

'Self-service' option for medical test

The Ministry of Health has launched self-service registration for expatriates, who have to undergo medical fitness examination while renewing their visa. As per the details available, this service allows expatriates and companies to easily obtain the results of medical examinations to renew residency or obtain residency cards from service centres in civil affairs, and also while obtaining visas for the first time. **DETAILS ON P3**



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OMAN EMERGES AS ONE OF THE TOP EXPORTERS OF FERTILISERS



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SHOWCASING THE WONDERS OF OMAN TO FRENCH VIEWERS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF JORDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdullah II of the Kingdom of Jordan on his country's 77th Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to King Abdullah, wishing him good health, happiness and long life. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on King Abdullah while the people of Jordan realise further aspirations of progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO ARGENTINIAN LEADER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alberto Fernández of the Argentine Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments to President Fernández, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the people of the Argentine Republic further progress and prosperity. — ONA

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LIBYA WATCHERS SEE SIGNS OF PROGRESS

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VISIT STEMS FROM GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

HM TO VISIT IRAN FROM SUNDAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday, according to a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court on Wednesday.

The statement reads as follows: "In culmination of the ties of friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Iran with effect from Sunday, May 28, 2023, in response to an invitation from the Iranian President, Dr Ebrahim Raisi.

"The visit stems from the fruitful relations and good neighbourliness between the two countries.

"His Majesty's visit comes within the context of the continuous consultation and coordination between the two leaderships to discuss various developments at the regional and international arenas. The visit will also touch on means of promoting cooperation between Oman and Iran in different spheres to serve their current and future interests and aspirations.

"During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied

by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdussalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, ambassador at large Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran.

"May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him good health, happiness and success for the good of the Arab and Muslim nations!" — ONA

HM CONFERS ORDER OF FELICITATION

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday conferred the Order of Felicitation on Mark Evans, Executive Director of Outward-Bound Oman, in recognition of his efforts in upgrading the status of Outward-Bound Oman, earning it an international reputation. The medal was handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court, when he received Evans at his office. — ONA



New weekly digital newsletter

Oman Observer will launch on Thursday the first edition of the Oman Weekly Wrap-up newsletter.

Every week, the online team will bring a specially curated selection of stories from our print and online editions, as well as exclusive content that you won't find anywhere else.

This initiative aims to deliver updates directly to subscribers' inboxes without any delay. As part



of the publication's commitment to online innovation and staying at the forefront of news delivery, the new newsletter will debut this Thursday.

The newsletter will carry stories from across various sectors, including local, politics, business, culture, sports, exclusive interviews, opinion pieces and more!

To subscribe, visit <https://www.omanobserver.om/subscribe>

Royal Decree ratifies Oman-Tajikistan air services agreement

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 32/2023 on ratifying the air services agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tajikistan, signed in Muscat on March 15, 2023.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

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

Royal Decree No 33/2023 on endorsing the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Protocol that supplements the Convention for the

Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, signed in Beijing on September 10, 2010.

Article (1) endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Protocol that supplements the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the official document for joining the aforementioned Protocol in accordance with its provisions.

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



A remarkable growth in bilateral relations

HM'S VISIT TO IRAN COMES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONTINUOUS CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERSHIPS

REGIONAL COOPERATION AND DIALOGUE WILL ENSURE SECURITY FOR THE REGION

THE VISIT WILL TOUCH ON MEANS OF PROMOTING COOPERATION BETWEEN OMAN AND IRAN IN DIFFERENT SPHERES

TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND OMAN WILL IMPROVE IN VARIOUS FIELDS, INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION, ENERGY AND TOURISM



The Omani-Iranian relations have been witnessing a remarkable growth in various areas, which truly reflects the deep-rooted ties of friendship between the two neighbouring countries.

The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday affirms the advanced relations between Oman and Iran. These relations are based on mutual respect and good neighbourliness.

Furthermore, the talks, to be conducted by His Majesty the Sultan with President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of Iran, will open broader horizons for cooperation between the two countries in different spheres, particularly in the economic, investment and trade fields. The two leaders will also exchange views during the talks on a set of regional and international issues.

During the past two years, trade exchange between Oman and Iran grew by 27.9 per cent to reach RO 320.8 million by the end of 2022.

OMANI EXPORTS

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the total Omani exports to Iran amounted to RO 207.4 million in 2022, of which RO 4.2 million is the value of Omani origin exports, compared to RO 1.2 million in 2021, constituting a surge by 244 per cent.

The most important exports of Oman include machines, devices and equipment for heat treatment, plates, sheets, tapes, products of poly methacrylate, diesel engine lubricants, optics tools, equipment for medical examination and electrical equipment.

Meanwhile, the total imports of Oman from Iran in 2022 amounted to RO 113.4 million, compared to RO 98.7 million in 2021. Those imports include livestock and semi-finished products of iron steel and petroleum tar, as well as fruits, shrimp and live animals.

The data shows that the trade balance in 2021 and 2022 was in favour of Oman, reaching RO 53.3 million and RO 94 million, respectively.

As for the Iranian investments in Oman, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion indicated that the number of companies in which there is an Iranian contribution

reached 1,847 by the end of 2022. In those companies, the number of Iranians who have shares stood at 3,600, with a total contribution value of RO 196.6 million, comprising 87.5 per cent



The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Tehran will contribute to the development of relations between the two countries in various fields. It is expected that the visit will result in the signing of several agreements

IBRAHIM BIN AHMED AL MUAINI
Ambassador of Oman to Iran

of the total invested capital in those companies. The number of companies with 100 per cent Iranian shareholding reached

1,346. The number is equivalent to 72.9 per cent of the total number of companies with Iranian investment. Further, the total number of Iranian shareholders in these companies reached 2,623 investors.

IRANIAN SHARE

Moreover, the value of the Iranian contribution in these companies amounted to over RO 6 million, while companies with 50 per cent Iranian share have a total contribution value of RO 148.8 million.

The wholesale and retail trade sector ranked first among other sectors in terms of the number of licensed activities. The number of activities reached 2,176, which is equivalent to 65.3 per cent of the total licensed activities in the sectors.

As far as licences are concerned, they reached 793 licences for the activity of exporting and importing offices, which is the highest number among other activities. Statistics indicated that Iran ranked third in terms of the number of commercial registrations in Oman, with 4,496 commercial registrations at the end of 2022.

SEVERAL DEALS

Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran, affirmed that the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Tehran will contribute to the development of relations between the two countries in various fields.

It is expected that the visit will result in the signing of several agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) that serve the interests of both countries.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Ali Muaini added that Oman and Iran enjoy historical and stable relations, pointing out that Oman relies in its relations with other countries on



The official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Tehran and his meeting with the supreme leadership of Iran will enhance partnership and cooperation between various Omani and Iranian establishments more than ever

ALI NAJAFI KHOSHROUDI
Ambassador of Iran to Oman

several principles, including credibility and transparency. Those principles, he affirmed, enabled Oman to play a prominent roles at the regional and

international levels. On his turn, Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman, said that the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Tehran and his meeting with the supreme leadership of Iran will enhance partnership and cooperation between various Omani and Iranian establishments more than ever.

The Iranian ambassador said that the relations between the two countries are historical and distinguished. There is ongoing coordination and consultation between the two countries on various regional and international issues, as well as economic and political files that serve the interests of the two countries and their peoples, explained the ambassador.

Khoshroudi added that the trade and economic exchange between the two countries has tripled over the past two years. Trade exchange between Oman and Iran reached \$2 billion with a 60-per cent growth during the past year, he said. He further noted that the efforts exerted to enhance air and sea transport between Oman and Iran will contribute significantly to boosting trade and economic exchange between Tehran and Muscat.

TOURISM AND TRADE

The Iranian ambassador indicated that cancelling travel visas for citizens of the two countries has contributed greatly to the promotion of tourism and trade exchange.

This increased the number of daily flights between various areas in Iran and Oman, he added.

He reiterated that Oman has a special place in Iran's foreign policy, as Iran's supreme leadership always lauds Oman's balanced and influential role in the regional and global arenas.

Meanwhile, Mohammed Abdul Hussein Baqer, Head of the Omani side in Oman-Iran Business Council, said that the upcoming official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Iran serves many goals that will enhance economic relations and augment trade exchange, joint projects and investment partnerships.

He pointed out that Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in cooperation with the Iranian side, will organise several Omani and Iranian trade fairs in the two countries during the current year.





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■ HH SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES INDIAN AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday, Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed relations between Oman and India and means of enhancing them, in addition to discussing several matters of mutual interest. — **ONA**

Sayyid Badr receives Governor of Yunnan



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Wang Yubo, Governor of Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China. The meeting reviewed relations between the two countries and means of promoting them in various fields.

It also touched on cooperation with Yunnan Province in the economic, investment and tourism areas, in addition to organising joint exhibitions and exchanging expertise and visits between the two sides.

The meeting was attended by Ambassador Khalid bin Hashel

al Muslehi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, Yousef bin Issa al Zadjali, Head of the Asia and Pacific Department, Shaikh Salim bin Rabie al Sunaidi, Wali of Al Amerat, Li Lingping, Ambassador of China to Oman, and a number of officials from both sides. — **ONA**

Qualifications framework launch on May 31

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAQA) convened a press conference on Wednesday, presided over by Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukaili, Chief Executive Officer of the Authority. Dr Al Shukaili unveiled during the press conference the official launch date of the highly anticipated National Qualifications Framework in the Sultanate of Oman. It will take place on May 31 at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, under the auspices of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance.

As the designated Authority responsible for the governance, management and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance assumes a crucial role, as prescribed by Royal Decree No (9/2021). This decree highlights the Authority's responsibility to "prepare and develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework, encompassing Omani qualifications and harmonising foreign and international qualifications." Moreover, to fulfil a range of national objectives identified through consultations



with stakeholders across Oman's education and training sectors.

Dr Al Shukaili emphasised that the national qualifications frameworks serve as the primary and official point of reference worldwide for classifying, comparing, calibrating and designing national qualifications of all types while aligning them with international qualifications. They constitute a fundamental component of education quality systems. With the imminent launch of the National Qualifications Framework by the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance, the Sultanate of Oman will proudly join the league of 150 nations that have established their own national framework. She underlined the extensive scope encompassed within this framework, meticulously crafted to support the national economic and educational requirements and to fulfil various national objectives, as determined through

consultations with relevant authorities from all educational and training sectors in Oman.

The Authority's primary objective, during the official ceremony introducing the Comprehensive National Qualifications Framework in the Sultanate of Oman, is to raise awareness, promote and advocate for the framework among all pertinent stakeholders. This includes highlighting the significant milestones achieved by the Authority in its development, elucidating its applications and showcasing its substantial benefits to the country and its citizens. Additionally, the Authority will present its future implementation plan during the ceremony.

The Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) serves as a vital and official reference for classifying qualifications, comparing Omani qualifications with foreign or international counterparts, and guiding qualification development.

Ministry of Health launches 'self-service' system for expat medical fitness test

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has launched self-service registration for expatriates, who have to undergo medical fitness examination while renewing their visa. As per the details available, this service allows expatriates and companies to easily obtain the results of medical examinations to renew residency or obtain residency cards from service centres in civil affairs, and also while obtaining visas for the first time.

The system aims to increase transparency, reduce counterfeit reports, and save time and effort in issuing medical reports through electronic linkage with the Royal Oman Police (ROP). It will allow the Directorate General of Disease Surveillance and Control to follow up, manage, and control the system and obtain the necessary statistics from private sector hospitals and centres that provide medical examination services for expatriates.

As per the new system, an expatriate needs to have a PKI-enabled SIM card (available from the telecom operator) which needs to be activated and linked with the Resident card at the Sanad Office (one-time activity). Once activated, the expatriate can avoid visiting the Sanad to register for the medical fitness examination, as it can be done online, including payment for the service. The rest of the procedures remain the same, including getting the examination done at the medical centre and returning to the Sanad or the company PRO



The system aims to increase transparency, reduce counterfeit reports, and save time and effort in issuing medical reports through electronic linkage with the Royal Oman Police

for visa application.

According to the ministry, this service is a component of the "residency-related medical fitness examination system." Its primary objectives are to enhance transparency, reduce the occurrence of counterfeit reports, and streamline the process of issuing medical reports by establishing electronic integration with the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

The beneficiaries of this system include entrepreneurs who intend to employ foreign workers, individuals seeking residency, the Directorate General of Disease Surveillance and Control for monitoring and managing the system and obtaining relevant

statistics, as well as private sector hospitals and clinics that provide medical examination services for expatriates.

This system simplifies the retrieval of medical examination reports, ensuring transparency and preventing fraudulent activities. It establishes connections between multiple ministries to enable service automation. Moreover, it saves time and effort for beneficiaries by facilitating the accurate completion of transactions and enables officials to manage and oversee workflow processes directly.

The system offers a range of services, such as conducting medical examinations for expatriates who require them for work residency or renewal purposes. It also caters to individuals seeking to obtain or renew study visas, issue or renew health cards, obtain or renew family entry visas, obtain or restore Omani citizenship, and conduct medical examinations for technical teams and sailors, whether for enrolment or renewal purposes.

RECALL CAMPAIGN
For LG 86 Inch Smart TV

Date of the Campaign : 25.05.2023
Campaign type : Recall of supporting stand
Campaign section : Electronics
Product description : 86 Inch Smart TV (supporting stand legs)

The number of Products affected	Code of the product	The year of production	Product model
86UQ90006LC: 60 86NANO796QA: 45	203IN, 204IN, 205IN, 206IN, 207IN or 208IN	2022	86 Inch Smart TV 86NANO796QA, 86UQ90006LC

Description of the issue:
LGE has identified that the TV-supporting stand legs of 86 Inch Smart TVs described above, if not installed correctly according to the manual and other written instructions, may be susceptible to cracks, which may result in a tip-over of the TVs. The possibility of improperly installing TV supporting stand legs may lead to the risk of TV overturning and the risk of injury.

Actions:
1. Inspection on whether the TV-supporting stand legs have been installed correctly and have not cracked. LGE will also provide further guidance on the proper installation method (<https://www.lg.com/global/how-to-videos/uhd-tv-86uq-stand-install>).
2. In the event that consumers inform LGE that their TV-supporting stand legs have cracked, replacement TV-supporting stand legs (the "New Stands"), which have been tested to maintain stability and are not vulnerable to cracking will be offered free of charge.
If you have mounted the 86 Inch Smart TV product on a wall, then you may continue to use the product as-is without attending to the above actions.

For more information:
Please contact LGE at 80075545, or visit our website for instructional videos on self-inspection (<https://www.lg.com/global/how-to-videos/uhd-tv-86uq-stand-self-inspection-global>) and correct installation (<https://www.lg.com/global/how-to-videos/uhd-tv-86uq-stand-install>).

Contact Data:
Registered Address for LGE's local distributor (OTE Group): PO BOX 421 PC 118, Sultanate of Oman
Commercial registration Number: 1/33586/3



GCC MARKS 42ND ANNIVERSARY TODAY

A MOMENT TO PONDER PAST ACHIEVEMENTS, CONTEMPLATE FUTURE



MAY 25 marks the 42nd anniversary of foundation of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The anniversary constitutes a moment during which the member states ponder about the great strides made in implementation of the goals set by the GCC Articles of Association. The statute provides for consolidating economic and political cooperation, enhancing regional development and establishing stronger ties among member states in various fields.

The establishment of the GCC on May 25, 1981 took place during exceptional circumstances emanating from regional tensions that prevailed at that time, posing political, security and economic challenges to the countries of the region. This prompted the GCC states to unify efforts, cement cooperation among them and enhance economic, political and security integration to realise stability and address the challenges.

Besides achieving coordination, integration and interdependence among member states, the Articles of Association stresses the need to boost ties and establish similar regulations in economic, financial, commercial, customs and transportation fields. It calls for cooperation among member states in educational, cultural, social, health, media, tourism, legal, technical, scientific and industrial areas.

It also covers measures to expand cooperation in the fields of industry, mining, agriculture, water and livestock resources, in addition to establishing research centres and encouraging private sector cooperation.

STRONG BACKING

In this regard, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, said that, on this anniversary, GCC people recall with great pride the foundation of the GCC way back in 1981, which gave rise to the march of prosperity, security and stability of its peoples.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Sayyid Badr said: “In his first speech after assuming the reins of power, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq affirmed

his strong backing to the GCC.” Sayyid Badr quoted His Majesty the Sultan as saying, “We will continue joining hands with our brethren, leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, to contribute to the progress made in the march of cooperation, realise the aspirations of our peoples and upscale the GCC accomplishments.”

Sayyid Badr pointed out that, on the occasion of the 42nd GCC anniversary, it is time to highlight the GCC’s remarkable achievements and development indicators in member states in all fields. This, he added, “gives us all more confidence and strong will to move forward with the blessed march of cooperation.” Sayyid Badr stressed that the ‘GCC citizen’ constitutes the cornerstone of the GCC’s comprehensive development and the very objective of decisions issued from time to time by GCC leaders.

Sayyid Badr said that the GCC current session, which is chaired by the Sultanate of Oman, is inspired by the directives of the GCC leaders, aimed at preserving the gains made in the past four decades, maintaining security and stability in the region and contemplating further economic integration with all its programmes, projects and goals.

FOUR DECADES

Meanwhile, Idris bin Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and International Organisations in Geneva, said that the 42nd anniversary of the establishment of the GCC embodied the bonds of cooperation among member states during the past four decades.

Al Khanjari added that GCC countries have achieved remarkable progress in various fields, while at the same time enhancing the spirit of solidarity. He pointed out that this served as a source of inspiration for all GCC countries, which, he said, put their economic and human resources and potentials at the service of their people, while also promoting regional and international status of the cooperation council.

Al Khanjari affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman, acting in its



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GCC ON MAY 25, 1981 TOOK PLACE DURING EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES EMANATING FROM REGIONAL TENSIONS THAT PREVAILED AT THAT TIME

IT IS TIME TO HIGHLIGHT THE GCC’S REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS IN MEMBER STATES IN ALL FIELDS

GCC COUNTRIES HAVE ACHIEVED REMARKABLE PROGRESS IN VARIOUS FIELDS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENHANCING THE SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY

GULF EFFORTS LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFIED AND EFFECTIVE FOREIGN POLICY THAT SERVES THE ASPIRATIONS OF GULF PEOPLES, PRESERVING THEIR GAINS AND SPARING THEM ONGOING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

capacity as chair of the current GCC session, plays an important role in boosting the process of joint Gulf action and highlighting the GCC’s presence in the international arena.

This, he said, enhances the status of the GCC in the global arena and highlights its unified positions on various issues that are floated for discussion during international forums.

In view of its presidency of the 43rd regular session of the GCC, Oman began, this May in Muscat, to host meetings of

GCC ministerial committees. These meetings seek to enhance cooperation between GCC states in various political, economic, trade, security and defence fields.

In the political aspect, Gulf efforts led to the development of a unified and effective foreign policy that serves the aspirations of Gulf peoples. Gulf efforts focused on establishing unity in economic, defence and security policies and achieving the GCC common goals and aspirations.

GCC states have contributed to resolving many regional issues,

the most important of which is the crisis in Yemen, where the GCC capitalised on dialogue and consultation between the parties concerned and on initiatives to support a political settlement and provide humanitarian aid. GCC states also worked hand in hand with the United Nations by supporting the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to Yemen.

PALESTINIAN CAUSE

On the Palestinian issue, the positions of the GCC countries were and still are consistent that the Palestinian cause constitutes the prime concern of Arabs and Muslims. The GCC also supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The GCC calls for ensuring that the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people should be guaranteed. They also reject the displacement of Palestinian people and the creation of settlements on the occupied Palestinian lands.

The GCC states also played a prominent role in the return of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Arab League by means of a diplomatic solution. The efforts culminated in Syria’s participation in the 32nd Arab Summit held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The GCC urged the Lebanese people to stick to their unity and to elect a president in accordance with the Lebanese constitution.

The developments in Sudan received the attention of the GCC, which expressed its firm stance in support of the country’s security, safety and stability. The GCC called upon all political leaders in Sudan to exercise restraint and give priority to dialogue and wisdom. It urged all to join ranks and overcome their differences and focus on fulfilling the aspirations of the Sudanese people.

On the global arena, the GCC occupied centre stage and earned international and regional respect, thanks to the fact that it succeeded, during the past four decades, in endorsing dialogue as an approach to deepen common understanding as a basis for

resolving issues.

Major GCC joint economic projects during the past 40 years include the Gulf Common Market, the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority, the GCC unified smart card, the Customs Union, the Gulf Payments Company, the GCC railway project and the customs information centre.

The GCC states endorsed, in 2002, the “Security strategy for combating extremism accompanied by terrorism”. In the same year, they issued the “Muscat Declaration on Combating Terrorism”. In 2004, the GCC states signed the GCC agreement on combating terrorism. Most of the member states ratified the agreement, which became binding under Article (46), for countries that deposited ratification documents at the GCC General Secretariat.

The education sector has received the attention of the Cooperation Council during the past 42 years. Many achievements were made in this sector, including equality in general and technical education and the promotion of the values of Gulf citizenship. GCC states endorsed a guide for equality among GCC citizens who are resident in each other’s countries in terms of treatment at universities and government higher education institutions.

In the health field, GCC states demonstrated their cooperation through the exchange of expertise and medical technologies during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. The experience showed the member states’ ability to work jointly to stem the spread of the virus through quarantine measures and application of preventive standards regulating international travel and trade.

In fields of culture, tourism, antiquities and museums, the GCC achievements include the establishment of the Centre for Translation and Arabization. The members states also endorsed the new “GCC Cultural Strategy 2020-2030”, as well as a guiding law to regulate antiquities and a programme for cooperation to protect antiquities in conjunction with the countries of the world.



ISF’S ANNUAL SCIENCE FIESTA 2023 CONCLUDES

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Indian Science Forum’s Annual Science Fiesta 2023 under the Indian Social Club brought together hundreds of students from Indian schools located in different parts of Oman. The Rolling Trophy was won by the Indian School Al Ghubra.

This year’s theme was India’s Space Journey: Moon, Mars and Beyond where students participated in various competitions such as debates for juniors and seniors, photography contests and digital symposium. This is in addition to Science Exhibition conducted by ISF for the students.

Dr J Retnakumar, Coordinator, Indian Science Forum, Indian Social Club, said the students’ performances were beyond expectations. “The two-day annual science fiesta by the Indian Science Forum of Indian Social Club Oman has thrown light on the amazing student talents in Oman. Through the competitions, the talents were exposed. I was so delighted to see the excitement, enthusiasm, optimism and participative spirit of students that was ably supported by parents, teachers and principals



of respective Indian schools in Oman,” he said. “We shall conduct more competitions which will promote the talents of students in the days ahead,” he explained.

The Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Amit Narang, delivered the inaugural speech where he conveyed his impressions about the students’ scientific exhibition that was held at the Innovation Centre at the National University for Science and Technology.

In his keynote address, the chief

guest Dr Myl Swamy Annadurai said he was surprised by the award but he said it goes on to prove that when you do your work well the society will appreciate the achievements and look forward to the students achieving them in the future.

“I was impressed by how well the students were prepared as they were ready for the questions. I asked one of the students why there was no school complex in his space colony in Moon and Mars. He took a few seconds and

bounced back, by then we would be using Android for education,” said Dr Annadurai.

Dr Ali al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology, said, “Science and technology hold the key to the progress and development of any nation. For any successful economy, particularly in today’s quest for knowledge-based economies, science, technology and engineering are the basic requisites.”

200 students to be trained in AI per year

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Led by a team of local IT-savvy youngsters, Microsoft Oman displays an array of innovations in Artificial Intelligence, cloud, data and Amp to the visitors at the annual COMEX 2023, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre since May 22.

The team is led by Shaikh Saif bin Hilal al Hosni (pictured), Country Manager, Microsoft Oman and Bahrain Microsoft.

An array of industry-leading technological innovations, gadgets and ideas that highlight the critical role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays in the successful digital transformation journeys of governments and businesses is demonstrated at the COMEX 2023, which will end on Thursday.



“The Sultanate of Oman is setting up the necessary infrastructure to accelerate economic diversification and introduce a series of digital innovations across vital sectors,” said Al Hosni.

“AI is a defining technology of our time, and we are optimistic about what AI can do for industries and the society in the Sultanate.

Microsoft has long been a trusted partner in digital change across the Sultanate of Oman. At this year’s COMEX, we shall devote ourselves to helping delegates get ready for AI and make it work,” he added.

“Our focus on AI readiness will further strengthen best practices and ensure that all delegates can return to their

organisations with value-adding knowledge. Microsoft’s stand will feature five partners, including Netways, PWC, Cypher Learning, Noventiq, and IITC (International Information Technology Co.),” Al Hosni further said.

He said till date, Microsoft has trained 135,000, and more than 80,000 teachers and 600,000 students in Oman have access to Microsoft Education solutions. All students and teachers in Oman public schools have access to O365. With its partnership with Oman Technology Institute, Microsoft is aiming to skill students and graduates on Cloud and AI; while 200 students will be trained in Artificial Intelligence per year, 300 students to be certified yearly as part of a national programme with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Omani students shine at prestigious ISEF in US

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

Students from the Sultanate of Oman achieved outstanding positions at the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) held in Dallas, United States, from May 13 to May 19. ISEF is the world’s largest and most esteemed exhibition for innovation competitions among school students, offering prizes exceeding \$8 million. The event covers 17 diverse fields and attracted nearly 2,000 students from around the world.

Oman participated in three innovative projects, with Dohat Al Adab School from Muscat Governorate earning fourth place in the field of environmental engineering for their innovation ‘Using animal bones to produce filaments for a 3D printer.’ In the field of biomedicine, Al Amal School for Basic Education received two special awards: A financial scholarship from King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and a financial grant from the Sigma Xi organisation. The latter includes the publication of the students’ scientific research in the organisation’s scientific journal, which has been active since 1886 and is among the ten oldest scientific journals globally. This recognition allows the students to present their research at the International Forum for Scientific Research in November 2023 in California, USA.

ISEF is one of the world’s most prestigious international science fairs, held annually in the United States. It focuses on scientific and cultural aspects as well as scientific research, attracting a wide range of pre-university level students, including middle and high school students. The fair aims to support and encourage students’ talents and skills in various scientific fields, such as engineering design, mathematics, and technological development. Oman’s participation in ISEF reflects the Ministry of Education’s unwavering commitment to advancing students, supporting their abilities in diverse scientific fields, and engaging them in local, regional, and international scientific forums.

Mariam al Rahbi, a grade 11 student from Dohat Al Adab School in Muscat Governorate, said she felt honoured to represent Oman at the international exhibition. “Going to the US on behalf of my country was like a dream come true. The moment I achieved fourth place on the global stage filled me with feelings of joy and pride. Standing on the podium, representing my country, is a source of immense pride. Our project focused on environmental engineering, specifically on converting animal bones into threads for 3D printers. Plastic consumption is also rising due to the increasing use of 3D printers. Our innovation aims to reduce plastic usage, which is a common problem worldwide. We also have plans to establish a dedicated factory for producing these threads in the near future,” she said.

For Shather al Kharousi, a grade 11 student from Dohat Al Adab School in Muscat Governorate, it was a matter of pride to represent Oman on a global stage. She stated, “We transformed our idea into a product that economically benefits individuals and the environment. We conducted a comprehensive feasibility study for establishing a factory that reuses animal bones in the production process. Participating in a major event like ISEF was not easy, and it taught me the importance of patience. While conducting our research, we encountered many obstacles, but our perseverance led us to alternative paths. This experience made me realise the significance of continuous effort in pursuing our goals.” Iman al Rahbi, a physics teacher and supervisor of the scientific innovations activity, expressed joy and pride in winning fourth place in the field of environmental engineering at the prestigious ISEF. The competition, which involved 96 projects in environmental engineering, is recognised as the largest global competition for scientific innovations. The journey to qualify for the competition was challenging, starting with the National Olympiad for Innovations and meeting all the international participation requirements.

Fakhriya al Shaibani, the supervisor of the Al Amal School team, said the achievement instilled a spirit of determination to excel in future competitions, building on their previous experience.

Basma al Owaisi, a grade 11 student at Al Amal School, shared the extensive preparation process for participating in the Fair. The preparations involved conducting laboratory experiments, following international standards for producing antibiotics, and consulting specialists from universities and hospitals across Oman. The psychological readiness for such a grand competition was also crucial.

Alaa al Aufi, another grade 11 student at Al Amal School, described the team’s journey, starting from research and continuous reading to gather ideas for project development. The process included discussions on the research paper and meeting the requirements for participation in the International Science and Engineering Fair. They proceeded with laboratory experiments, data analysis, and final preparations for evaluation, presentation, and psychological readiness.

A book that comprehends Oman’s ancient story

TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Over the past few decades, numerous specialists have dedicated their studies to the geology of the Sultanate of Oman. Their research on the geology and tectonics of the country and parts of the southern Arabian Peninsula has captivated the attention of international geologists.

In his book, ‘The Story of Life in Oman from 700 Million Years Ago’, Mohammed bin Hilal al Kindi, an Omani geologist, takes readers on an enlightening scientific journey to discover the captivating tale of life in Oman from its earliest known existence.

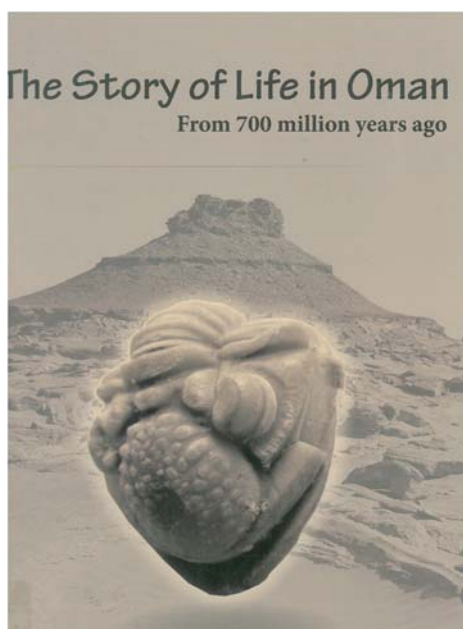
This comprehensive book invites readers on a fascinating journey through time, unravelling the story of life in Oman dating back 700 million years. With over 270 vivid photographs, the book adeptly weaves geological, environmental and historical

events together to present a seamless scientific narrative.

Delving into the movement of Oman’s land throughout the geological ages, the book elucidates how the land’s dynamism influenced the diversity of its organisms. It traverses through time and space, offering an exploration of this dynamic corner of our planet. By immersing themselves in this book, readers will begin to grasp the intricate relationship between the Earth’s environment and the organisms inhabiting it.

Comprising six chapters, this book provides in-depth insights into the geological history of life. The first chapter lays a vital foundation by offering an overview of planet Earth, defining its components and providing essential information about determining the Earth’s age. It also sheds light on the absolute age of rocks, fossils and extinctions.

The second chapter delves into “Precambrian Life” and discusses Oman’s



state during the Precambrian era, highlighting examples of organisms that inhabited the region during this period. Moving on to the third chapter, the book explores Oman during the “Palaeozoic”

era and the various life forms found in the region, such as trilobites, primitive fish, nautiloids, bivalves, graptolites, corals, echinoderms, ostracods and plants.

The fourth chapter focuses on Mesozoic life and identifies the organisms that thrived in Oman during this era. Chapter five provides detailed information on “Cenozoic Life,” shedding light on the organisms that populated Oman during this period, including proboscideans, horned animals, primates, ungulates, marine animals and fossils.

The final chapter dedicates significant attention to humans. It covers crucial topics such as the emergence and classification of humans, climate changes and the migration of early humans to Arabia over the past one million years. Moreover, it provides specific information on climate change, the distribution of Homo sapiens in Oman over the last 200,000 years and the development of human civilisation in Oman since 9,000 BC.

To enhance the value of his book, the author collaborated with numerous experts and specialists in the field of geology. Accompanying the author were a team of photographers whose contributions played a pivotal role in the success of this project, documenting the ancient historical and geological eras of the Sultanate of Oman.

In order to make the content more accessible to non-specialist readers, the author simplifies many of the fundamental concepts of geology. Additionally, a glossary is included, explaining 45 scientific terms to aid readers in comprehending the text. The author poses significant scientific questions and provides scientific explanations, supplementing the text with photographs, graphics and tables for further clarification.

Given that, the book is published in both Arabic and English versions, many specialists consider it an indispensable scientific reference for undergraduate and postgraduate students alike.



Sudanese still await relief on day two of tense ceasefire



A man walks past a burnt out bank branch in southern Khartoum as fighting had calmed following ceasefire. – AFP

KHARTOUM: Fighting had eased but not stopped in Sudan on Wednesday, the second full day of a ceasefire that has raised cautious hopes among beleaguered civilians that aid corridors and escape routes will open soon.

Sporadic air strikes and artillery fire have still echoed across the capital, residents said, but US and Saudi observers said “fighting in Khartoum appeared to be less intense” since the one-week truce entered into force late on Monday.

Washington and Riyadh, which brokered the ceasefire deal between the forces of two rival generals, however pointed to reports “indicating that both sides violated the agreement”.

Nonetheless, they stressed that

preparations were underway “to deliver lifesaving assistance” to the people of Sudan, who have endured more than five weeks of fighting that has claimed more than 1,000 lives.

The chaos has left millions hunkering down in their homes to hide from the combatants and roaming looters amid power blackouts and desperate shortages of water, food, medicines and other staples.

Khartoum resident Ali Mohammed said water supply “still hasn’t been restored” on Wednesday, “but at least I was able to go out and buy water for my family”.

Mohammed Taher, 55, was finally able to “go to Khartoum’s central market five kilometres

away to buy food and return without incident”, he said.

The fighting pits Sudan’s de facto leader, the army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, nicknamed “Hemedti”, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

It has displaced more than a million people inside Sudan, the International Organization for Migration reported on Wednesday, with a further 319,000 people seeking refuge across borders.

Those unable to flee have run low on basic supplies, and more than half the population, 25 million people, are in need of humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations. “The whole country has been taken hostage”,

said the UN’s expert on human rights in Sudan, Radhouane Nouicer.”

Hopes for quick relief from the fighting and suffering were dimmed by the fact that a series of earlier ceasefires were all quickly broken, with both sides trading blame for the violations.

Saudi and US mediators also voiced “concern” that the warring sides had sought to gain military advantage in the lead-up to the truce.

A mass exodus of Sudanese has meanwhile continued into neighbouring countries, including Chad, Egypt and South Sudan, sparking regional fears the conflict will spread across borders because of transnational ethnic ties. — AFP

Clearing Israel budget, PM hints at resumption of judicial overhaul

TEL AVIV: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu secured a two-year Israeli national budget on Wednesday and suggested this could clear the way for a resumption of his religious-nationalist coalition’s contested judicial overhaul.

Opposition politicians, who have been in compromise talks with the government over the proposed reforms since they were suspended in late March, protested.

One threatened to “shake up the country” if Netanyahu pursues the legislation unilaterally.

The introduction of the reforms in January set off months of unprecedented anti-government demonstrations, spooking some foreign investors as well as international credit agencies.

The shekel on Wednesday tumbled nearly 1 per cent against the dollar to 3.735, its weakest since March 2020, in what analysts saw partly as a response to the prospect of redoubled political and economic furore.

Asked if the judicial reforms were also now back on the agenda, Netanyahu said:

“Certainly. But we are trying to reach understandings (in the compromise talks). I hope we will succeed in that.”

Netanyahu says the overhaul, which would limit some Supreme Court powers and give the coalition greater control over appointments to the bench, aims to redress decades of overreach by the judiciary and to balance out branches of government.

Critics see a threat to independence of the courts by the prime minister, who is on trial on graft charges he denies. Western powers have voiced concern for Israel’s democratic health.

Centrist opposition leader Yair Lapid demanded that President Isaac Herzog, who has been mediating negotiations with the government, demand a clarification from Netanyahu.

Lapid’s coalition partner Benny Gantz said on Twitter that if the judicial overhaul is tabled, “we’ll shake up the country and stop it”. The budget increases funding to seminaries serving ultra-Orthodox Jewish men, which economists warn means fewer will enter the broader workforce. — Reuters



An aerial view shows Israeli protestors holding a sign which says in Hebrew “looting government” at a demonstration against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. – Reuters

China’s Xi offers Russia ‘firm support’ in ‘core interests’

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping offered Beijing’s support on Moscow’s “core interests” at a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on Wednesday.

China and Russia have in recent years ramped up economic and diplomatic cooperation, growing even closer since Moscow’s attack of Ukraine despite Beijing’s insistence that it is neutral in that conflict.

Mishustin’s trip this week is the highest-level visit by a Russian official to China since last year.

Xi told Mishustin China and Russia would continue to offer each other “firm support on issues concerning each other’s core interests and strengthen collaboration in multilateral arenas”, according to a readout by the official Xinhua news agency.

China and Russia should “push cooperation in various fields to a higher level”, he said, and “raise the level of economic, trade and investment cooperation”.

Mishustin also met with Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday, saying that “relations between Russia and



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin meets with China's President Xi Jinping in Beijing. – AFP

China are at an unprecedented high level” following a grand welcoming ceremony outside Beijing’s Great Hall of the People.

“They are characterised by mutual respect of each other’s interests, the desire to jointly respond to challenges, which is associated with increased turbulence in the international arena and the pressure of illegitimate sanctions from the collective West,” he said.

Li, in turn, hailed the “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between

China and Russia in the new era”. China is Russia’s largest trading partner, with trade between them reaching a record \$190 billion last year, according to Chinese customs data. Li said bilateral trade had already reached \$70 billion so far this year. “This is a year-on-year increase of more than 40 percent,” he said.

Ministers from the two countries signed a series of agreements after the talks on service trade cooperation and sports, as well as on patents and Russian millet exports to China. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

NAIROBI

Over one million people displaced in 4 months

More than a million Somalis have been displaced within their own country in just over four months through a “toxic” mix of drought, conflict and floods, humanitarian agencies said on Wednesday.

Around 433,000 people were forced from their homes between January 1 and May 10 as a grinding insurgency raged and clashes broke out in the breakout Somaliland region, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said. In addition, “over 408,000



people were displaced by floods sweeping across their villages and another 312,000 people were displaced by ravaging drought”, they said in a joint statement. — AFP

PESHAWAR

Suicide bomber kills four at police checkpoint

A suicide bomber killed four people when he detonated a car bomb at a police checkpoint in a marketplace in northwest Pakistan on Wednesday, officials said.

Local police official Rasool Daraz said two soldiers, a policeman and a civilian were killed when the bomber blew himself up in Liaqat Bazar of the Datta Khel sub-division of North Waziristan.

“The bomber blew up his vehicle while he was being



searched at the check post,” he said. “It seems the bomber wanted to reach another destination but blew himself up after he was stopped by police for a routine search.”— AFP

HERAT

Six killed, 100 homes destroyed in flood

Six people have been killed and dozens of homes washed away in central Afghanistan after heavy rains were funnelled down mountain valleys causing devastating floods, a local official said on Wednesday.

Abdul Wahid Hamas, a spokesman for the governor in central Ghor province, said the area hit by high waters on Tuesday “has not seen such a flood at least in the last decade”.

He said three women and a child were killed when their



home was washed away.

In Pasaband district a man and a woman were also swept away and later found dead while one person remains missing. — AFP



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In brief

ATHENS



PRESIDENT TAPS JUDGE TO LEAD INTERIM GOVERNMENT

A senior Greek judge, Ioannis Sarmas, was asked on Wednesday to lead an interim government tasked with organising a second national election by late June, the presidency announced.

Faced with “the impossibility of forming a government” just three days after national elections “the solution, according to the Constitution is the formation of an interim government,” said President Katerina Sakellariopoulou during a meeting with Sarmas. She referred to the fact that none of the three parties that led Sunday’s polls was willing to form a coalition government, after failing to get majority.

GENEVA



UN URGES JUNTA TO OPEN UP TO MOCHA RELIEF

The United Nations on Wednesday called for Myanmar to open up and ensure life-saving aid can get to parts of the country hit by deadly Cyclone Mocha. UN rights chief Volker Turk urged the country’s military rulers to let needs assessments go ahead as the Southeast Asian nation reels from the cyclone’s impact.

Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh on May 14, collapsing buildings and turning streets into rivers.

The UN launched an appeal for \$333 million in emergency funding for 1.6 million people it said were affected by Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar. — AFP

WARSAW



PLANS TO UPDATE NAVY WITH MODERN SUBMARINES

Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said that the country plans to beef up its navy with modern submarines.

“We plan to initiate a procedure for the purchase of submarines and the transfer of the necessary technologies before the end of this year,” Blaszczak said in Warsaw on Wednesday.

The Polish defence ministry will soon publish more details on how many submarines will be purchased and with what sort of technologies they will be equipped, he said. Currently, Poland’s navy has one Soviet-designed submarine, launched in 1985, the “Orzel.” — dpa

Moscow not interested in halting Ukraine war: Kremlin spokesman

MOSCOW: The Kremlin is not interested in halting the conflict with Ukraine, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday, while officials in the Russian border region of Belgorod continue to report of attacks.

Russia will continue its “special military operation” until the end, until it has asserted its interests and achieved its goals — either in the course of the fighting or through “other available means,” Peskov was quoted as saying on Wednesday by state news agency TASS, using the preferred term by Moscow to describe the war against the neighbouring country it launched 15 months ago.

According to Peskov, there are currently no indications of the possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Negotiations with Kiev are impossible because the Ukrainian leadership itself has “forbidden negotiations of any kind with Russia,” the Kremlin spokesman said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has made the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territories a precondition for peace talks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, spoke of “increasing instability in the world” in light of the war he ordered last year, in a video message addressing a security conference in Moscow.



Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu chairs a meeting of the Defence Ministry Board in Moscow, Russia. — Reuters

Putin held the West responsible for the development, saying Western powers were trying to maintain global dominance at the expense of other countries.

The Kremlin leader once again accused the Western states, which are helping Ukraine to defend itself against the Russian attack by supplying weapons, of “neo-colonialism.”

Meanwhile, the Russian region

of Belgorod on the border with Ukraine has been attacked with a “large number” of drones, according to authorities.

Cars, residential buildings and administrative buildings were damaged in the city of Belgorod itself and in other places in the region, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Wednesday. Most of the drones had been destroyed by anti-aircraft fire, he added.

The western Russian border region has been rocked by attacks for months. Moscow holds Ukrainian saboteurs responsible, saying they have been attacking the area with grenade launchers and artillery.

Dozens of “representatives of Ukrainian military units” had been fighting in the area since Monday, according to Russian reports. Russian authorities

lifted the temporary state of alert and declared the “anti-terrorist operation” over, with the Russian Defence Ministry saying it had “eliminated” more than 70 Ukrainian people.

Two volunteer corps of Russian citizens fighting for the Ukrainian side in the war have claimed responsibility for Monday’s attacks, while Kiev has denied any involvement. — dpa

White House, Republicans to talk US debt ceiling

WASHINGTON: Negotiators for Democratic President Joe Biden and top congressional Republican Kevin McCarthy were set to reconvene on Wednesday morning, seeking a deal to raise the United States’ \$31.4 trillion debt ceiling and avoid a catastrophic default.

Time is running short for a deal, as the Treasury Department has warned that the federal government could be unable to pay all its bills by as soon as June 1 and it will take several days to pass legislation through the narrowly divided Congress.

The US bond giant PIMCO said it believed negotiators needed to strike a deal by the middle of this week to make that deadline.

Biden and McCarthy, the House of Representatives Speaker, remain deeply divided on how to move forward. McCarthy told reporters on Wednesday that he and Biden have not spoken since a Monday meeting at the White House but that talks between their negotiating teams have been “productive.”

“We’ll get together this morning,” McCarthy said, referring to the negotiators.

Republicans are pushing for sharp spending cuts while Democrats are offering to keep spending flat, instead using new taxes to help reduce the federal government’s debt.

The months-long standoff has



US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy speaks with reporters as he arrives for the day in the midst of ongoing negotiations to raise the United States’ debt ceiling. — Reuters

spooked Wall Street, weighing on US stocks and pushing the nation’s cost of borrowing higher. US stocks were expected to open lower on Wednesday.

Biden and McCarthy’s negotiating teams reported no significant progress after a two-hour meeting at the Capitol.

“The biggest gap we have is the funding issue,” said McCarthy’s lead negotiator, Representative Garret Graves. Republicans want to cut spending for the 2024 fiscal year beginning in October back to 2022 levels, while Democrats have pushed to hold it steady at this year’s rate.

White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre called the talks “incredibly tough.”

“Both sides have to

understand that they’re not going to get everything that they want,” Jean-Pierre said at a briefing. Negotiators differ over Republicans’ proposals to impose new work requirements on benefits programmes for low-income Americans, loosening energy permitting rules and clawing back some unspent funds Congress authorised to fight the Covid pandemic. A source familiar with the White House’s negotiations said Biden is “willing to meet the Speaker halfway” and has offered a compromise, which includes a spending freeze, rescinding significant unspent Covid relief funds and a two-year cap on spending in line with previous bipartisan budget agreements. — Reuters

German police target ‘Last Generation’ activists in nationwide raids

MUNICH: German police officers and prosecutors conducted large-scale raids on Wednesday of properties belonging to members of the climate group Last Generation, whose members are known for gluing themselves onto roads.

A total of 15 properties, including flats and offices, were searched from around 7:00 am, according to the Munich General Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office.

The raids are related to numerous criminal charges filed against members of the group since last year. Seven suspects between 22 and 38 years old are accused of forming or supporting a criminal organisation. Initially, no one was arrested.

Last Generation has made a name for themselves in Europe with acts of civil disobedience, such as obstructing traffic, abseiling from motorway bridges and throwing food at museum artworks.

According to German investigators, two of the suspects allegedly attempted to sabotage an oil pipeline that runs from Trieste, in Italy, to Ingolstadt, in Bavaria, in April 2022.

The central accusation in connection with the searches that took place in seven states is that the suspects organised a fundraising campaign to finance further crimes for Last Generation and thus collected at



Climate change activist of the Last Generation, Aimee Van Baalen, answers media questions after holding a press conference in Berlin. — Reuters

least \$1.5 million. The police did not say how much money was confiscated.

The goal of the investigation is to find out where the money came from and to gain insight into the membership structure, police said.

Properties in the states of Hesse, Hamburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, Bavaria, Berlin and Schleswig-Holstein were raided. According to the police, about 170 officers were deployed nationwide.

Among the locations searched included the Berlin apartment of Last Generation spokeswoman Carla Hinrichs, who is well-known in Germany due to her frequent TV appearances.

“With their guns drawn, the officers stormed into Carla’s room, where she was still in bed,” the group complained. Police declined to comment, claiming that police tactics must be kept secret. — dpa

Vini and the middle class



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Have you heard the story of Vini? Vinicius Junior, just like many heroes we know, rose from a little known ambitious young man, to one of the most inspiring sports stars in the world. This 23-year-old Brazilian professional footballer took football pitches by a storm for the past three years, due to his speed and dribbling skills.

The world came to know, amidst all this glory that he has been subjected to racial abuse by opposing fans, players, referees in the Spanish football league, known as the La Liga.

While we as human beings are celebrating how civilised our world has become, it seems we failed a test this May in Valencia. In a recent La Liga football match between Vini and his Real Madrid teammates against Valencia, hundreds of Valencia fans targeted the Brazilian dark skinned player with racial slurs, calling him monkey and imitating monkey sounds, to provoke Vini and throw him off balance.

It was too little and too late when

Spanish authorities, after strong actions taken by the Brazilian government led by President Lula da Silva defending his compatriot, decided to arrest seven Valencia fans of hate crime charges, and fine their club and partially close, this is no serious way of standing up to an evil such as systematic racism.

In just one category of hate crimes, the year 2021-2022 witnessed more than 7,000 Islamophobic crimes, in just six countries in Europe, according to Al Jazeera.

Sadly, while Vini joins a long list of amazing talents who suffered because of racism, that includes Super Mario Balotelli and Samuel Etoó, the fact that ugly racism is rearing its head is not a Spain or European Union problem, but a global socio-economic and political phenomena, including in our region, that we must invest our energy, time and money in eliminating it together before it eliminates us.

The adoption of austerity has been on the rise as a public policy by governments around the world

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since the global financial crisis of 2008. This meant shrinking public services budgets, privatising services and rising fees, in addition to rising taxes and overall cost of living, with all of this leading to a decreasing purchasing power and a helplessly shrinking middle income class.

This applies similarly across the world from thousands of Valencia fans to millions of the former US president Donald Trump supporters.

We can see this in Europe, especially where austerity measures were applied stringently such as in Spain, Italy and Portugal,

coupled with rising immigration unleashed tides of ethnocentrist, abusive rhetoric, not only against immigrants, but also against any vulnerable group or individual seen as “not one of us” such as the case with Vinicius Junior.

“Morals of oppressed peoples deteriorate,” is a saying attributed to the father of modern sociology the Scholar Ibn Khaldun. This is evident in a society’s silent, gradual acceptance of the spread of substandard ethical practices such as lying, bullying, cheating, bribery. Even one would assume that oppressed communities with global south heritage would be more just, this is not the case.

In a recent Al Jazeera study, more than 40 per cent of Palestinian study subjects did not see discrimination against dark skinned people as a problem, and I still remember how many millions around the world were disappointed when in World Cup 1998 the disgraced French football star Zinedin Zidane, who has Muslim heritage, stomping on the

Saudi player Fuad Anwar showing Zidane’s deteriorating morals of oppressed people.

Expressing diverse points of views enriches our lives, and systems that unreasonably limit these natural human expression tendencies are similar to trying to limit the flow of a running river; water will always find a way to flow.

For humans, from all income classes, increasing pressure turns into a lost of faith in the fairness of a “rigged” system.

In particular, a shrinking middle income class means deteriorating public manners, and it is the responsibility of reasonable decision makers to take the road less travelled by and do the right thing.

We should thank Vini for his perseverance for three years, and for reminding us of the significance of investing in standing for justice and against any form of injustice, especially when an injustice is committed by someone considered one of our own people to set an example.

Climate scientists flee Twitter as hostility surges

ROLAND LLOYD PARRY

Scientists suffering insults and mass-spam are abandoning Twitter for alternative social networks as hostile climate-change denialism surges on the platform following Elon Musk’s takeover.

Researchers have documented an explosion of hate and misinformation on Twitter since the Tesla billionaire took over in October 2022 — and now experts say communicating about climate science on the social network on which many of them rely is getting harder.

Policies aimed at curbing the deadly effects of climate change are accelerating, prompting a rise in what experts identify as organised resistance by opponents of climate reform.

Peter Gleick, a climate and water specialist with nearly 99,000 followers, announced on May 21 he would no longer post on the platform because it was amplifying racism and sexism.

While he is accustomed to “offensive, personal attacks, up to and including direct physical threats”, he said, “in the past few months, since the takeover and changes at Twitter, the amount, vituperativeness, and intensity of abuse has skyrocketed”.

Robert Rohde, a physicist and lead scientist at the non-profit environmental data analysis group Berkeley Earth, analysed activity on hundreds of accounts of widely followed specialists posting about climate science before and after the takeover.

He found climate scientists’ tweets were losing impact. The average number of likes they received was down 38 per cent and average retweets fell 40 per cent.

Twitter has not commented directly about what changes it has made to the algorithms that drive traffic and visibility.

Contacted at its e-mail address for comment, its press department returned its now customary reply, an automated e-mail with an emoji.

But in a tweet seen as an acknowledgement of a deliberate change, Musk wrote in January: “People on the right should see more ‘left-wing’ stuff and people on the left should see more ‘right-wing’ stuff. But you can just block it if you want to stay in an echo chamber.”

In another analysis, prominent climatologist Katharine Hayhoe monitored responses to a tweet on climate change which she published twice, as an experiment, on separate dates before and after the takeover. — AFP

Disaster deaths decline but damage rises on hotter planet

MD TAHMID ZAMI
AND MEGAN ROWLING

OVER THE
FIVE DECADES,
ECONOMIC
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ROCKETED
AS EXTREME
WEATHER
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TURBO-CHARGED
BY GLOBAL
WARMING

As Cyclone Mocha gathered strength in the Bay of Bengal in early May, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) warned of a “very dangerous” storm that could have “major impacts” for hundreds of thousands of the world’s most vulnerable people.

Authorities and aid agencies in Bangladesh and Myanmar evacuated about 400,000 coastal dwellers as fears grew that sprawling camps, home to Rohingya families displaced by conflict and military crackdowns, would suffer a direct hit. While the arrival of yet another powerful cyclone surprised few in a fast-warming world, disaster experts highlighted the relatively low number of deaths — estimated at several hundred in worst-affected Myanmar and zero in Bangladesh.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said the storm had caused widespread devastation in both nations, affecting “the poorest of the poor” — but that in the past, they had suffered death tolls as high as hundreds of thousands from such cyclones.

“Thanks to early warnings and disaster management, these catastrophic mortality rates are now thankfully history. Early warnings save lives,” he added, as the WMO this week released new figures on the impacts of disasters since 1970.

Over the five decades, economic losses rocketed as extreme weather events were turbo-charged by global warming, with the 2010-2019 period accounting for nearly a third of total losses of \$4.3 trillion, largely due to a growth in damage from storms.

By contrast, the number of reported deaths per decade shrank from more than 556,000 in 1970-1979 to about 184,500 in the most recent decade, with a far smaller share attributed to storms.



A view of the damage caused by Cyclone Mocha in Sittwe, Myanmar, in this image released on May 17. — Reuters

According to the Global Commission on Adaptation, early warning systems — which give public information about extreme weather events before they hit and activate measures to keep people safe — can cut damage by 30 per cent with just 24 hours’ notice.

The WMO says such systems save lives and provide at least a tenfold return on investment — but only half of countries have put them in place so far, with coverage especially low in small island developing states, least developed nations and Africa.

The UN chief has announced a goal of ensuring everyone on earth is protected by early warning systems by the end of 2027, through an initiative being implemented by UN agencies, development banks, governments and national weather services.

The programme is seeking new investments of about \$3 billion — a sum the WMO says would be dwarfed by the benefits.

Mami Mizutori, head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

(UNDRR), said the rollout of early warning systems around the world so far had been key in lowering mortality from disasters this century — a rare success as threats spiral.

A mid-point review of goals set in 2015 under a global pact to avert disasters by 2030 said “progress has stalled and, in some cases, reversed”, despite more countries creating disaster loss databases and adopting national risk reduction strategies.

“We can definitely say that action has not caught up with awareness — and risk is ahead of us,” Mizutori said in an interview during a UN meeting on the global pact, called the Sendai Framework, in New York last week.

“If we don’t manage to prevent (disasters), we pay a very, very huge price in lives and livelihoods,” she added. The review of the targets adopted in Sendai, Japan, revealed the number of people affected by disasters each year — through harm to their health, homes and incomes — has fallen since 2015.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

Beautiful wrinkles...

In life, every phase deserves a celebration. It has always been about communication between body, mind and soul, from the baby steps to the pain in the back after playing squash, and then getting up from a chair. Young at heart, falling apart as the years go by.

The lines around the eyes and the lips are symbols of a life of joy, experiences, love, strength, and all the obstacles to a better future.

Working, studying, being good, and being responsible are heavy hurdles to chasing the purpose of becoming a good example to the family and society. Not that I haven't made mistakes; I have made both big and small ones.

I am celebrating life, my life, because wonderful things happened to me despite a childhood of poverty and being constantly reminded by working parents that the only way out of impoverishment was to study. Perhaps, lately, things have changed a bit with social media, but study and knowledge will never be obsolete.

As part of my determination to look at life as a fabulous gift, I also have the motivation to avoid being a grumpy person.

Why complain about health issues, retirement, the cost of living, or the government? These only make one bitter, and nothing will change except a faster health deterioration.

However, three situations deserve examination to gain a deeper understanding of what life is about. The first is a visit to a hospital. It is when we can appreciate that nothing is more important than having good health.

In my teenage years, I went to play with long-term hospitalised teen girls. Later, I went to a hospital for visually impaired people to read to young indigenous Amazonians.

The second is to visit a prison, where we can learn that one of the most precious things in life is freedom. I visited youngsters spending time behind bars for being involved in crimes.



Sonia Ambrosio

The writer is journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

THE LINES
TELL ME THAT
I HAVE THE
RESPONSIBILITY
TO KEEP
MY BODY
OPERATIONAL,
MY MIND SHARP,
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LOVING ALL
THINGS

The third examination is to visit a cemetery, which I have visited a few times. It is a place in which we can learn that we are equal; the ground we walk over today will be our roof tomorrow.

There are also lessons from some of the saddest sights I have ever seen: homeless young and old, men and women living in inhumane, squalid conditions as a consequence of drug or alcohol addiction. No dignity or emotion.

People, if we can call them that, would commit hideous crimes to satisfy their dependence. The profitable money-making business of drug, human, and alcohol exploitation of people's vulnerabilities is becoming a global reality.

So, I look in the mirror and see a nice-looking, cheerful face and a healthy body and mind. I will look again in the mirror tomorrow and the day after tomorrow until I am permitted to do so. We can be superheroes, but in fact, we are just a candle in the wind.

Even my wrinkles look beautiful in the mirror. The lines tell me that I have the responsibility to keep my body operational, my mind sharp, and my heart capable of loving all things.

These days, when social media is setting beauty standards, looking younger or prettier is almost a must, but it comes at a high cost. One of the famous quotes of the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius says, "how easily we love ourselves above all others, yet we put more stock in the opinions of others than in our own estimation of self."

Within this celebratory mood, it helps to understand that everything has its time. The sunrise and sunset, the low and high tides, all follow nature, and so do we.

The best part is that we can pen it down and, in this particular case, share it with you, the person reading this. Despite the laughter lines, I will keep smiling.

ONE STEP BELOW RED ALERT



Incandescent materials, ash and smoke are spewed from the Popocatepetl volcano as seen from the San Nicolas de los Ranchos community, state of Puebla, Mexico, on Wednesday. Mexican authorities on Sunday raised the warning level for the Popocatepetl volcano to one step below red alert, as smoke, ash and molten rock spewed into the sky posing risks to aviation and far-flung communities below. – AFP

Libya watchers see signs of progress towards reconciliation

RIM TAHER

Oil-rich but war-scarred Libya has for years been ruled by two rival governments, but now some analysts see faint signs of progress towards reconciliation between them.

They point to discord within one of the camps, based in the east and backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, where the parliament last week suspended its former premier Fathi Bashagha.

Paradoxically, the observers say, Bashagha's political demise could signal that the Haftar camp is moving towards rapprochement with the internationally recognised government in the capital Tripoli.

Some observers even suggest this could aid United Nations-led efforts urging new elections this year in the country that has been torn by bloody chaos since the 2011 overthrow of Moamer Gaddafi.

The political rupture in the east has reversed the fortunes of Bashagha, who a year ago launched an attack on Tripoli that was repelled after a day of deadly street fighting.

Bashagha was suspended on May 16 by the eastern-based parliament, which also announced an investigation against him for unspecified reasons.

The move against Bashagha "sealed the end of the political life of this former strongman," said analyst



Libya's former interior minister Fathi Bashagha. – AFP

BASHAGHA'S
POLITICAL
DEMISE COULD
SIGNAL THAT THE
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RAPPROCHEMENT
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INTERNATIONALLY
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GOVERNMENT IN
TRIPOLI

Hasni Abidi of the Geneva-based Institute for Arab and Mediterranean Cultures.

His "humiliating departure... reflects the differences in the eastern camp, in particular between the Haftar clan represented by his children and the parliament," Abidi said.

Tripoli-based interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah has meanwhile used the "paralysis of the eastern government to consolidate his grip on political

and economic life in Libya", he said.

The North African country was plunged into more than a decade of bloody violence following Gaddafi's ouster in a Nato-backed popular uprising in which the veteran ruler was killed.

The ensuing chaos drew in warlords, militants and foreign mercenaries and claimed countless lives while leaving the country awash with guns.

Haftar, backed by foreign

powers, launched an assault on Tripoli in 2019 that left thousands more dead but ultimately failed.

The warring parties reached a formal ceasefire in October 2020.

Since then, the United Nations has resumed its efforts for new elections, to bring stability to the troubled country, but these have been repeatedly delayed.

Bashagha, from the port city of Misrata and formerly a political heavyweight in the western camp, had sought Haftar's support in late 2021, vowing to work for "national reconciliation".

Bashagha's suspension comes ahead of a mid-June deadline declared by the United Nations for the rival political forces to agree on a framework to hold elections before the end of the year.

Bashagha "always had an expiry date", said Emadeddin Badi of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, a Switzerland-based research body.

"His usefulness ended the day he lost the possibility of establishing himself in Tripoli," the analyst said.

Libyan media have meanwhile reported that talks have been held between representatives of Haftar and Dbeibah.

Dbeibah's nephew and one of

Haftar's sons "have been in almost continuous talks for months", researcher Jalel Harchaoui said.

"The desire of these two Libyan personalities to accommodate one another is one of the reasons for Bashagha's fall," he said.

Badi said Haftar had offered to suspend Bashagha, a move that had the "blessing" of Egypt.

The head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, has said he hopes for an agreement "by mid-June" to hold elections before the end of this year.

He told the UN Security Council last month that "intensive consultations have taken place amongst security actors" and said "there has been a new dynamic in Libya".

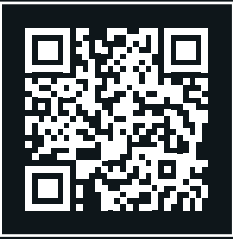
Libyan political analyst Abdallah al Rayes said the rival camps' new understandings are the culmination of "discreet negotiations in Cairo" with a view to "forming a new coalition government".

"This is a step that precedes any agreement on the polls," he added.

Harchaoui, however, was less optimistic and said "the elites already well in place today... have absolutely no intention of leaving power in order to allow credible and authentic elections". — AFP

sport

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AL SUWAIQ FINISH RUNNERS-UP, SEEB THIRD

AL NAHDA

CROWNED OMANTEL LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The players of the Al Nahda team proudly celebrated their official crowning as the winners of the Omantel League, following the conclusion of the last round of the league. The prestigious event was held under the esteemed auspices of Shaikh Talal bin Saeed al Maamari, CEO of the Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel).

Al Nahda's outstanding performance throughout the tournament led them to claim the top spot with an impressive 56 points, finishing 4 points ahead of runners-up Al Suwaiq.

Moreover, Sur, with a tally of 28 points, maintained their position in 11th place, securing the last pre-relegation spot as they officially survived in round 24.

Al Nahda's achievement in clinching the league title marked a remarkable double for the team, as they had previously emerged victorious in the Sultan's Cup last March,

Al Seeb had hoped for a stumble from Al Suwaiq to claim second place, but the latter secured their qualification for the Super Cup match

defeating Al Seeb.

Meanwhile, Al Suwaiq showcased their strength by securing second place in the Omantel League, following a convincing 4-0 victory over Sohar in the final match of the 26th round. Essam al Subhi, Mamadou, Omar al Fazari and Saudi Ali were the goal scorers, leading Al Suwaiq to finish the league with 52 points, just one point ahead of third-placed Al Seeb.

Al Seeb had hoped for a stumble from Al Suwaiq to claim second place, but the latter secured their qualification for the Super Cup match.

According to the regulations set by the Oman

Football Association, the participants of the Super Cup are the champions of both the league and the HM Cup, or the league champions and runners-up if one team secures both titles. This season, Al Nahda emerged victorious in both competitions and thus, they will face Al Suwaiq in the upcoming Super Cup encounter.

DHOFAR FOURTH

In another noteworthy match, Al Seeb triumphed over Al Rustaq with a solitary goal, scored by Mohsen Al Ghassani in the 90 + 5 minute. This victory enabled Al Seeb to conclude the league with 51 points, securing the third position.

Dhofar secured the fourth spot by defeating Al Ittihad with an impressive 4-1 win at Al Saada Complex Stadium.

Abdullah al Mushrafi's two goals, Josephat Lubaga, and Qasim Saeed were the goal scorers, propelling Dhofar to accumulate 45 points.

On the other hand, Al Ittihad's tally remained at

17 points, placing them in the 17th position and were relegated to the First Division League.

Additionally, Al Musannah emerged triumphant over Al Bashayer with a narrow 1-0 victory, raising Al Musannah's tally to 33 points, and securing the ninth position. Meanwhile, Al Bashayer remained at the bottom of the league standings with 12 points.

In another thrilling match, Oman Club and Al Oruba settled for a 3-3 draw, with Oman Club finishing the league in seventh place with 37 points, while Al Oruba ended up in 12th place with 17 points.

Lastly, Al Nasr lost to Bahla with a score of 2-1, so Al Nasr's balance was stuck at 30 points in tenth place, while Bahla raised their tally to 40 points in sixth place.

This season of the Omantel League has been a testament to the exceptional skill and dedication exhibited by all the participating teams, and their remarkable achievements have captivated football enthusiasts across the nation.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Grade In Tender Board Registration	Location	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
4/2023	Consulting Offices	First	CONSULTANCY SERVICES (DESIGN AND SUPERVISION) TO CONSTRUCTION OF RESIDENTS FOR SECURITY AT THE MINISTRY'S AT AL KHUWAIIR	06/06/2023	03/07/2023
5/2023	Services	First	LUQT AL ATHAR BOOK PRINTING	30/05/2023	12/06/2023

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Maqsood to lead Oman at Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe



Oman squad for Zimbabwe Qualifier

MUSCAT: Experienced all-rounder Zeeshan Maqsood will lead Oman at the forthcoming ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier, which will be held in Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9.

Oman Cricket unveiled the 17-member national squad at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds in Al Amerat on Wednesday with the skipper expressing confidence in the team's hopes to qualify for the World Cup.

"We are ready for the challenge and it's a big opportunity for us to showcase our potential. We have the experience of playing against all the teams except for West Indies and Zimbabwe. We have to play to our best abilities and hopefully we can achieve the desired results," said Maqsood.

The ten-nation Qualifier will decide the remaining two spots for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in India 2023. Oman, who are aiming to qualify for the World Cup for the first time, will be heading to Durban in South Africa for a preparatory camp on May 28 where they will play five

practice games before heading to Zimbabwean capital of Harare on June 11.

Oman's 17-member squad will be trimmed to 15 for the Qualifier after the trip to Durban.

Oman's flamboyant batter Aqib Ilyas has been named Maqsood's deputy with the squad consisting of a majority of all-rounders.

Leg-spinner Samay Shrivastav and all-rounder Rafiullah are the only uncapped players in the squad.

The batting responsibilities will be on the shoulders of Jatinder Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Aqib Ilyas, Shoaib Khan, Zeeshan Maqsood, Mohammed Nadeem, Ayaan Khan and Sandeep Goud.

The bowling attack will be spearheaded by left-arm pacer Bilal Khan and the lanky Kaleemullah with Rafiullah, Fayyaz Butt, Nadeem, Goud and Shoaib in support roles as medium pacers.

The spin department will depend on the guiles and the magic of Jay Odedra, Shrivastav, Maqsood, Ilyas and Ayaan.

With an average age of 32, the team will rely on the experience, which had come good during the ICC World Cricket League Division 2 where Oman finished second in the seven-nation tournament that featured 36 ODIs over the past four years.

Three wicketkeepers — Naseem Khushi, Suraj Kumar and Adeel Shafique — have been drafted with one sure to miss out from the final 15.

Oman grouped with Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and UAE

Oman have been clubbed with former World Cup winners Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and neighbours UAE in Group B. Hosts Zimbabwe, West Indies, Netherlands, Nepal and United States make up Group A.

Oman will begin their campaign on June 19 in Bulawayo against Ireland followed by a game against UAE on June 21. On June 23, Oman will take on 1996 World Cup winners Sri Lanka before concluding the league stage with a match against Scotland on June 25.

All-round Jadeja leads Chennai into IPL final

CHENNAI, India: Ravindra Jadeja starred with bat and ball as Chennai Super Kings beat holders Gujarat Titans by 15 runs on Tuesday to enter the IPL final that could be skipper M.S. Dhoni's farewell.

Four-time winners Chennai posted 172-7, a total their bowlers defended as they bowled out Gujarat for 157 in a play-off believed to be the last home match at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium for the 41-year-old Dhoni.

The left-handed Jadeja returned figures of 2-18 with his spin bowling following his 22 runs, which boosted the Chennai total after Ruturaj Gaikwad's 60 on an awkward pitch for batting.

Fireworks lit up the sky as Chennai made their 10th Indian Premier League final.

"IPL is too big to say it's just another final," the captain said on presenter Harsha Bhogle's question on the Sunday final being "just another final" for Dhoni's team.

"Used to be top eight teams to compete with the best players available in the world, but now it's 10 teams, so now it's tougher. It's hard work of two months because of which we are standing over here. Lot of character showed by the individuals."

Dhoni also stalled suggestions that he was about to retire, saying he will take "eight, nine months" to decide on his IPL future.

"The small auction will be around December, so why to take the headache right now. I have ample time to decide," he said.

Gujarat, led by Hardik Pandya, will have another shot at making the final, which is on Sunday in Ahmedabad, when they take on the winner of the second play-off between Lucknow Super Giants and five-time champions Mumbai Indians.

The spotlight remained on Dhoni, who is India's most decorated player, leading his country to two World Cup triumphs including the inaugural T20 crown in 2007 and has played mentor to younger heroes including Virat Kohli.



Chennai Super Kings' Ravindra Jadeja is clean bowled by Gujarat Titans' Mohammed Shami (not pictured) during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 first qualifier cricket match between Chennai Super Kings and Gujarat Titans at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — AFP

Dhoni has attracted huge crowds across venues with fans turning up in Chennai's yellow as a tribute to the cricketing great.

His home venue was nearly packed to capacity as fans cheered every move of their hero, who raised the noise when he came into bat.

- Gaikwad reprieve -

But the crowd soon fell silent as the superstar, who has been troubled with a knee injury in this season but has not explicitly said he is retiring, fell to Mohit Sharma for one off two balls.

Earlier Gaikwad registered his fourth half-century of the season as he capitalised on a reprieve on two when he was dismissed in the second over only for the delivery to called no-ball.

He hit back with a six and four and soon converted Chennai's modest start to a strong opening stand of 87 with New Zealand's Devon Conway, who made 40.

Chennai wobbled after Gaikwad's departure but Jadeja's 16-ball cameo, which included two sixes, and one hit over the fence by England's Moeen Ali in the final over fired Chennai to what turned out to be a winning total. — AFP

Spin to be the deciding factor between MI and LSG at Chennai



Both teams are impact and each of these teams have super destructive players, that can change the course of the match within a few overs. Although, both these teams will be clashing a neutral venue, that will ideally suit spin and that's something that makes the Lucknow Super Giants a slight favourite. But for the benefit of Mumbai, the form of Ishan Kishan and Rohit Sharma would be a big bliss for Mumbai. Talking about momentum, both the teams have found their peak form off-lately and should bring them in a great mindset into this must win game.

• PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER
– Both these teams clashed in the 64th match of this year's edition, where Lucknow came out on top by a small margin of just 5 runs. Batting first, Lucknow were in

trouble at 35/3 from where Krunal Pandya had a brilliant partnership with Marcus Stoinis, from where Stoinis finished incredibly well to get Lucknow to 177/3. Chasing 178 to win, MI got off to a flyer, where it lost its first wicket at 90. But some tight fielding with some some excellent fielding later in the innings allowed LSG to win by 5 runs, despite 19 ball 32 runs by Tim David.

• Head-to-Head — Played — 3; Won by LSG – 3; Won by MI – 0

• LSG possible 12 – K Sharma, Q de Kock, P Mankad, M Stoinis, N Pooran, K Pandya, A Badoni, K Gowtham, R Bishnoi, N Ul Haq, M Khan, Y Thakur

• MI possible 12 – R Sharma, I Kishan, C Green, S Yadav, T David, N Wadhera, C Jordan, P Chawla, J Behrendorff, K Kartikeya, A Madhwal, V Vinod

• Pitch & Weather Report – The MA Chidambaram Stadium is the home ground of Chennai Super King and it is also called as the unbreachable fortress of



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

CSK. The pitch is ideally trusted to support the spinners and stroke making becomes tougher as the innings progresses. Although, the small boundaries will provide results to even half of a well-connected short as well. The temperature is expected to hover between 30 to 38 degrees and as the evening progresses, batting could get easier with dew coming into play. Teams winning the toss could very well chose to bowl first.

• Our Match Prediction – Mumbai is filled with match winners and even if one of the players has a great day, they are capable of making the match one-sided. One player who tops this list is Suryakumar Yadav, who is considered to be one of the best T20 players in the world. If mumbai can get off to a good start and then SKY can play deep, that would be an ideal circumstance. LSG, is a brilliant team and they



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh celebrates after scoring a half-century during the IPL Twenty20 cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Kolkata Knight Riders. —AFP

thrive in low scoring games. LSG is mainly filled with small contributing players that can provide exceptional match changing contributions. Batting had actually weakened, after the injury of KL Rahul, is what many said. Although the experts say that, KL Rahul's injury has been a blessing in disguise and his presence was only dampening

the team, and the results have also shown the same. It wouldn't be wrong to say that, this is a game for Lucknow to lose and the surface is something that should end the road for Mumbai. So, its going to be 'Luknawi Kali Gajar ka halwa' in the dinner.

SEND US YOUR COMMENT FOR NEXT DAY'S MATCH BEFORE 12 NOON ON WHATSAPP ON "00968 92470544" AND THE BEST COMMENTS WILL BE INCLUDED IN OUR ARTICLE. "30 words on the team that you support" + FULL NAME + DESIGNATION + AGE + NATIONALITY.

You could post us your views and question on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, TWITTER — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. DON'T FORGET TO USE THE #OOIPL2023 FOR BETTER REACH.

Oman national rugby team gets new outfit

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman National Rugby Team received a new jersey ahead of embarking on an ambitious journey of hosting tourneys and training school children, on Wednesday.

The jersey was received by Nabil al Busaidi aka Nabs, Chairman of Oman Rugby from Dan Wood, MD of Bahwan DHL in the presence of Nico Schütz — CEO Middle East DHL Supply Chain, and Paul Spyropoulos JV Board Member, Bahwan Enterprises.

Speaking to the Observer after receiving the new identity, Nabs said this support to Oman rugby which is having an increasing takers among expatriates living in Oman, will give further boost to the game in the country.

“Although Rugby has been in Oman since 1970’s, it’s gaining much popularity now in a bigger scale among the residents and reasonably well among citizens. The difference between rugby then and now is that unlike in the past it’s an Olympic sport now and more youngsters are getting attracted to the game. The support from DHL is a push towards Omani Olympic team and I’m given the responsibility of spearheading the same,” Nabs said.

He further said that there were not many takers for the sport in the past but the scenario is changing and signing the agreement with DHL will attract more budding players.

“We have a long term understanding with Oman Rugby just as we have elsewhere in the world,” said Dan.

“DHL key responsibilities is to support the sport and local rugby is really inspiring and we are proud and happy to be part of Oman Rugby,” Dan adds.

“We now have a Federation and full time staff to promote the sport and hopefully we will have better push next year with students from international schools and army and Police teams,” Nabs said.

As per the schools’ programme with the Ministry of education next academic year, the rugby team is meeting with schools and heads of institutions to train both the teachers and students on touch rugby. This will be followed by setting up age groups and inter-school competitions, leagues, like that.

Military team:
The successful achievement is that Oman Rugby was able to form a military team where the players, after receiving a 2 weeks’ training, were able to take on to Middle East championship where they played against teams which were playing for 15 to 20 years.

Although rugby in Oman is in nascent stage, it has become an Associate Member of Asia Rugby which is the continental Federation under world Rugby. Oman Rugby is a member of international touch rugby and Nabs hoped that the sport will see growth from next season.

Rugby is accessible to all, men and women can play in the same team and there is good number of takers for touch rugby and we can pick up the people who are serious about the game, according to Nabs.

“Playing against all Omani team it’s been just two weeks and we are fairing well and we have right guys and they are progressing well.”

Oman held 3 rugby tourneys and the last was an international tourney where the team faced opponents from around GCC and it’s been considered to be the best tourney held in the middle East. Each one was getting better than the previous one.

“We have another tourney coming up in September Midnight 6’s where the games will be played at midnight, under floodlight and it will be coinciding with rugby world cup in France and we will have Muscat 6’s and Oman Touch Sixes and each one will get bigger and better,” Nabs sounded confident.



Bangladesh blank Oman; South Korea, India win



ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Bangladesh beat a spirited Oman 2-0 in their opening Junior Asia Cup hockey match in Salalah late on Tuesday.

Mohammed Ali and Mohammed Hossain struck two field goals in 22nd and 24th minutes respectively which Oman had no answer in the Pool B match at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex Pitch 1 in Salalah.

On Wednesday, heavyweights South Korea made a strong start to their campaign with a 6-1 win against Uzbekistan in Pool B.

South Korea went ahead in the third minute with a penalty corner goal from Minkwon Kim.

Seunghwan Lee made it 2-0 for them in the 18th minute. Kim found his second goal after a good Korean move in the 35th minute to make it 3-0.

South Korea extended their lead to 4-0 in the 44th minute as Sungmin Lee struck the target from a penalty corner.

Uzbekistan, who suffered a 7-1 defeat against Japan in their first match, pulled one goal back through a field goal from Shavkatjon Kakhramonov in the 50th minute.

However, Geonwoo Park’s field

goal in the 56th minute made the result beyond doubt while Keonyeol Hwang completed the 6-1 scoreline in the final minute from a penalty corner.

INDIA HAMMER TAIPEI
In the second match on Wednesday, favourites India smashed Chinese Taipei 18-0 to start their campaign in style.

With the biggest margin of win in the tournament so far, India raced to top of Pool A leapfrogging Pakistan, who had also posted a thumping 15-1 win against the Chinese Taipei.

India, Pakistan and Japan have three points each in Pool A but the superior goal difference put India

on top followed by Pakistan and Japan.

Arajeet Singh Hundal sizzled for India with four goals which included a field goal hat-trick (19th and 30th minutes). Hundal added another field goal in the 59th minute.

Amandeep netted three goals (37, 38, 41) while Uttam Singh (10, 59), Bobby Singh Dhami (10, 46) and Bobby Poovanna India Chandura (39, 54) scored a brace each.

Other scorers were Sharda Nand Tiwari (11-pc), Angad Bir Singh (37), Aditya Arjun Lalage (37), Amir Ali (51-pc) and Yogember Rawat (60th minute) who all found the target once.

Oman take on UAE in key ANOC Asian qualifier

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oman beach soccer team will begin their campaign in the ANOC Asian qualifiers as they will meet UAE in a crucial clash on Thursday. The match will kick off at 8:15 (Oman time).

The qualifiers will be hosted in Jeddah city, Saudi Arabia and three days qualifiers meet will feature participation of six teams including hosts Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Thailand, Japan and Oman. In another deciding fixture, Iran will take on Thailand.

The winner of Oman and UAE match will advance to the semifinals and the same for Iran and Thailand encounter.

Asian heavyweights Japan and hosts Saudi Arabia confirmed their spots in the semifinals based on the Fifa world ranking while Saudi Arabia were ranked first as they are the hosts. Japan will meet the winner of Iran and Thailand game while Saudi Arabia will take on the winner of Oman and UAE fixture.

Oman team, coached by the long-serving national head coach of Oman beach soccer team, Talib Hilal, will chase a historic qualification to the ANOC World Beach Games Bali 2023. Oman



players missed their attendance in the first edition of the ANOC World Beach Games in Doha in 2019 which featured teams of Japan, Iran and UAE. Iran had ended the competition as the runners-up as the final match finished in favour of champions Russia.

Oman and UAE match will be an open book for the both teams as they met several times during the last two months. Both head coaches are well known with playing system and weakness areas. It is expected to be a thrilling knockout match.

Oman beach soccer team recently ended their participation at the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 on a successful note. Coach Talib Hilal’s men finished the championship as runners-up as they lost to Egypt 4-2 last Saturday in the final game of the championship.

Oman team’s campaign in the Arabian event began with a strong start as they thrashed Palestine 7-1 and then they received a shock 5-3 loss against Egypt before registering an astounding 14-0 victory over

Kyrgyzstan in the last group match to secure spot in the quarterfinals and qualifying from the group as second behind toppers Egypt.

In the quarterfinals, Oman beat UAE 5-4 to book a berth in the semifinals. Then, Oman team defeated Morocco 4-2 in the semifinals to confirm their attendance in the final match. Egypt beat Oman 4-2 in the final.

The recently concluded Arab beach soccer championship 2023 and the underway ANOC Asian qualifiers will act as a significant step for Oman’s team preparation for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup UAE 2023 which will be hosted by Dubai during November 16 to 26. Oman are ranked 14th internationally in the latest Fifa world ranking and will be looking to claim maximum technical output ahead of the world class tournament.

OMAN SQUAD: Khaid al Araiimi, Mishaal al Araiimi, Munthir al Araiimi, Abdullah al Souti, Amjad al Hamadani, Nohu al Battashi, Younis al Owaisi, Sami al Balushi, Yahya al Muraikhi, Abdulrahman al Fazari, Nohu al Zadjali, Ahmed al Owaisi, Iyad al Alawi and Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi.



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The offer is extended to 31st May 2023

Ominvest, Bank Dhofar spice up rival offers for Ahli Bank

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Rival suitors Oman International Development and Investment Co SAOG (Ominvest) and Bank Dhofar have submitted sweetened offers for Ahli Bank as competition for the Omani lender heats up. Ahli Bank said it is evaluating the two offers the outcome of which will reshape the banking landscape in Oman. Ominvest, through its Consortium, presented an increased cash offer of 200 baisas per share to all Ahli Bank shareholders.

This revised offer aims to provide an attractive opportunity for shareholders to participate in the transaction and gain from the potential benefits. Ominvest already holds a significant 8.68

per cent shareholding in Ahli Bank and plans to acquire up to 66.32 per cent of the issued share capital, with a long-term objective of owning 75 per cent of the company's shares.

Under the proposed deal, Ahli Bank will maintain a minimum free float of 25 per cent to comply with regulatory requirements. As part of the offer, Ahli United Bank, a strategic investor, is set to receive the full offer price for their 35 per cent shareholding, amounting to a substantial RO 136.5 million.

Simultaneously, Bank Dhofar has made waves with its ambitious plan to acquire the complete shareholding of Ahli Bank SAOG. Bank Dhofar's Board of Directors said they have thoroughly evaluated this proposition, aiming to secure 100 per cent ownership



THESE ACQUISITION ENDEAVOURS BY OMINVEST AND BANK DHOFAR REFLECT THEIR STRATEGIC FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING THEIR MARKET POSITIONS AND EXPANDING THEIR SERVICE OFFERINGS.

of Ahli Bank while complying with relevant regulations.

The proposed terms offer existing shareholders of Ahli

Bank a choice to receive a cash consideration for up to 25 per cent of their current shares, with the remaining portion settled

through newly issued shares by Bank Dhofar. Cash compensation will also be provided to legal shareholders and their affiliates who face restrictions on owning shares in a commercial bank.

To finance the cash portion of the offer, Bank Dhofar plans to tap into its existing liquidity and capital resources, supplemented by contributions from its current shareholders.

The proposed exchange ratio for the acquisition is set at 1.2910 of Bank Dhofar's ordinary shares for each share of Ahli Bank.

These acquisition endeavours by Ominvest and Bank Dhofar reflect their strategic focus on strengthening their market positions and expanding their service offerings.

The successful completion of

these offers is contingent upon obtaining regulatory approvals and garnering support from concerned shareholders.

The banking sector and the wider business community are closely monitoring Ahli Bank's official communication regarding the offers, as it will provide insights into the progress and subsequent developments that may arise.

These acquisition offers represent significant opportunities for Ominvest and Bank Dhofar to enhance their presence in the banking sector and potentially reshape the financial landscape of the region.

As the situation unfolds, market observers and industry analysts are eagerly analysing the implications and potential ramifications of these strategic moves.

Oman emerges as one of the top exporters of fertilisers

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as one of the world's top exporters of fertilisers in recent years, thanks to its abundant reserves of natural gas and strategic location.

The country's fertiliser industry has been growing rapidly, with several major players investing in new plants and expanding their production capacity. The World Bank reports that Oman exported \$1.38 billion worth of fertilisers in 2021, making it at the top four after Russia, China and Saudi Arabia.

In 2022, exported fertilisers worth \$2.6 billion, according to International Fertiliser Association.

One of the key factors driving Oman's success as a fertiliser exporter is its proximity to major markets in Asia. The country's location on the Arabian Sea makes it an ideal hub for shipping fertiliser products to countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are among the world's largest consumers of fertilisers.

In addition to its strategic location, Oman also has abundant reserves of natural gas, which is a key feedstock for the production of fertilisers. This has enabled the country to develop a thriving petrochemical industry, with several major players investing in new plants and expanding their production capacity.

One of the biggest players in Oman's fertiliser industry is the Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), which is a joint



THE WORLD BANK REPORTS THAT OMAN EXPORTED \$1.38 BILLION WORTH OF FERTILISERS IN 2021, MAKING IT AT THE TOP FOUR AFTER RUSSIA, CHINA AND SAUDI ARABIA.

venture between OQ (50 per cent), Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (25 per cent) and Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (25 per cent).

OMIFCO operates a large ammonia-urea plant in the port town of Sur, which has a production capacity of 2 million tonnes per year.

Another major player in Oman's fertiliser industry is the Salalah Methanol Company (SMC), a wholly owned subsidiary of Oman Oil Company. SMC operates a methanol plant in Salalah, which has a production capacity of 3,000 metric tonnes per day.

Methanol is a key feedstock for the production of formaldehyde, which is used in the manufacture of urea-formaldehyde resins, a common fertiliser.

Oman's success as a fertiliser exporter has not gone unnoticed by the international community.

In 2021, the country was ranked as the world's fifth-largest exporter of urea, with exports totalling 4.8 million tonnes. OMIFCO, on the other hand, just recently said that its urea is now being exported to as many as 14 countries globally.

Also, a study last year prepared by the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce revealed that Oman is among the Arab countries that can supply Brazil with fertilisers exported by Russia.

The study said that Oman could provide fertilisers (nitrate and phosphate mixtures and ammonium nitrate mixtures in aqueous solution or ammonia) to Brazil. It also stated that Oman exports to Brazil could reach to \$1 billion. In 2020, Oman exported \$65 million worth of fertilisers to Brazil.

Looking ahead, Oman's fertiliser industry is expected to continue to grow, driven by strong demand from key markets in Asia. The government is also committed to supporting the industry, with plans to invest in new infrastructure and provide incentives for companies to expand their operations.

BankDhofar makes an offer to acquire Ahli Bank

The above represents:

- A premium of 15.0% to ABO's closing share price of OMR 0.174 as at 9 April 2023 (the "ABO Unaffected Share Price");
- An implied Price to Q1 2023 Book Value multiple of 1.30x.

Since the submission of the initial non-binding offer to the board of directors of ABO on 10 April 2023 (the "Initial Offer"), BankDhofar's share price has appreciated. As a result, for the Share Component, this appreciation translates into a significant increase in the value of each ABO share under the agreed Swap Ratio of 1.2910. As at closing share prices on 17 May 2023.

The Swap Ratio of the Revised Offer now represents:

- A premium of 30.6% to the ABO Unaffected Share Price, valuing each ABO share at OMR 0.227 based on the BankDhofar closing share price of OMR 0.176;
- An implied Price to Q1 2023 Book Value multiple of 1.48x, by far exceeding the average Price to Book Value multiple of the Omani banking sector. For the avoidance of doubt, the Cash Component values each ABO share at OMR 0.200.

Strategic Rationale

After completion of the Takeover offer, BankDhofar will look to effect a combination with ABO. We believe that a combination of BankDhofar and ABO is a compelling opportunity for ABO shareholders to:

- Create a leading domestically-focused wholly owned Omani bank with a robust competitive position, well placed to serve the entirety of the market with leading market positions across a number of customer segments;
- Combine the banks' highly complementary activities and expertise across retail, corporate and Islamic banking for the benefit of the combined group and its customers;
- Provide career development opportunities for both banks' employees;
- Provide opportunities to create value for both sets of shareholders, notably through an improvement in the combined group's cost of funds; and
- Provide enhanced liquidity for both sets of shareholders.

All in all, the proposed transaction offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long-term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalized bank on day one.

BankDhofar remains highly confident in the ability to successfully execute the contemplated transaction.

Any transaction, should it proceed, is subject to obtaining approvals from regulators and other applicable requirements.

A further announcement will be made if and when appropriate.

Bank Muscat wins Best Retail Bank Award at MENA Banking Excellence Awards

MUSCAT: In recognition of its excellent banking products, services, and its customer-centric vision to serve its customers better every day, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded the prestigious Best Retail Bank – Oman Award for the second consecutive year, at the recently-held MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2023 instituted by MEED.

The award was received on behalf of the bank by Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, at a glittering ceremony held in Dubai and attended by a number of senior bankers from across the region.

The MENA Banking Excellence Awards celebrated the achievements of the best banks in the region, which are focusing on innovative solutions and international best practices to



enhance the banking experience of their customers.

The recognition is an acknowledgement of the global best practices adopted by Bank Muscat, its customer-centric vision, and its large number of innovative, modern products and services. These have been

developed to suit a modern lifestyle and provide more opportunities for its customers to enjoy a convenient and distinctive banking experience.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are

delighted to win the MENA Banking Excellence Award for the second consecutive year.

The accolades and recognition Bank Muscat continue to receive for its banking services come as a result of the great efforts made by its employees and the innovative products and services, which are

being continuously developed by the bank.

We thank MEED for recognising us through this prestigious award and will work to further better our services based on our customer-centric vision. Bank Muscat will continue to launch new, innovative products and services, which add value to our customers and are in line with their varying needs.”

He added: “Bank Muscat is keen to contribute to the ongoing digital transformation of Oman, strategised as a part of Oman Vision 2040, and this is reflected in the continuing launch of a diverse range of products and services for our different customer segments.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to all our valued customers for their continuing trust and confidence in our services and products, and promise to keep developing more such innovative services in the future to fulfil their aspirations.”

OAB gives away 10 holidays to credit card customers



MUSCAT: Committed to continuing to reward cardholders with exciting rewards and benefits, Oman Arab Bank is planning unforgettable holidays for 10 lucky credit card customers.

Starting today and continuing until July 2023, the bank will be organising monthly draws for vacations worth RO 1,200 each.

These holidays will include airline tickets and accommodations for two in popular summer destinations in Europe and Asia.

Customers using their credit cards for a minimum of RO 5 within Oman will earn one raffle ticket, while transactions abroad or in foreign currencies will secure two raffle tickets per RO 5, including online and POS transactions. For more information as well as terms and conditions, please visit www.oman-arabbank.com.

OAB customers benefit from collaborations with various merchants that offer discounts to the bank's credit card holders.

Earlier this year, customers were able to save when they shopped using their OAB Credit Cards both online and in-store. Customers can conveniently check credit card balances, settle payments, and change their limits using the OAB Online app.

Khedmah launches ‘Khedmah Pay’ platform to develop E-collection processes



MUSCAT: Oman Investment and Finance Company's Khedmah announced the launch of its new platform 'Khedmah Pay' during its participation in COMEX 2023.

Aimed at facilitating customer services with digital solutions for e-payments, the platform allows customers at shops to make instant and secure payments using QR codes linked to the Khedmah app.

In addition, business owners can develop their own collection processes through the platform.

The launch of this service aims to assist sellers, traders, and owners of small and medium-sized enterprises in providing an advanced and easy-to-use platform for collecting sales amounts from customers through the Khedmah app, which is presently used by more than 800,000 subscribers.

This service also provides the feature of receiving and tracking collection operations easily and securely in accordance with decision no. (386/2022) of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion regarding the provision of electronic payment services for consumers.

Said bin Ahmed Safrar, CEO of Oman Investment and Finance Company 'Khedmah', commented on the occasion of the service's launch, saying, “As

one of the Sultanate of Oman's top collection companies for more than 40 years, Khedmah is keen on developing its customer services by implementing the best digital solutions that keep up with people's changing needs and lifestyles.

We anticipate that the 'Khedmah Pay' platform will persuade storeowners and other business owners to switch to more practical, cost-efficient, and secure solutions, which will benefit them in the long-term, particularly with the rising demand from customers for quick and simple payment options.”

“Khedmah” aims, through its “Khedmah Pay” platform, to empower merchants and businesses to achieve the best results from digital payments and overcome traditional challenges they face when it comes to conducting transactions and maintaining payment records.

This service includes a range of benefits for business owners who have multiple sales outlets, such as the ability to make instant payments and compliance with government regulatory regulations.

With the contactless payment feature, the service ensures safe and convenient payments through scanning the QR code and activating the transfer process.

Vodafone Oman signs partnership agreement with Code Academy

MUSCAT: Enabling the rise of a new coder generation, Vodafone Oman has signed a partnership agreement with Code Academy, a training institute specialised in delivering IT and trending technology programmes, for the development and co-implementation of a programme in coding and trending technologies for the new generations.

Set to become Vodafone's anchor CSR initiative, the programme will aim, in the long-term, to bridge the technical knowledge gap between school and higher education as well as build the foundation for the creation of a new vocational career path in the market.

Since inception, Vodafone commitment to Oman has been underpinned by a drive to create opportunities for growth and value-generation in line with Vision 2040. Today, though its



partnership with Code Academy, it is looking to develop and nurture young minds with new-age coding capabilities supplemented by tailored soft skill coaching delivered by Vodafone.

Scheduled to open for registration in the second half of this year, the programme will

target youth between the ages of 10 and 13 years old across Oman, offering in-person and online courses in the areas of problem solving, programming, cyber security and trending technologies such as Data Science and Artificial Intelligence; in addition to soft-skills and innovation.

Artistry Show by Malabar Gold & Diamonds lures jewellery lovers in Oman

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of over 315 showrooms across ten countries has launched the latest edition of the Artistry Show — a branded jewellery exhibition, which will be held at Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom at West Gate Mall, Ruwi from May 25 to June 3, 2023.

The 'Artistry' show presents jewellery lovers with an opportunity to witness the finest in jewellery craftsmanship from the brand in addition to a superior shopping experience. From Malabar Gold & Diamonds' exclusive brands such as Mine, Era, Viraa, Ethnix, Precia and Divine, the designs which are featured in



the Artistry Show have been handpicked from all over the world, offering a highly exclusive visual treat for the connoisseurs of fine art.

“Artistry is an amassment of the finest jewellery that Malabar Gold & Diamonds has to offer. Each piece is a work of art and is sure to excite jewellery lovers who prefer exclusivity in their adornments.

The jewellery showcased in the exhibition is available across gold, diamond and precious gems, ensuring that there is something to cater to the varying preferences of our immense customer base.

I urge all jewellery lovers to visit our showroom in Ruwi, which is the largest jewellery store in Oman and witness the spectacle that we have

prepared”, commented Najeeb K, Regional Head – Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds. As an added incentive, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is also offering free gold coins on diamond and precious gem jewellery purchases.

Customers are eligible for 1 gm gold coin on diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO and ½ gm gold coins for purchase worth RO 300.

Spread across 4000 sq ft, the showroom of Malabar Gold & Diamonds in West Gate Mall, Ruwi, offers a magnificent shopping area, displaying thousands of exquisite jewellery from over 20 countries. The showroom also features a luxurious customer lounge and valet parking facility.



Oman targets launch of Energy Transition Policy by Q2

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MAY 24

Two key policy documents that will underpin the Omani government's commitment to decarbonising the domestic economy and supporting the global transition to a sustainable, clean-energy based future are slated for completion and their eventual unveiling by around the middle of this year.

The Energy Transition Policy/Strategy and the Legal Frameworks are both keenly anticipated by local and international developers eyeing a windfall of investment opportunities linked to the emerging clean energy and renewable hydrogen economy.

Their imminent launch and implementation will impart strong new impetus to Oman's energy transition plans, according to a

high-level official of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Director-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen, said work on the Energy Transition Policy and Strategy document is substantially complete with final approvals awaited from authorities before it can be formally unveiled.

Speaking at the IEEE Power Talks forum, which concluded in Muscat on Wednesday, the official provided an outline of Oman's Energy Transition Masterplan, which was tendered out last July.

"We needed to accelerate the base of the hydrogen economy, and it was a clear mandate given to the ministry to set up the policy regulatory framework, allocate enough lands, set up a new company to orchestrate the sector and a directorate in the ministry



to look after this sector," said Eng Al Shidhani.

A key milestone in this journey was marked last October when Oman announced a firm commitment to Net Zero by 2050 while Oman Hydrogen Company (Hydrom) was formally launched as well. Building on

these developments, commercial agreements were signed earlier this year to support six hydrogen projects that will produce around 700,000 tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2030, he said.

In his talk, Al Shidhani emphasised the critical importance of the Royal Decree setting out

Oman's green hydrogen vision and promulgated in February this year.

"What's good about this Royal Decree is that no one can do anything with the 50,000 sq kilometres of land allocated for green hydrogen projects without the permission of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. That provides a lot of security to the market and as well to Hydrom to go ahead and masterplan and orchestrate the development of the sector," he explained.

Al Shidhani also affirmed that contract awards for the first two blocks earmarked under Hydrom's public auction route will be announced "next week or the week after".

Further awards are expected by the end of this year or early next year with the goal to secure around 1 million tonnes of green

hydrogen output by 2030, he said.

As for the Energy Transition Strategy, it proposes targets for decarbonisation at 10-year intervals (2030, 2040 and 2050) through to the Net Zero goal of 2050, said Al Shidhani.

It centres on, among other pillars, the use of low-carbon hydrogen for domestic consumption in industry, power sector and transportation, among other sectors, with surplus volumes targeted for export.

"The vision of the Oman Energy Transition Policy Strategy is to achieve Net Zero by 2050 while also ensuring energy security, competitive growth in the low-carbon economy and value to society; and it entails the use of renewable energy as a major energy source for Oman to compete in the energy sector on the global stage," he added.

First Oman-Bahrain Products Expo begins

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT, MAY 24

With the participation of 32 Omani and Bahraini entrepreneurs besides a number of owners of small and medium-sized companies, the first Omani-Bahraini Products Exhibition under the auspices of Abdullah bin Adel Fakhro, Bahraini Minister of Industry and Trade, got underway at the Seef Mall in Manama on Wednesday.

Organised in coordination with the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, several small and medium entrepreneurs in the exhibition take part in the Expo, thanks to the coordination of the embassies of the two

brotherly countries, as well as the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, headed by Rudina bint Amer al Hajariyah, President of the Omani-Bahrain Friendship Association.

"We are happy to organise the first exhibition of various products and services from both friendly countries thanks to the Bahrain Society for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, and with the support of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority," said Rudina bint Amer al Hajariyah, President of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association.

In addition to being a distinguished event that aimed at reviving the economic

and commercial movement between Omani and Bahraini entrepreneurs and merchants, the Expo also aims at developing the process of trade exchange and investments in joint national and economic projects to serve the two brotherly countries.

A delegation from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is participating in the exhibition, in cooperation with the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, through a special corner for tourist information, through which the tourism potentials of the Sultanate of Oman are being promoted to the visitors to the exhibition, and the Bahraini people are introduced to the most important sites, cities

and tourist attractions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The exhibition which is open for four days from Wednesday till Saturday, May 27, also brings together a group of the most luxurious and best Arab perfumes and incense, and types of Omani and Bahraini fragrant scents that bear the signature of high-end brands, retailers and distributors of luxury goods, and many other products including Omani sweets, Omani frankincense, incense, clothes, abayas, silverware, and Omani handicrafts, and honey.

Omani entrepreneurs who are specialised in cosmetics and personal care products are also showcasing their offerings at the Expo.

ODP to provide high-speed big data analysis services for OQ Group



MUSCAT: Oman Data Park (ODP), the Sultanate of Oman's first managed cloud services and cyber security provider, signed an agreement to provide high-speed big data analysis services in the oil and gas field to OQ Group, the global integrated energy company in Oman, as part of the activities of the 32nd edition of COMEX, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The agreement was signed by Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Chief Executive, OQ, and Eng Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park.

In accordance with this agreement, Oman Data Park provides a cloud environment that enables the analysing of the big data in high-speed, that paves the ways to the transferring and hosting of OQ data in a highly efficient and secure manner to the Oman Data Park data centre within the borders of the Sultanate of Oman to ensure safe analysis of big data, based on Oman Data Park's distinguished capabilities in handling big data.

Oman Data Park will provide a cloud digital workspace that automatically adapts to the needs of OQ for its employees and contractors, quickly expand scopes of work for software testing and development, provide workspace that helps the company to eliminate the complexity in managing hardware inventory, OS versions and patches, and Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI), which contributes to enhancing simplify the company's desktop delivery strategy.

With Oman Data Park workspace, the users get a fast,

responsive desktop of their choice that they can access anywhere, anytime, from any supported device in particular during natural disasters and in any circumstances.

The agreement aims at enhancing efficiency, adapting the new direction of leading organisations in the region and globally, expanding the base for benefiting from cloud service technologies and keeping abreast of the latest developments in information technology and cloud services.

The signing of the high-speed data analysis agreement in the oil and gas field with OQ came in light of the approval of the OQ's board of directors for the group's cloud strategy.

The cloud strategy of OQ is consistent with the initiatives of the local content promotion programmes in the Sultanate of Oman that aim at advancing efforts to enable the private sector to lead the Omani economy, enhancing local products, promoting small and medium enterprises, as well as enhancing the in-country value added.

Commenting on this deal, Eng Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park Company, said: "We are pleased to sign this agreement with the OQ Group, at a time that our company has made huge strides in all its services, as ODP operates the only virtual data centre — Nebula — as well as it owns the Cyber Security Park, the sole specialised cyber security centre in the country, run by highly qualified Omani employees, where it provides security operations and services around the clock.

OQ explores significance of fostering transparency in internal auditing

MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy group, is commemorating the Internal Audit Awareness Month, observed worldwide in May each year. This initiative aligns with OQ's vision and plans to bolster its institutional performance and quality assurance in accordance with international auditing systems and standards.

To celebrate this occasion, OQ has launched a roadshow to raise public awareness about internal auditing within the Group. Recognising the importance of fostering transparency in internal auditing and governance procedures, the event showcases the accomplishments in this area.

It underscores the value contributed by internal auditing departments to their respective organisations. Distinguished guests, including officials from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) in Oman, and executive management team members, attended the roadshow.

During the event, Abdulrahman bin Ahmed al Harthi, Chief Executive Assurance at OQ, delivered



a speech emphasising, "This initiative was launched to increase awareness about the significance of internal auditing and its role in supporting the Group in achieving its objectives in accordance with international standards. OQ leverages cutting-edge internal auditing technology, including software like Qlik Sense, TeamMate, and Celonis."

Al Harthi added, "We are dedicated to nurturing an

internal auditing culture at OQ by implementing various measures, the most notable being the adoption of digital auditing procedures and the automation of our auditing systems.

"This roadshow aims to strengthen the vital functions of risk management, control, and governance carried out by the internal audit departments within the Group. It will also reinforce the value of assurance in supporting OQ's risk

management strategy and the overall governance framework of the Group."

OQ endeavours to enhance the skills and capabilities of its people by providing specialised training programmes in various fields that support internal auditors in their work. OQ aims to achieve this objective by collaborating with international training organisations such as the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA).

Is a new BRICS currency on the horizon?



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

After several decades of trading with the major currencies in the global transactions, the time is right for the issuance of a new global currency by merging the currencies of BRICS – the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

The goal of the new currency is to reduce the dominance of the US dollar at a time when 30 other countries have announced to deal with the BRICS currency in international transactions, whether or not it includes countries seeking membership of the bloc. In fact, a new currency may be part of the gathering of the BRICS summit in South Africa in August.

Experts indicate that the

BRICS currency will impact the dominance of the dollar and gradually end the world's total dependence on the dollar as a global reserve currency.

Moreover, the new currency will strengthen the local currencies of countries and secure them with gold and other valuable commodities.

The BRICS countries today represent more than 40 per cent of the world's population and about 30 per cent of the global GDP. And with the accession of other countries, including some Arab countries, this will increase the use of the new currency in global trade.

Over time, this new development will result in decolourisation of the global economy, besides diversify the

reserves the BRICS member countries.

Today, the BRICS group of countries represents the largest economies in the global south, and it has great power in production and consumption processes, which helps this commercial bloc to be viable.

Efforts to reduce the hegemony of the US dollar are not the topic of debate today, but calls to clip the dollar's power have grown in response to US actions against some countries, particularly Russia, which is subject to sanctions as a result of its war with Ukraine.

There is great debate about how to build independency of the financial system through the BRICS countries, especially in the wake of the flurry of US interest

rate hikes that have created challenges for many countries in the conduct of their economic and monetary policies.

BRICS countries aim to achieve a level of self-sufficiency in international trade among themselves, which has eluded other currency unions in the world to achieve.

This group does not share territorial borders and is capable of producing a wider range of goods than any existing monetary union as a result of geographic and demographic diversity.

Each of them has a heavy economic weight in its region, which gives it the ability to enhance trade and commodity exchange, in addition to circumventing trade restrictions between them, and promoting re-exports.

These countries are described as the fast-growing economies that could collectively dominate the global economy by 2050.

Besides, Brazil, Russia, India and China, are among the ten largest countries in the world in terms of population, area and gross domestic product.

Since 2009, the BRICS group has increasingly formed a more coherent geopolitical bloc, and its governments meet annually in official summits to coordinate multilateral policies.

They work not to interfere in the affairs of others, and to achieve equality and mutual benefit among themselves. Today, it is considered the geopolitical competitor and seeking to expand membership during the coming period.

Supply chain scrutiny may upend EU solar ambitions

BY LISA JUCCA

Making the world a greener place through clean energy is hard enough. Doing so while also avoiding human rights violations looks even harder.

Western nations are rushing to install more solar panels to reduce their dependency on polluting fossil fuels like gas and oil.

That's in principle a boon for China, which dominates each step of photovoltaic manufacturing. Yet a rising legislative tide aimed at ensuring companies' supply chains are free from forced labour and other abuses presents a mounting challenge for Western utilities.

At the heart of the problem is Xinjiang. The province is a major producer of silicon metal, the quartz-based feedstock for ultra-pure silicon — known as polysilicon — which is the key raw material in solar panels.

Last year Xinjiang accounted for some 35 per cent of global solar-grade polysilicon output, says market specialist Bernreuter.

The United States, which has accused Beijing of repressing minorities in the province, banned the import of Xinjiang polysilicon and other products in June last year, triggering delays in the delivering of solar panels for German utility RWE and other players.

Now things could also get trickier in Europe. Germany has introduced from this year

legislation requesting that companies with more than 3,000 employees police their supply chains or risk a fine of up to 2 per cent of turnover. A parallel EU-wide proposal on value chain due diligence and a plan to eradicate forced labour from all products entering the 27-nation bloc are under discussion.

For energy players, ensuring that Chinese panels are completely free from the banned basic mineral is tricky. Moreover, a crackdown this month on consulting firms that often help non-Chinese investors with their due diligence is complicating things.

Avoiding Chinese solar components altogether, as some US players are starting to do, is probably the safest bet.

But there's not yet enough raw material outside China. Bernreuter estimates that non-Chinese solar-grade polysilicon is enough to produce 40 gigawatts of solar panels per year. That may suffice to satisfy annual US photovoltaic installation, which rose to 19 gigawatts last year, according to IEA data.

But it won't supply Europe's needs: under its bold REPowerEU plan, the 27-nation bloc may need to install 60 GW of solar power per year, EU Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson said in December.

That may still not suffice. With China likely to dominate the photovoltaic industry in the near term, Europe may need to choose between tough due diligence checks and realising its green ambitions. — Reuters



Employees work on photovoltaic solar panels at a factory of Risen Energy in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters



ANNE O KRUEGER

The author, a former World Bank chief economist and former first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, is Senior Research Professor of International Economics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Development at Stanford University.

Recent headlines seem to augur a global debt crisis. The United States is teetering on the precipice of a self-inflicted default. Egypt, Ghana, Pakistan, and many other countries are in grave financial difficulties. Italy and Japan's debt burdens have grown heavier.

And the Chinese are delaying or hampering multilateral efforts to restructure low- and middle-income countries' debt. The International Monetary Fund counts 41 countries as being heavily indebted, and that does not include middle-income countries such as Argentina, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The concerns these stories have fuelled are real, but there are fundamental differences between them. The US has the capacity to service its debts, and it has been a reliable borrower for many years.

Its problem is political. By contrast, the question for poorer countries is whether, or how much, they can repay. Many heavily indebted low-income countries have debt levels that are already unsustainable or will be soon. Some have missed payments or announced that they will have to suspend debt service. Private lenders have responded by refusing to lend more. But this cohort of indebted countries can be broken down further into two groups.

Some countries were in relatively satisfactory positions until Covid-19 forced them to borrow more to finance pandemic-related expenditures. International financial

A world of debt



A vendor prepares a bag for a customer at a wholesale market, amid the country's economic crisis in Colombo, Sri Lanka. — Reuters

institutions have created special facilities to help these countries secure rapid additional financing, and to sustain normal financing as their economies recover.

The other group already had high and rising debts before Covid-19, often because they had splurged on projects with low or negative rates of return.

Sri Lanka is a case in point. A new government took office in 2019 and cut taxes dramatically, increasing already large fiscal deficits and borrowing even more. While ill-advised domestic policies – notably a prohibition on imported agricultural inputs – sharply reduced the country's agricultural production, the government spent down its foreign-exchange reserves and then borrowed at higher interest rates (especially from China) until it could borrow no more.

Because many heavily indebted countries rely on imports for essential food, medicines, and intermediate goods, an inability to finance imports during a crisis can result in factory closures and a sharp decline in economic activity – as happened in Sri Lanka.

Until the afflicted country acquires the foreign exchange needed to finance renewed import flows, essentials will remain scarce.

In these cases, the IMF works with the government to formulate policies to enable the country to restore growth and creditworthiness. If the IMF did not insist on such reforms,

it would merely be increasing the country's indebtedness and postponing an inevitable reckoning.

Hence, to ensure that the country follows through, the IMF generally disburses funds in tranches as reforms are carried out, with the initial disbursement enabling a resumption of import flows and debt servicing.

Recognising the impact of such crises on the poor, some observers have called for debt reduction and new funds to be offered without any condition that the country correct the policy failures that led to extreme indebtedness.

But in assuming that new lending will help the poor, they fail to see that this is often a case of "throwing good money after bad." In many cases, one reason why the country is poor is that its previously accumulated debt went toward low-productivity investments.

Despite the long process that the IMF undertakes before agreeing to a programme, additional complications may emerge after it is established. When the IMF deems a country's debt burden too heavy for it to sustain its debt-servicing requirements, restructuring of sovereign debt must be part of the agreed IMF programme and negotiated with private and public creditors.

Sometimes, reforms and IMF money can help a country achieve growth and finance its debt service. But in other cases,

the debt has become so large that it is unreasonable to expect the country to resume servicing it fully.

To address this issue, officials from the creditor countries' governments will meet and agree on debt-restructuring terms, which might include a reduction in the face value of the debt, a rescheduling of principal repayments, or even a grace period.

Traditionally, private creditors will also participate in these talks and agree to a haircut on outstanding debt.

But China's rise as emerging and developing economies' largest bilateral creditor has frustrated matters. The Chinese have been reluctant to restructure debts, and have insisted on lending to debtor countries whatever they need to cover their obligations. If the IMF disbursed funds under those conditions, some portion of them would simply go to repay China, which would then be treated more favourably than other creditors.

IMF programmes therefore cannot be implemented until all creditors have reached an agreement on restructuring. Sri Lanka could not receive funds from the IMF for months because the Chinese refused to take a haircut on loans they had made. Instead, they wanted to lend even more money to Sri Lanka so that it could service its debt (and increase its overall debt to China).

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CULTURE

Volunteers distribute sweet water to devotees on the occasion of the martyrdom day of the Sikh Guru Arjun Dev, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US actor and former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger arrives for the premiere of “Fubar” at The Grove in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



CONSERVATION

Euflasia de Jesus (Nina), 53, and Louhani Amahi, 3, indigenous from the Kaimbe people, are pictured close to the Canudos Wind Energy Complex in Canudos, Bahia state. A wind farm in northeastern Brazil sounds like a welcome climate-friendly energy solution, but it is causing controversy over another kind of environmental worry: the impact on the endangered Lear’s macaw. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A dressed attendee poses in the Honour Courtyard before taking part in the “Fetes Galantes” fancy dress evening at the Chateau de Versailles, outside Paris. — AFP

ART

Asterion, a minotaur weighing 47 tonnes and 13 metres high made by “La Machine” street theatre company, moves through the Montaudran district in Toulouse, southwestern France, guided by a team of machinists. — AFP



art & life

THURSDAY | MAY 25, 2023 | DHUL QA’ADA 5, 1444 AH

OMAN OBSERVER       www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

Showcasing the wonders of Oman to French viewers

Echappées Belles [Beautiful Excursions] is a weekly discovery magazine watched by millions in France dedicated an episode to Oman. This writer took them to some of the most popular spots in the capital and deep into the canyons to learn more about some of the country's hidden jewels.

ENTERTAINMENT

The US artist who went from prison cell to Paris show

AGED 16, HALIM FLOWERS was arrested in the United States, tried as an adult then jailed for murder. Now aged 42, he is a prolific artist, poet and writer exhibiting in Paris.

The turnaround has been spectacular. Flowers was only released in 2019 after a change in US law allowed for under-18s who had been tried as adults to be “re-sentenced”.

Then a year later, when Covid-19 pushed much of the world into lockdown, his wife — also an artist — suggested he should give painting a go.

“I just took the brush. I had no idea about colour, how mixing red and white made pink. She told me how to do that, how to take care of my brushes,” he said.

Visiting AFP’s photo studio in Paris, Flowers sketched a graffiti-style draw-

ing on a white background and explained that art was his “only drug”.

“I don’t smoke drugs, I don’t drink alcohol, I don’t party. All I do is art,” he said. Colourful and rich in symbolism, his work highlights the experiences of people on the margins — prisoners, the homeless, those with mental health issues.

The Washington native, who is displaying his paintings until Sunday at the Champop gallery in the French capital, told the United States’ National Public Radio in 2021 he had already sold art worth more than \$1 million.

His life now is a far cry from that of the skinny teenager who featured in a 1998 documentary for HBO titled “Thug Life in DC”.

A disconsolate Flowers told the documentary he had no hope, and that



his mother would probably be dead by the time he was freed.

- KARDASHIAN COLLABORATION -

Flowers was raised in a poor neighbourhood of the US capital and grew up during the crack “epidemic”.

He fell into drug dealing and eventually got caught up in a robbery that resulted in someone being shot dead.

Despite not being the shooter, he was tried and convicted of murder under the principle of “aiding and abetting”.

He said his generation of jailed children were regarded as “super predators” but he knew he was innocent and had enough faith in himself to struggle to show his humanity.

“Those who are considered as beasts and super predators today can become those who visit the museums tomorrow,” he said.

After years of campaigning, he was finally freed in early 2019 — his mother greeting him with open arms.

Already with a track record as an author and poet, he worked with reality TV star Kim Kardashian on a documentary called “The Justice Project”, which helped to secure the release of one of his childhood friends.

He met both Kardashian and her then husband, musician Kanye West, although he credits West’s fellow rapper Jay-Z with sparking his interest in visual art.

- ‘LACK OF LOVE’ -

“I was introduced to visual art through listening to Jay-Z rap about Jean-Michel Basquiat,” he said, referring to the US artist who shot to fame in the 1980s before dying of a heroin overdose at 27 in 1988.

For Flowers, seeing that a black person had been “received and revered in the art world” was a revelation and inspired him to begin studying the arts while in jail.

The similarity between his work and that of Basquiat has led to accusations he is copying his forebear but Flowers flatly denies the charge.

“To show my reverence to my ancestors through my work is an honour,” he said.

“Anything that I do that resembles them is because we share the same spirit.” Now he wants to use his art to change perceptions, particularly about notions of justice.

“I think people are surprised that I came home from prison and I wasn’t being bitter or angry,” he said.

There’s nothing that necessarily links being in jail to being angry and bitter, he stressed.

He sees the issue as a wider one — society in general, he said, has been infected by a “pandemic of lack of love”. His mission is to create a “new visual language” that will vaccinate against this pandemic and transform our image of justice. — AFP

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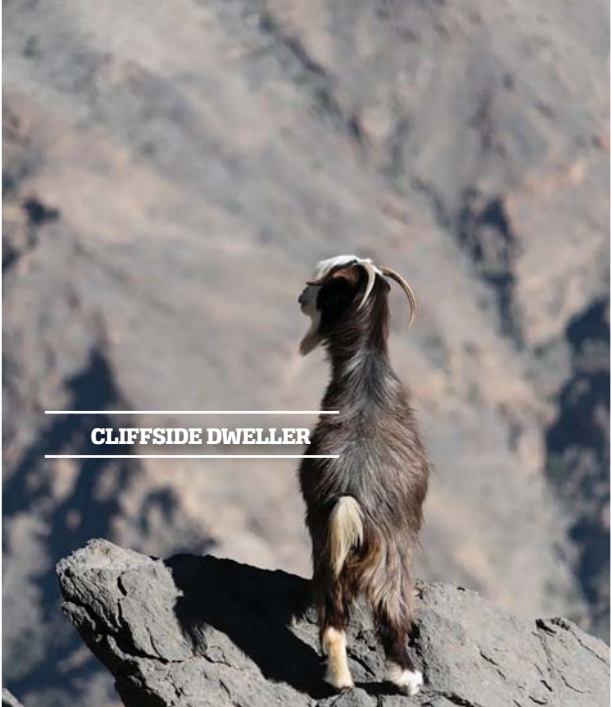


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THE CANYON VIEW



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OUT IN THE SAND

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By Khaled Abdul Malak

In October last year, I was approached by French TV journalist Marie Perrin about taking part in a travel program titled *Echappées Belles* [Beautiful Excursions] which is broadcast on France 5.

The programme takes viewers off the beaten track to discover new places – from the most iconic landmarks to the least known treasures – and for this collaboration, the team was planning to dedicate one episode to Oman.

The weekly discovery magazine had its first broadcast in 2006 presented by its seasoned hosts and explorers, and from its humble beginnings, it is now watched and enjoyed by millions weekly per episode, not just in its home country but also by those who watch the show across different social media platforms, including Youtube.

I was delighted by the offer and jumped on this great occasion to promote the uniqueness of this country, which I know very well and cherish so much. The team arrived in Oman in November and spent 12 days shooting in different locations.

The episode included reports about different subjects showcasing the natural beauty of the country, its people, its development, and its traditions backed by interviews with Omanis active in many different domains.

The team who visited Oman included Sophie Jovillard, the journalist, Mathieu Despiau, cameraman and director, Yann Manier, the sound engineer, and Agnès Vanhems, the assistant.

The team shot for several days in Oman to create nearly an hour and a half of a show that showcased the diversity of the country.

Overall, they've met different Omani personalities taking viewers to an intimate look at what makes Oman a beautiful country.

They showcased many of Oman's different traditions packing it all in within an hour and a half show showcasing traditions such as henna tattoo amongst women, what comprises an Omani meal, and how the most revered Omani dishes are prepared



but ultimately looked at the soul of the country and its people.

They ventured into Sur to understand the relation of Omanis to the sea, explored the wonderful world of sea turtles, interacted with local fishermen to talk about changes and traditions, visited desert safaris and not only understand what life is like in the desert but what the culture is like for people living in the desert.

For my part, I was glad to have shown the team not just within Muscat and its many beautiful attractions including the historic Muttrah Souq, but also showed them the grandness of some of Oman's beautiful architecture including the Royal Opera House Muscat.

Beyond Muscat, I was honoured to show the team some of Oman's beautiful canyons, took them for a hike

deep into the mountains and showed them the beauty as well as why the aflaj system of Oman has become a beautiful addition to the World Heritage Site List of Unesco.

Overall, the programme was an insightful look into Oman and why it is a destination filled with welcoming and hospitable people with beautiful traditions worth checking out.

I was very thrilled to watch the

documentary when it was posted on Youtube on April 30. The episode on Oman had a great positive impact. I received plenty of messages from enthusiastic travellers telling me that the places shown in the documentary are so unique that it made them consider visiting the magnificent hidden Eden called Oman.

You can watch the documentary at this link: <https://youtu.be/-YpSk4Xx6s4>.

DISCOVERY

'Fast X' races ahead to become biggest international launch of 2023

UNIVERSAL PICTURES' "Fast X" raced to the top of the box office this weekend, launching at \$67.5 million in the United States, according to studio estimates.

The summer action flick matched early box office projections, which anticipated that the film would gross more than \$60 million in the United States and Canada.

Internationally, "Fast X" opened to \$251 million for a global cumulative total of nearly \$319 million. Abroad, the only "Fast & Furious" movie ever to beat that number is "The Fate of the Furious" in 2017.

The blockbuster has notched the biggest international debut of 2023 and the second best global launch of



the year – behind Universal Pictures' "The Super Mario Bros. Movie."

The 10th instalment of the "Fast and Furious" franchise dethroned Disney and Marvel Studios' "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3," which slipped into second place, adding \$32 million in its third weekend for a North American cumulative of \$266.5 million.

Rounding out the top three was "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," which collected \$9.8 million in its seventh weekend for a domestic total of \$549.3 million, according to estimates from

measurement firm Comscore.

Directed by Louis Leterrier, "Fast X" gathers Vin Diesel, Charlize Theron, Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, John Cena, Nathalie Emmanuel, Brie Larson, Jordana Brewster, Jason Statham and Sung Kang for one big, outrageous family reunion. The sequel also features franchise newcomers Alan Ritchson, Daniela Melchior and Jason Momoa.

The latest jaunt in the "Fast and Furious" saga received a tepid response from critics, earning a 54-per cent rotten rating on review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes and a B-plus grade from audiences polled by Cinema Score.

"The problems with 'Fast X' exist on a more structural story level," wrote film critic Katie Walsh for the Tribune News Service. "It feels like Leterrier and the writers are just digging up loose familial relations and celebrity cameos and throwing characters together for the heck of it, tossing Oscar-winning actresses (count 'em: four) in the audience's face to create a distraction from the other weaknesses in the script."

Next weekend, opening in wide release is Disney's live-action remake of "The Little Mermaid," as well as Open Road Films' "Kandahar," Sony Pictures' "The Machine" and Lions gate's "About My Father." – tca/dpa

ART

Klimt painting sells for over \$50m in New York spring auctions

A PAINTING BY renowned Austrian painter Gustav Klimt as fetched more than \$50 million at the annual New York spring auctions, in what was the painting's first time on the auction block.

The early 20th century work "Insel im Attersee" ("Island in Lake Attersee") went to a collector in Japan for \$53.2 million, the auction house Sotheby's announced on Wednesday.

The landscape painting depicts a shimmering, turquoise body of water in vibrant colours characteristic of Klimt, who was a quintessential member of the art nouveau movement.

It was sold after a seven-minute



bidding war, said the auction house.

The painting "L'Empire des lumières" by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte (1898-1967) was

also sold, at a steep price of \$42.3million.

In total, the Sotheby's auction on Tuesday evening raked in around \$427 million. – dpa



art & life

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THURSDAY | MAY 25 | 2023

LIFESTYLE

Weeds grow at London's Chelsea Flower Show

NETTLES, DANDELIONS, brambles: weeds — once considered a scourge — are taking pride of place at London's Chelsea Flower Show as gardeners concern themselves more than ever with biodiversity and sustainable development.

Around 145,000 visitors, including King Charles III and Queen Camilla, are expected to attend the five-day annual horticultural extravaganza starting on Tuesday, one of the most popular of its kind worldwide. Visitors can enjoy a selection of specially planted gardens showcasing themes and trends.

In 2022, the gold medal went to a garden celebrating rewilding after the reintroduction of beavers to the southwestern England.

This year, no less than one third of the 12 main gardens in competition feature weeds such as nettles, knapweed, dandelions, chickweed or buttercups that generations of gardeners have spent their lives rooting out.

Six-time Chelsea Flower Show gold-medal landscape designer Cleve West has managed to include 19 weed species in his garden for the Centrepiece Association.

West said the garden, constructed around the dilapidated remains of a 19th-century house, was for him the perfect metaphor for the young homeless people the charity cares for, who shouldn't be written off.

BIODIVERSITY

"Weeds play a very significant part in repairing land. When land has been disturbed, weeds are the first things that go. They are pioneer plants that go in and repair the soil," he said.

"They sort of have a microbial activity in the soil that helps make soils healthy, fertile and it provides food for early pollinators — even homes for some invertebrates," he said.

"So they play a very important part in biodiversity." This is the first time he has planted weeds in a competition garden.

He says he is fascinated by all "the life forms they support" and urges gardeners to make space for them if possible to discover the "intricacies involved in how plants grow together".

Jilayne Rickards has designed the "Fauna and Flora" garden, which invites visitors on an eco-trek to Rwanda's Virunga mountains in the footsteps of gorillas and includes a spectacular waterfall.

"Thistles and brambles and nettles... this is typical gorilla habitat," she said of the weed species that she cultivated in Cornwall, southwestern England.

"We spend a lot of time ripping these things out of our garden, not aware of perhaps the amount of wild-life and biodiversity it actually supports," she said.

Another garden, designed by landscape architect Tom Massey with a laboratory dome, is devoted to the role and under-

standing of insects. Here again, weeds have their place, including dandelions and clover.

The concept of celebrating weeds, however, is not without its critics at a show famed for the creativity and meticulousness of its beautiful gardens.

"The war against traditional gardens is about to go nuclear," is how conservative newspaper The Daily Telegraph summed up the latest weed-friendly trend.

TRADITIONALISTS

Celebrity gardener Alan Titchmarsh told Country Life magazine the aim of the Royal Horticultural Society's flagship show was to reward gardening excellence.

This was being "observed", he said, by a need to show gardeners were not "died-in-the-wool traditionalists" but "vibrant folk with a finger on the current environmental pulse", he said.

Even so, weeds have not yet succeeded at complete domination.

The 12 main gardens in competition — out of a total of 36 — use an average of 3,000 different plants. The smallest, dedicated to balconies and potted plants, has around a hundred.

Themes range from edible plants — with a chef using them to prepare meals — to Korean herbal medicine, wellness and listening.

All the gardens will be recycled, donated for example to a hospital or communities. — AFP



THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI

Is technology and Google driving us crazy?

'AN OPK'

As I was concentrating on the story I was working on, which needed to be submitted early for publication, the lady of my house texted me, "Let us invite the visitors tomorrow."

I obeyed, I agreed, and so be it. I paused my story and made the necessary phone calls to the invited guests and she was happy about it as I struggled to finish up my story.

Later in the evening, she called me to know where I was and I mockingly told her that 'I am just leaving office so in thirty minutes I will be joining you home.'

One minute later, she spots me behind her in her kitchen. She knows my gait even from a distance. "Why do you always fabricate your whereabouts? You said you are just leaving office?" she asked sweetly.

I love surprising her but she may be thinking ill about it.

"By the way, why lie? Do you think you will have the chance of finding me doing something wrong?" I immediately changed the topic because it was not my intention.

Suddenly, she asked me to take her to the pharmacy to buy an 'OPK'.

She too, has never seen or used one, but technology and Google have caused problems that she has read about, and now she needs them.

So, we drive to the pharmacy and reluctantly, I offered to go in. A few minutes later, I come back empty-handed from the pharmacy, because she says there must be fifteen in a pack, but the only ones available are five in the same pack.

I sat in the car, and as I was telling her that was all I got, she again sent me to ask the pharmacist for a better and cheaper option with more than five tests.

To please her, I went again and came back empty-handed. The pharmacist said he had never seen one that had more than five pieces.

"Please do not feel bad, just go bring it for me. I will Google again later," she said. She too was embarrassed, but I took it lightly.

It was the third time I was entering the pharmacy with the same pharmacist. I do not know what he might be thinking of me, but being a man, obviously he understood it was neither for me nor by me.

OPKs are for ladies, and if he is a husband too, he would surely know who is behind my going in and out of the pharmacy.

I drive happily back home, she got her OPK, and I am not mad at her, but what would have happened if it was the other way around?

'LOSING WEIGHT'

Given that I love providing the lady of my house with what she requests, I never say no because she has this shy-like noble, innocent smile which makes me give in.

Anyways, so it was a sunny morning last weekend, and she requested that I go for a long drive. She likes long drives, and this time she suggested we drive to Sohar, which is more than 200 kilometres from Muscat. So we drove off, talking, sharing ideas, and reminiscing about the past.

Ever since she took a step to lose weight, I have missed the 'we time' we always had when sharing meals, and I thought the long drive would compensate in some way.

The 'losing weight' thing started that day when she popped out the question to me, asking me how I felt about her weight.

I was very honest and truthful to tell her that I loved her the way she was only that she should watch out not to raise the scales more.

This triggered her serotonin level a bit due to the second part of my response. You see, when I say I love the way she is, she takes it as a joke, and when I say she needs to slow down in order to be careful with health issues, she thinks I am not happy about her appearance.

The 'weight issues' are of recent concern to many people, as my neighbour was telling me what happened with him when he constantly proposed to go for daily thirty minute walks with his wife.

She was not the 'walk-aholic' type, yet he was proposing this for her own benefit. What happened few months later, was that she travelled abroad with her sister, and just a month after her return, she was losing weight intensely after surgery.

She underwent surgery not because she wanted to but because she thought the reason why her husband needed the walks together was her scale problems.

The point I am trying to make here is that self made love is so important. We cannot love other people until we learn how to love and accept ourselves the way we are. Let's remind ourselves that our values do not rely on our bodily looks. Till next time....

Shaddad al Musalmi is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

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