed on you,” Raisi told Assad, according to a statement from the Syrian presidency and Iran’s Irna news agency.

Tehran has provided economic, political and military support to Syria, helping Damascus claw back most of the territory it lost at the start of the conflict and positioning itself in a leading role as Assad seeks to focus on reconstruction.

Assad told Raisi that Syria-Iran ties “were stable and steady during difficult times despite heavy political and security storms that struck the Middle East”, according



Syria's President Bashar al-Assad stands with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Damascus, Syria. – Reuters

to the statement.

Iran “did not hesitate to provide political and economic support (to Syria), and even offered blood,” Assad added.

Raisi’s visit is the first by an Iranian president to Syria since the war broke out, and comes at a time

when more regional capitals are re-engaging with the government in Damascus.

The large Iranian delegation includes the ministers of foreign affairs, defence, oil, roads and urban development as well as telecommunications. — **AFP**

SCHOOL VICTIMS MATTER IN BRAZIL



Backpacks representing victims of school massacres during a protest in front of the National Congress in Brasilia. – AFP

Israel continues razing Palestinian homes in the West Bank

HARES: Israeli troops carried out demolitions on Wednesday of the homes of two Palestinians accused of carrying out deadly attacks on Israelis in the occupied West Bank last year. The army said the demolitions targeted the homes of Mohammed Souf, 18, accused of a “car-ramming and stabbing attack” which killed three Israelis last November, and Younis Hilan, accused of fatally stabbing an Israeli the previous month.

Souf’s uncle, Mostafa, denounced the demolitions as

“collective punishment.”

“This is the occupation’s policy which we, as Palestinians, are familiar with and used to. We were sure this would happen, because we have been through collective punishment before,” he said.

Hilan’s father Jalal stressed that the stabbing carried out by his son in the Palestinian village of Al-Fundug, west of the city of Nablus, “wasn’t my fault.”

He said he had expected the army to raze only the one floor of the family home in which his son



Smoke billows as Israeli forces demolish Palestinian homes in the village of Hares, in the occupied West Bank. – AFP

had lived, but complained they had demolished another floor too.

The army said that during the demolition of Hilan’s home “suspects hurled rocks and rolled burning tyres at the soldiers.”

Israel, which has occupied the West Bank since 1967, routinely demolishes the homes of individuals it blames for attacks on Israelis. Human rights activists say the policy amounts to collective punishment, as it can render non-combatants, including children, homeless. But Israel says the

practice is effective in deterring some Palestinians from carrying out attacks.

From Tuesday morning around 100 rockets were fired by groups from Gaza towards Israel, according to Islamic Jihad.

In response, the Israeli army said it carried out a number of air strikes on Gaza early on Wednesday, targeting “weapons manufacturing sites, outposts, military complexes and an underground tunnels” belonging to Hamas. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

HARARE

Opposition MP convicted ahead of vote

A popular opposition politician in Zimbabwe was convicted of obstruction of justice in a high-profile trial on Wednesday, a move that bars him from contesting upcoming elections.

In a case that critics said was politically motivated, Job Sikhala was found guilty almost a year after he was first arrested, and after spending more than 300 days behind bars pending the verdict.

“The state has proved its case beyond any reasonable doubt,”



magistrate Marewanazvo Gofa told the court. Sikhala was handed a six-month suspended sentence and a \$600 fine, or another six months behind bars if he fails to pay. — **AFP**

BANGKOK

Serial killer charged with 14 counts of murder

A Thai woman accused of a spate of poisonings has been charged with 14 counts of murder, police said, in one of the kingdom’s worst suspected serial killing cases.

Sararat Rangsiwuthaporn is alleged to have swindled thousands of dollars out of her victims before poisoning them with cyanide.

She was arrested last week over nine suspicious deaths that took place over several years, but the police swiftly widened their



probe. Her husband, a high-ranking policeman, is also facing fraud and embezzlement charges related to the murders, deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn said. — **AFP**

KIGALI

115 perish as flooding hits Rwanda

At least 115 people have died as floods and mudslides swept through northern and western Rwanda after torrential rains, the state-run broadcaster said on Wednesday, warning that the toll could rise.

“The rain that fell last night caused disaster in the Northern and Western Provinces,” the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) said on its website.

“Currently, the provisional figures published by the administration of these provinces



say that 115 people have been declared dead.”

East Africa often suffers from flooding and landslides during the rainy seasons.

— **AFP**



In brief

■ NOOTDROP



DECLARED CHEMICAL ARMS TO BE DESTROYED

The world's chemical weapons watchdog said on Wednesday that the process of destroying tens of thousands of tonnes of declared chemical stockpiles will be completed "within the next few weeks."

The watchdog, which also unveiled its new chemical laboratory and high-tech facility outside The Hague, warned that new challenges to fight chemical weapons were emerging such as threats posed by artificial intelligence.

"More than 70,000 tonnes of the world's most dangerous poisons have been destroyed under the supervision of the OPCW," said Fernando Arias, head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. — AFP

■ BELGRADE



NINE DEAD, SEVEN INJURED IN SCHOOL SHOOTING

Eight students and a security guard were killed during a school shooting in Belgrade on Wednesday, officials said, with police accusing the detained 13-year-old suspect of plotting the attack for a month and making a kill list.

The incident rocked the Balkan nation, which has not seen a school shooting of this magnitude for decades and where one cabinet minister called it the "biggest tragedy" to occur in the Serbian school system in recent history.

"Eight children and a security guard were killed, while six children and one schoolteacher were wounded," the interior ministry said. — AFP

■ ROME



POLICE SWOOP ON MAFIA ACROSS EUROPE

Police across Europe staged a vast, coordinated operation on Wednesday against the 'Ndrangheta, Italy's most powerful and wealthy mafia that controls the bulk of cocaine flowing into Europe.

Some 132 people were taken into custody in early morning raids as part of a blitz involving eight European countries plus Brazil and Panama, according to EU law enforcement agency Europol.

"It is likely the biggest operation ever carried out in Europe against the Calabrese mafia," said Eric van Duyse, spokesman for Belgium's federal prosecutors' office, which began the investigation five years ago.

Russia blames Ukraine for foiled drone attack aimed at Putin

MOSCOW: Russia said on Wednesday it had shot down two drones aimed at President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin residence in what it called a Ukrainian "terrorist" assassination attempt.

Kyiv said it had "nothing to do" with the alleged attack and suggested it was "staged" by Moscow.

Russia announced the incident after a series of extraordinary sabotage attacks in the run-up to celebrations for the nation's most important holiday on May 9.

"Today at night, the Kyiv regime attempted to strike the Kremlin residence of the President of the Russian Federation with unmanned aerial vehicles," the Kremlin said.

The operation was described as "a planned terrorist act and an attempt on the life of the President of the Russian Federation."

Moscow said Putin was not hurt and there were no casualties.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin was working at his residence near Moscow on Wednesday.

Kyiv said it did not target the Kremlin.

"Ukraine has nothing to do with drone attacks on the Kremlin," presidential spokesman Mikhaylo Podolyak said.

"Such staged reports by Russia should be considered solely as an attempt to prepare an information background for a large-scale terrorist attack on Ukraine," Podolyak said.

The last five days have seen two



People run near a train station hit by a Russian military strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kherson. — Reuters

Two unmanned vehicles were aimed at the Kremlin... the devices were put out of action. The operation was described as "a planned terrorist act and an attempt on the life of the President of the Russian Federation."

trains derailed by explosions, oil depot fires near and in Crimea, and power lines blown up near Saint Petersburg.

Officials in Russia said they were dealing with a major fire at a fuel depot close to the bridge to Russian-annexed Crime in the night between Tuesday and Wednesday.

A source in the emergency services was quoted by TASS news agency as saying that the fire had been caused by a drone.

In possible signs that preparations are being stepped

up, the frontline city of Kherson in southern Ukraine announced a long curfew for residents and sabotage acts behind Russian lines intensified.

Kherson, which was re-taken by Ukrainian troops in November, will be under curfew from Friday evening until Monday morning.

Regional officials said this was "for law enforcement officers to do their job", but similar long curfews have also been used in the past for troop and arms movements. — AFP

UK police called up for massive coronation security operation

LONDON: More than 29,000 police officers will take part in one of the UK's "most significant" ever security operations for the coronation of King Charles III this weekend, police said on Wednesday.

Some 2,000 guests, including global royalty and world leaders, will be at Saturday's event in central London, with huge crowds lining the route to and from Buckingham Palace.

The government earlier insisted that security services were "ready to deal" with the challenges a man was arrested on suspicion of throwing shotgun cartridges into the grounds of Buckingham Palace.

Police detained the man, who was allegedly armed with a knife, at about 7:00 pm on Tuesday, causing concern just days before the historic event, which is the first coronation in Britain since 1953.

Security minister Tom Tugendhat said that police were "all over" the challenges presented by the coronation.

"Our intelligence and other security forces are extremely aware of the challenges that we face and ready to deal with them as the police did quite brilliantly yesterday," he said.

The drama unfolded after the man approached the gates to the palace and threw several items into the grounds suspected to be shotgun cartridges, according to the Metropolitan Police.

They have been recovered and will be taken for specialist examination. — AFP

Germany to pull troops out of Mali by May 2024

BERLIN: The German government said on Wednesday it had decided to end its participation in the UN mission in Mali by next May over problems with the ruling junta.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's cabinet said Berlin would pull its 1,110 troops in the UN mission MINUSMA out of the West African country over the next year and pivot towards more humanitarian and development aid for the region.

"Whether we want it to or not, what happens in the Sahel affects us," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said in a statement.

"We are reorganising our engagement in the region and will let our participation in MINUSMA run out in a structured fashion over the next 12 months."

The government said it would "at the same time deepen its civil support for the region" and "strengthen the focus of its engagement on security in Niger, Mauritania and the states on the Gulf of Guinea".

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said the recent fighting in Sudan had underlined "how quickly a country's instability can lead to an existential threat for the lives of our citizens".



UN peacekeepers stand guard in the northern town of Kouroume, Mali. — Reuters file photo

He said Berlin's goal was to "foster the growing responsibility of Africans for security and stability on their own continent".

Germany announced last year that it planned to withdraw its troops from the mission by May 2024, a decision now approved by the governing coalition.

It came after the German army, known as the Bundeswehr, had repeatedly run into operational problems with the ruling junta.

The Sahel state has been battling a security crisis since separatist insurgencies broke out

in the north in 2012.

It has since August 2020 been ruled by a military junta, which broke a long-standing alliance with France and other Western partners in the fight.

The German cabinet in March agreed for up to 60 German soldiers to participate in the new EU-led military mission EUMPM, based in Niger.

Mali's long-running insurgency has claimed thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. — AFP

The push to de-dollarisation

It is hardly surprising that Argentina will adopt the yuan in trade deals with China. It is the first Latin American country to switch to the yuan. Brazil has also agreed with China to trade in yuan and its own currency, the real, rather than the American dollar.

The possibility of BRICS developing a currency union to be used for cross-border trade between the nations that form the bloc is a challenge with a chance of success. During the 2020 summit, the group jointly issued the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025.

A single union currency means a free flow of trade between members, even when not sharing geographic borders; therefore, US sanctions on one country will lose their effectiveness because products can still travel between member states and end up beyond or even inside the United States consumer market.

Several countries have recently expressed interest in joining the group. Thirteen countries have formally applied to join, and another six have asked informally, according to reports as the BRICS members prepare to meet in June to discuss the bloc's expansion. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Argentina, the UAE, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain and Indonesia have all shown interest in joining the bloc.

It appears that the goal to dethrone the US dollar dates back to 1960. In 1944, the US dollar became the worldwide reserve currency, the main currency used for trade and saving, as part of the Bretton Woods Agreement (and System).

The arrangement granted the US government control over the banking system — and the right to use that control to sanction adversaries.

China's advocacy for reforming the dollar-based global financial system can be traced to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, according to a statement by Dai Xianglong, then Governor of the People's Bank of China. It is also relevant to observe that BRIC, founded in 2009, publicly declared it a priority during its inaugural meeting to reduce



Sonia Ambrosio

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THE POSSIBILITY OF BRICS DEVELOPING A CURRENCY UNION TO BE USED FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE BETWEEN THE NATIONS THAT FORM THE BLOC IS A CHALLENGE WITH A CHANCE OF SUCCESS

reliance on the US dollar and diversify the global currency and financial system. South Africa joined the bloc in December 2010. BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of emerging market economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Regardless of the acronym sequence, China is seen as the BRIC concept's backbone.

The bloc's principal achievements have been – so far – in the area of financial cooperation. It is important to acknowledge that Russia and China have already created their cross-border payment mechanisms. China's yuan has replaced the US dollar as the most traded currency in Russia, largely because of sanctions on Russia following the war in Ukraine. India's rupee is the second most traded currency in Russia for the same reason. Also, China's national oil company, CNOOC, and France's TotalEnergies had just completed China's first LNG trade settled in yuan.

It is not just a monetary union; it also has the appeal of having a strong political influence on global governance. With growing tensions between the United States, Russia and China, the BRICS move indicates a shift in global finance. New technologies are enabling market instruments for trade contracts and payments. Therefore, the impact of a BRICS union currency would not be limited to inter-BRICS but would have a global effect.

The academic article on the 'pathways to de-dollarisation' framework addressed by Zongyuan Zoe Liu and Mihaela Papa in 'Can BRICS De-Dollarise the Global Financial System?' makes an excellent read on what is under way.

The BRICS are emerging as a club of great powers committed to collective action. The literature and academic research on the BRICS' long-term commitment to reforming the global financial system and diversifying the global currency structure are limited, but there is plenty of reliable information on the players' long-term aim to dethrone the US dollar.

WATCHING THE VOLCANO!



A Colombian soldier watches the Nevado del Ruiz volcano as it emits a cloud of ash at Nevado del Ruiz, Caldas Department, Colombia, on Tuesday. Colombian authorities recommended the evacuation of the towns closest to the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in the west of the country, whose seismic activity could trigger an eruption. – AFP

Realism about investment treaties

ANDRÉS ARAUZ
AND GUILLAUME LONG

A stream of European countries have exited the controversial Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) over the past year. France, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Denmark have all withdrawn from the ECT, or announced their intention to do so, joining Italy, which left in 2016.

By allowing foreign energy investors to sue national governments for losses caused by policy changes, the ECT prevents countries from delivering on their commitment to meet the Paris climate agreement's targets and effectively neutralises their plans to tax oil companies' windfall profits.

If advanced economies are being cowed by large corporations and struggling to implement urgently needed reforms, developing countries are in a much worse position. Lured by the often deceptive promise of higher capital inflows, many have signed a raft of bilateral and multilateral investment treaties. Like the ECT, these agreements contain investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms that allow foreign investors to bring a claim against a state before a private international tribunal. Dissatisfaction with the ECT in Europe could have sparked an important debate on how ISDS affects the future of the planet; instead, many

AS EU MEMBER STATES WITHDRAW FROM THE ENERGY CHARTER TREATY EN MASSE, DEVELOPING ECONOMIES SHOULD CALL FOR AN OVERHAUL OF MANY MORE INVESTMENT TREATIES



ECT was designed to encourage Western investment in the energy sector of former Soviet bloc countries.

European Union member states continue to press developing countries to conclude investment treaties.

Established at the end of the Cold War, the ECT was designed to encourage Western investment in the energy sector of former Soviet bloc countries, particularly the fossil-fuel industry. To assuage concerns about expropriation, breach of contract, and other discriminatory treatment, the treaty permits investors to submit disputes to international arbitration, a supposedly neutral forum, rather

than national courts. Through this system, corporations can sue governments for investment losses, including future profits, which can amount to billions of dollars. As of June 2022, at least 150 investment-arbitration cases have been brought under the ECT.

But the ECT is just the tip of the iceberg. Roughly 2,500 investment treaties — most of them bilateral — permit international investors to use ISDS arbitrators to settle disputes with states. Corporations can sue states for any judicial,

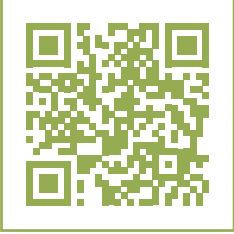
legislative, or regulatory decision, including at the municipal level, that could affect their bottom line. Investment treaties thus make it harder for governments to implement stronger and more effective environmental safeguards, labour rights and safety standards. Even the threat of an investor suit can stymie policymakers.

Not even the promise of reform has tempered key European member states' resolve to leave the ECT. The European Commission has said that a coordinated EU exit treaty —

an outcome called for by the European Parliament — appears inevitable. There is also talk of EU countries agreeing among themselves not to apply the ECT's sunset clause, which protects any existing investment for an additional 20 years after a state's exit (the European Parliament also voted in favour of annulling the clause). Many believe that phasing out fossil fuels cannot wait another two decades.

Developing countries could make the most of this unprecedented pushback against the ECT by demanding an overhaul of the many crippling investment treaties to which they are a party. Yet while EU member states are leaving the ECT, a growing number of African countries, including The Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Eswatini, are joining it.

Unfortunately, Europe's refusal to subordinate political decision-making to corporate interests has not extended beyond the bloc's borders. Despite announcing its withdrawal from the ECT, France still has 19 bilateral investment treaties with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as another 20 with African countries. Spain has 18 and 11, respectively, and the Netherlands has 15 and 22.



GCC under-secretaries hold preparatory meeting ahead of ministers meet

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Basil bin Ahmed al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, presided over the 39th preparatory meeting of the Under-secretaries of the Ministries of Youth and Sports in the GCC countries in Muscat on Wednesday.

In his speech, Al Rowas said: “The continuation of the great efforts made by the GCC countries in youth and sports sectors confirms the importance of these sectors and the importance of making advancement not only at the GCC level but also at the international level, as evident by the various youth achievements.”

“The continuation of joint programmes, youth activities and events in the scientific, social, economic and artistic fields contributes to strengthening ties between Gulf youth and exchanging experiences among them” he added.

During the meeting, a number of issues of common interest in the field of youth in the GCC countries were discussed, foremost the decision issued by the Supreme Council at its 43rd edition in Riyadh in 2022, regarding the advisory body’s views on enhancing joint action towards digital transformation and modern technologies.

Taking advantage of the recommendations and implementation mechanisms



were discussed along with plans for each ministry in line with the laws and regulations in force in each country.

The undersecretaries recommended continuation of initiatives and proposals that would enhance and develop joint cooperation in the youth field. They assigned the Planning and Coordination Committee to study the views that received from the ministries of youth and sports in the GCC countries, and to develop appropriate implementation plans for them in line with developments in the current and future phase in line with the visions of the GCC countries in the youth field.

The meeting also reviewed the updated regulations of the technical committees, which would develop and strengthen joint Gulf action, and the general framework for the Gulf Youth Day for the year 2023, which is scheduled to be organised on June 6 every year. They discussed the importance of strengthening international strategic partnerships with GCC countries and international organisations, and benefit from the distinguished experiences and capabilities available in these countries in the field of youth in a way that serves the youth of the GCC countries.

The officials also approved the recommendations reached by the joint task forces in the youth field between the GCC, Jordan and Morocco through the meetings held in 2022.

Dhofar claim Salalah derby against Al Nasr

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

Dhofar secured a narrow 1-0 win over city rivals Al Nasr during their Salalah derby at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium in the 23rd round of Omantel League on Tuesday.

The game’s lone goal was scored by Dhofar’s Brazilian recruit Wilmerson, who converted a penalty kick in the 29th minute. The referee awarded the penalty to Dhofar following a rough tackle made by Al Nasr’s Moayad Awad, who received a red card in the process. Al Nasr then were left with 10 players to complete 63 minutes of the match.

Then, the two teams presented an equal level with a relative advantage for Dhofar in the last quarter of the first half.

In the second half, Dhofar continued to dominate the field, taking advantage of Al Nasr’s numerical disadvantage, although they missed several opportunities.

On the other hand, Al Nasr tried on several occasions during the course of the second half to find an equaliser through counter-attacks, but it lacked focus, so the match ended with



Dhofar winning by a goal.

With this win, Dhofar temporarily rose to fifth place with 36 points, one point ahead of Oman Club, who will play against second-placed Al Suwaiq in the 23rd-round match on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Al Nasr remain 10th in the league table with 27 points, and the team failed to capitalise on the defeat of the ninth-placed Al Musannah, who lost to Sohar on Monday.

AL RUSTAQ FOURTH

The same round saw Al Rustaq and Sur teams facing off at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The match ended in a goalless draw, with both teams struggling to find the back of the net.

The first half was cautious, with Al Rustaq enjoying an

advantage and a number of opportunities to advance. However, Ahmed al Adawi missed a real opportunity at the beginning of the half, after he was alone with the Sur goalkeeper and hit it next to the left post. Despite Al Rustaq’s

pressure, all attempts were unsuccessful, and the first half ended in a goalless draw.

The second half saw more determination from both teams, with Rustaq, in particular, wanting to come out with a positive result. Sur led a number of attacks, but neither team could capitalise on any chances, the final touch was not present in all the moves and the referee cancelled a goal for Al Rustaq due to offside in the 66th minute. The match ended in a goalless tie, leaving both teams with a point.

With this result, Al Rustaq secured their fourth place with 40 points, while Sur were in 11th with 21 points.

Despite the draw, Al Rustaq missed the opportunity to catch up with Al Seeb, who finished third with 42 points. Al Seeb also tied in the same round match with Al Ittihad, who are in 12th place with 17 points. With this tie, Sur also missed the chance to widen the points difference between them.

The Omantel League is nearing its end, with only three rounds remaining, and the battle for the top and bottom spots remains fierce as teams fight to secure their position in the league standings.

Oman Golf Association attend R&A International Conference

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Oman Golf Association (OGA) have just returned from the home of golf, St Andrews Scotland where the R&A's International Conference was held. Last staged in 2017 the three-day conference was attended by 170 delegates from the R&A's overseas affiliates with representation from 65 countries.

The R&A along with the United States Golf Association (USGA) govern the sport of golf worldwide. Due to the pandemic the conference was not held on its normal 4 year rotation in 2021 however the pandemic, and the effect that it has had on golf in both a positive and negative sense, made up much of the discussion.

The conference, titled 'Golf's Golden Opportunity', saw speakers from within the golf industry, and also from outside, discuss the growth that golf has seen over recent years, and how this growth can be further developed. Keynote speakers from organisations such as Golf New Zealand explained their development strategies in growing the game with particular focus on ladies and juniors. Sustainability also featured heavily, both from an environmental perspective, but also in regard to continued participation of those who are



introduced to the game through the many available channels including digital engagement.

Head of the delegation and General-Secretary of the OGA, Ahmed al Jahdhamy said "We are grateful for the continuing

support and guidance that the R&A have offered the Oman Golf Association and it was a pleasure to attend their International Conference at St Andrews. We will continue to work closely with the R&A and their newly appointed

regional development manager Neal Graham to ensure that golf in Oman continues to grow".

Al Jahdhamy's words were echoed by Jamie Wood, Technical Director for the OGA, "After the disruption of the last few years it was fantastic to be able to share some time with colleagues from other federations and have the opportunity to listen to a top-class group of presenters. Under guidance from the R&A the attendees were encouraged to look at other sports and industries as a model for increased participation and growth, listening to experts from outside the world of golf commenting on the opportunity that golf currently has was very interesting. As a golfer any visit to St Andrews is inspiring and we have definitely come away with some valuable insights that we hope to be able to use here in Oman".

The Oman Golf Association represents amateur golf at all levels in the Sultanate of Oman, elite National Teams compete at Under 13, 15, 18, Men's and Ladies levels in tournaments regionally and internationally, and in collaboration with the golf clubs in Oman the OGA have several initiatives to develop and grow the game, specifically amongst children and ladies.

Davis leads Lakers over Warriors, Knicks square series



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) drives to the hoop between Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (6) and guard Dennis Schroder (17) in the fourth quarter during game one of the 2023 NBA playoffs at the Chase Center. – USA Today Sports

SAN FRANCISCO: Anthony Davis led a defensive masterclass as the Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Golden State Warriors 117-112 on the road to take a 1-0 lead in their NBA Western Conference playoff series on Tuesday.

The eagerly anticipated showdown between the two Californian glamour clubs lived up to the billing as the Lakers held off a thrilling late Golden State rally to take a crucial early advantage against the NBA champions in the best-of-seven series.

The Lakers appeared to be cruising to victory after opening up a 14-point lead with less than six minutes remaining in the fourth quarter after a clinical defensive performance at San Francisco's Chase Center.

But the Warriors came roaring back with a flurry of three-pointers and Stephen Curry knotted the score at 112-112 to complete a 14-0 Golden State run with 1min 38sec remaining.

Yet just when it looked as if the Warriors were building unstoppable momentum, the

Lakers regrouped to snatch victory.

A D'Angelo Russell layup edged them back in front at 114-112 before a LeBron James free throw increased the Lakers lead to three.

Jordan Poole then missed a game-tying 27-foot three-point effort with 9.7sec left on the clock before the Lakers drew two free throws for German international Dennis Schroder to make the game safe.

"We know this team — they're the defending champions. No lead is safe against them, they can get hot at any moment," Davis said of the Warriors.

"But this is just a mindset for our team, knowing we can beat this team, it's a confidence-booster for us.

"We've been able to get this one in game one, but we haven't done anything yet."

Davis finished with 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocks while James chipped in with 22 points, 11 rebounds, four assists and three blocks.

— AFP

HAQ AND AZAM GUIDE PAKISTAN TO 287-6 IN THIRD NEW ZEALAND ODI

KARACHI: Opener Imam-ul-Haq and Babar Azam hit solid half-centuries on Wednesday as Pakistan scored 287-6 against New Zealand in the third one-day international in Karachi.

Haq scored a 107-ball 90 for his 16th half-century while Azam made a 62-ball 54 for his 26th half-century, after New Zealand won the toss and opted to bowl on a slow-paced National Stadium pitch.

Trailing 2-0 after losing the first two matches in Rawalpindi by five and seven wickets respectively, New Zealand started well by getting the in-form opener Fakhar Zaman caught off Matt Henry for 19. Zaman, who had scored three hundreds in his last three ODI innings



Pakistan's Agha Salman plays a shot during the third one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the National Stadium in Karachi. – AFP

had shaped up well before his fall, leaving it to Haq and Azam to steady the innings during their 108-run second-wicket stand.

Azam hit three boundaries and a six before he chopped one onto his stumps off Henry.

Haq, who hit seven boundaries and a six, was bowled by pacer Adam Milne in the 38th over.

Abdullah Shafique struggled again as he managed just 19, but Agha Salman (31) helped Mohammad Rizwan (32) add 54 runs for the fifth wicket to lift the total.

In the final overs, Mohammad Nawaz and Shadab Khan also chipped in with 11 and 21 not out respectively. Henry was the best bowler for New Zealand, taking 3-54.

Kolkata, Hyderabad look for a comeback



SRH VS KKR AT HYDERABAD

We did receive a record number of messages from fans, some for Virat Kohli, some for Gautam Gambhir and the others against both of them. As an analyst, I feel that things do happen in the ground (following the guidelines). At the end of the day, both the teams are trying their best to win and the road to success has different routes. I am not sure whether Kohli crossed the line or not, but as professionals, all should have left it behind in the field, while walking out.

There is one thing that I respect Kohli for and that's the fact that he took the entire Lucknow Super Giants going after him in Bengaluru and he waited for the second match-up, where he decided to take it out. It was very much evident from the start, with the aggression of the entire RCB team.

Although, talking from BCCI and IPL's perspective, they are definitely loving every moment of this, considering the attention and involvement of people in this topic, which is their ultimate motive.

● **PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER** – On the previous occasion that these two encountered each other was at Kolkata, where SRH piled up a mammoth 228/4 on the back of a wonderful century from Harry Brooks and a fifty from captain Aiden Markram. In reply, KKR did give in their best to get to 205/7, but they were never in the game with wickets falling regularly and only a solo 70-run partnership between Nitish Rana and Rinku Singh stood out.

● **TEAM INFO** – This is a contest between the two teams that haven't really got going in this season. Both these sides need to win almost all of their remaining games to have any honest chance at qualification for the play-offs. With just 3 wins a piece, Kolkata are sitting at 8th spot and Hyderabad are at the 9th position. Sunrisers did win their last game against Delhi, so they have some



kind of momentum.

● **Head-to-Head** — Played — 24; Won by KKR– 15; Won by SRH – 9

● **SRH possible 12** – M Agarwal, A Sharma, R Tripathi, A Markram, H Klaasen, H Brook, A Samad, M Markande, B Kumar, A Hosein, U Malik, T Natarajan

● **KKR possible 12** – N Jagadeesan, R Gurbaz, V Iyer, N Rana, R Singh, A Russell, S Narine, D Wiese, S Thakur, H Rana, V Chakaravathy, S Sharma

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The pitch at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium has always been a belter to bat on. In the

three matches played at the venue so far in the tournament, teams batting first have crossed the 190-run mark twice and won both matches. Hence the captain winning the toss will prefer to bat first and bring the opposition under pressure by posting a mammoth total. With very low chances of rain, the temperature will hover between 24 to 33 Degree Celsius.

● **Match Prediction** – Both these struggling sides would be looking for some kind of momentum that can help them finish this year's IPL. If these teams could win all their

remaining games, they could very well qualify as well. If not, they could work as party-poopers to others' seasons as well. Between both these sides, it's Kolkata who look like a stand out team, but haven't been able to deliver, but I feel that this is where they will start to get things right and go on a roll. So, it's going to be 'Kolbo lorbo jeetbo' at Hyderabad in a run-fest.

FAN COMMENTS (DOCTOR'S SPECIAL)

● The entire social media is about GG vs VK and a lot of rage that Naveen Ul Haq is getting. The entire situation was well depicted here. I agree that this is an old suppressed issue that finds its way out. Although, it was a wrong thing to happen by the ambassadors of this game and an amazing thing to happen for the event as a whole. – Dr Vidhyut Ramki, 47, Archaeologist, US Citizen

● Born in Kolkata and brought up in Hyderabad, I have been supporting both these sides but they have disappointed. Although, when they clash against each other, there are serious fireworks

and I am just expecting the same. Would love some Gambhir-Kohli type of incident in this one too. – Dr Radhika Maheshwari, 40, Obstetrician/Gynecologist, Indian.

● Being a fan of Virat Kohli, I love the aggression that he brings to the table and I really want this to continue. Even without raising his hand, he did convey to the opponents that he is the boss there and he should be respected. Hoping to see him in the leadership role more. Started watching this game because of my husband and now because of my son, we don't miss a single match of Kohli. – Dr Rahma al Balushi, 43, Paediatrician, Omani.

● Often, I feel that the game of cricket is undermined by calling it a gentleman's game. With the involvement of women, the line doesn't make sense any more, plus we all love a little bit of good quality action and drama. Most importantly, such intensity does make the match more interesting and memorable for the viewers and audiences. – Dr Makarand Jewrikar, 39, Paediatrician/Badr Al Saama, Indian.

ALCARAZ EARNs ZVEREV REVENGE, MEDVEDEV OUT OF MADRID OPEN

MADRID: World number two Carlos Alcaraz breezed past Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-2 to reach the Madrid Open quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Third-ranked Daniil Medvedev crashed out against Russian compatriot Aslan Karatsev, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4.

In the women's competition world number two Aryna Sabalenka was forced to sweat by Mayar Sherif but eventually came through 2-6, 6-2, 6-1 to reach the semi-finals.

Top-seeded Spaniard Alcaraz, who also beat Zverev in last season's Madrid final, gained revenge for the German's triumph when they met later in the 2022 French Open quarter-finals.

Two-time Madrid winner Zverev, 26, was blown away in the opening set. He improved a little in the second but not sufficiently to trouble Alcaraz, who moved his opponent around at will.

"I played at a great level, I didn't let him dominate, I went on the attack the whole time, and above all, I returned really well," said Alcaraz, who won in one hour 22 minutes.

"I played a complete game, and that's how we have this result -- but it's not a normal result against (Zverev)."

Zverev zipped past Hugo Grenier 6-1, 6-0 in the third round, appearing to find form after the ankle injury he suffered last year, but was exposed by a razor sharp Alcaraz.

The US Open champion dropped just two points in the first set in his near-immaculate service games, and put strong pressure on the German's serve.

Alcaraz converted his third break point to take a 2-0 lead in the 11-minute second game, before wresting another from Zverev for 5-1, consolidating to take the set.

The duo traded blows on serve at the start of the second set before Alcaraz carved out a break for 3-2 when Zverev sent a forehand return wide.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action during his round of 16 match against Germany's Alexander Zverev. – Reuters

Alcaraz again broke for a 5-2 lead with a neat forehand down the line and triumphed on serve when Zverev batted a return long.

Alcaraz, who turns 20 on

Friday, is aiming for his 10th tour-level title after defending the Barcelona Open in April.

In the last eight, the Murcian will face Karen Khachanov who dispatched Andrey Rublev

7-6 (10/8), 6-4 in another all-Russian battle.

Medvedev, second seed in the Spanish capital, has admitted he struggles on clay and fell to another defeat against Karatsev

on the dirt, as he did in Rome two seasons ago.

Karatsev triumphed comfortably in the first set tie-break, his ball striking immaculate throughout the

clash, hitting 28 winners to just four unforced errors.

Ranked 121st in the world, the qualifier broke the 2021 US Open winner for 3-2 in the second set and only dropped two points on his serve after that to progress.

"Feeling great, playing well, I just have to focus every match. I'll be preparing for the next round," said Karatsev.

He will face Zhizhen Zhang, who became the first Chinese player to reach the quarter-finals of a Masters 1000 event.

Zhang eked out a nailbiting victory over world number 10 Taylor Fritz, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (10/8).

SLOW START

Australian Open champion Sabalenka struggled badly at first against Sherif but turned the two-hour match around convincingly to reach the semi-finals.

"I was just trying to keep fighting to keep playing my game and find my rhythm," said Sabalenka.

"She's a clay court specialist and I'm very happy with this win. It was a very tough one."

Sherif, the first Egyptian to reach a WTA 1000 quarter-final, capitalised on Sabalenka's erratic start to break in the first game.

The 26-year-old became the first player to take a set off Sabalenka in Madrid.

However the Belarusian, 24, bounced back strongly, converting all four of her break points in the second set and hitting 10 winners to Sherif's one to force a third.

The 2021 Madrid winner was a break down at 2-1 in the second but won 11 of the next 12 games, dominating her opponent in the third set.

Sabalenka will face Greek world number nine Maria Sakkari after she came from behind to beat Romanian Irina-Camelia Begu 6-7, 6-4, 6-2 in the second quarter-final.

— AFP

Messi's PSG future in doubt after suspension over Saudi trip

PARIS: Lionel Messi's future at PSG was plunged into doubt on Wednesday after he was suspended by Paris Saint-Germain after travelling to Saudi Arabia without the club's permission.

A source with knowledge of the disciplinary procedure said that Argentina's 35-year-old World-Cup winning captain, who is out of contract at the end of the season, would be sidelined for "several days", while various media in France reported that he would be suspended for two weeks.

"He cannot train, cannot play, and will not be paid while disciplinary measures are in place," the source added.

Another source, also speaking on condition they were not identified, indicated that the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner would "probably" be sidelined for a fortnight, noting that "nobody is more important than the club".

Messi played the whole game in PSG's 3-1 home defeat by Lorient in Ligue 1 on Sunday.

He then travelled to Saudi Arabia to fulfil commercial commitments in his role as a tourism ambassador for the Gulf state.

The Saudi Tourism Authority said in a press release on Wednesday that Messi had "returned to Saudi for a second time, this time with his family" and had been treated to a demonstration of palm weaving and had fed Arabian gazelles.

As a result of the trip, Messi missed a training session scheduled for Monday following the weekend defeat.

The PSG squad were given a day off on Tuesday and Messi did not take part in training on Wednesday either.

REMOTE PROSPECT

PSG are due to return to league action away at struggling



Troyes on Sunday, a game that Messi may now miss.

If he were to be sidelined for two weeks he would also sit out a home match against Ajaccio on May 13.

The disciplinary measures make the prospect of Messi staying in the French capital after his two-year deal expires at the end of this season even more remote.

Having at one point looked set to extend his stay for another year, a source close to the club said last month that he was now "much more likely" to depart.

Messi arrived from Barcelona, the club where he had spent the majority of his career, in 2021 but has struggled to reproduce his best form at Qatar-backed Paris.

Despite that, he has scored 31 goals in 71 appearances in all competitions.

He was recently jeered by a section of the PSG support, who see him as a symbol of all

the club have done wrong in focusing on superstar signings while failing to build a genuinely competitive team.

Messi has scored 20 goals in all competitions this season and is the leading assist provider in Ligue 1, with 15.

However, his form since leading Argentina to World Cup glory in Qatar has declined along with that of most of the PSG team.

Their insipid performance against Lorient was a sixth defeat in 17 Ligue 1 matches in 2023.

They remain five points clear of Marseille at the top of the table with five games left, and are therefore still on course for a record 11th French title.

However, they were knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich and also went out of the French Cup at the same stage to Marseille. — AFP



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Fitch revises 5 Omani banks’ outlooks to positive

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 3

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has revised five Omani banks’ Outlooks to Positive from Stable, while affirming their Long-and Short-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs).

The banks are Bank Muscat (BM; BB-/B), Bank Dhofar (BD; BB-/B), National Bank of Oman SAOG (NBO; BB-/B), Ahli Bank (ABO; BB-/B) and Sohar International Bank (SIB; BB-/B). Fitch has also affirmed the Viability Ratings (VRs) of BM at ‘bb’, BD and NBO at ‘bb-’, ABO at ‘b+’ and maintained the Rating Watch Positive (RWP) on SIB’s ‘b+’ VR.

Fitch has also maintained the Rating Watch Negative (RWN) on HSBC Bank Oman (HBON) ‘BB+’ Long-Term IDR, ‘bb-’ VR and Shareholder Support Rating (SSR) ‘bb+’.

The rating actions follow a similar action on Oman’s sovereign rating on April 11, 2023 and reflect the agency’s view of an improving probability of support for the banks from the Omani authorities, Fitch stated.

Fitch has also revised its outlook to positive from stable on the ‘bb’ Omani banks’ operating environment score, in line with the Outlook revision on the sovereign ratings, given banks’ large direct and indirect exposure to the government and the wider public sector.

Oman, GCC reaffirm commitment to energy transition, green economy

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Oman’s Ministry of Economy hosted a panel discussion to address the future of the green economy within countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The meeting was a part of a quarterly series to explore potential prospects for joint economic and developmental integration within countries of the GCC, under the Office of the Economic and Development Commission of the General Secretariat.

Dr Nasserbin Rashidal Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, stressed the importance of transitioning to a green economy in his keynote speech. “Today, the world is facing a number of unprecedented transformations and a state of uncertainty as a result of geo-economic variables, climate changes, disruptions in supply chains, the energy crisis, and other challenges.

This prompted the world to race against time to switch to renewable energy sources. Accordingly; the shift towards a green economy has become an urgent necessity rather than an environmental luxury.

These new transformations require unprecedented and innovative levels of preparation and adaptation that can only be achieved through forward looking processes.”

Headed, “Despite international efforts and progress in the transition to alternative energy and the pursuit of a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the



transition to renewable energy is still far from the targeted path.

Especially in light of the energy price crisis and the need for economies to recover rapidly from economic crises, which forced some countries to resort to using coal again, and intensified gas extraction operations to obtain energy.”

“However, on the other hand, solutions in regard to the deployment of clean energy technologies, are on the rise. Available data indicate that alternative solutions to reducing emissions and facilitating the energy transition are gaining momentum globally.

Electric car sales, for example, grew 14 per cent faster than global car sales in 2022.”

“Our means of understanding and anticipating this transforming scene stems from our ability to

anticipate the future of energy and find intersectional methodologies to develop accurate scenarios that suit our countries, as energy producing countries for a smooth transition towards a low-carbon Gulf economy without harming the nature of the existing Gulf economic structures.

In order to achieve this goal, we must work closely together to promote investment in the green economy and renewable energy, encourage innovation and the development of new technologies,” Dr Al Maawali further added.

In his keynote speech, Khalid bin Ibrahim al Sheikh, Director General of the Office of Economic and Development Affairs at the GCC General Secretariat, highlighted the value of the green economy.

“According to a report issued by the Vice-Chairman of the Business

In order to achieve this goal, we must work closely together to promote investment in the green economy and renewable energy, encourage innovation and the development of new technologies.

DR NASSER AL MAAWALI
Under-Secretary
Ministry of Economy

Cooperation Council have pledged to increase the use of renewable energy.

“The GCC countries are working to achieve the goals [of using renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions] by developing renewable energy infrastructure, supporting research and innovation in the field of hydrogen and other renewable energy sources, encouraging investment in renewable energy projects, and providing support and incentives for renewable energy investors to achieve these goals,” shared Al Sheikh.

Last year, the Sultanate of Oman pledged to achieving net zero-carbon emission by 2050. The transition, according to the National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net-Zero, could contribute an additional 50 per cent to local GDP by 2050.

Oman’s labour movement now boasts 324 trade unions

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 4

The 4th Conference of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFWO), an event held every four years to coincide with elections to select a new president and board of directors, began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Wednesday under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs.

In attendance at the launch were a number of high officials representing the Arab and International Labour Organisation, as well as an assortment of Arab and regional trade union federations.

Present from Oman were delegates from a number of locally registered trade unions, and



officials from five sectoral labour federations representing the Oil & Gas, Industry, Construction, Tourism and Power sectors.

Addressing the forum, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer bin Shuwain al

Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, said the Ministry has initiated dialogue with three key three production companies to ascertain their feedback on initiatives

to strengthen labour market legislation and activate the private sector’s role in engaging with civil society institutions, including the General Federation of Oman Workers.

ESTABLISHED IN 2010, AND GENERAL FEDERATION OF OMAN WORKERS HAS SINCE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS TO BECOME A VITAL FORCE IN COLLECTIVE BARGAIN, LABOUR DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND OTHER LABOUR RELATED ISSUES.

The ILO’s Decent Work Programme is also been discussed as part of this initiative, he said. Nabhan bin Ahmed al Battashi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers, said the grouping now includes 324 labour unions and 7 sectoral federations distributed across various economic activities and sectors.

The Federation’s mandate is to engage in meaningful dialogue through collective bargaining

in boosting productivity and improving performance.

According to Faiz Ali al-Mutairi, Director-General of the Arab Labour Organization, efforts are ongoing to enhance the mechanisms of social dialogue between governments and social partners, in accordance with Arab labour standards, especially regarding trade union rights and freedoms, providing minimum wages, and expanding the social protection umbrella.

In a statement to the media, Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said: “The conference, organised by the General Federation of Oman Workers, is one of the most important events as it represents one of the fundamental and important pillars of production.

OABC to hold free webinar series on Oman-US FTA

MUSCAT: Oman businesses are invited to take part in a five-part series of free online workshops designed to build awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities of the free trade agreement between the US and Oman.

This programme was created by the Oman American Business Centre (OABC) through support from the US Embassy Muscat. Oman is one of 20 countries globally to have a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States, offering businesses a significant competitive advantage both in exporting to the US as well as importing.

This interactive webinar series has been designed to empower Omani traders with knowledge on how to successfully navigate the FTA and will cover topics such the place and role of bilateral free trade agreements and how they contribute to economic growth through enhancement of two-way trade and the structure and provisions of the Oman-US FTA.



The workshops will also cover a comprehensive review of the rules of origin and technical compliance.

The workshop series will begin on May 10, 2023 and run each month through September. These sessions are free and open to everyone, but you must register in advance by Monday, May 8 at oabc.org/events or email info@oabc.org for more information.

As the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman (AmCham Oman), the Oman American Business Centre promotes understanding, partnerships & other matters of mutual economic interest between business communities in Oman and the United States.

Formed in 2003, their mission is to foster the development of commercial activity between Oman and the United States.

A P Moller - Maersk opens new Oman office at Sohar Freezone

MUSCAT: A P Moller – Maersk, a global integrator of logistics, inaugurated a new corporate office at Sohar Freezone in the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday, May 3, 2023.

Present at the inauguration were Christopher Cook, Managing Director, Maersk UAE, Oman, and Qatar; Omar al Mahrizi, Chief Executive Officer, Sohar Freezone; and senior leaders from Maersk and Sohar Freezone.

“Oman is a significant market for us where we are committed to serving our important customers by bringing world-class integrated logistics solutions closer to them. Our ambition is to simplify the supply chains, make them efficient and transparent, and thus contribute towards the Oman Vision 2040 that aims at making Oman a competitive economy,” said Christopher Cook, Managing Director, Maersk UAE, Oman, and Qatar.

Christopher added, “SOHAR Freezone was a natural choice for us to set up our new office because of its strategic location at the port and the world-class



infrastructure of road network and air connectivity on offer.”

The new office in Oman, the third one in the country after Muscat and Salalah, will allow Maersk to get closer to its customers and create meaningful interfaces with them.

Besides ocean transportation, Maersk will offer a host of services and solutions to its customers in Oman, such as landside transportation, including cross

border movement of cargo, customs clearances, warehousing & distribution, cold chain logistics and air freight.

“As a full-integrated logistics and industrial hub enabling global business partnerships, we are pleased to welcome Maersk, a global integrated logistics company, as our latest tenant at SOHAR Freezone.

This partnership will enable us to streamline our operations

further as we continue to focus on logistics and supply chain optimisation and strengthen our position as a smart logistics hub.

Together with our partners, SOHAR continues to support Oman’s ambitions to further expand the transport and logistics sector, as per the objectives laid out in the Oman Vision 2040,” stated Omar Mahmood al Mahrizi, Chief Executive Officer of SOHAR Freezone.

The new office complements the several other initiatives Maersk has undertaken to strengthen its footprint in Oman. In November 2022, Maersk added Khazaen Dry Port (KDP) to its extensive ‘Port of Call’ network, offering transportation, container terminal, and reefer container services to import and export goods easily.

Around the same time, Maersk also launched a service through the Port of Salalah in Oman as a gateway to Yemen, ensuring seamless cargo movement. This has increased efficiency for the customers and has the potential to eliminate unexpected costs.

Unlock a range of lifestyle benefits with NBO’s reimaged credit cards

MUSCAT: In keeping with its aim to offer unexpected value, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has upgraded its suite of Credit Cards, unlocking a world of shopping, dining and travel benefits for its customers.

The Visa Infinite, Visa Platinum, Visa Gold and newly added Visa Signature Credit Card, have all been redesigned to suit the lifestyle of their users, including the frequent travellers among them. NBO’s credit cards now offer an even wider variety of features and exclusive retail and travel benefits which includes easy payment plans, including special discounts on dining, entertainment, hotels, car rental services and more.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager - Head of Retail Products at National Bank of Oman, said, “At our bank, we aim to do right by our customers by building valuable relationships



with them that extend beyond transactions.

We continue to attune our products and services to the needs and lifestyles of our customers, and as such are happy to offer a better-than-ever and valuable credit card proposition. With exclusive benefits and through frequent campaigns, every card is an opportunity to save, earn and win, adding huge value to the day-to-day spending of customers and enriching their lives.”

Customers using credit

cards can enjoy up to 1 per cent rewards on every transaction and can benefit from a range of services including easy payment plans for purchases above RO 100.

The credit card offers additional benefits such as travel and medical insurance, monthly cashback on digital entertainment channels, and access to two-for-one offers in worldwide destinations and Oman through Visa’s App “Xperience”. Frequent travellers can also make use of the exclusive discounts on hotels and car rental services worldwide.

On top of these features and benefits, the Visa Infinite, Visa Signature and Visa Platinum cards provide Airport Lounge Access, while both the Visa Infinite and Visa Signature also cover free travel insurance and concierge services around the clock.

BNI all set to launch Oman operations



MUSCAT: Business referral networking organisation BNI (Business Network International) is all set to begin operations in the Sultanate of Oman. With this, Oman will be the 77th country where the BNI will have its direct representation.

The BNI representatives did a ‘Visitor Info Meeting’ at Grand Millennium on Monday to discuss the launch process in Oman and shared the importance of an excellent system that can hugely benefit Oman based businesses.

“Internationally it has been supporting businesses for 38

years and now Oman based businesses have opportunity to acquire BNI services to grow and increase customer base,” said a post event press release issued on Monday.

“The meeting is in line with Oman’s official recognition as the 77th country of the BNI. Global Chairman and CEO of BNI, Graham Weihmiller emphasised that now Oman based businesses have the opportunity to engage with BNI services to increase their businesses and grow customer base using the modernised business networking and globally proven system,” a BNI press release said.

ahlibank offers 10% cash reward on salary transfers



MUSCAT: Committed to enhance customer experiences, while underscoring its intent to inculcate a savings culture, ahlibank continues its attractive 10 per cent cash reward on salary transfers.

As part of this rewarding promotion, customers who transfer their salary to ahlibank will receive an immediate one-time cash reward of 10 per cent of their monthly salary, with a maximum cash reward amount capped at RO 500.

The offer, open to both Omanis and expatriates, is structured to infuse a note of positivity while transferring salaries for the first time to ahlibank. All customers who transfer their monthly salary to the Bank with an amount of RO 1,000 or above are eligible for this reward offer.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution, said, “This cash reward promotion is an extension of our gratitude to our customers who value our services and trust our products. We want our new salary transfer customers to experience the sense of gratification that is embedded in our scheme; we want each one of our customers to feel inspired to save and grow their money with our Bank. We are ready and excited to welcome all new salary transfer customers with this irresistible offer.”

Haval’s Jolion SUV EMI starts as low as RO 71

MUSCAT: From the stable of global SUV specialist Haval is a new edition of Jolion – a compact SUV that is smart beyond its years. In addition to its bold architecture and masterful engineering, this smart SUV bristles with cutting-edge technology and safety features that simply outclass its peers.

Of late, however, sales of this elegant SUV from Haval have been strongly buoyed by a package of incentives and freebies that have made the Jolion an eminently worthy acquisition for many price-conscious customers in Oman.

This package of benefits, valid till May 15, 2023, include price-busting EMIs that start as low as



RO 71 on top of packages that come bundled with insurance and registration for the first year and 50,000 km service warranty.

To top it all, customers receive window tinting from the

renowned 3M brand for no extra cost. Furthermore, customers are guaranteed 50 per cent of the sale price when they decide to trade in their vehicles.

In Oman, the five-seater

Jolion is available in three trims: Comfort, Deluxe and Luxury. Standard across all three trims is a front grille, LED headlights, daytime running lights and automatic wipers, among other features.

The sides have body-coloured door handles and power-folding and adjustable body-colour side mirrors with turn signals.

The rear includes an exhaust system, liftgate cargo access, roof spoiler and LED taillights. All trims share the same 1.5L turbocharged 4-cylinder engine that delivers 140 hp of power and 210 nm of torque. The engine drives the front wheels through a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission.

Keeping in mind the Jolion’s particular affinity with the younger demographic of customers, the SUV’s interior is delightfully appointed and outfitted. All three trims boast Button Engine Start and MicroFiber Leather Steering Wheel. Exclusive on the Luxury is a panoramic sunroof, as is a 6-way electrically adjusted driver seat

OTE Group is the exclusive dealer for the diverse product line-up of vehicles from Great Wall Motor, including the Haval range, in the Sultanate of Oman. Backed by a nationwide service network, OTE Group offers excellent sales and after-sales service support on par with global standards. For more information please contact 800-50004.



Will the dollar retain its dominance?

HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

This question has been repeatedly raised in international economic circles and by those interested in the US currency: Can the US dollar's appeal as a reserve currency in international transactions last forever?

Some research centres agree that the US dollar era is unlikely to end overnight. But they also point out that efforts by some countries, including the BRICS group to issue a new unified currency, are progressing.

This effort will undoubtedly erode the dollar's hegemony over the world's economies. As we know that the dollar is the main currency in the world since the end of World War II, and it is used for about half of international trade, international loans and global debt securities.

It is also the most traded currency in the foreign exchange market, and it holds the most reserves of central banks in the world.

However, today this currency is facing some challenges from emerging currencies, especially the Chinese yuan, which is supported by the second largest economy and trading partner in the world, "China", which operates to promote the use of its currency in international trade and investment.

Some countries have expressed their agreement to use the Chinese currency in their transactions. The dollar has also faced some risks in wake of US financial

sanctions against some hostile countries. These sanctions limit a foreigner's access to the US financial system, and reduce confidence in the dollar as a global currency.

It is difficult to predict how long the dollar will remain as a major currency in the world, but it depends on many other factors such as economic growth of countries, trade relations, political stability and financial innovation, indicating that the dollar will continue to dominate for some decades, while some believe that this currency will face more competition, thereby weakening its appeal.

Some financial advisors in America believe that the BRICS currency may pose a serious threat to the dollar, given that this group is geographically diverse and it is large in its population and geographical area. It will pose a unique threat to the hegemony of the dollar, and it is working to achieve a level of self-sufficiency in international trade between them, at a time when the anti-dollar campaign is extending today by some officials in Europe as well, while France decided to sign a trade deal with China in its local currency, the yuan.

This means that the dominance of the dollar in trade and global investment flows is facing a large number of new threats as a result of the BRICS plans to promote the use of alternative currencies to the dollar in their projects and through a stable currency backed by gold and a new reserve currency among them.

Some reports indicate that the status of the US dollar as a reserve currency has eroded in the past year at a rate of 10 times the speed seen in the past twenty years, while for decades it was the sovereign as the reserve currency in the world, and it is widely used in cross-border trade, especially for commodities such as oil.

However, its lustre has declined since last year, and experts believe this decline will become more evident in the coming years.

Oman's grid operator plans 32 power transmission projects

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 3

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owned operator of the nation's transmission system, says it has secured approval for the implementation of a large pipeline of projects planned over the next years aimed at, among other things, integrating a wave of upcoming solar and wind based power projects into the grid.

As many as 32 transmission projects, including grid stations, overhead transmission lines and 400kV interconnectors, are proposed to be implemented at key locations across the Main Interconnected System (MIS) serving the northern half of Oman, and the Dhofar System in the south.

"Thirty-two transmission projects in MIS and Dhofar System are planned over the coming five-year period 2023-2027," said Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, CEO - OETC. "Most of the projects are designed to increase the transmission system capacity to meet the future growth in demand, connect new generations, connect new rural areas, and meet the Transmission Security Standard criteria," he noted in the company's new 5-Year Transmission Capability Statement (2023 - 2027), approved recently by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

The majority of these transmission projects are linked to an array of new solar PV and wind-based developments lined up for



THE GIANT SCHEME - THE BIGGEST OF ITS KIND SO FAR IN OMAN - WILL BE FULLY ENERGIZED ONLY IN 2025, BUT TRANSMISSION SYSTEMS CONNECTING THE PROJECT TO THE GRID ARE EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED BY Q2 2024.

procurement as Independent Power Projects (IPPs) in the coming years.

Many of these renewables-based projects are due to come up in relatively remote, yet solar and wind resource-rich parts of the country, thus requiring investments in transmission systems to connect them to the grid.

Large-scale solar schemes slated to be connected to the grid include the 1000MW Manah I and Manah II Solar PV IPPs in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The giant scheme - the biggest of its kind so far in Oman - will be fully energized only in 2025, but transmission systems connecting the project to the grid are expected to be completed by Q2 2024.

Two other solar IPPs - one envisioned in Al Dhahirah Governorate (500 MW Ibri III Solar IPP) and another similar-sized scheme planned elsewhere in the Main Interconnected System - will also be linked to the grid.

According to Eng Al Rumhi, Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) - which oversees the procurement of all new power and water capacity - has also sent connection requests for a string of new wind farm projects planned over the coming years.

The list includes plans for a 200MW wind farm at Duqm and 100MW capacity project in Jaalan

Bani Bu Ali. Both sites will be connected to the grid by Q2 2026.

Another set of connection requests concern plans for a second 100MW wind farm (Dhofar II Wind IPP) at Harweel in Dhofar Governorate, currently the site of Oman's first wind project. This additional wind farm is expected to be connected to the grid by Q4 2026.

Additionally, a 200MW wind farm in Ras Madrakah is due to be integrated into the grid in Q2 2027. But the flagship transmission project of OETC is the ongoing North-South Interconnector Project (Rabt), the first phase of which - linking the MIS with Duqm - due for completion in June 2023. The second phase of Rabt will travel further south from Duqm to link up with the Dhofar System, effectively creating a single unified national grid by 2027.

Oman's labour movement now boasts 324 trade unions

FROM PAGE 13

Discussions during the conference aim to contribute to the comprehensive development process, improve the business environment in Oman, and empower national cadres."

Established in 2010, and General Federation of Oman Workers has since evolved over

the years to become a vital force in collective bargain, labour dispute resolution and other labour related issues.

During the 2019-2022 term of the Federation, GFW conducted 85 training programs and awareness lectures for a total of 3500 participants. It provided legal consultations on 4,807 labour

complaints and matters, oversaw the signing of 915 settlement protocols and collective labour agreements, and established seven sectoral labour unions. Other issues resolved by the Federation pertain to delayed payments of wages, and non-compliance of health and occupational safety standards.

ODB approves RO 26.7 million loans for Q1 2023

MUSCAT: The Oman Development Bank achieved high growth rates in credit performance during Q1 2023, as the value of approved loans of various categories amounted to RO 26.7 million, an increase of 77 per cent compared to RO 15 million in Q1 2022.

The manufacturing sector is the biggest beneficiary of Oman Development Bank with a total amount of RO 8.4 million distributed over 485 loans, including light workshop projects of an industrial nature.

The total approved financing for the tourism sector amounted to RO 4.9 million, benefiting 78 projects, with a growth rate of 386 per cent compared to the same period in 2022 with RO 1 million.

The approved loans for the fisheries sector also achieved a slight increase by 10 per cent compared to last year, bringing the value of financing to the sector to RO 4.3 million, distributed over 586 fish loans of various sizes.

The loans from professional



and general services ranked fourth, with a loan value of RO 3.1 million, distributed over 299 loans. The approved loans for the agricultural and livestock sector increased by nearly 100 per cent in terms of value and the number of beneficiary loans with and 311 loan approvals with a total value of about RO 2.7 million.

Approved loans to the health sector accounted for the highest growth rate in terms of value, amounting to 509 per cent compared to the first quarter of last

year, bringing the total approved amount to RO 1.8 million distributed over 14 loans, while the total approved amounts last year amounted to RO 300,000.

The educational sector achieved a slight growth of 3 per cent, bringing the total value of loans approved for the sector to RO 1.4 million, distributed over 32 educational loans.

Meanwhile, ODB financed a mining project with a total value of RO 100,000 and seeks to increase its contribution to financing

this promising economic sector, especially in mining projects that constitute inputs for the localisation of industries and projects based on innovation in converting primary raw materials into high-value products that are in highly in-demand in local and global market.

The Muscat Governorate had the highest value in terms of amount of approved loans during Q1 with approximately RO 5.5 million, followed by the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah

South, with a total value of RO 4.9 million distributed over 415 loans. Al Batinah North Governorate on the other hand, has a total value of RO 3.4 million and 257 loans, Al Buraimi Governorate with RO 2.6 million, then Dhofar Governorate with a total value of RO 2.4 million.

The total amounts approved for loans in the Governorate of Al Batinah South reached RO 2 million, followed by the Al Dhahirah Governorate with a total value of RO 1.5 million, the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with a total value of RO 1.4 million, and then Al Wusta Governorate with a total value of RO 1.2 million, the governorates of Musandam and Al Sharqiyah North with to RO 900,000 each, with the bank seeking to expand financing projects that enjoy high added value in the governorates.

Hamad bin Salim al Harthy, Acting CEO of Oman Development Bank, stressed that the bank seeks to be an important contributor to the national economy and to increasing value-added projects,

explaining that the bank targets high growth rates during its short-term operational plan (2023-2025).

The bank hopes that it will reach the size of the lending portfolio and will reach RO 300 million, with an annual increase of more than 15 per cent.

He said that the royal directives and legislation that the bank is working on, in cooperation with the relevant government agencies, will accelerate the achievement of the targeted numbers and increase the bank's contribution to achieving the goals of Oman's Vision 2040, especially in economic diversification and governorate development.

He pointed out that the bank has worked to enhance the services provided by its branches spread across all governorates of Oman to receive all categories of micro, small and medium financing and corporate loans, with a lending volume of up to RO 7.5 million for qualitative projects implemented outside Muscat Governorate.

— ONA

Classifieds



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An advertisement for property rental services. It features a 3D orange figure holding a blue and white megaphone. The text is arranged in a dynamic, overlapping layout. At the top, a grey box contains the text 'HAVE A PROPERTY'. Below this, a red banner with yellow text reads 'FOR RENT?'. To the right of the figure, the text 'Advertise with us.' is displayed in black. At the bottom, a red box contains the text 'Contact us on:' followed by the large yellow number '99639264'. The background is white with grey geometric shapes.

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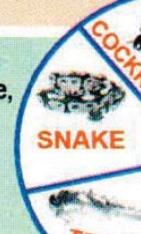
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FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020 DHUL, QAAIDA 18, 1441 AH

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

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

Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen.

"The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said.

Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a bridge between the Muslim East and the West."

Guterres said that the United Nations will continue to follow the example of the Sultanate in addressing and supporting peace and stability in OCA.

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Ministry of its founder, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknotes, which will begin circulation this month.

CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. **TURN TO 14**

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and forward spread by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are being followed.

A drive around the downtown Road and its adjoining areas reveals how vigilantly people comply with different measures to curb the spread of the virus.

While most people follow the guidelines, some are not. In some cases, it is necessary to police the authorities, at least we can score them away," he said.

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STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

Seafood, Surfing, and Serenity:

A Summer Escape to Masirah Island

Masirah Island has become synonymous with beautiful beaches and outdoor adventure. If you're planning to go to Masirah this summer, here are four things that you can't skip ... **P20**



Roman army camps identified in Arabian desert in 'spectacular' find

ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE USED satellite images to make a "spectacular" find of Roman military camps in the Arabian desert.

University of Oxford researchers identified three new Roman fortified camps - in the typical playing card shape - across northern Arabia.

The discovery may be evidence of potential surprise attacks during a previously undiscovered Roman military campaign linked to the Roman takeover of the Nabataean Kingdom in 106 AD, a civilisation centred on the city of Petra,

located in Jordan.

Dr Michael Fradley, who led the research and first identified the very well preserved camps on Google Earth, suggests there is little doubt about the date of the camps.

He said: "We are almost certain they were built by the Roman army given the typical playing card shape of the enclosures with opposing entrances along each side.

"The only notable difference between them is that the western most camp is significantly larger than the two camps to



the east."

Oxford's Dr Mike Bishop, an expert on the Roman military, said: "These camps are a spectacular new find and an important new insight into Roman campaigning in Arabia.

"Roman forts and fortresses show how Rome held a province, but temporary

camps reveal how they acquired it in the first place."

The researchers suggest the camps would have been built by the army as temporary defended stations when they were marching on campaign.

Dr Fradley added: "The level of preservation of the camps is really

remarkable, particularly as they may have only been used for a matter of days or weeks.

"They went along a peripheral caravan route linking Bayir and Dumatal-Jandal.

"This suggests a strategy to bypass the more used route down the Wadi Sirhan, adding an element of surprise to the attack.

"It is amazing that we can see this moment in time played out at a landscape scale."

Professor Andrew Wilson, a co-author on the paper, said: "These marching camps - if we are correct in dating them to the early second century - suggest the Roman annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom following the death of the last king, Rabbel II Soter in AD 106, was not an entirely straightforward affair, and that Rome moved quickly to secure the kingdom."

Because the distance between each camp is 37 km to 44 km, the researchers speculate it was too far to be crossed by infantry in a day.

Therefore they suggest the camps were instead built by a cavalry unit who could travel over such barren terrain in a single day, possibly on camels.

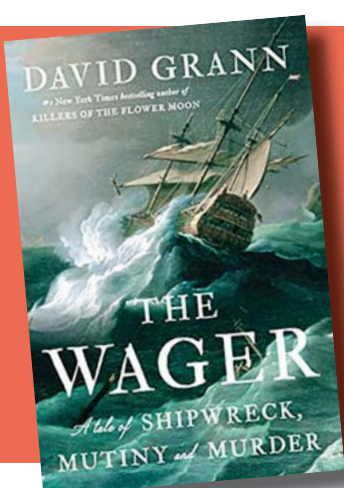
The paper is published in the journal *Antiquity*. — **PA Media/dpa**

READ

THE WAGER

BY DAVID GRANN

The survivors of a shipwrecked British vessel on a secret mission during an imperial war with Spain have different accounts of events.



FASHION

A model walks down the runway showing a creation by Mexican designers Julia and Renata during the Spring-Summer collection show at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Guadalajara, Mexico. — **AFP**



ENTERTAINMENT

French Rapper Elie Yaffa Booba performs at the 15th Festival of Urban Music of Anoumabo in Abidjan. — **AFP**





Dance gets world's first heavy metal ballet

IN A REHEARSAL STUDIO in central England, dancers are getting to grips with new, heavy metal-inspired ballet steps. Moving gracefully in unison, they team pirouettes with air guitar, leaps with head banging.

Welcome to "Black Sabbath – The Ballet", the brainchild of Cuban dance superstar Carlos Acosta, artistic director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Determined to celebrate the cultural treasures of the UK's second city since his arrival in 2020, Acosta took his idea to Black Sabbath co-founder and guitarist Tony Iommi, who gave it his blessing along with the group's original vocalist Ozzy Osbourne.

"I was fascinated with the idea. I thought 'How are they going to do that,'" Iommi, 75, said on Thursday in Birmingham.

"I just couldn't imagine how they'd do ballet to Black Sabbath and then I thought well maybe they're going to use the... softer tracks, but no they went for 'Black Sabbath', 'War Pigs', 'Iron Man,'" he said.

"I think I was just really intrigued."

The full-length, three-act ballet opens in Birmingham, the pioneering group's home city, in September before going on tour. Rehearsals have just begun.

BAT INCIDENT

According to writer Richard Thomas, the ballet is the "rags-to-riches story" of four young men who went from the "factory floor to one of the most successful bands in rock history", although he stressed it would not be a documentary set to music and dance.

The legendary group's original line-up was Osbourne, Iommi, bassist Geezer Butler and drummer Bill Ward.

They were instrumental in creating heavy metal in the early 1970s with dark and high-volume guitars coupled with a keen interest in the occult.

"It's very simple. It's like Black Sabbath meets the Birmingham Royal Ballet," Thomas said.

There would, however, be use of archive interviews and also some famous Black Sabbath stories such as how Iommi lost the tips of two fingers



in an industrial accident on his last day working at a sheet metal factory.

Also making an appearance will be the tale of the "Stonehenge" set that had to be dumped after a measurements mix-up meant it was so big it wouldn't fit into auditoriums.

And he said there might "possibly be a brief mention of the bat incident", in which Osbourne thought a fan had thrown a rubber bat onstage only to discover — after he took a bite — that it was real.

For Acosta, 39, there had been an immediate rapport with Iommi after he first approached him with the project.

"I didn't know the man (or) how we were going to hit it off, but obviously we both come from the same background in terms of working-class and poor families... and the chemistry was instant," he said.

The former star dancer said he came to the music of Black Sabbath late due to growing up in Cuba.

STRATOSPHERIC

"I grew up in the 1980s, I wanted to be Michael Jackson. I didn't know anything about Black Sabbath," he said, adding that he only discovered the group through a friend in the late 1990s.

"This was the music of those who



are marginalised so I found it very interesting."

Musically, composer Chris Austin said it had been difficult to know where to start as the Black Sabbath back catalogue was so huge.

But he said once they narrowed it down it had been easy to be inspired by the music's "glorious irregularity" and "enormous shifts of tempo", combined with Osbourne's early "stratospheric" vocals.

The show will be a treat for fans after the group, including three of

the original members, ended their last-ever tour with a final concert in Birmingham in 2017.

Iommi said he was as interested as everyone else to discover how the ballet would turn out, but that he had been confident in Acosta and his team from the start.

"I know from our fans that there is a lot of excitement to come to the show," he said, adding that he expected people would be particularly keen to join in.

"I think it will be great." — AFP

CULTURE

Here's the story: Jordan initiative shapes young minds



AT A SCHOOL IN AMMAN, a Jordanian volunteer opened a book and asked: "Who's excited to hear a story?" — part of an initiative to get children to find joy in reading.

The "We Love Reading" initiative, which is present in 65 countries worldwide, was founded by Rana Dajani, an associate professor of biology and biotechnology at the Hashemite University in Jordan.

She spent five years living in the United States, where she enjoyed reading to her children.

But when she returned, Dajani noticed schoolchildren in her home country were rarely reading for pleasure.

She decided to change all that, and in 2006 "We Love Reading" was born.

"In the beginning, I noticed that children only read for their school lessons, so I did research and found that the best way is for an adult to read stories to them aloud," Dajani said.

Dajani began with small weekly sessions in a mosque near her house in Amman's Tabarbour neighbourhood.

"On the first day, only 25 children came," she recalled. Undaunted, she carried on and the initiative gradually expanded, training volunteers nationwide.

"We Love Reading" is now present across Jordan, with 4,000 trained volunteers ranging in age from 18 to 100.

"Our programme educates leaders, and it is strong and based on scientific research," Dajani said.

According to her, the initiative has so far helped about half a million children in Jordan, including tens of thousands of refugees who had fled the conflict in Syria.



REAL PAPER BOOKS

Each "saifir" — ambassador in Arabic — reads stories to children anywhere they choose, be it a mosque, church, school or nursery.

Dajani said it was important not to read stories on electronic devices, "which we want to keep them away from, because it would be a losing battle. We want real paper books."

Illiteracy rates in Jordan have plummeted from 88 per cent in 1952 to 5.1 per cent in 2020, according to official figures, and the programme seeks to ignite a passion for reading among children.

"Through reading, thinking patterns change and the child's brain and psychological health develop," Dajani said.

So far, "We Love Reading" has produced 33 titles for children on topics ranging from the environment, refugees and bullying to gender, social communication and science.



The initiative has also expanded to other countries, with 8,000 trained volunteers internationally, and has won plaudits from across the globe including a Unesco award in 2017.

Huda Abu al-Khair has been a reading volunteer in Jordan for four years.

"I loved the idea of the programme, as it develops children's language, ideas and concepts," Khair said.

"That's why I read to children in kindergarten, during school trips, in public parks and at family gatherings — whenever I get the chance," she added.

Back at the school in the capital Amman, she gathered round her a group of some 20 children aged four and five, and began to read.

"I am Dina, and this is my brother Hani. We are twins. I came to life minutes before him, but we're alike, and we both love birds, swallows and hummingbirds."

Her narration is accompanied by chirping from a tape recorder, the only nod to modern technology.

"Education at a young age is like engraving in stone," said Khair. It lasts a lifetime. — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

ANIMAL PLANET

DNA study of famed US sled dog shows what made him so tough



NEW YORK'S CENTRAL Park has a statue dedicated to him, and there's even been a movie about him: a sled dog named Balto. Now he is the focus of a DNA study, 90 years after he died, to see what made the pooch so famously tough.

In 1925, this Siberian husky was part of an expedition in Alaska called the serum run, the goal of which was to bring life-saving medicine to young people in the remote town of Nome that were threatened by diphtheria.

The mission in horrendous blizzards conditions involved a series of sled dog teams transporting the anti-toxin relay-style from the city of Anchorage. Balto led the dog team that covered the last stretch of the grueling journey.

The dog died in 1933, and its mounted body has been on display at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History ever since.

"Balto's fame and the fact that he was taxidermied gave us this cool opportunity 100 years later to see what that population of sled dogs would have looked like genetically and to compare him to modern dogs," said Katherine Moon, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the main author of the study.

It was published on Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Her team took skin samples from the dog's belly and reconstructed its genome — the complete set of genes in an organism.

They compared this genetic material with that of 680 contemporary dogs from 135 breeds.

Contrary to a legend that held that Balto was half wolf — as suggested in an animated Universal Pictures film that came out in 1995 — this analysis found no evidence he had wolf blood.

It turned out Balto shared ancestors with modern day Siberian Huskies and the sled dogs of Alaska and Greenland.

Zoom's team also compared Balto's genes with the genomes of 240 other species of mammals as part of an international effort called the Zoonomia Project.

This allowed researchers to determine which DNA fragments were common across all those species and have not therefore changed over the course of millions of years of evolution.

This stability suggests that these stretches of DNA are associated with important functions in the animal, and that mutations there could be dangerous.

The bottom line from the research was that Balto had fewer potentially dangerous mutations than modern breeds of dogs did, suggesting he was healthier.

"Balto had variants in genes related to things like weight, coordination, joint formation and skin thickness, which you would expect for a dog bred to run in that environment," Moon wrote in a statement. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

'Polite Society', a 'bonkers' multi-genre martial arts adventure



WHEN "BRIDGERTON" actor Priya Kansara first read the script for the action-comedy film "Polite Society," she thought it was "kind of bonkers," but knew immediately that she wanted to be part of it.

"It was just so original," she said, and her co-lead, "Umbrella Academy" actor Ritu Arya, could not agree more.

The Focus Features film, which opens in theatres on Friday, travels between British-Pakistani teen angst to video game-style wedding heist combat, playing out against a punchy soundtrack.

Arya describes the movie as an "eclectic funny world where you just don't know where it's going to go, full of real characters and real relationships."

"Polite Society" tells the story of teenager and aspiring stuntwoman, Ria Khan, who Kansara portrays, and her older sister Lena Khan, played by Arya.

When Lena drops out of art school and quickly gets engaged, Ria and her friends plan a bride-heist of epic proportions.

Director Nida Manzoor's first feature film scored a 94-per cent on Rotten Tomatoes after premiering at the Sundance Film Festival.

Critics have praised the quirky martial arts film for its inspiring and unconventional representation of compelling women and girls.

In his review, Nick Schager of "The Daily Beast" describes the movie as a "rambunctious affair about fighting the patriarchy and, just as impor-

tantly, the old-school tiger moms who support it."

Both Kansara and Arya saw the film as an opportunity to not only bring something outside the box to the cinematic world, but also centre it around women-power.

Lena as being "a mess" but still feeling responsible for looking after her little sister and supporting her.

"They're connected and they're going to go on this journey together to figure that out," she said.



"Strong women come from strong women," Kansara said. "This is just what we know and it's just so beautiful to see this on screen."

Arya added that it is important to see the women in this multi-generational feature as strong, but also vulnerable and flawed.

The sisterly love between Ria and Lena is one of the central depictions of both strength and imperfection in the movie, as Arya describes

While Lena must search for clarity, Ria has a sense of self that she carries throughout the film as she trains to become a stuntwoman.

"She'll go to the ends of the earth to achieve what she wants," Kansara said.

Kansara admires her character for encouraging herself when it is not something everyone can do for themselves, especially when their dreams are a bit more unusual. — Reuters

CHANGING WORLD

Deadly invader devastating Venezuelan coral reefs



AN OMINOUS SHADOW in the turquoise Caribbean waters off Venezuela comes from a deadly intruder — a soft coral that experts say has caused one of the most destructive habitat invasions on record anywhere.

The *Unomia stolonifera*, native to Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific, is a pinkish type of pulse coral so called for its dance-like movements in the ocean currents.

It is a popular aquarium ornament — pretty to look at and hardy — with a single polyp fetching as much as \$80 to \$120. But it is also a killer — settling on native hard corals, rocks and even seagrass which it suffocates and replaces, ultimately destroying entire ecosystems.

Off Venezuela's north coast, Unomia dominates the ocean floor landscape after being introduced through the illegal aquarium trade around 20 years ago.

"This is an ecological catastrophe," said marine biologist Juan Pedro Ruiz-Allais, director of Project Unomia, named after the invader he has spent years investigating. Fish stocks are drastically decreasing in the waters off Venezuela as native reefs, which serve as nurseries and feeding grounds, die off, he said.

"When the reef dies, when it is covered by the *Unomia stolonifera*, a disruption of the food chain occurs," said the biologist.

"It is a social, food security, and economic problem because the livelihood of fishermen is compromised."

- 'Nobody knew' -

When Ruiz-Allais first came across the invader in 2007, it was an unknown species in the Caribbean and even the Atlantic, he recalled. "Nobody knew what it was."

It was first spotted in the Mochima National Park, a gorgeous archipelago covering more than 94,000 hectares, and has since been found to have colonised most of those islands. The first scientific report was published in 2014, and the coral was initially classified as a member of the broad *Xeniidae* family before it was finally categorised in 2021 as *Unomia stolonifera*.

From Mochima, it has spread west and east in the Caribbean Sea. Off the northern state of Anzoategui, it has taken over the equivalent of 300 football stadiums.

The coral is spread by fishing nets, anchors and ship ballast water. "It is a great coloniser," Gustavo Carrasquel, director of the Azul Ambientalistas, an environmental NGO, said.

- 'UNPRECEDENTED' -

The threat extends beyond Venezuela's borders: officials say Unomia traces have been found near the islands of Aruba and Curacao, and in waters off Colombia and Brazil — where it became attached to an oil rig but was controlled.

"It is a problem that will affect the rest of the Caribbean," said Ruiz-Allais.

But nowhere has it been more destructive than in Venezuela. "It is an unprecedented case," said Project Unomia coordinator Mariano Onoro.

Fishermen and tour operators, concerned about the invasive coral's rapid propagation, have resorted to manual extraction. But experts say this is not advised, because broken-off fragments are transported by the tides, settling to create yet more colonies.

The privately funded Project Unomia has developed an extraction machine with a group of engineers that is awaiting government approval for testing.

Venezuela's Institute for Scientific Research and the ministry of eco-socialism have launched an investigation into the coral's rapid spread but have yet to come up with a solution.

For now, the magnitude of the problem is such that the invader's elimination appears impossible.

"What we can do is recover some areas and control it," said Onoro. — AFP



Seafood, Surfing, and Serenity: A Summer Escape to Masirah Island

Masirah Island is home to a small but vibrant community of fishermen, farmers, and craftsmen, who continue to rely on the island's natural resources for their livelihoods. The island's beaches are famous for their abundance of lobsters, crabs, and other seafood, which are sold at the island's bustling fish market.

The local culture on Masirah Island is deeply rooted in traditional Omani values and customs. Hospitality is a central part of the island's culture, and visitors are welcomed with open arms by the friendly locals.

Planning to go to Masirah? Here are four things that you can't skip if you visit the island.

KITEBOARDING

With its consistent winds and clear waters, Masirah Island is a popular destination for kiteboarding enthusiasts. Kiteboarding involves using a kite to harness the wind and pull oneself across the water on a board. Kiteboarding lessons and equipment rentals are available on the island, and there are several spots where kiteboarders can launch and ride the waves.

For kiteboarding, visitors will need to rent or bring their own kiteboarding equipment, including a kite, board, harness, and safety gear. Lessons are also available for those new to the sport. The kiteboarder harnesses the power of the wind with the kite, and uses the board to ride across the water, performing jumps and tricks. It is important to know the best times when the wind is stronger in the island to fully enjoy this adventure.

TURTLE WATCHING

Masirah Island is home to one of the largest nesting populations of green turtles in the world, and visitors can witness this amazing natural phenomenon during the summer months. The turtles come ashore at night to lay their eggs, and visitors can join guided tours to watch the nesting process up close. The tours are led by trained

guides who ensure that the turtles are not disturbed or endangered.

For turtle watching, visitors will need to join a guided tour led by a trained guide. The tour usually takes place at night, and visitors are led to the nesting sites where they can watch the turtles laying their eggs. The guides ensure that the turtles are not disturbed or endangered, and visitors are asked to follow strict guidelines to minimise their impact on the

Masirah Island is a seafood lover's paradise. The island's rich fishing heritage and fresh seafood make it a unique and delicious culinary destination in Oman.

Visitors to Masirah can enjoy a wide variety of seafood dishes, including traditional Omani specialities such as grilled kingfish, spiced shrimp, and fish curry. The island's restaurants and food markets offer a range of options for seafood lovers, from simple



nesting turtles.

CAMPING

Masirah Island's pristine beaches and rugged interior make it an ideal destination for camping enthusiasts. Visitors can set up camp on the beach or in the interior, and enjoy the island's natural beauty and tranquility. There are several campgrounds on the island, and visitors can rent equipment or bring their own.

For camping, visitors can bring their own equipment or rent it on the island. Campsites are available on the beach or in the interior, and visitors can enjoy the island's natural beauty and tranquility while camping. Visitors should be aware of the island's environmental regulations and follow them to ensure that the island's natural resources are protected.

FEAST ON SEAFOOD

grilled fish served with rice and vegetables to more elaborate seafood platters featuring lobster, crab, and shrimp.

One of the highlights of the seafood scene on Masirah is the local fish market. Every morning, fishermen bring in their catch to be sold at the market, where locals and visitors can purchase the freshest seafood available. The market is a lively and colourful place, with vendors selling a wide variety of fish and shellfish, as well as local produce and spices.

For those who want to experience the island's seafood culture in a more hands-on way, fishing charters are available for hire. Visitors can join local fishermen on their boats and try their hand at catching fish, which can then be cooked up and enjoyed on board or back on shore.

