

**FOREIGN MINISTER, TURKISH
COUNTERPART DISCUSS TIES**

Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister has expressed his heartfelt greetings to Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye on being appointed on this position, wishing him success in carrying out his duties. **>A5**



**ROYAL DECREE APPOINTS OMAN'S
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO UNWTO**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No. 38/2023 appointing a Permanent Representative for the Sultanate of Oman to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Madrid, reading as follows: Article (1) appoints Omar Said Al Kathiri, Oman' Ambassador to Spain, as a Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the World Tourism Organization in Madrid. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**



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TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

**OMAN
Dhofar braces for
Khareef season**

1 A meeting was held at the office of the Governor of Dhofar on Wednesday to assess the preparedness of government and private establishments for the Khareef (monsoon) season 2023. **>A5**

**WORLD
5 nations elected to
UN Security Council**

2 The United Nations General Assembly elected Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and South Korea to the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday for two-year terms starting on January 1, 2024. **>A7**

**SPORTS
Benzema signs deal
with Saudi club**

3 Karim Benzema has agreed terms on a three-year deal with Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad after leaving Real Madrid, the Saudi Arabian club announced on Tuesday. **>B6**

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**40°
MUSCAT**

SULTANATE SEEKS TO MAXIMISE RETURNS FROM MINING SECTOR



Ministry of Energy and Minerals is working to boost the added value of products before they are exported

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Forecasts for the mining sector in Oman is promising with the promulgation of the Minerals Resources Law and several key projects being undertaken by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to attract mega investments into this vital sector.

For increasing the contribution of the mining sector to the gross domestic product (GDP), the Ministry is working on the optimal utilisation of minerals and conducting pre-feasibility studies.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals seeks to develop and organise the sector by completing and developing the geological, geophysical and geochemi-



Al Zubair Mohammed Al Zubair



Engineer Saud Khamis Al Mahrouqi

cal maps of Oman. It is pressing ahead with exploration of all kinds of minerals and determining their uses in the field of industry. It is exerting efforts to maximise benefits from available resources with the prime aim of diversifying sources of national income and setting aside large quantities of minerals.

The ministry encourages the establishment of industries that rely on minerals such as the glass industry, the production of copper alloys and metal industries.

The ministry has also embarked on raising the added value of the product before its export. It is issuing regulations to encourage investors to enter into production activities that benefit

from local mineral ores.

The mining sector constitutes one of the basic economic pillars that Oman Vision 2040 seeks to establish.

Eng. Saud Khamis Al Mahrouqi, Director General of Minerals at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said that the ministry has so far signed 16 agreements in the mining sector.

Those pertain to 12 concession areas for metallic minerals with the Oman Minerals Development Company, a concession area pact for laterite ore with the British company 'Nights Bay' and three pacts for concession areas of 'potash' and 'lithium' ore (signed with "Mawardi Mining", 'Tasnim' and 'Ara'). **>A2**

'SIGNBOOK'

App to aid persons with hearing disabilities

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A mobile application developed by an Omani innovator is set to open a world of possibilities and accessibility for persons with hearing disabilities. 'SignBook', the application that has been developed by Sultan Naseer Al Amri, was launched on Wednesday.

The project, supervised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Authority, was also the recipient of Mada - Aleco award for best mobile application in 2020-

2021. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Aleco) launched the Mada Innovation Programme to encourage innovators to create Arabic solutions for persons with disability and elderly, thus increasing its availability within the region through a combination of grant programmes.

SignBook, aims to assist persons with hearing disabilities to access and enjoy services provided by various government and private sections. The application allows an inclusive com-



'SignBook' has been developed by Sultan Naseer Al Amri. — **ONA**

munity by providing services on an equal basis.

The application is much more than just a convenience but is a game changer for people with hearing impairments. SignBook on smartphones will open up a world of possibilities and accessibility as technology encourages seamless integration between deaf and hard of hearing communities and the hearing population.

The founder of SignBook application, Al Amri is the first deaf Arabic broadcaster. **>A2**

**Ministry supports
farming of grapes in
North Al Batinah**

A4

GREEN MOUNTAIN

Cooler clime of Jabal Al Akhdar attracts tourists

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With temperatures sizzling to plus 40 degrees Celsius across the Sultanate of Oman, one of the few places that can be an ideal getaway from the scorching summer is the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

Pleasant weather

The wilayat has been receiving hundreds of visitors in recent times, be it the citizens, residents or foreign tourists as they flock to enjoy the pleasant weather conditions up the mountains.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), a total number of 57,867 visitors, including 16,476 Omanis visited the wilayat over the past five months.

One of the reasons for a steady stream of visitors has been rains during the summer in the wilayat, which had made the destination



attractive and appealing with comparatively cooler weather conditions. The enhanced tourism facilities in the wilayat includes three to five star hotels, guesthouses and other lodging options.

Ali bin Mohammed Al Busaidi, Deputy Wali of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdar said: "The wilayat

has received great attention from the government and seen a remarkable development in various fields including tourism. We are currently receiving a steady flow of tourists from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman."

He added: "We plan to hold the Al Jabal Al Akhdar Festival in Au-



gust, which will feature various activities for tourists."

Ali bin Saif Al Shukaili, Assistant Director of the Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate said: "The ministry is intensifying its field visits to monitor the level of services offered by the hotel establishments

in Al Jabal Al Akhdar."

He added: "At present, the wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdar offers 734 rooms in 13 hotels including three to five star resorts, hotels and guesthouses. There are two hotels under construction, which are expected to be completed by the end of the current year.

Once completed, there would be an addition of 180 rooms."

He explained that there are two tourism facilities under construction in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, with investment from the private sector.

Keen interest

He added that the ministry has doubled its interest in the Green Mountain by holding different tourism and promotional activities, including the Green Mountain Festival in its first edition in August 2022 in partnership with Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, indicating that the ministry is offering many sites in the state for investment in tourism by the private sector in order to boost job opportunities and provide good services that meet the needs of tourists.

Tourist activities in the Green Mountain vary during the summer, such as mountain climbing, hiking, visiting caves and ancient villages, among others.

— **With ONA inputs**

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Royal Office Minister meets Saudi ambassador

MUSCAT: Gen. Sultan Mohammed Al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office received on Wednesday Abdullah Saud Al Enezi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and areas of joint cooperation. They also exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest.

The ambassador lauded the relations binding the Sultanate of Oman with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. -ONA



MEETING: Gen. Sultan Mohammed Al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office with Abdullah Saud Al Enezi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman. - ONA

MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND MINERALS

Mining sector in Oman to help economic diversification

<FROM A1 Al Mahrouqi pointed out that the ministry has plans to make the mining sector in Oman a sustainable sector that enhances value added chains, both upstream and downstream in the economic echelon. Al Zubair Mohammed Al Zubair, Chairman of the Board of Directors of ARA Natural Resources Company, said that the mining sector in Oman is a promising sector targeted by Oman Vision 2040 for economic diversification and the growth of the gross domestic product, due to the abundance of various metal types that could generate a wealth

of investment opportunities. Prior to its culmination into final form, the mining sector saw a chain of structural changes, capped up by the promulgation of Royal Decree No. 75/2020, which merged the mining sector with the oil, gas and renewable energy sectors.

The Ministry has ever since been entrusted with the management of the mining sector, previously run by the Public Authority for Mining, which was established under Royal Decree No. 49/2014.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is developing the areas of control and inspection in the mining sector to maximise the

added value and boost its expected returns. This step was undertaken in cooperation with strategic partners, including the Smart Monitoring Initiative, whose tender was floated recently and is currently being evaluated.

Oman boasts a range of metallic mineral ores such as copper, chromium, iron ore, manganese and non-metallic ores like marble, limestone, gypsum, clay, silica and dolomite sandstone. Oman, which abounds with high quality mineral ores, constitutes a major global destination due to the growing demand for these products.

— With inputs from ONA

RNO Academy gets nod to issue eligibility certificates

The go-ahead was granted in accordance with the criteria of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers

AL MUSANAA: The Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has obtained accreditation from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to issue the "Certificate of Eligibility in Ba-



sic Safety Training".

The go-ahead was granted in accordance with the criteria of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978.

The ministry has approved a number of Omani doctors at Said bin Sultan Naval Base to conduct examinations for sailors. The phy-

sicians are authorised to issue the prescribed medical examination certificate.

The accreditation reflects RNO's keenness to ensure that its personnel obtain proper qualification and ongoing knowledge that is updated in accordance with international laws.

The certificate affirms its holder's competence and capability to

perform salvage tasks related to ships and crew, including basic skills needed to deal with, report and respond to marine emergencies.

The naval safety training course covers personal survival techniques, first aid skills, fire prevention, combat abilities, personal safeguards and social responsibility. -ONA

SIGN LANGUAGE

SignBook has many features

<FROM A1 Sultan Naseer Al Amri has founded the Institute of Communication Training. A specialist for sign language education, he is the CEO of Hyatt Information Technology S.A.L.

The SignBook has various features such as instant sign language interpretation service, pre-translation of content in sign language by (QR Code-Barcode) to explain pre-written content and sign language translation service for official news, announcements and emergencies.

The application enables persons with hearing disabilities to live independently and find practical solutions to obstacles that they face through confidential and instant technology.

Al Amri told Oman News Agency, (ONA), that the application provides a number of services represented in simultaneous interpretation via visual communication to enable people with hearing disabilities, increase their self-confidence. It also provides an interactive communication environment and a



bridge between the delivery of written and audio content in a smooth, accurate manner within record time through sign translation experts.

Al Amri said that already there are 3,835 users of the application, while the number of visual content services translated into sign language has reached 742 times, while the number of printed materials prepared in sign language via (QR Code-Barcode) are 90.

SignBook is available on (iOS) and (Android) and is available with institutional subscriptions to the services included in the application.

MEETING

Foreign Ministry Undersecretary receives ambassador of the UAE

MUSCAT: Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs received here on Wednesday Mohammed Nakhira Al Dhaheri, Ambassador of the UAE to Oman.

During the meeting, Al Harthy received a written message from Sheikh Abdullah Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the UAE. -ONA



PEOPLE IN OMAN URGED TO DONATE BLOOD

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) has urged people with AB+ve blood type to donate blood at the Central Blood Bank in Baushar. "If your blood type is AB+, there are people who are in dire need of blood donation at the Central Blood Bank in Baushar."



NAMA WATER SERVICES

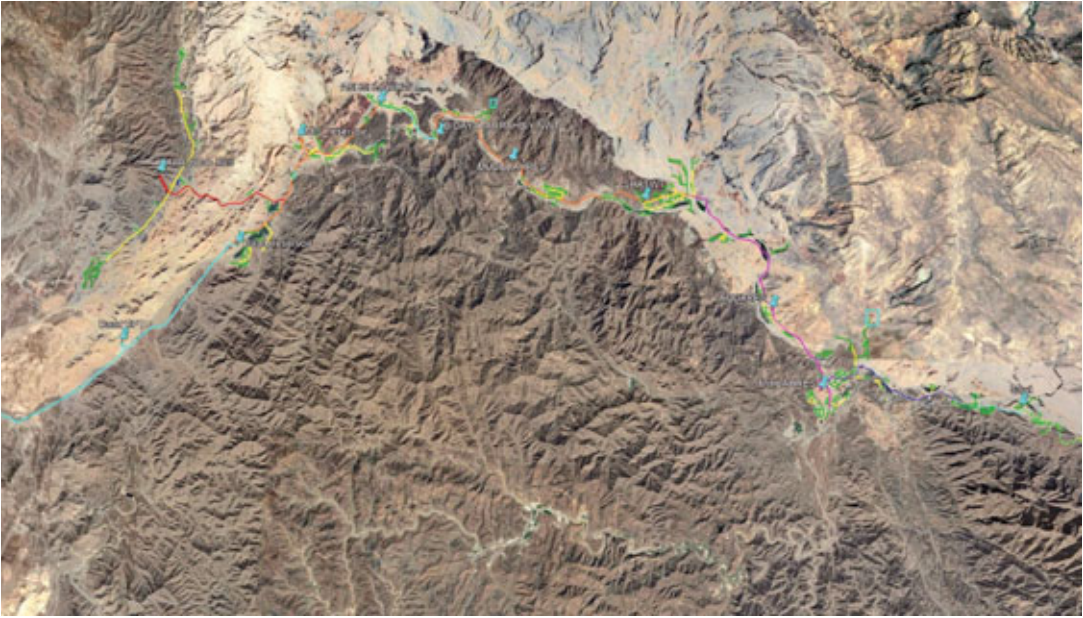
Water projects in North Al Sharqiyah cost over OMR143mn

IBRA: Nama Water Services Company has said that the total cost of managing the water services sector in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah stood at more than OMR143 million.

The cost quoted by Nama includes existing projects and projects under construction, as well as "small, medium and large development" projects and the annual cost of water tanker contracts.

Qais Saud Al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services Company, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that 26,035 subscribers benefit from water networks at North A'Sharqiyah Governorate.

The governorate has 2,064 km of water network pipes, 75 water collection reservoirs and 14 main pumping stations, Al Zakwani added. -ONA



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Stress on boosting trade, tourism between Bursa and Muscat

Bursa is one of the important Turkish cities that receives great attention due to its beauty, neighbourhoods and landmarks, and the aesthetic charm of its green nature and cultural heritage

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With the aim of developing trade, tourism, and economic relations between the Turkish city of Bursa and Muscat, the Turkish embassy organised a ceremony in Muscat, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat on Tuesday.

An introductory function was organised about Bursa under the slogan 'Bursa Promotion Day'.

Bursa is one of the important Turkish cities that receives great attention due to its beauty, neighbourhoods and landmarks, and the aesthetic charm of its green nature and cultural heritage.

The inauguration of the ceremony was attended by Muhammet Hekimoğlu, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and more than 100 people, including the Mayor of Bursa, Turkish and Omani tourist and medical travel companies, as well as a number of Omani and Turkish media professionals.

The Ambassador of the Re-



public of Turkey, Muhammet Hekimoğlu, said in an exclusive interview to Times of Oman: "I have heard a lot of good things about the Sultanate of Oman before I came to as an ambassador to Muscat in January 2023. I was

amazed with the Omani-Islamic architecture and civilised culture evident on the buildings here, the kindness of the people of Oman, the manner in which they welcome guests, their respect for residents, visitors and fellow citi-

zens. The love for their country and their adherence to customs and traditions is commendable.

Their aspiration to progress in all fields and their relentless pursuit to develop their country and their interest in science, economy, trade

and tourism is commendable."

The ambassador indicated that he is also looking forward to introducing his country and strengthening the bonds of bilateral relations between Oman and Türkiye, diplomatic, commercial and tourism, citing the historical and exceptional relations of the two countries, describing the Sultanate as a country of peace.

The Turkish ambassador hopes that Omanis will travel for tourism, trade and investment to Bursa and other Turkish cities.

The Mayor of Bursa, Aliinur Aktar, said in an exclusive interview to Times of Oman: "I am very happy to be in Oman, and this is my first time to the Sultanate. I previously visited the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of Bahrain, today I am here among you and felt so happy to be among Omani officials and citizens. I have heard that Omanis are generous, hospitable and kind people."

He also said: "I came to introduce Omanis to the city of Bursa, of which I am the mayor, and I hope to develop the two countries' relationship in tourism and trade."

The Mayor of Bursa confirmed that tourism in his city is very rich with the presence of many prominent natural places, such as waterfalls, lakes, forests and high mountains, which have become a centre of attraction for tourists from around the globe.

He pointed out that the Bursa city was called the Green Bursa because of its many forests, one of which includes the "historic tree" that is more than 600 years old. It is also distinguished by the fact that it includes the longest cable car in the world, extending for over 9 kilometres. Adding that it was the first capital of the Ottoman Empire, which includes many historical monuments, such as the Great Mosque, which dates back to the period between 1396 and 1400.

LEBANON

Oman takes part in forum that aims to tackle inequality



BEIRUT: Oman participated in a forum in Lebanon that touched on innovative and practical policies for tackling inequality, with a focus on food security as one form of such inequality.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, took part in the 2nd Arab Forum for Equality, in Lebanon.

The forum was themed "Towards inclusive youth employment in the Arab region".

Oman's delegation in the forum was headed by Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The forum was organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and Pathfinder for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. It aimed to finalise dialogue between decision-makers



and experts in the Arab region and other places of the world within the context of inequality in the Arab region.

The forum highlighted the effects of inequality resulting from current regional and international developments. It also showcased best practices in the social security sphere. -ONA

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MINISTRY PAYS GREAT ATTENTION TO FARMING OF GRAPES IN NORTH AL BATINAH



SOHAR: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources pays great attention to the growing of grapes in North Al Batinah.

Ahmed bin Ali Al Miqbali, Head of the Agricultural Production Division at the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Al Batinah Governorate, said that the area allocated for planting grape plants for the current season is estimated at three feddans, including one feddan each in the farms of Wilayat of Al Khaboura and Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, and one feddan in the farms of the wilayats of Sham and Sohar.

He pointed out that the number of grape plants in the wilayats of Al Khaboura and Al Suwaiq is estimated at 1,400.

He said that a number of grape farms in the wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate receive the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. This is in the form of partial help in the cost of the irrigation system, full support for vine pergola, free of charge plants to farmers, in addition technical support and guidance.

Sua'ad bint Mohammed Al Quraini, a researcher in the field of fruits at the Agricultural Research Station in North Al Batinah Governorate said that the research programme on grapes crop conducted at the Agricultural Research Station in the Wilayat of Sohar aimed at evaluating the productivity and growing 24 species of local and imported grapes under the climatic conditions of North Al Batinah Governorate and selection of the best species

Sua'ad bint Mohammed Al Quraini, a researcher in the field of fruits at the Agricultural Research Station in North Al Batinah Governorate said that the research programme on grapes crop conducted at the Agricultural Research Station in the Wilayat of Sohar is aimed at evaluating the productivity and growing 24 species of local and imported grapes under the climatic conditions of North Al Batinah Governorate



farmers in the various wilayats of the Sultanates.

Over 1,169 grape plants were distributed to the farmers during the last season, she added.

She said that the grapes are grown during January and February in the nursery followed by shifting them to the farms. The arrangement of the vine pergola includes planting of grape plants in lines each of them at a distance of three metres from each other, she said.

The soil where the grapes plants are grown in a sandy-clay with soil PH (Acidity) of 7.5 to 8.5 with drip irrigation system.-ONA

Dhofar gears up for Khareef season 2023

Government and private establishments outlined their plans for Khareef season

SALALAH: A meeting was held at the office of the Governor of Dhofar on Wednesday to assess the preparedness of government and private establishments for the Khareef (monsoon) season 2023. The readiness procedures were discussed during the meet-



ing, which was held here under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan Turki Al Said, Governor of Dhofar. HH Sayyid Marwan expressed gratitude for the directives of His Majesty the Sultan to provide direct subsidies on fuel prices at Salalah Airport and equate fuel prices with counterparts at Mus-

cat International Airport. This, he said, will encourage the operation of more direct inbound and outbound flights to Salalah Airport. He noted that the competitive prices will enhance tourism and economic movement in the governorate. During the meeting, government and private establishments

outlined their plans for the Khareef season. The meeting also touched on the readiness of Salalah Airport, services and plans for regulating traffic and air traffic safety, as well as procedures on access through checkpoints, medical services, ambulance services, residency and accommodation. — ONA



Foreign Minister, Turkish counterpart discuss relations

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister has expressed his heartfelt greetings to Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye on being appointed on this position, wishing him success in carrying out his duties. During a phone call made between the two ministers to-

day, Sayyid Badr and Fidan underlined the joint keenness to continue promoting bilateral relations between Oman and Türkiye in various fields. They also stressed the importance of continuous consultations and coordination on different matters of mutual interest. — ONA

Oman chairs preparatory meeting of GCC Food Safety Committee

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday chaired the 7th preparatory meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Food Safety Committee.

The committee comprises undersecretaries of ministries concerned with food safety in the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Sultanate of Oman was

represented during the meeting by Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al Bakri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture.

The meeting discussed the unified food law of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Gulf Cooperation Council centre for assessing food hazards and the Gulf Coop-

eration Council (GCC) guide for control on imported food, among other topics. The meeting was attended by Khalid Ali Al Sunaidi, Assistant

Secretary General for Economic and Development Affairs at the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council. — ONA

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

PDO celebrates graduation of a new batch of Emdad initiative trainees

MUSCAT: The Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) celebrated yesterday the graduation of 228 young Omanis as part of its Emdad initiative in collaboration with the "Musalih" platform. The ceremony was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat under the auspices of Sayyid Salim Musallam Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources. Following an agreement signed in 2020 between PDO and the Musalih platform, the graduates joined a training programme in specialised technical fields including plumbing, fixing and installation of electrical connections. Qualified graduates will join Musalih, which is an online handyman services platform. It links Omani professionals with customers in need for household services. Through the platform, customers can choose the type



and timing of service, with clear prices and within a short time. The Emdad initiative seeks to improve employment opportunities for Omani jobseekers by providing vocational training, scholarship opportunities and apprenticeship programmes. Emdad continues to co-ordinate directly with relevant government and private sector entities to create sustainable opportunities aligned with job market needs.



METEOROLOGIST

Cyclone Biparjoy expected to impact weather in Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The tropical cyclone Biparjoy may turn into severe cyclone on Friday, a meteorologist at the Civil Aviation Authority, (CAA), said. While speaking to *Times of Oman's* sisterly radio channel Al Shabiba, Younis bin Hussein Al-Shezawi, a meteorologist at the CAA, said that the indirect effects of Cyclone Biparjoy may start from Thursday. The cyclone is currently classified as first-degree, with the possibility of development to the second-degree within the next 24 hours, reaching a wind speed at its centre ranging from 80 to 95 knots. In his interview with Al-Shabiba Radio, Al-Shezawi indicated that the current indications show the possibility of the cyclone developing to the third degree by Friday (June 9, 2023), and Saturday with wind speeds around its centre ranging from 96-112 knots, along with the flow of cumulus clouds on the coasts of the Arabian Sea. He indicated that the paths of the cyclone, Biparjoy, will be more clear on Friday, with the approach of its movement. He noted that at present there are several models for the directions of the cyclone. Al-Shezawi added that some models indicate the movement



of the cyclone towards the Indian coasts, while others indicate the direction of the cyclone to move towards the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman in the North Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta Governorates. He explained that the discrepancy in the readings of the models is a natural matter, and Omani Meteorology is working to take the essence from all the models and their data and analyse them according to the experience of its cadres and capabilities, because in such tropical conditions it is difficult to accurately predict the path of a cyclone based on only one model. It is noteworthy that Oman Meteorology has revealed, on its official account on Twitter, the latest developments in the tropical situation in the Arabian Sea. Oman Meteorology indicated that the cyclone centre is 1,140km

away from the coast, and the accompanying clouds are 740 km away. In addition, Oman Meteorology indicated that the weather phenomenon is currently classified as a tropical cyclone, Biparjoy, of the first degree. It is located at latitude 12.3 north and longitude 66.2 east. The wind speed around the centre is 65 knots, and the expected direction of the cyclone is north towards the center of the Arabian Sea. Earlier, Abdullah Al Khadouri, Director General of the Directorate General of Meteorology, indicated that until Wednesday morning the cyclone's track was still fluctuating, but we must be cautious and consider all possibilities, such as the possibility of the change in direction towards the north and northwest near the coast of Oman.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/2023/093	UNE-LOT 05C-2023	22/06/2023	02/07/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/2023/094	MODIFICATION OF EXISTING UNSAFE OVERHEAD SERVICE CONNECTION NDS DISTRIBUTION SH-03-2023	22/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 105.000
DISC/2023/095	MODIFICATION OF EXISTING UNSAFE OVERHEAD SERVICE CONNECTION NDS DISTRIBUTION SH-04-2023	22/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 105.000
DISC/2023/096	REPLACEMENT OF PILOT RELAYS IN 33kV CRP, RTU PANEL, 11kV CAPACITOR BANKS, LVAC PANEL & 110V DC SYSTEM (BATTERY & CHARGER) AT EXISTING 33/11kV AL-HUSN-1 PSS AND REPLACEMENT OF DISTANCE RELAY AT REMOTE ITTIN GSS END	22/06/2023	11/07/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/2023/101	11kV & LV NETWORK ENHANCEMENT PROJECT IN WADI AREA-(LOT-01)	22/06/2023	02/07/2023	RO. 105.000

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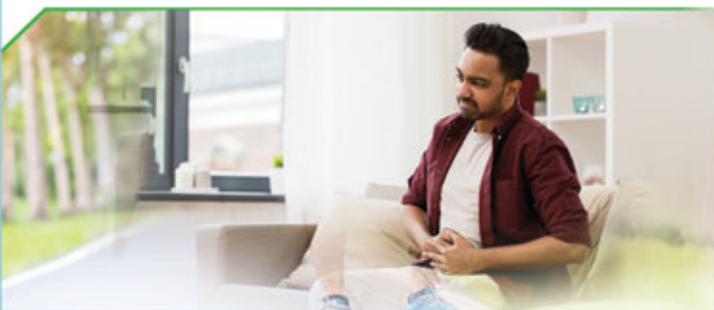
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UN COURT SAYS

Rwandan genocide suspect unfit for trial

THE HAGUE: The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, based in The Hague, has declared that Rwandan genocide suspect, Felicien Kabuga, is unfit for trial. Judges at the UN court have instead called for an “alternative” legal procedure.

“Mr Felicien Kabuga is unfit to participate meaningfully in his

trial and is very unlikely to regain fitness in the future,” the judges said in a statement. The UN judges were looking to “adopt an alternative finding procedure that resembles a trial as closely as possible, but without the possibility of a conviction.”

Kabuga is in his late 80s, although his exact age is disputed.

The coffee and tea tycoon is one of the few remaining Rwandan genocide suspects awaiting justice, as 62 individuals have already been convicted by the tribunal.

What is Kabuga accused of?

After evading arrest for decades, Kabuga was eventually arrested in Paris in 2020 and subsequently

sent to The Hague for trial.

Kabuga initially faced trial in September 2022 with prosecutors alleging that Kabuga promoted hate speech through his broadcaster, Radio Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTL), and armed ethnic Hutu militias. Kabuga has denied the allegations.

— DW

India is a vibrant democracy, says White House official

Later this month, Indian PM Narendra Modi is set to travel to the US for a state visit. White House will host PM Modi for a state dinner on June 22



WASHINGTON: India is a “vibrant democracy” and anybody who happens to travel to New Delhi can see that for themselves, the White House said dismissing concerns over the health of democracy in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

When asked whether the US is concerned regarding the health of democracy in India, John Kirby, Coordinator for Strategic Com-

munications at the National Security Council in the White House said, “India is a vibrant democracy. Anybody that, you know, happens to go to New Delhi can see that for themselves. And certainly, I would expect that the strength and health of democratic institutions will be part of the discussion.” Further, he pointed out that the US administration never shies away from “expressing concerns that we might have with anyone around the world.”

“You can do that with friends;

you’re supposed to do that with friends,” the White House official said. Later this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to travel to the US for a state visit. White House will host PM Modi for a state dinner on June 22.

Kirby said that the visit is “really about advancing what is now and what we hope will be a deeper, stronger partnership and friendship going forward.”

Addressing a press briefing, Kirby called India a “strong partner” of the US on many levels. He

said that India is a member of the Quad and a partner of the US with respect to Indo-Pacific security.

The White House official said that US President Joe Biden is looking forward to having PM Modi to advance the partnership between two countries.

In response to a question about PM Modi’s state visit to the US, Kirby said, “India is a strong partner on very, many levels with the United States. You saw that, in Shangri-La, Secretary Austin announced some additional defence cooperation now that we’re going to pursue with India. Of course, there’s an awful lot of economic trade between our two countries. India is a member of the Pacific Quad and a key friend and partner with respect to Indo-Pacific security.”

“I could go on and on and on. There’s innumerable reasons why India certainly matters not just bilaterally between the two of our nations, but multilaterally on very many levels. And the President is looking forward very much to having PM Modi here to talk about all those issues and to advance and deepen that partnership and that friendship,” he added.

On June 5, the US Secretary of Defence concluded his visit to India. During his visit, he termed the US-India partnership as the “cornerstone” of a free and open Indo-Pacific. He said that both countries have a unique role in preserving the rules-based international order.

Addressing a press conference after holding wide-ranging talks with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Austin said, “I had productive discussions today with Defence Minister Singh and National Security Advisor Doval. As the world’s two largest democracies, India and the United States play a unique role in preserving the rules-based international order that keeps us all secure.”

He further said, “Since I last visited India in 2021, our global and strategic partnership has continued to rapidly grow. Today, the US-India partnership is a cornerstone of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and our deepening bonds show how technological innovation and growing military cooperation between two great powers can be a force for global good.” — ANI

AIR DEFENDER 23

NATO to hold largest ever European air drills over Germany

BERLIN: Germany is set to host NATO’s largest air force deployment over Europe in the alliance’s history, officials said on Wednesday.

The Air Defender 23 exercise will involve 10,000 participants and 250 aircraft from 25 countries.

The drills are designed to simulate a response to an attack on a NATO member country.

The US will send 100 aircraft and 2,000 personnel to take part in the exercise.

“We are showing that NATO territory is our red line, that we are prepared to defend every centimeter of this territory,” German Air Force Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz said.

But the senior German commander insisted that the exercise was designed to show a “defensive” posture towards Russia.

“But we won’t, for example, conduct any flights toward Kaliningrad. So this is intended to be defensive,” he said. — DW

CONTROVERSIAL REFORM

French protesters push last-ditch effort to stop pension law

PARIS: Unions mobilised opponents of France’s controversial pension reforms law yet again on Tuesday, in the 14th protest action this year against the law which raises the retirement age by two years.

Unions are hoping a significant participation would pressure parliament ahead of a scheduled Thursday vote which aims to scrap the law. The vote, spearheaded by the small, left-backed Liot faction, is not expected to come through.



What happened with the protests?

Members of the hard-left CGT trade union raided and briefly occupied the Paris Summer 2024 Olympics headquarters, the Reuters news agency said.

Videos circulating on social media also showed purported protesters flocking into the headquarters in Aubervilliers, northern Paris.

Some protesters threatened to disrupt next year’s Olympics.

A Games spokesperson told Reuters that several dozen CGT protesters entered the building briefly. He denied that any violence or damage took place.

“It’s going to be another big day in the history of the trade union movement,” the new head of the hard-left CGT union, Sophie Binet, told BFM television on Tuesday morning. “After six months

the unions are still united and the level of anger, frustration and motivation is high.”

Some 280,000 participants took part in Tuesday’s demonstrations and strikes nationwide, the French Interior Ministry said. At the height of the pension protests earlier this year, over one million protesters took to the streets to air their grievances.

French authorities deployed some 11,000 police forces, including 4,000 in the capital.

“This will be the last protest of this kind over the pension matter,” Reuters quoted Lauren Berger, head of the CFDT trade union, as saying ahead of the protest in Paris.

Thursday’s scheduled vote is the latest of several attempts to scrap the law, which has triggered nationwide protests for all of this year. — DW

FOR TWO-YEARS

5 nations elected as non-permanent members to UN Security Council

NEW YORK: The United Nations General Assembly elected Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and South Korea to the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday for two-year terms starting on Jan. 1, 2024.

“My congratulations to Algeria, Guyana, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia, for being elected as non-permanent members of the @UN Security Council for a two-year term beginning on 1 January 2024. I thank the tellers for assisting in this election,” Csaba Korosi, President of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly tweeted. It has five permanent veto-wielding members: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

This comes when India has been insisting the United Nations Security Council to be more inclusive and add more permanent and non-permanent members.



UN Security Council

Stating that the current composition of the UN Security Council (UNSC) no longer aligns with the realities of an interconnected and multipolar world, India’s permanent representative to the UN, Ruchira Kamboj on Thursday urged for urgent reform of the UN body.

Reform of the United Nations Security Council is a critical issue that demands urgent attention, she said. The world is evolving and there is a pressing need for a Council that is more representative, inclusive and effective in main-

taining global peace and security, Kamboj said.

The Indian envoy was speaking at a Roundtable on Security Council Reform at the UN headquarters hosted by the Permanent Missions of Brazil, India, South Africa and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on Thursday.

India has repeatedly called for more inclusiveness in the UNSC for the countries of the world and has urged for multilateralism on various occasions.

Addressing the UNSC on Thursday Kamboj said that the reforms

of the UNSC are a critical issue that has long been debated and demands urgent attention.

She said it is time to recognize the contributions of countries that have demonstrated their ability to foster peace, promote development, and tackle global challenges. She said that by expanding the Security Council’s membership in both permanent and non-permanent categories, its legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness can be enhanced.

A reformed Security Council would enable to pool resources,

expertise and perspectives from a wider range of countries. Empowering us to confront these issues with greater effectiveness and unity.

She also reminded the council that 73 heads of state and government at UNGA 77 were in agreement last year supporting the pressing need for reform.

“No less than 73 heads of state and government at UNGA 77 last year were in agreement, as you would all recall, on the pressing need for reform,” she said.

“The time for Security Reform Council is now,” Kamboj said. — ANI

Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

SPORTS

Swiatek sails past Gauff to set up semis clash with Haddad Maia

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur goes down fighting in quarter-finals

PARIS: Defending champion Iga Swiatek of Poland maintained her dominance over American teenager Coco Gauff to set up a French Open semi-final against Brazilian 14th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia on Wednesday.

World No. 1 Swiatek, who beat Gauff in the 2022 final, won 6-4 6-2. The contest was much closer than last year but Swiatek's quality showed in a seventh straight win over Gauff.

Haddad Maia, 27, reached her first Grand Slam semi-final by fighting back to stun Tunisia's Ons Jabeur.

Haddad Maia, who had never previously reached the third round of a major, recovered to win 3-6 7-6 (7-5) 6-1.

The 27-year-old is the first Brazilian woman to reach a Grand Slam semi-final since Maria Bueno in 1968.

Haddad Maia has become known for her ability to come through long tests, including in the Roland Garros fourth round when she outlasted Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo in an epic lasting almost four hours.

That was the longest women's match of the season and, while the encounter against Jabeur was nowhere near as long, she again demonstrated her physical and mental endurance.

Against an opponent backed by a large number of flag-waving Tunisian fans on Court Philippe Chatrier, Haddad Maia started slowly in her first major quarter-final.

The world No. 14, who served a 10-month doping suspension which ended in 2020, was broken three times in the first set as



SEMI-FINALISTS: Iga Swiatek (photo left) of Poland and Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia celebrate their respective wins in the quarter-finals on Wednesday. - wta.com



Jabeur took control. Break opportunities were scarce in the second set until two chances not taken by Jabeur at 5-5 ultimately proved costly for the 28-year-old Tunisian.

Last year's Wimbledon and US Open runner-up missed the first break point with a forehand that went long, her opponent saving the other with a series of aggressive returns.

The Brazilian, having shown the importance of hanging in as

Jabeur rattled through service games, eventually took her fourth set point to send the match into a decider.

Galvanised, the left-hander's heavy forehand returns caused more problems for Jabeur as she moved 3-0 ahead.

The pair exchanged breaks in the next two games before Haddad Maia, who could now hear the support of singing Brazilian fans, saved four breaks to hold for 5-1.

Jabeur, now becoming increas-

ingly demoralised, spanked a forehand long on the second match point, leaving Haddad Maia looking flummoxed at what she had just achieved.

Alcaraz to meet Djokovic in semi-finals

Earlier on Tuesday night, World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz demonstrated his court dominance against Stefanos Tsitsipas in the French Open quarterfinals with a straight-set victory, 6-2, 6-1, 7-6, to set up

a highly anticipated semi-final against No. 3 seed Novak Djokovic.

"This match is what everyone wants to watch, and it will be a good one to play," Alcaraz said about the upcoming semifinal.

"If you want to be the best, you have to beat the best. Djokovic is one of the best in the world, and I'm looking forward to it," added the 2022 US Open champion.

The blockbuster match between Alcaraz and Djokovic carries more than a spot in the final. The victor

will depart Paris next week as the world's top-ranked player.

In the night session on Court Philippe Chatrier, Alcaraz appeared untouchable against No. 5 seed Tsitsipas, delivering 36 winners compared to his Greek opponent's 21. He claimed victory after two hours and 12 minutes.

"It wasn't much fun out there in the first two sets. I felt completely off," Tsitsipas admitted post-match. "I just hope it never happens again." - Agencies

ICC WTC FINAL

Head, Smith pile on runs as Australia take control

LONDON: Travis Head and Steve Smith produced an unbroken 251-run fourth-wicket stand to leave Australia on 327/3 and well on top after the opening day of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) Final against India at The Oval on Wednesday.

Head was the star of the day, registering the first-ever century in a WTC Final and hitting the first of his six Test tons to come outside of Australia, finishing on 146 not out. And his teammate Smith continued his extraordinary record at The Oval, where he now averages triple figures after his unbeaten 95.

India's quicks had taken three wickets while the ball was moving around in the first couple of hours of play. And they were made to pay for not snaffling a few more wickets, as a brilliant partnership between Head and Smith punished India as the day went on.

India made the headlines before the day's play had even begun when they opted not to pick the world's top-ranked Test bowler, preferring an extra option in their



four-strong pace attack to spinner R Ashwin in their XI.

That Indian pace quartet of Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur troubled Australia's batters for much of the first hour of play. And when Siraj got the edge to pick up the key wicket of Khawaja in the fourth over, it was looking like an inspired decision by India skipper Rohit Sharma to elect to field after he won the toss and chose to bowl.

Warner played at a wide one down the leg side from Thakur on the stroke of lunch and a brilliant catch by KS Bharat sent him packing to leave Australia 73/2.

Shami threw the first punch after lunch as picked up a wicket with his first delivery after the interval, casting Marnus Labuschagne (26). That dismissal left Australia in a spot of bother on 76/3, but then on it was a sublime display from Head and Smith to wrest the day's honours.

MEDIA REPORT

Messi to join Inter Miami

LONDON: Argentina superstar Lionel Messi will join American Major League Soccer club Inter Miami after his exit from French champions Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), according to a BBC report on Wednesday.

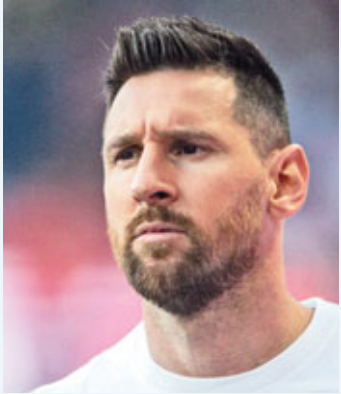
The former Barcelona player is set to reject a more lucrative offer from Saudi Arabian side Al-Hilal and play in the same competition as Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema but Messi has opted to reject it, the report added.

The report also puts an end to the speculations of the Argentine legend's return to his boyhood club Barcelona.

The transfer will be a major boost for American football, which has attracted superstars like Pele, David Beckham and Thierry Henry over the years, but signing Messi might require something creative from both the league and the Miami team.

The deal with the MLS club includes collaboration from brands like Adidas and Apple.

While with Barcelona, Messi, 35, earned himself a record six Ballon d'Or awards as the world's



top player. He remains the team's all-time scorer with 672 goals in 778 appearances, and the top scorer in the Spanish league with 474 goals in 520 matches. He won 10 La Liga titles, four Champions Leagues and seven Spanish Cups.

Messi was heavily tipped to be favouring a move to Saudi Arabia, but he was ultimately tempted to Major League Soccer side Inter Miami for a variety of reasons including lifestyle, and a deal with big brands that extends beyond football.

He already owns a house

in Miami, which he currently rents out.

He was keen on a return to Barcelona this summer but the Financial Fair Play limitations that will be in place for next season in La Liga made any ambitious plan to bring him back an impossibility.

Paris Saint-Germain won Ligue 1 in both his seasons at the club but went out in the Champions League last 16, which means his time in France was not seen as a huge success.

He netted 32 goals in 75 games for the club - and ended this season with 16 goals and 16 assists in Ligue 1.

Messi's two-year contract comes to an end this summer and both parties agreed to go their separate ways, with the forward suspended for two weeks in May for an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia.

His legacy comes from his time at Barcelona and winning the World Cup with Argentina in December. He left Barcelona in 2021, after 21 years with the club, because of the club's financial problems. - Agencies

OMAN CRICKET INITIATIVE

Pioneering sports-centric health insurance deal for Oman cricketers

MUSCAT: In a first for any sports associations in the Sultanate of Oman, a sports-centric health insurance policy has been inked between Oman Cricket (OC) and a leading Muscat-based insurance company.

The long-term policy arrangement will ensure that the national team cricketers currently in South Africa, en route to play the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe (June 18-July 9), will be covered for any injuries or health issues.

Confirming the three-year deal between OC and Dhofar Insurance Company, Alkesh Joshi, OC treasurer, said, "This is the first time that a sports-centric health policy has been



introduced in Oman. This is a one-of-its-kind health insurance policy for its national team players. We are happy to have taken the pioneering step.

"This policy ensures that the players do not have to worry, God forbid, in case of any injuries as they will be provided with the best healthcare and flown to any part of the world for treatment. From air travel to getting the treatment from the best experts, they would be taken care of by us."

Joshi said: "The policy has provided a great relief to the players, who can now focus on what they do the best: performance on the field. They have the biggest mission ahead as they attempt to make history by qualifying to the Cricket World Cup. The Zimbabwe Qualifier is the ultimate test for our players, and we wanted them to go into the tourna-

ment in the best shape and mindset."

He added: "We have never had so much talent in the squad in recent times. Be it Bilal Khan, the high-est wicket-taker during ICC World Cricket League Division 2, or skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, who was named the ICC Associate Player of the Year or Jatinder Singh, one of the most flamboyant strikers. We have a balanced squad with the selection made on pure merit and horses for courses policy. I am sure, we will be no pushovers in Zimbabwe."

Oman are among the ten teams who will vie for the two available Cricket World Cup slots to be played in India later this year.

Divided into two groups, Oman are clubbed with World Cup winner Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and the UAE in Group B. Group A comprises hosts Zimbabwe, two-time winners West Indies, Nepal, Netherlands and United States.

Incentives doubled for Zimbabwe Qualifier

With the stakes high in Zimbabwe, Joshi informed that "OC has doubled the players' bonuses for the Cricket World Cup Qualifier."

He added: "After the team finished second in Division 2, we increased their monthly contracts and the incentives have been dou-

bled. Players shouldn't worry about anything other than their display on the field. We have also chalked out a plan to reward them on performance of each match."

The OC official said: "World Cup Qualifier will be a great test for our cricketers on how to handle pressure while playing against Test-playing nations and World Cup champions. We have a difficult challenge. The players have worked hard, and it is now the time for them to deliver. We believe in them and are confident that they will make the country proud with their performance at one of the biggest stages in world cricket."

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES
The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by August 2023 reaching \$74.90, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by 54 cents from the price of Tuesday, which was \$74.36. - **ONA**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER
The MSX index closed at 4,650.60 points, down by 0.09 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.32 per cent at 468.77 points. DIDIC, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Barka Water & Power Company, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser.

Workshop highlights government efforts in promoting entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) organised in Muscat a workshop to showcase government efforts in promoting entrepreneurship.

The workshop showed the extent to which the government is keen to highlight the sector of small and medium enterprises (SME) as a basic pillar of the national economy. It outlined the incentives and exemptions extended to this sector in response to the needs of the local market, as well as the steps taken to help SME products get access to global markets.

Papers presented at the workshop elaborated on the roles of many establishments and institu-



tions in promoting SMEs. These include ASMED, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, the Oman Investment Fund, the Tender Board, the Capital Market Author-



ity and the Ministry of Education. The papers cited the incentives, programmes, packages and initiatives made by ASMED to serve the enterprises. They provided impor-

tant data and indices by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor in the field of SMEs. The papers demonstrated the initiatives of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), whose subsidiary firms lend sustainable support to SMEs, notably through the Supplier Development Programme and the Business Privatisation Programme. The papers also listed the exemptions provided by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in favour of small and medium enterprises.

The workshop underlined the Capital Market Authority's role in furnishing a sound entrepreneurial environment through innovative financing, insurance and related commercial activities.

In addition, the workshop highlighted the efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Education in spreading the culture of entrepre-

neurship. This was introduced through school curricula, seminars and conferences, besides activating the roles of career guidance centres and the student orientation centre.

The ministry's system includes training programmes in financial planning, a programme on start-ups and related research and studies and statistics about student companies.

The workshop exhibited Sas Centre's experience in supporting SMEs, as well as the roles of Oman Technology Fund in promoting bold investment ventures.

The workshop also presented examples of the operations of Beehive, a company specialising in innovative financing. - **ONA**

Global growth to fall to 2.1% in 2023

Global growth has slowed sharply and the risk of financial stress in EMDEs is intensifying amid elevated global interest rates, the World Bank's latest report shows



Ajay Banga



REPORT: Growth projections for 70 percent of emerging markets and developing economies and nearly all advanced economies have been downgraded. - **bw**

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Global growth is projected to decelerate from 3.1 percent in 2022 to 2.1 percent in 2023, according to a new report.

In emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) other than China, growth is set to slow to 2.9 percent this year from 4.1 percent last year, according to the World Bank's latest Global Economic Prospects report. These forecasts reflect broad-based downgrades. Growth projections for 70 percent of EMDEs and nearly all advanced economies have been downgraded.

"The surest way to reduce poverty and spread prosperity is through employment—and slower growth makes job creation a lot harder," said World Bank Group President Ajay Banga. "It's important to keep in mind that growth forecasts are not destiny. We have an opportunity to turn the tide but it will take us all working together."

Global growth has slowed sharply and the risk of financial stress in EMDEs is intensifying amid elevated global interest rates, the report further added.

Most EMDEs have seen only limited harm from the recent banking stress in advanced economies so far, but they are now sailing in dangerous waters. With in-

creasingly restrictive global credit conditions, one out of every four EMDEs has effectively lost access to international bond markets. The squeeze is especially acute for EMDEs with underlying vulnerabilities such as low creditworthiness. Growth projections for these economies for 2023 are less than half those from a year ago, making them highly vulnerable to additional shocks.

"The world economy is in a precarious position," said Indermit Gill, the World Bank Group's Chief Economist and Senior Vice President. "Outside of East and South Asia, it is a long way from the dynamism needed to eliminate poverty, counter climate change, and replenish human capital. In 2023, trade will grow at less than a third of its pace in the years before the pandemic. In emerging markets and developing economies, debt pressures are growing due to higher interest rates. Fiscal weaknesses have already tipped many low-income countries into debt distress. Meanwhile, the financing needs to achieve the sustainable development goals are far greater than even the most optimistic projections of private investment."

The latest forecasts indicate that the overlapping shocks of the pandemic, the Russian invasion

of Ukraine, and the sharp slowdown amid tight global financial conditions have dealt an enduring setback to development in EMDEs, one that will persist for the foreseeable future. By the end of 2024, economic activity in these economies is expected to be about 5 percent below the levels projected on the eve of the pandemic. In low-income countries—especially the poorest—the damage is stark: in more than one-third of these countries, per capita incomes in 2024 will still be below 2019 levels. This feeble pace of income growth will entrench extreme poverty in many low-income countries.

"Many developing economies are struggling to cope with weak growth, persistently high inflation, and record debt levels. Yet new hazards—such as the possibility of more widespread spillovers from renewed financial stress in advanced economies—could make matters even worse for them," said Ayan Kose, Deputy Chief Economist of the World Bank Group. "Policymakers in these economies should act promptly to prevent financial contagion and reduce near-term domestic vulnerabilities."

In advanced economies, growth is set to decelerate from 2.6 percent in 2022 to 0.7 percent this year and remain weak in 2024, the report

says. After growing 1.1 percent in 2023, the US economy is set to decelerate to 0.8 percent in 2024, mainly because of the lingering impact of the sharp rise in interest rates over the past year and a half. In the euro area, growth is forecast to slow to 0.4 percent in 2023 from 3.5 percent in 2022, due to the lagged effect of monetary policy tightening and energy-price increases.

The report also offers an analysis of how increases in US interest rates are affecting EMDEs. Most of the rise in two-year Treasury yields over the past year and a half has been driven by investor expectations of hawkish US monetary policy to control inflation.

According to the report, this particular type of interest rate increase is associated with adverse financial effects in EMDEs, including a higher probability of a financial crisis. Moreover, these effects are more pronounced in countries with greater economic vulnerabilities. In particular, frontier markets—those with less developed financial markets and more limited access to international capital—tend to see outsized increases in borrowing costs; for instance, sovereign risk spreads in frontier markets tend to rise by more than three times as much as those in other EMDEs.

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), the leading entity in the development of Oman's fisheries sector, recently participated in the prestigious SIMEC Aquafish 2023 exhibition held in Saudi Arabia.

The event proved to be a resounding success for FDO, as it received significant interest from visitors who were captivated by the abundant investment opportunities in Oman's flourishing fisheries sector. FDO showcased its wide range of high-quality products and value-added projects, reinforcing its reputation as a key player in the regional fisheries industry.

SIMEC Aquafish 2023, one of the largest aquaculture exhibitions in the region, attracted industry professionals, investors, and government representatives from across the globe. FDO's participation allowed them to present Oman's thriving fisheries sector to an international audience and highlight the country's potential as an attractive investment destination.

Visitors to FDO's booth were impressed by the diverse range of investment opportunities available in Oman's fisheries sector. FDO highlighted its commitment to sustainable fishing practices, which ensure the long-term viability and environmental pres-

ervation of Oman's rich marine resources. The showcase of advanced aquaculture technologies and infrastructure further demonstrated FDO's dedication to enhancing productivity and maintaining high-quality standards throughout the added value chain.

"FDO's participation in SIMEC Aquafish 2023 was a remarkable success," said Dawood AlWahaibi from Fisheries Development Oman. "The event provided us with an excellent platform to showcase the immense potential of Oman's fisheries sector to a global audience. We received overwhelming interest from visitors who recognized the attractive investment opportunities and the quality of products and services offered by FDO. We are confident that these interactions will pave the way for meaningful partnerships and collaborations, ultimately driving the sustainable growth of Oman's fisheries industry."

Throughout the exhibition, FDO presented its wide array of products and services, including fresh and frozen fish, value-added seafood products, fish processing facilities, aquaculture technologies, and sustainable fishing practices. The comprehensive range of offerings displayed by FDO further solidified its position as a leading entity in the region's fisheries sector.

SEED FUNDING ROUND

Omantel invests in byanat for data analytics solutions expansion for telecom operators

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has invested in byanat's Seed Funding Round to expand the provision of data analytics solutions through a software-as-a-service (SaaS) analytics platform for telecommunications operators and service providers.

The funding round featured participation from 500 Global in collaboration with Sanabil Investments, an investment fund owned by the Public Investments Fund (PIF) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Al Jabr MENA, a startup development and innovation firm. This funding is set to expedite byanat's technology and

product development and enable entry into the Saudi market.

byanat is one of the tech companies that was incubated at Omantel Innovation Labs. The company aims to enhance infrastructure in the telecom, energy, and utilities sectors. Their SaaS analytics platform assists businesses in effectively scaling and maintaining connected infrastructure, by unifying communication management, device management, and data analytics.

Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, commented, "This historic investment partnership is an eloquent endorsement of the trust global investors have in Omani startups. It also reflects Omantel's far-sighted vision towards innovation and technology.

Omantel's investment in byanat is driven by our confidence in its potential to revolutionise the technology industry, not just in Oman but worldwide. As we continue to focus on enhancing and growing our innovative services and infrastructure, we also place a high priority on empowering startups through various programs offered by Omantel Innovation Labs."

Omantel Innovation Labs, Oman's innovation and entrepreneurship centre, fosters Omani tech startups and cultivates a thriving ecosystem. Their investment in byanat reaffirms their dedication to nurturing groundbreaking startups and reinforcing Oman's status as a regional leader in technology and innovation.

Ahmed Al Ghadani, CEO of

byanat, commented, "With this milestone investment, our focus at byanat is firmly set on the future. We're committed to scaling our operations, expanding our product offerings, and reaching new markets, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of our industry."

byanat has already made waves, won the Machine Learning Award in Data at Oman's 2nd Big Data and Analytics Meet and is among the top 2 per cent accepted into the 500 Global accelerator programme in the Mena region.

As digital infrastructure becomes more complex, the demand for advanced data analytics solutions grows. With Omantel's support, byanat's innovative platform is poised to tackle these challenges and deliver value.



MARKET

MSX index ends lower



DIDIC, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Barka Water & Power Company, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,650.60 points, down by 0.09 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.32 per cent at 468.77 points. DIDIC, up 10.00 per cent, was the top gainer while Barka Water & Power Company, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Ahli Bank were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded while Sohar International Bank Perpetual Bonds were the most active in terms of turnover. A total number of 410 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR3.5 million, with more than 8.79 million shares changing hands. Out of 56 traded securities, 14 advanced, 14 declined, and 28 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net buyers for OMR344,000 while foreign investors were net sellers for OMR314,000, followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR29,000 worth of shares. Financial Index closed at 7,531.37 points, down 0.19 per cent. Prices of DIDIC, National Finance, Al Batinah Development Company, Al Omaniya Financial Services and Bank Nizwa were up by 10.00 per cent, 4.24 per cent, 2.02 per cent, 1.70 per cent and 1.05 per cent respectively. Prices of Al Shargia Investment, Al Madina Investments, National Bank Oman, United Finance and Al Anwar Investment were up by 2.67 per cent, 2.04 per cent, 1.82 per cent, 1.70 per cent and 1.10 per cent respectively. Industrial Index closed at 6,101.52 points, up 0.05 per cent. Prices of Raysut Cement and Gulf Mushroom Products were up by 1.16 per cent, 0.45 per cent respectively. Prices of Voltamp Energy and Oman Cables Industry were up by 1.05 per cent, 0.25 per cent respectively. Services Index was down by 0.24 per cent before closing at 1,683.75 points. Prices of Muscat Desalination, Sharqiyah Desalination, Ooredoo and Oman Telecom were up by 5.88 per cent, 1.67 per cent, 1.12 per cent and 0.41 per cent respectively. Prices of OIFC, SMN Power Holding, Sembcorp Salalah and Abraj Energy were up by 4.26 per cent, 2.33 per cent, 1.98 per cent and 0.34 per cent respectively. –

United Securities

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

OMAN STOCKS

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	4,672.23	4,650.60	4,650.60	4,654.95	-4.35	-0.09
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,572.64	7,531.37	7,531.37	7,545.42	-14.05	-0.19
Industry Index	6,101.52	6,081.14	6,101.52	6,098.33	3.19	0.05
Services Index	1,683.31	1,683.49	1,683.75	1,687.83	-4.08	-0.24
MSX Shariah Index	468.77	467.23	468.77	467.26	1.51	0.32
MSX TR INDEX	8,142.59	8,114.16	8,114.16	8,119.87	-5.71	-0.09
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,204.17	8,204.20	8,204.20	8,219.51	-15.31	-0.19
SERVICES TR IDX	1,858.19	1,850.69	1,850.98	1,855.47	-4.49	-0.24
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,517.94	6,496.17	6,517.94	6,514.54	3.40	0.05

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
8,795,265	3,500,170	410	23,735,333,389	14	14	28	56

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	P/B VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET															
OOREDOO	4,690	1,884	2	0.380	0.382	0.380	0.382	0.388	0.004	1.117	0.382	0.388	0.388	0.100	235,641,611
OMAN TELECOM	270,515	262,975	7	0.988	0.972	0.988	0.972	0.988	0.004	0.413	0.972	0.980	0.972	0.100	728,000,000
OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	34,000	8,840	2	0.260	0.260	0.260	0.260	0.260	0.000	0.000	0.260	0.256	0.260	0.100	26,000,000
HSCB BANK OMAN	1,007	156	2	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.000	0.000	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.100	310,048,482
OMAN CEMENT	138,865	48,235	9	0.360	0.360	0.360	0.360	0.360	0.000	0.000	0.360	0.360	0.368	0.100	119,114,176
AL ANWAR CERAMIC	36,500	9,928	3	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.000	0.000	0.272	0.262	0.265	0.100	59,840,000
ALJAZEEHA SERVICES	5,000	1,250	3	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.000	0.000	0.250	0.250	0.255	0.100	15,301,088
BANK DHOFAR	95,089	16,547	9	0.173	0.175	0.173	0.173	0.173	0.000	0.000	0.173	0.155	0.173	0.100	518,368,798
BANK MUSCAT	1,230,410	328,900	42	0.268	0.268	0.265	0.265	0.265	0.000	0.000	0.265	0.265	0.268	0.100	1,988,185,221
GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO	170,600	10,236	9	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.000	0.000	0.060	0.057	0.060	0.100	12,000,000
RENAISSANCE SERVICES	15,550	5,960	8	0.384	0.384	0.374	0.384	0.384	0.000	0.000	0.384	0.376	0.384	0.100	90,781,440
SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	270,000	27,290	5	0.102	0.102	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.000	0.000	0.101	0.101	0.102	0.100	463,586,291
MADINA TAKAFUL	19,400	1,630	3	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.000	0.000	0.084	0.082	0.092	0.100	14,700,000
OMINVEST	45,000	16,590	4	0.370	0.370	0.366	0.366	0.370	-0.004	-1.081	0.366	0.366	0.370	0.100	244,621,746
UNITED FINANCE	181,555	10,520	14	0.058	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.059	-0.001	-1.695	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.100	20,653,383
NATIONAL BANK OMAN	571,080	166,532	20	0.275	0.275	0.270	0.270	0.275	-0.005	-1.818	0.270	0.270	0.250	0.100	439,005,516
SMN POWER HOLDING	800	67	2	0.082	0.084	0.082	0.084	0.086	-0.002	-2.326	0.084	0.082	0.084	0.100	16,769,390
AL SHARGIYA INVESTMENT HO	13,640	996	1	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.073	0.075	-0.002	-2.867	0.073	0.072	0.075	0.100	6,570,000
OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE	75,930	6,976	10	0.063	0.063	0.060	0.060	0.064	-0.004	-4.255	0.062	0.062	0.062	0.100	22,396,500
Total	19	317,641	914,793	155											

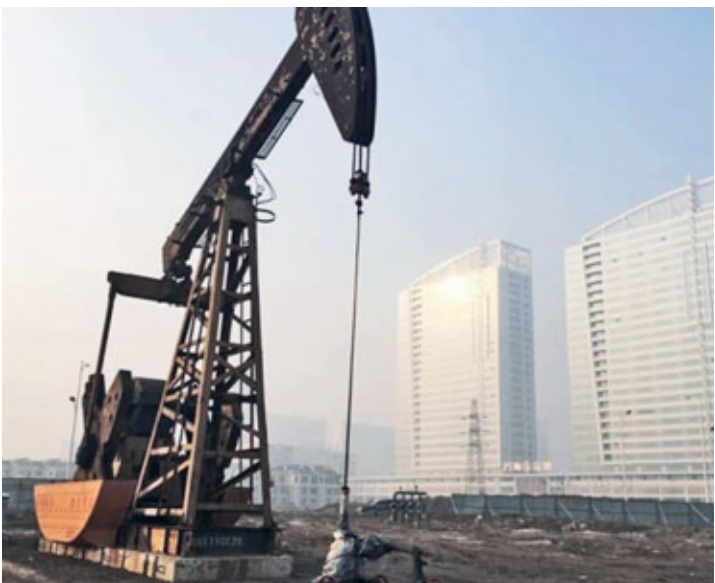
Parallel Market

OMAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	7,739	15,382	2	0.198	0.198	0.198	0.198	0.180	0.018	5.882	0.198	0.198	0.198	0.100	81,030,771
MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	6,119	821	3	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.085	0.005	5.882	0.090	0.087	0.090	0.100	13,995,000
NATIONAL FINANCE	90,000	10,750	7	0.118	0.123	0.118	0.123	0.118	0.005	4.237	0.123	0.116	0.120	0.100	70,565,627
OMAN REIT FUND	1,000	79	1	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.077	0.002	2.597	0.079	0.079	0.082	0.100	37,223,724
AMAN REAL ESTATE	86,600	8,314	6	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.094	0.002	2.128	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.100	19,200,000
AL BATINAH DEVELOPMENT & INV.	327,495	32,640	34	0.099	0.101	0.099	0.101	0.099	0.002	2.020	0.101	0.100	0.102	0.100	3,030,000
AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SERVICES	219,254	26,307	5	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.118	0.002	1.695	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.100	36,920,928
SHARQIYAH DESALINATION	50,000	6,100	1	0.122	0.122	0.122	0.122	0.120	0.002	1.667	0.122	0.122	0.129	0.100	11,931,864
RAYSUT CEMENT	3,049	524	2	0.171	0.175	0.171	0.175	0.173	0.002	1.156	0.175	0.173	0.175	0.100	35,000,000
BANK NIZWA	100,000	9,600	5	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.095	0.001	1.053	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.100	214,747,491
GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	18,800	4,211	3	0.224	0.224	0.224	0.224	0.223	0.001	0.448	0.224	0.224	0.224	0.100	10,251,539
DHOFAR INSURANCE	27,271	5,454	3	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.200	0.200	0.201	0.100	21,832,973
NATIONAL GAS	70,000	6,860	11	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.000	0.000	0.098	0.098	0.101	0.100	8,330,000
CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL INDUSTRIES	6,320	398	1	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.063	0.060	0.063	0.100	3,937,500
OMAN FLOUR MILLS	800	418	1	0.522	0.522	0.522	0.522	0.522	0.000	0.000	0.522	0.522	0.574	0.100	82,215,000
MUSCAT FINANCE	52,700	3,023	12	0.058	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.058	0.000	0.000	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.100	17,814,487
AHLI BANK	2,298,282	425,182	5	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.000	0.000	0.185	0.180	0.185	0.100	360,686,631
ASFAFA FOODS	2,000	591	2	0.292	0.299	0.292	0.299	0.299	0.000	0.000	0.299	0.290	0.299	0.100	35,880,000
TAGEER FINANCE	22,000	2,046	1	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.000	0.000	0.093	0.089	0.100	0.100	24,536,658
GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	70,550	13,361	26	0.190	0.191	0.188	0.191	0.191	0.000	0.000	0.191	0.198	0.190	0.100	38,770,411
TAKAFUL OMAN	84,414	4,052	4	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.046	0.048	0.100	12,000,000
AL SUWADI POWER	18,870	528	5	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.000	0.000	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.100	20,003,378
OMAN ARAB BANK	325,200	49,105	10	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.000	0.000	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.100	232,980,919
PHOENIX POWER	453	30	1	0.067	0.067	0.067	0.067	0.067	0.000	0.000	0.067	0.061	0.066	0.100	97,994,298
OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	50	99	2	1.990	1.990	1.985	1.985	1.990	-0.005	-0.251	1.985	0.000	2.000	0.100	178,054,500
ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	67,180	19,885	21	0.296	0.296	0.296	0.296	0.297	-0.001	-0.337	0.296	0.295	0.296	0.100	227,791,204
VOLTAMP ENERGY	865	81	3	0.094	0.095	0.094	0.094	0.095	-0.001	-1.053	0.094	0.094	0.095	0.100	7,651,859
ALANWAR INVESTMENT	270,340	24,352	19	0.090	0.091	0.090	0.090	0.091	-0.001	-1.099	0.090	0.089	0.090	0.100	18,000,000
ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	75,000	7,425	26	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.101	-0.002	-1.980	0.099	0.099	0.100	0.100	34,770,411
AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	75,000	3,610	6	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.049	-0.001	-2.041	0.048	0.048	0.049	0.100	4,800,000
BARKA WATER AND POWER	40,454	1,820	4	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.050	-0.005	-10.000	0.045	0.000	0.045	0.100	7,200,000
Total	31	4,490,775	683,065	209											

ECONOMIC HEADWINDS

Oil extends losses as economic slowdown concerns return

TOKYO: Oil extended losses on Wednesday as concerns over global economic headwinds deepened, erasing the price gains booked after top crude exporter Saudi Arabia's surprise weekend pledge to deepen output cuts. Brent crude futures were down 40 cents, or 0.5 per cent, at \$75.89 a barrel at 04:56 GMT. The US West Texas Intermediate crude futures fell 35 cents, also 0.5 per cent, to \$71.39 a barrel, Reuters reported. Both benchmarks had jumped more than \$1 on Monday, boosted by Saudi Arabia's decision over the weekend to reduce output by 1 million barrels per day (bpd) to 9 million bpd in July. "The fears of recession, as more and more sombre economic readings point towards a slowdown, have kept a lid on oil prices, eroding all OPEC+'s efforts to keep prices afloat," Priyanka Sachdeva, an analyst at Phillip Nova, said in a note. US gasoline inventories rose by about 2.4 million barrels and distillates inventories were up by about 4.5 million barrels in the



week ended June 2, market sources said on Tuesday, citing American Petroleum Institute figures. The unexpected buildup of stockpiles raised concerns over fuel consumption by the world's top oil consumer, especially as travel demand grew during the Memorial Day weekend. Meanwhile, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Tuesday that US crude oil production this year would rise faster and demand increases would cool compared to prior expectations. "The market has digested the

news of Saudi's production cut and investors are now reluctant to take a large position because of mixed economic forecasts and indicators in the United States and China," said Hiroyuki Kikukawa, president of NS Trading, a unit of Nissan Securities. China's official data showed on Wednesday that its exports shrank much faster than expected in May and imports fell, albeit at a slower pace, as manufacturers struggled to find demand abroad and domestic consumption remained sluggish. Nonetheless, some analysts expected Saudi Arabia's voluntary cut, the biggest in the kingdom in years, would put a floor under oil prices, although it was unlikely to underpin a sustainable price increase into the high \$80s-low \$90s per barrel range. "We expect oil prices to test upside as we enter the summer driving season in the United States," Kikukawa said, adding that tighter global supply and US plans to buy crude to refill the Strategic Petroleum Reserve would limit the downside. –BNA

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AL MOUJ MUSCAT

Golf Beach Residences achieves Oman's first BREEAM sustainability certification

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat has achieved Oman's first-ever BREEAM sustainability status, earning the internationally recognised certification for Golf Beach Residences, a collection of luxury family homes at the oceanfront lifestyle destination. BREEAM is the world's most established international sustainability certification organisation which since 1990 has rated more than half a million buildings worldwide. It uses 10 different measurement categories

THE STUDY BUILDS UPON SMITH'S PREVIOUS RESEARCH, WHICH SHOWED HOW WALKING MAY DECREASE CEREBRAL BLOOD FLOW AND IMPROVE BRAIN FUNCTION IN OLDER ADULTS WITH MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT



RESEARCHERS FIND WALKING IMPROVES BRAIN CONNECTIVITY, MEMORY IN OLDER ADULTS

Walking enhances connections within and between three brain networks, including one associated with Alzheimer's disease, according to a new study from the University of Maryland School of Public Health, adding to the growing body of evidence that exercise benefits brain health.

The study, which was published this month in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease Reports, looked at the brains and story recollection abilities of older adults with normal brain function and those with mild cognitive impairment, which is a slight decline in mental abilities such as mem-

ory, reasoning, and judgement and a risk factor for Alzheimer's. "Historically, the brain networks we studied in this research show deterioration over time in people with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease," said J. Carson Smith, a kinesiology professor with the School of Public Health and principal investigator of the study. "They become disconnected, and as a result, people lose their ability to think clearly and remember things. We're demonstrating that exercise training strengthens these connections."

The study builds upon Smith's previous research, which showed how walking

may decrease cerebral blood flow and improve brain function in older adults with mild cognitive impairment.

Thirty-three participants, who ranged between 71 and 85 years old, walked while supervised on a treadmill four days a week for 12 weeks. Before and after this exercise regimen, researchers asked participants to read a short story and then repeat it out loud with as many details as possible.

Participants also underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) so researchers could measure changes in communication within and between the three brain networks that control

cognitive function:

Default mode network - Activates when a person isn't doing a specific task (think daydreaming about the grocery list) and is connected to the hippocampus - one of the first brain regions affected by Alzheimer's disease. It's also where Alzheimer's and amyloid plaques, a prime suspect for Alzheimer's disease found around nerve cells, show up in tests.

Frontoparietal network - Regulates decisions made when a person is completing a task. It also involves memory.

Salience network -- Monitors the external world and stimuli and then decides what deserves attention. It also facilitates switching between networks to optimise performance. After 12 weeks of exercise, researchers repeated the tests and saw significant improvements in participants' story recall abilities.

"The brain activity was stronger and more synchronized, demonstrating exercise actually can induce the brain's ability to change and adapt," Smith said. "These results provide even more hope that exercise may be useful as a way to prevent or help stabilize people with mild cognitive impairment and maybe, over the long term, delay their conversion to Alzheimer's dementia."

— ANI

SPORTS

Benzema signs three-year deal with Saudi champions Al Ittihad

“I am excited to experience a new football league,” says the French star after signing with the club for an undisclosed fee

MADRID: Ballon d’Or winner Karim Benzema has agreed terms on a three-year deal with Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad after leaving Spanish giants Real Madrid, the Saudi Arabian Club announced on Tuesday.

French striker Benzema, 35, won 25 trophies - including five Champions Leagues and four La Ligas - in 14 years with Madrid but they agreed to let him leave his contract a year early. He scored 354 goals for Real, second only to Cristiano Ronaldo. Ronaldo, who hit 450 Real goals, plays for another Saudi club, Al Nassr.

Without disclosing details of the deal or Benzema’s salary, the club said in a statement that Benzema had undergone a medical examination and completed the signing in Madrid on Monday.

“I am excited to experience a new football league in a different



country,” Benzema was quoted as saying in the club statement.

“I have been fortunate to achieve amazing things in my career and achieve everything I can in Spain and Europe. It now feels the time is right for a new challenge and project,” the striker said.

“It’s a good league and there are many good players,” said Benzema. “Cristiano Ronaldo is already there, a friend which shows Saudi Arabia is starting to further progress its level. I am here to win, like I did in Europe.

national said referring to his new club’s ninth Saudi League title.

Al Ittihad are managed by former Wolves and Tottenham boss Nuno Espirito Santo.

Benzema played 648 times for Real after his 2009 move from Lyon and scored with his last touch for the club, netting a penalty in Sunday’s 1-1 draw with Athletic Bilbao before being replaced.

On Monday it was announced Al Ittihad were one of four leading Saudi Arabian clubs to be taken over by the country’s Public Investment Fund, which also owns Newcastle United.

The move is aimed at increasing the revenue of the Saudi Pro League to 1.8 billion Saudi riyals (\$480m) annually by 2030.

Ronaldo’s Al Nassr are another, and so are Al Hilal, who have been strongly linked to Paris St-Germain’s Lionel Messi this summer.

Al Ittihad’s President Anmar Bin Abdullah Alhailae, who was present at the signing in Madrid, said “all eyes will be on Karim” when he puts on the No. 9 shirt and makes his Saudi League debut next season.

“To sign the current Ballon d’Or holder from Real Madrid is [a] historic milestone for this special club,” Alhailae said.

Al Ittihad called Benzema’s arrival “the most impactful transfer in the club’s history”, as it competes with Riyadh-based clubs Al Hilal and Al Nassr in their bid to sign football’s biggest names. - Agencies

ENGLAND SQUAD FOR FIRST TWO TESTS AGAINST AUSTRALIA

Moeen Ali reverses Test retirement, included in England Ashes squad

LONDON: England spinner Moeen Ali, who had announced his retirement from Test cricket back in 2021, has been included in England’s squad for the first two Ashes Tests against Australia, starting from June 16 onwards.

“Warwickshire spin-bowling all-rounder Moeen Ali has been added to the England Men’s Test squad for the first two Ashes Test matches against Australia starting at Edgbaston on Friday, 16 June 2023,” said a statement from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Wednesday.

He replaced Somerset’s Jack Leach, who was withdrawn from the original 16-player squad on Sunday after sustaining a low back stress fracture, which rules him out of the five-match Ashes Test series.

As per ICC, the 31-year-old Somerset slow-left-arm developed low back symptoms during England’s Test victory over Ireland on Saturday.

A stress fracture was discovered during a scan on Sunday in London, ruling him out of the upcoming Ashes Test series.



Moeen, 35, who retired from Test cricket at the end of the 2021 summer, has reversed his decision following discussions with Test captain Ben Stokes, Test head coach Brendon McCullum and managing director of England Men’s Cricket Rob Key.

The Birmingham-born off-spin-

ner will be looking to add to his 64 Test caps. He has scored 2,914 Test runs and has 195 wickets at Test level. He has five centuries and 14 fifties in the format and his inclusion will add a lot to the depth of England’s batting. He will celebrate his 36th birthday during the first Test at Edgbaston on June 18.

Rob Key, Managing Director of England Men’s Cricket, said: “We reached out to Mo (Moeen Ali) early this week about returning to Test cricket. Having had a couple of days to reflect, Mo is excited to join the squad and play Test cricket again. His vast experience, along with his all-round ability, will benefit our Ashes campaign.”

“We wish Mo and the rest of the squad well for the Ashes campaign,” added Key.

The England party will report to Birmingham on Monday, June 12. They are due to practice at Edgbaston from Tuesday, June 13.

The off-spinner has a mixed record against Australia, taking 20 wickets in 11 Tests, at an average of 64.65, and scoring 476 runs, at 25.05.

England squad for first two Ashes Tests: Ben Stokes (captain), Moeen Ali, James Anderson, Jonathan Bairstow, Stuart Broad, Harry Brook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Dan Lawrence, Ollie Pope, Matthew Potts, Ollie Robinson, Joe Root, Josh Tongue, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood. -ANI

CRICKET

‘England have love affair with Ashes’

LONDON: England pacer Stuart Broad said that England have a “love affair” with the Ashes series. England will play against Australia in the Ashes series starting from June 16.

“You can’t take the emphasis off the Ashes because it’s our biggest series. You only have to be driving through service stations in the last year and it’s ‘come on guys, beat Australia’ - our country has a love affair with Ashes cricket, but as an organisation, we had to get our mindset away from personnel losing their jobs if results didn’t go the way you want them to,” Broad was quoted by *ESPNCricinfo*.

With five first-innings wickets in England’s ten-wicket victory over Ireland at Lord’s last week, Broad showed his lasting abilities as a strike bowler. “I think we have lived in a really healthy way in the last 12 months,” he added.

“The Ashes was only mentioned for the first time in the post-match debrief against Ireland, and it was ‘it doesn’t matter what the results are as long as we stick to how we play’. As long as



we have kids watching and saying ‘wow that’s incredible’, then we have done our jobs.”

“I’m just flowing around at the moment,” Broad said. “I feel really happy with how my cricket is, how life is. I feel fit, I feel fresh. Whether I play at Edgbaston, whether I play at Lord’s, Headingley ... I don’t mind, I play really well at all of them.

Broad loves playing against Australia as has taken 131 wickets in 35 matches with an average of 29.05. “I love playing against Australia, and whether that’s the first Test, the fifth Test, the third ... I’m happy to try and strike whenever I get the chance.” -ANI

ASIAN TOUR WELCOMES MERGER

‘PGA Tour, DP World Tour and LIV Golf merger a great result’

SINGAPORE: The Asian Tour called it “a massive stride forward” for golf on Wednesday after the PGA Tour and DP World Tour announced a surprise merger with the Saudi-backed LIV circuit, ending a bitter row for the past two years. The landmark agreement on Tuesday to merge will form a commercial entity to unify golf.

The stunning announcement took many in the sport, including players, by surprise and means that all litigation between the feuding parties is over. The Asian Tour said the agreement “validates” its decision last year to link up with LIV Golf, which made an initial commitment of more than US\$200 million to the tour.

“The Asian Tour welcomed and embraced yesterday’s news concerning the landmark announcement between the Public Investment Fund, the PGA TOUR and the DP World Tour,” Asian Tour commissioner and chief executive Cho Minn Thant said.

“This is a massive stride forward for the game and a great result for all parties concerned: the fans, brands, broadcasters, the tours and their membership.



“This hugely significant development validates our well-documented decision to collaborate with Golf Saudi and LIV Golf to elevate the Asian Tour’s standing in the game.”

“After two years of disruption and distraction, this is a historic day for the game we all know and love,” PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said in a joint news release.

The LIV Golf series is bankrolled by the Saudi Arabia Public

Investment Fund and critics have accused it of being a vehicle for the country to attempt to improve its reputation in the face of criticism of its human rights record.

The rival circuit launched in 2022 and has lured a number of big-name players from the PGA Tour, including Hall of Fame golfer Phil Mickelson, former world No. 1 Dustin Johnson, reigning PGA Championship winner Brooks Koepka and Australian

Cameron Smith. The tours themselves will continue with their 2023 schedules, but the new commercial reality means future calendars will be heavily altered.

Many players are furious after staying loyal to the established tours by turning down lucrative offers to go to LIV. What Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy - the faces of the PGA Tour’s fight with LIV Golf’s chief Greg Norman and Co - make of this will be fascinating.



The fact neither figure knew of the deal being brokered is another extraordinary facet in this stunning development.

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan revealed it was seven weeks in the making and involved only a tight-knit group of officials. “There were four in-person meetings and a number of video calls and phone conversations,” Monahan said. “When you get into these conversations and given the com-

plexity of what we were dealing with, it’s not uncommon that the circle of information is very tight.”

The new company will be chaired by PIF governor Yasir Al Rumayyan, with Monahan as chief executive and an executive committee that will include PGA Tour policy board chairman Ed Herlihy and board member Jimmy Dunne.

According to Monahan it was Herlihy and Dunne who were involved in the initial talks to broker the deal. Less than two months later Monahan was sharing a television studio couch with his new business partner Al-Rumayyan.

The PGA Tour commissioner’s change of direction is astonishing given his criticism of the Saudi regime when LIV was regarded as a hostile “existential threat” to the US circuit. “I recognise everything I’ve said in my past positions,” Monahan admitted. “I recognise people are going to call me a hypocrite. Anytime I said anything, I said it with the information I had at the moment.”

He now has to win over his players and formulate a future that includes the DP World Tour, which has to stall its plans to reveal a revamped 2024 schedule. - Agencies

IN PICTURES



Britain's King Charles III visits Viscri, Romania
Britain's King Charles III visits the Transylvanian village of Viscri, central Romania. King Charles is on a visit to Romania, his first visit abroad since his coronation. *Xinhua*



China's national college entrance exam starts
Examinees chat outside an exam site in Changsha, central China's Hunan Province. China's national college entrance exam, also known as "gaokao", started on Wednesday. *Xinhua*



Coastal view of Bridgetown in Barbados
This aerial picture shows a coastal view of Bridgetown, capital of Barbados. *Xinhua*



Royal Palace in Stockholm open to public with free admission
A child tries on royal clothes at the Royal Palace in Stockholm, Sweden. The Royal Palace was open to the public with free admission to celebrate National Day. *Xinhua*



People enjoy leisure time in Tehran
People have fun beside a lake at a park in Tehran, Iran. *Xinhua*



World Otter Day marked in Singapore
Wild smooth-coated otters make their way around Singapore's Marina Bay area. Wednesday marks this year's World Otter Day, a special day aiming to raise awareness about otters and their protection. *Xinhua*

ROUND-UP

BankDhofar expands its branch network in South Al Sharqiyah

The opening of Sur branch, Al Ashkhara branch and Masirah branch in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate is part of a broader strategy to grow BankDhofar’s presence across the country

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its expansion strategy, BankDhofar has recently announced the official opening of three more branches in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate; which are the Sur branch, the Al Ashkhara branch, and the Masirah branch. This step translates BankDhofar’s endeavour to be closer to customers across the Sultanate of Oman and provide them with the best banking experience.

The opening ceremonies were held in the presence of a number of prominent members of the society and the BankDhofar executive

management team.

Sur branch was officially opened under the patronage of Dr Yaha Badr Al Maawali – Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Ashkhara branch was opened under the patronage of Sheikh Nayef Hamoud Al Maamari- Deputy Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, while Masirah branch was opened under the patronage of Sheikh Abdul Hameed Al Abri – Deputy Wali of Masirah.

On this milestone of its branch network expansion efforts, Amjad Iqbal Al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar,



stressed that the opening of these branches in South Al Sharqiyah governorate is part of a broader strategy to grow BankDhofar’s presence across the country. “The

new branches will offer a range of banking services to customers. We will continue our efforts to get closer to our customers and open more branches,” he said.

BankDhofar has a nationwide network of 92 branches (including BankDhofar and Maisarah branches) and twocorporate branches. The branches are in

prime locations and are easily accessible, offering a wide range of services to customers.

BankDhofar has set a clear banking strategy that is in line with Oman Vision 2040 and has effectively contributed to driving the growth of the national economy. Since its inception in 1990, BankDhofar has established itself as one of the leading financial institutions in the Sultanate, with a strong presence in corporate banking, retail banking, treasury and project finance.

The bank has been catering to customers’ needs and requirements and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman through innovative products and creative solutions. Following best international banking practices, the provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, has placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.

SUMMER TREAT



Nesto launches ‘Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta’

MUSCAT: Nesto Hypermarket, one of the leading retail chains in Oman, announced the launch of its exciting summer offer, ‘Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta’.

The offer showcases a wide variety of fruits from across the globe, providing customers with a refreshing and healthy selection. To mark this special occasion, Nesto Hypermarket organised an official launch event at their Barka store, with the esteemed presence of Ahmed Rashid Al Kharousi, the deputy director general of Barka Municipality, inaugurating the event.

Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta is an exclusive offer that aims to delight customers with the freshest and most delicious fruits available. From tropical favourites to exotic varieties, Nesto Hypermarket has curated an exceptional range of fruits to cater to diverse tastes and preferences. This offer presents a unique opportunity for customers to indulge in the goodness of nature and embrace a healthy lifestyle during the summer season.

The official inauguration ceremony took place on June 5 at the Nesto Hypermarket Barka store. Ahmed Rashid Al Kharousi, representing Barka Municipality, attended the event with his presence and conducted the official inauguration. He commended Nesto Hypermarket for its commitment to promoting healthy

living and applauded its efforts in providing high-quality products and services to the community.

“We are delighted to launch ‘Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta’ at Nesto Hypermarket Barka. This event symbolizes our dedication to promoting healthy choices and offering our valued customers an extraordinary fruit shopping experience,” said Haris Palollathil, Regional Director of Nesto Hypermarket Barka. “We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ahmed Rashid Al Kharousi for inaugurating this event and for his continued support in making our endeavours a success.”

“Nesto Hypermarket has always been at the forefront of bringing exceptional offers and experiences to our customers. ‘Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta’ embodies our commitment to providing the freshest and finest fruits to the people of Oman,” added Mussavir Musthafa, Nesto Group Commercial Head. “We invite everyone to visit our stores and explore the incredible variety of fruits available. It’s an experience you won’t want to miss!”

The “Juicy Delights: A Summer Time Fruit Fiesta” offer is valid until June 9 across the Nesto Hypermarket outlets. Customers are encouraged to take advantage of this limited-time opportunity to savour the richness of nature’s bounty and embark on a journey of healthier living.

VALUE-FASHION BRAND

REDTAG’s new Eid Al-Adha collection is a celebration of tradition and summer

MUSCAT: REDTAG, the Middle East’s leading value-fashion and homeware brand, announced the launch of its Eid Al-Adha 2023 Collection, keeping with its longstanding tradition of specialised apparel range for momentous occasions in the region.

The latest collection, while characterising the detailing, chromatics, and designs associated with the joyous festival, finely reckons with the clothing considerations of the impending summer.

REDTAG, known for its balancing act between aesthetics and functionality along with uncompromising “value”, has fully channelled its core competencies toward the latest collection. The Eid al-Adha ensemble also exemplifies the value-driven brand’s expertise in fusion fashion — apparel that walks a fine line between global trends and Middle Eastern sensibilities. In doing so, REDTAG is staying abreast of the region’s sociocultural evolution.

“Heading into June, we gear up for the summer, looking forward



to Eid al-Adha and planning the holidays. It’s a period marked by unique clothing expectations. On one hand, there are climatic considerations; on the other, there are moments to celebrate. We factor in both to design the Eid al-Adha Collection, celebrating the whole season and everything that comes with it,” expressed Shehbaz Shaikh, Chief Retail Officer, REDTAG.

REDTAG emphasizes comfort in the collection for boys and girls. Contrast-collar shirts in elegant white, indigo blue trousers and T-

shirt-and-shorts co-ords in pastels make up the highlights for boys. For girls, floral-print polyester frocks, layered and netted midi dresses, pleated gold-coloured midi skirts, and pearl-beaded ruffle shoulder tops constitute wardrobe essentials that can make the season all the more comforting yet uncompromising on the fashion front.

Men can truly relax with short-sleeved Cuban-collared resort shirts in unique animal prints and crew-neck T-shirts in contemporary slogan prints. REDTAG has

doubled down on its use of floral prints in women’s Eid al-Adha Collection. The front-belted three-fourth sleeve dress with light pink and lavender florals is a summer delight, just like the steel-buckled dress, purple-hued pencil midi skirt, and flowy shirt with dense floral prints. They are fit-for-purpose for the balmy weather but are season-agnostic in appeal, Shehbaz Shaikh asserted.

Multi-pronged considerations, coupled with customer-centricity, have defined REDTAG’s strategy in recent years. Its ‘New Lower Prices’ initiative, as well as the existing hyper-convenience services such as ‘Anytime-Anywhere Exchange’, ‘Find Your Size’, ‘Fashion Stylists’, and ‘Free Home Delivery’ are a testament to that customer-first approach. With several such first-to-market services in the Middle East and its tiered loyalty program — RT Rewards — which boasts over 15 million members, REDTAG continues to cement its position as the leading value fashion and homeware brand in the region.

GOOD CHOICE FOR FAMILIES

Enjoy spacious experience in Ford Taurus

MUSCAT: The Ford Taurus with its stylish profile, powerful performance, impressive comfort and space is a good choice for families to make the most of.

The Ford Taurus makes the experience of taking the wheel fun with a 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine which is paired to an eight-speed automatic transmission, producing 232 Hp and 388 Nm of torque. The Taurus is equipped with front-wheel drive and three driving modes – Normal, Sport, and Eco. Surprisingly the large and powerful Taurus gives an impressive economy of as much as 15.3 km/l.

The Ford Taurus is engineered to offer a blend of seamless connectivity, high on-road performance and an entirely new sleek modern design. Boasting an attractive and stylish design, on an entirely different platform, the Taurus exudes refinement with numerous premium touches.



Featuring 19-inch, 10-spoke polished alloy wheels, a new flatter streamlined hood and a power-deployable door handle, Taurus is sleeker in its stance.

A dynamic shield-like, clipped trapezoidal grille with an active shutter, black mesh and chrome

surrounds hint at the power contained within, with a dual exhaust adding a strong sense of style and substance. Auto high beams and a full LED two-piece headlamp design guarantee Taurus is always seen in the best light.

The Taurus has a detailed and

well-appointed interior. The materials used throughout the cabin reinforce the feeling of comfort and exceptional, uncompromised quality. 10-way power driver, six-way power passenger seats and seven ambient colours – including a light interior colour palette.

In the Taurus, extensive use of sound-deadening materials, advanced technologies and precise engineering, as well as cooling dual-zone auto AC, ensure that whether in the front or rear seats, all occupants are treated to an exceptionally quiet cabin matched by a smooth and comfortable ride, and an incredible view from the expansive dual panel panoramic moon roof. A cavernous trunk boasting 520-litre capacity adds even greater practicality to the newly-designed flagship Ford sedan.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co.



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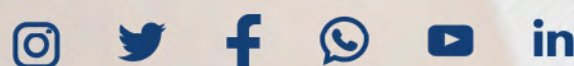


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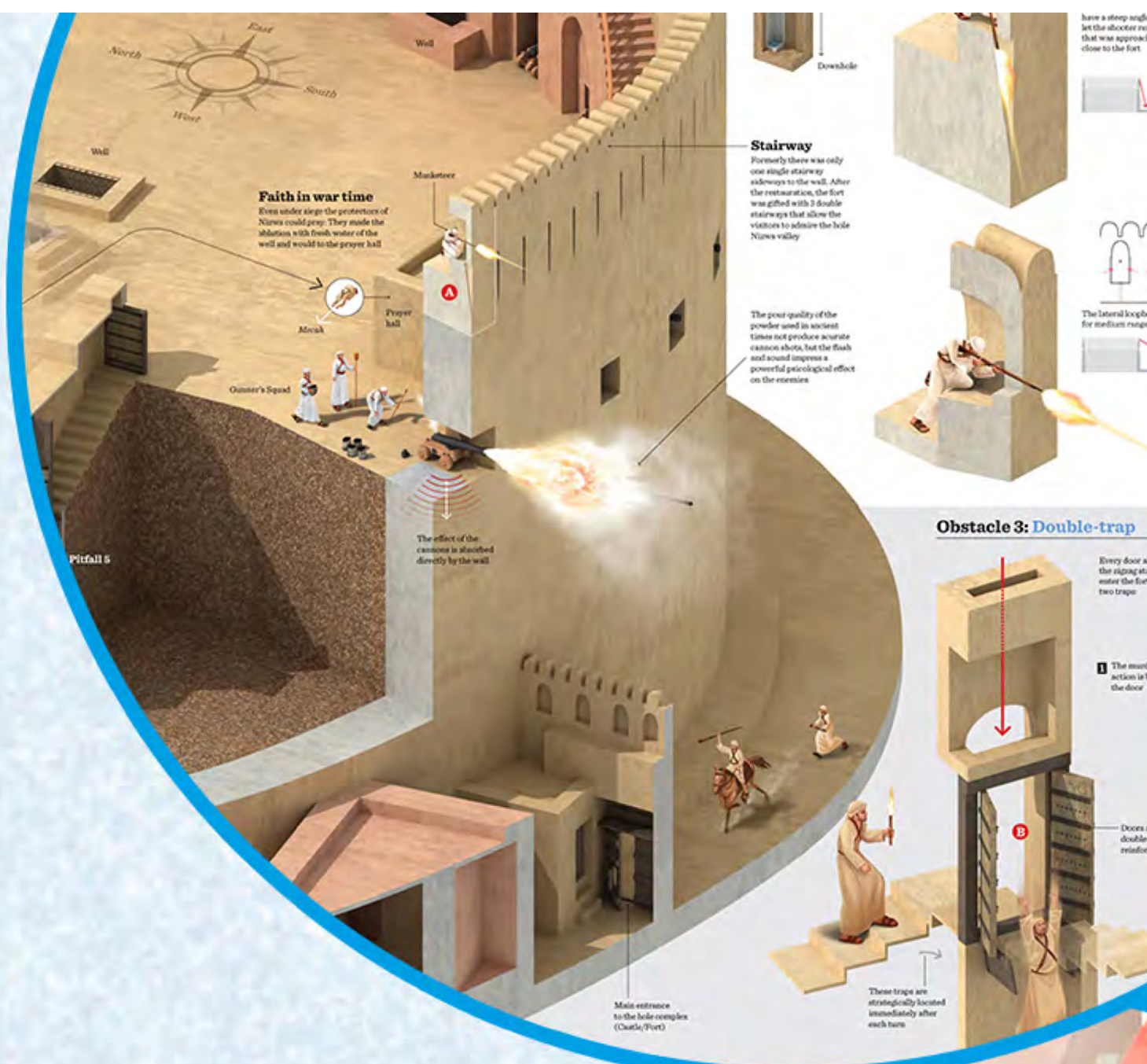


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