

The Committee of senior officials of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority held its 8th meeting in Muscat on Tuesday. The meeting was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Economy. It was chaired by Dr Nasser Rashid Al Ma'awali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy. The meeting, held with the participation of GCC under-secretaries for economy and planning, covered a number of topics related to phases of the GCC economic integration. The officials looked into decisions issued by the GCC Supreme Council during its 43rd session held in December 2022.



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SABALENKA SETS UP MUCHOVA CLASH IN SEMIS



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CBO EXPANDS BUSINESS ACTIVITIES OF FLCs IN OMAN



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STRAWBERRY BOYCOTT LEAVES SPAIN'S FARMERS IN A JAM



MUSCAT

SHURA APPROVES DRAFT DEBT LAW

MUSCAT: Majlis Ashishura approved the draft Law on Public Debt and preferred it to the State Council at its 15th ordinary meeting of the 4th annual sitting held under the auspices of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Shura Chairman, on Tuesday. Earlier, the Economic and Financial Committee of Shura studied the draft law and submitted a report to Shura. **SEE P2**

WADI DAYQAH DAM TO BE OPENED ON JUNE 11

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) on Tuesday said it will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam gates to release 15 million m3 of water from June 11. Located in Qurayat, 75 km from Muscat, Wadi Dayqah is home to one of the largest dams in the Arabian Peninsula. **SEE P2**

KHERSON

UKRAINE DAM DESTROYED

An attack on a major Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine Tuesday unleashed a torrent of water that flooded a small city, two dozen villages and sparked the evacuation of 17,000 people. Moscow and Kyiv traded blame for ripping a gaping hole in the Kakhovka dam in what Kyiv said was an attempt by Russia to hamper Ukraine's long-awaited offensive. People in the city of Kherson, the largest population centre nearby, headed for higher ground as water, which had been held back by the dam and a hydroelectric plant, rose in the Dnipro River. **SEE P7**

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RECORD DEEP DESCEND



The Omani Cave Exploration Team has reached a depth of at least 300 metres in a cave hole that could potentially be the deepest ever discovered. The Ambaort Hole holds great intrigue and potential. With their expertise and determination, the team descended into the depths of this enigmatic cave, documenting its unique features and mapping its intricate passages. **REPORT ON P4**

CYCLONE BIPARJOY BREWING, IMPACT UNLIKELY ON OMAN

A depression formed in the southeast Arabian Sea on Tuesday, about 1,160 km from the coast of the Sultanate of Oman, quickly developed into a tropical storm named Biparjoy. The cyclonic storm will intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by Thursday morning and very severe cyclonic storm by Friday evening in areas adjoining Arabian Sea. But it may not have an impact on the Sultanate of Oman, experts said.

A weather forecaster from Oman Meteorology said, "Direction is still ambiguous and has many probabilities. Some models see it moving towards Gujarat, India, while others point towards Masirah Island, Oman. The tracks are many but it will be critical after three to five days. Now it is a tropical storm and the next 24 hours is crucial for us to come to the right understanding of the system."

The name Biparjoy was given by Bangladesh and means 'calamity' or 'disaster'. As per IMD website, the name was adopted by World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) countries in 2020. **FULL REPORT ON P2**

MERGER OF NAMA FIRMS TO RAISE EFFICIENCY

MUSCAT: Nama Holding Group on Tuesday merged Muscat Electricity Distribution Company, Mazoon Electricity Company, Majan Electricity Company and Tanweer Company into two entities.

Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply will now cover all aspects related to the electricity sector in all governorates of Oman, except for Dhofar Governorate where electricity, water and waste services are provided through Nama Dhofar Services Company.

The group will unify all electricity services under the name of "Nama Services", with the firm acting as one-stop-shop for all subscribers. The company will have a uniform service hall for subscribers and it will establish an electronic platform (Nama Platform) to provide a unified service, exclusively related to the electricity sector.

Ahmed Amer Al Mahrezi, Acting CEO of Nama Group, affirmed that the assets and employees of the abovementioned companies were distributed to the two new companies ("Nama Electricity Distribution" and "Nama Supply"), each according to its specialization.

The process ensures uninterrupted flow of business and projects, said Al Mahrezi, noting that the group was keen to accomplish this merger in co-operation with the authorities concerned, namely the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Investment Authority and the Authority for Public Services Regulation. Al Mahrezi added that the merger will help revise the costs of the electricity sector in the medium term, raise the efficiency of the electricity system, upgrade the standard of services and develop them to keep pace with technical developments in the field of subscriber services.

DETAILS ON P15



INSIDE



MILKY WAY: PHOTOGRAPHERS' DELIGHT

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Iran's embassy reopens in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: Iran officially reopened its embassy in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, a Reuters witness said, following a deal to re-establish ties and ease a long rivalry that fuelled conflicts across the Middle East.

A ceremony was held inside the embassy's compound with dozens of diplomats and officials attending the reopening of the diplomatic mission for the first time in seven years.

"We consider today an important day in the relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Alireza Bikdeli said.

"The region will move towards greater cooperation and convergence to achieve stability, prosperity and progress," Bikdeli said in a speech during the ceremony.

In March, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed, in a deal brokered by China, to end a diplomatic



Foreign diplomatic delegations attend the official ceremony of the reopening of the Iranian embassy in Riyadh Tuesday. — AFP

rift and re-establish relations following years of hostility that had endangered regional stability including in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. The deal also highlighted China's growing influence in the Middle East.

DIPLOMACY AND DIALOGUE

Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran following the storming of its embassy in Tehran in 2016 after a dispute over the execution of a cleric. The relationship had begun worsening a year earlier, after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates intervened in Yemen's war, where the Ansar Allah movement had ousted a Saudi-backed government and taken over the capital Sanaa.

"Diplomacy is the best means for communication and dialogue between countries to reach a common understanding," Bikdeli said. — **Reuters**



Majlis Ash'shura approves draft public debt law

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Majlis Ash'shura approved the draft Law on Public Debt and preferred it to the State Council at its 15th ordinary meeting of the 4th annual sitting held under the auspices of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, on Tuesday.

Earlier the Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash'shura studied the Law on Public Debt and presented its observations and proposals with regard to the law through a report it submitted to the Majlis Ash'shura. Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, chairman of the committee read out the report before the Majlis during the meeting.

'The members of Majlis Ash'shura approved the amendments and additions made to the draft laws by the Economic and Financial Committee,' a



press statement from the Majlis Ash'shura stated.

Besides, the members of Majlis Ash'shura were briefed about the draft Law on Protection of Bank Deposit referred to it by the Council of Ministers.

During the meeting, the Majlis

Ash'shura also approved the draft Law on Advocacy and Legal Consultation referred to it by the Council of Ministers.

'Before approving the law, the Majlis Ash'shura's members voiced their proposals observations over the report of the Law and

Legal Committee regarding the draft law read before the Majlis by Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zedjali, chairman of the committee,' the statement said.

The Majlis Ash'shura's members agreed with the committee in several amendments contained in

its report. The members presented their observations on the draft law in general before approving it by means of majority voting meaning that the draft law will be sent to the State Council.

Majlis Ash'shura also approved a proposal to set up a fund for

supporting sports, cultural and youth activities after being discussed during the session before referring it to the State Council.

The Majlis Ash'shura also discussed reports submitted by its standing committees including a report prepared by the Economic and Financial Committee on an expressed desire regarding the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and the free zones in Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazyunah.

Also discussed was the Information and Culture Committee's report on the expressed desire regarding the virtual tour of archaeological sites in the Sultanate of Oman, the report of the Food and Water Security Committee on the expressed desire on wheat cultivation in the Sultanate of Oman. The Majlis Ash'shura's members approved the reports by majority voting.

Wadi Dayqah Dam to be opened on June 11



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) on Tuesday said it will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam gates to release 15 million m3 of water from June 11. Located in Qurayat, 75 km from Muscat, Wadi Dayqah is home to one of the largest dams in the Arabian Peninsula.

Dayqah Dam was built in 2012 to collect rainwater from the surrounding mountains and control the water flowing through the villages below. The result is a stunning fresh water lake and a stream flowing 7 km from the main body of the dam. In a tweet, MoAFWR said, "The ministry will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam to drain about 15mn m3 of water.

The dam has a storage capacity of 100mn m3 and a height of 75m.'

Foreign ministry's under-secretary receives German, Kenyan officials

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs received on Tuesday Dr Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office in Germany.

The two sides reviewed relations of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting them. They also exchanged views on a set of issues of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Head of the Europe Department, Thomas Schneider, Ambassador of Germany to Oman and a number of officials from both sides.

Shaikh Al Harthy also received Roseline K Njogu, Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs in the Republic of Kenya.

The two sides discussed aspects of the historical relations and existing cooperation between the two countries. They also reviewed the situation of the Kenyan workforce in the



Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting was attended by Amina Abdullah, Kenyan Ambassador to Oman, Saleh bin Mohammed al Saqri, Head of Africa Department, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Cyclone Biparjoy brewing, impact unlikely on Oman

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A depression formed in the southeast Arabian Sea on Tuesday, about 1,160 km from the coast of the Sultanate of Oman, quickly developed into a tropical storm named Biparjoy. The cyclonic storm will intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by Thursday morning and very severe cyclonic storm by Friday evening in areas adjoining Arabian Sea. But it may not have an impact on the Sultanate of Oman, experts said.

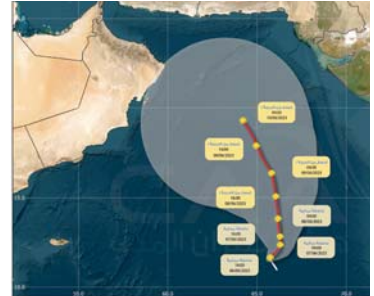
A weather forecaster from Oman Meteorology said, "Direction is still ambiguous and has many probabilities. Some models see it moving towards Gujarat, India, while others point towards Masirah Island, Oman. The tracks are many but it will be critical after three to five days. Now it is a tropical storm and the next 24 hours is crucial for us to come to the right understanding of the system."

The name Biparjoy was given by Bangladesh and means 'calamity' or 'disaster'. As per IMD website, the name was adopted by World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) countries in 2020.

The development of this system has been fairly fast as when Observer spoke to Bushra al Saadi, Meteorology Specialist at National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, said, "The tropical system is expected to move north west of the Arabian Sea with no direct impact over Oman in the next five days. Maybe after five days the direction might change. There would be direct or indirect effects over the coast of Oman until then everything is stable in terms of weather conditions."

Earlier in the week, one of the weather forecasters had explained that one of the signs that there is a status change in the tropical system could be seen in the wind.

Every category is different from the low pressure to depression, deep depression to tropical storm and tropical



cyclone. The wind speed around the centre of the tropical storm is 40 knots according to Al Saadi.

"For now the movement shows towards north to northwest most likely to the Indian coast and Pakistani coast, but maybe in the coming hours and days there could be changes," noted Al Saadi.

She explained that there is a low chance of Oman's coast getting affected. The wind will not cool down the temperature as summer is approaching, but can cause downdraft wind resulting in dust rising and movement of unstable objects.

Along the Oman Sea coast, winds will be northeasterly light to moderate during the day time becoming southwesterly light at night, while along the rest of the governorates it will be southerly to southwesterly light to moderate occasionally fresh along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and deserts areas.

"An exceptionally warm Arabian Sea, a weak monsoon onset, and favourable Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO) conditions are favouring this cyclone," Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, wrote on Twitter.

The sea surface temperatures are 30-32 degrees Celsius. "This is above the climatological mean. This is clearly the climate change link, as Arabian Sea warming is favouring more intense cyclones," Koll tweeted. High sea surface temperatures favour the formation of cyclones.

Further, MJO, an eastward-moving disturbance of clouds, rainfall, winds and pressure that moves in the tropics, is active in the Indian Ocean, making conditions conducive for the formation of a cyclone, according to Koll.

IMF officials in Oman; discuss latest macroeconomic developments, prospects



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is currently hosting experts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for meetings, which began on Tuesday and last till June 13, in the context of preparing for Article IV consultations of the IMF's Articles of Agreement.

The IMF delegation will meet a number of officials from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Ministry

of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Oman Investment Authority and the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

During Tuesday's meetings, a number of topics were discussed relating to the latest macroeconomic developments and its expected prospects in light of the regional and international updates, in addition to the fiscal and economic

policies adopted by Oman in line with the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

The IMF conducts such visits as part of its mandate to follow monetary and financial policy developments in its member states, and monitor potential risks that can threaten international financial stability.

It is noteworthy that Article IV of the IMF establishment

agreement states conducting bilateral discussions with member states on an annual basis, where a team of IMF experts visit a member state for the purpose of gathering financial and economic information necessary for evaluating the state's financial and economic performance before issuing the relevant report.

— ONA



Seminar discusses importance of organ donation, awareness



HILAL AL GHAFRI
IBRI, JUNE 6

The General Directorate of Health Services in Al Dhahirah Governorate organised an introductory seminar on the importance of organ donation at the conference hall of Ibra Hospital under the auspices of Dr Said bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Ibra.

The seminar was part of the national programme to create awareness about organ transplant and related laws, as well as explain the mechanism for conducting organ donation, transplantation procedures and the necessary preparations for them, besides warning of the danger of patients going to black markets to buy human organs.

The seminar also seeks to shed light on those patients who are suffering from organ failures, such as the kidneys, heart, pancreas and lungs, and the extent of individual and societal benefits of the organ donation process, which gives a new normal life to the patient.

The seminar's deliberations began with a speech of Dr Ahmed bin Said al Kalbani, Director-General of Health Services in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah, who emphasised the importance of organ donation and the need to build partnerships among the various relevant sectors to achieve the goals of the National

Organ Transplant Programme.

Dr Sameh Morgan, a nephrologist at Ibra Hospital, reviewed dialysis and the importance of kidney donation, as the kidney is the most requested organ for transplantation among patients due to the increasing cases of renal failure. It calls for community solidarity to donate to those patients to return to their normal lives, as the number of people with kidney failure reached 135 in Al Dhahirah Governorate in 2022, against 2,275 total such cases in the Sultanate of Oman. There are 311 live kidney donors and 21 brain-dead donors in the Sultanate of Oman.

Liver transplantations were carried out from 28 living donors, which reflects the high health support culture among members of society and the importance of organ donation to save the lives of others.

Dr Ahmed bin Said al Busaidi, Director of the Programme, presented an introduction to the National Organ Transplant Programme.

The seminar also touched upon the issue of organ donation from legal and religious perspectives. Saif bin Ali al Muqbali from the Department of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Al Dhahirah Governorate, spoke about it.

GULF YOUTH DAY 537, 252 youths in Oman

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

At the end of May 2023, the Sultanate of Oman had a youth population of 537,252, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) reported. This data release coincides with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) celebration of Gulf Youth Day, observed annually on June 6.

The youth population is generally defined as individuals between 18 and 29 years old. Notably, there has been a decline in the number of young individuals compared to 2021. In 2021, the youth population was reported to be 544,983, whereas the current youth population has decreased by approximately 7,731 individuals. Additionally, comparing the youth population from 2017 to 2021, there has been an overall decline of 4.6 per cent.

Based on the data provided by the NCSI in 2021, there were 171,500 employed youths, with 60 per cent working in the government sector and 40 per cent in the private sector. Additionally, 75 per cent of Omani youth were



actively job-seekers, with 34 per cent of them holding a general education diploma. However, there has been a significant 33 per cent decrease in the percentage of job-seekers between 2020 and 2021.

In 2021, the marriage rate among youth was only 15 per cent, indicating that 75 per cent of them remained single and

had never been married. Out of the total youth population, 395,032 individuals were single, while only 144,831 were married. Additionally, there were 4,707 divorced youth and 413 widows/widowers. Among the Omani disabled youth, the number stood at 7,746, with 28 per cent of them experiencing hearing impairment.

Gulf Youth Day provides a platform for young people to showcase their talents, share their ideas and discuss important issues affecting them and their communities

Gulf Youth Day aims to promote youth empowerment, engagement and development in the region. It provides a platform for young people to showcase their talents, share their ideas and discuss important issues affecting them and their communities.

The event typically includes various activities such as workshops, seminars, panel discussions, cultural performances, sports competitions and exhibitions.

Gulf Youth Day plays a significant role in empowering and inspiring the youth of the Gulf countries, providing them with a voice and encouraging their active participation in shaping the future of their nations.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ‘SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SECURITY’ CONFERENCE

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, took part on Tuesday in the 2nd ministerial conference on social development in members states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The conference, held in Cairo, Egypt, is themed ‘Social Justice and Social Security’.



The Sultanate of Oman's delegation was represented by Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development.

During the conference's sessions, efforts of member states were highlighted in implementing decisions of sectoral ministerial conferences on various matters. — ONA

16 years on, memories of Cyclone Gonu still haunt many

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shaddadm

Even though 16 years have passed, memories of the devastation caused by Cyclone Gonu when it hit and drastically affected Oman in June 2007 have not faded for those who went through the struggles.

It was June 6, 2007, when the powerful Gonu hit Oman. It is believed to be the strongest cyclone to hit the Arabian Peninsula since 1945, and what ensued was hardships and struggle for many people in Oman when dwellings got flooded, streets got washed away, and infrastructure collapsed.

Remembering those days, the pain wells up in their eyes every time those who went through the agony relive those memories. “Cyclone Gonu can never be forgotten. I remember spending three days without communication, water and electricity. The main road leading to Al Amerat got washed away, and we had no option but to just sit and wait,” Fuad al Farsi, an



Amerat resident, said.

“We survived with the little we had, and procuring just water was an adventure. Many of the overhead water tanks flew off the roof; hence there was no way of getting water. It was like we

were in a war situation,” Al Farsi added.

Like Al Farsi, Amerat Touqialso said life was difficult. “Somehow, after a day without water and electricity, we just decided to drive from Al Amerat to Wadi Adai. It

took us eight hours. We wanted to go to Ghubra to seek refuge at my brother's house, but the journey, which normally takes 20 minutes, took eight hours,” he said.

Oman suffered severe power outages and water shortages as

crews and volunteers worked to clean up and repair the damage after the cyclone inundated the capital with floodwater and slush.

The storm left wide swathes of Muscat underwater, with

floodwaters racing out of the mountains behind the city and demolishing homes and roads and sweeping away vehicles.

Qurum residents were also badly affected. The whole of Qurum near CCC was filled with water. “My family and I had to climb to the top of my building because the water was rising with each passing minute. We were lucky as an ROP helicopter came to rescue us. Our house was filled with water, and we had to change all my furniture later,” Zaher Naser, who was then living in Qurum, said.

Muscat and the eastern city of Sur were hit by severe water shortages amid the country's usual high heat and humidity.

Residents scoured supermarkets for bottled water and also siphoned drinking water from swimming pools, as municipal authorities struggled to provide water supply by tankers.

Despite how tenuous the state of affairs was, life returned to normality within a short time, thanks to the authorities who worked day and night.



OMANI EXPLORERS CONQUER 300M DEEP CAVE

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6.

The Omani Cave Exploration Team has made significant progress in the field. Under the leadership of passionate adventurers, they recently delved into a cave hole that could potentially be the deepest ever discovered, reaching a depth of at least 300 metres.

The Ambaort Hole holds great intrigue and potential. With their expertise and determination, the team descended into the depths of this enigmatic cave, documenting its unique features and mapping its intricate passages. Their exploration of the Ambaort Hole proved to be a milestone in their journey, leading to renaming the cave to the Ajdroust Hole, symbolising their significant contribution to its discovery and understanding.

Upon the time of the book publication, the team had reached a depth of 150 metres, but they managed to surpass this depth and explore down to 300 metres in the last few days.

The Omani Cave Exploration Team's explorations have not only contributed to scientific research and understanding, but have also helped raise awareness about the geological wonders hidden beneath Oman's surface

The team faced challenges during their exploration mission, as carbon dioxide levels exceeded 1 per cent (10 thousand parts per million) and oxygen levels dropped below 17 per cent. These conditions made it difficult for the team to continue their mission. Furthermore, the team encountered obstacles due to a lack of respiratory aids and excavation equipment, preventing them from fully completing their exploration.

Through their expeditions, the Omani Cave Exploration Team seeks to inspire others to

appreciate the beauty and significance of Oman's caves. Their discoveries and experiences are shared in their book, *A Guide to the Caves of Oman - The Remarkable Subterranean World of the Sultanate of Oman*, a testament to their dedication and the captivating allure of these hidden realms.

As pioneers in their field, the Omani Cave Exploration Team continues to push the boundaries of what is known about Oman's caves, paving the way for future explorers and scientists further to unravel the secrets of this fascinating subterranean world.

The Omani Cave Exploration Team's explorations have not only contributed to scientific research and understanding, but have also helped raise awareness about the geological wonders hidden beneath Oman's surface. By sharing their experiences and discoveries, they have inspired others to appreciate and protect these delicate underground ecosystems.





Physically challenged pedal from Kathmandu to Muscat for peace

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Two physically challenged yet passionate cyclists from Nepal arrived in Oman, pedalling thousands of kilometres. Starting from Nepal's capital Kathmandu, they arrived in the Sultanate of Oman en route to their mission to explore the globe on cycles. Their arrival in Muscat coincided with World Bicycle Day on June 3.

The two youngsters, Chitra Poudel and Ram Kaji Basnet, who are driven by the ideology of empowering individuals with disabilities, share a subtle message of 'global peace for a better future' and an inclusive society. They were accorded a warm welcome in Muscat.

Having already visited 85 countries, the duo embarked on this mission with the support of the NRN Social Club (Nepali Social Club).

The United Nations General Assembly declared June 3 as World Bicycle Day (WBD)

in April 2018, recognising the uniqueness, longevity and versatility of the bicycle, which has been in use for two centuries across the globe. It is also to promote cycling as a simple, affordable, reliable, clean and environmentally friendly sustainable means of individual transport.

"These two cyclists have been actively engaging with local communities and spreading the message of unity and inclusivity. They have been exemplifying the spirit of determination by participating in this global endeavour despite being disabled," said Binod Das, Spokesperson, Non-Resident Nepali Social Club.

Some enthusiastic cyclists in Oman organised a celebratory event to commemorate WBD in Muscat. They pedalled through the capital area, inspiring the onlookers for a healthy lifestyle and shared values of peace, camaraderie, and the limitless potential of the human spirit.

Middle East airlines return to 98% of pre-Covid level

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As airlines in the Middle East return to profitability, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has released roadmaps aimed at providing step-by-step detailing of critical actions and dependencies for aviation to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

These roadmaps address aircraft technology, energy infrastructure, operations, finance, and policy considerations leading to net zero, the IATA said.

Meanwhile, it was revealed that Middle East carriers have been swiftly rebuilding their international networks and in March 2023, the region's international connectivity had returned to 98 per cent of its pre-Covid level.

The region's return to profitability in 2022 was supported by a significant increase in the passenger load factor of almost 25 percentage points, outstripping the performance of the other regions.

The return to net profitability, even with a 1.2% net profit margin, is a major achievement.

It may be recalled Oman Air recently said that the total revenue forecast for 2023 is expected to be up 236 per cent in 2023, compared to 128 per cent in 2022 and -3 per cent in 2021.

"Airline financial performance



in 2023 is beating expectations. Stronger profitability is supported by several positive developments. China lifted Covid-19 restrictions earlier in the year than anticipated. Cargo revenues remain above pre-pandemic levels even though volumes have not. And, on the cost side, there is some relief. Jet fuel prices, although still high, have moderated over the first half of the year," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

The net zero roadmaps are the first detailed assessment of the key steps necessary to accelerate the transition to net

zero by 2050. Together, they show a clear direction and will evolve as we dig deeper to set interim milestones on the way to net zero. I must emphasise that the roadmaps are not just for airlines. Governments, suppliers, and financiers cannot be spectators in aviation's decarbonisation journey. They have skin in the game. The roadmaps are a call to action for all aviation's stakeholders to deliver the tools needed to make this fundamental transformation of aviation a success with policies and products fit for a net-zero

world," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

Roadmaps focus on the fuels and new energy carrier infrastructure upstream from airports needed to facilitate the use of aircraft powered by SAF or hydrogen. Renewable energy plays a vital role in meeting the aviation sector's energy demand, and the roadmap outlines milestones to enable the necessary infrastructure developments, the opportunities for reducing emissions and improving energy efficiency by improving the way existing aircraft are operated.

SEZAD completes 67 per cent of its 5,000 trees project in Duqm

DUQM: Coinciding with the World Environment Day, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) continues implementing its plan to increase the green area in the zone.

Tremendous works are under way to plant several key locations in SEZAD, including main and service streets, in addition to planting a number of parks where modern systems are used for irrigation, using treated water.

Ibrahim bin Zaher al Rawahi, from the Afforestation and Landscaping Department in the Special Economic Zone Department of Duqm, said, "Around 67 per cent of the project to plant 5,000 trees, intended to be



planted by the end of 2023, has been completed in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with more than 3,347 trees have been already planted. The current green spaces in SEZAD cover about 26,000 sqm. It is expected that the green spaces in the Zone will be increased by the end of this year to cover an area of over 50,000 sqm of various special trees that are suitable for the climatic conditions in SEZAD".

Al Rawahi pointed out that the agricultural nursery in Duqm, which is stretching over an area of 5,000 sqm, is being operated to serve as a primary source for supplying plants that are compatible with the climate of Duqm. The nursery serves as the main incubator for the production of seeds and ornamental trees before planting them in the parks and on the streets, in addition to being a hub for agricultural experiments and new types of plants and trees. The Special Economic Zone at Duqm has allocated part of the nursery to be operated and managed by a small and medium enterprise, which is specialised in afforestation.

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-15/2112/2023	Renovations Work on Main Operation Theater at Khoula Hospital	18/June/2023	12/July/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Tender Announcement

Request for Pre-Qualification for Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services

National Veterinary Vaccines Company is seeking for an experienced and qualified Project Management Consultancy firms to provide comprehensive Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services for a veterinary vaccine facility project. The selected consultancy will be responsible for overseeing the successful execution of the project, ensuring efficient project management practices, and providing expert cost consultancy advice. Scope of Service: Pre-Contract and Post-Contract Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services.

Qualification No.	PQ-PMC-2023-2
Tender Fee	50 OMR
Last Date for Collection	18 th June 2023
Last Date for Clarifications	22 th June 2023
Last Date for Submissions	25 th June 2023

Companies with relevant experience in executing similar projects within the same domain are invited to purchase this tender.

For inquiries or to request pre-qualification documents, Please contact us by email:

musaab.alrahbi@nvvc.om[+968 92466909](tel:+96892466909)

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" Invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name Provision of Spare Parts under a Call-Off Agreement for MWASALAT's VDL Bus Fleet.

Project Summary MWASALAT would like to have a qualified Supplier to supply spare parts for all MWASALAT's VDL vehicles based on a call-off agreement.

Tender Fee NIL **Grade & Specialty** Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Last date for tender document distribution
Wednesday, 07th June 2023

Last date for tender document distribution
Monday, 25th June 2023

Last date for submission
Sunday, 16th July 2023

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

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China, Russia conduct air patrol over Sea of Japan

BEIJING: China and Russia conducted joint air force patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea on Tuesday, as South Korea said it had deployed fighter jets in response to warplanes near its airspace.

Beijing and Moscow “staged the sixth joint aerial patrol in accordance with an annual military cooperation plan between China and Russia”, the Chinese defence ministry said in a statement.

The statement gave no further details of the manoeuvres, which took place over waters bordering Japan, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan.

South Korea said four Russian and four Chinese military aircraft had entered its air defence identification zone (ADIZ) around lunchtime on Tuesday, prompting it to scramble fighter planes.

An ADIZ is an area wider than a country’s airspace in which it tries to control aircraft for security reasons, but the concept is not defined in any international treaty.

The South Korean military “identified the Chinese and Russian jets before their entry into the air identification zone”, Seoul’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)



The picture shows Russian President Vladimir Putin standing with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. – Reuters file photo

said. “We deployed air force fighters to conduct tactical steps in preparation in case of an emergency,” it added.

The eight foreign jets did not violate Seoul’s airspace, the JCS said.

The incident comes after the defence ministers of South Korea, Japan and the United States agreed to set up real-time data sharing on North Korean missile launches by the end of the year.

South Korea has supported Western sanctions on Russia over the dispute in Ukraine and has

sent humanitarian aid to Kyiv.

But it is bound by its own regulations prohibiting the supply of lethal aid to countries in conflict.

China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine war. It has been criticised by Western countries for refusing to condemn Moscow and for its close strategic partnership with Russia.

During a March summit in Moscow, Chinese leader Xi Jinping invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Beijing and the two leaders declared that ties were “entering

Beijing and Moscow staged the sixth joint aerial patrol in accordance with an annual military cooperation plan.

CHINESE DEFENCE MINISTRY

a new era”.

Analysts say China holds the upper hand in the relationship with Russia, and that its sway is growing as Moscow’s international isolation deepens.

Beijing and Moscow were Cold War allies with a tempestuous relationship but in recent years have drawn closer, especially in the economic and military realms.

Both countries have touted what they call a “no-limits” partnership and played up what they frame as a close friendship between presidents Xi and Putin. — AFP

Iran unveils hypersonic missile hailing deterrent

TEHRAN: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards unveiled an intermediate range ballistic missile on Tuesday capable of travelling at hypersonic speeds of up to 15 times the speed of sound, state television reported.

President Ebrahim Raisi hailed the new missile’s hypersonic capability, saying it would boost Iran’s “power of deterrence” and “bring peace and stability to the countries of the region”.

The official IRNA news agency published photographs of the ceremony in a closed area it did not identify. Several top military commanders were present, including Guards chief General Hossein Salami.

“The range of the Fattah missile is 1,400 kilometres and its speed before hitting its target” is between 13 and 15 times the speed of sound, IRNA said.

Like slower ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles can be equipped with nuclear warheads and Iran’s announcement it was producing one in November prompted International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi to express concern.

Grossi added he did not see the new missile “having any influence” on negotiations with Iran over its nuclear activities.

Talks between Tehran and major powers on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal that was left in tatters when Washington unilaterally abandoned it in



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during the unveiling ceremony of the new ballistic missile called “Fattah”, in Tehran. – Reuters

2018 and imposed renewed sanctions are currently stalled.

Iran has since suspended its implementation of the strict limits it agreed to on its nuclear activities and restricted IAEA monitoring in a policy it is only slowly reversing.

Unlike conventional ballistic missiles, hypersonic ones fly on a trajectory low in the atmosphere, enabling them to reach their targets more quickly and with less chance of being intercepted by modern air defences.

When the programme was announced last year, Guards aerospace chief General Amirali Hajizadeh said the system was developed to “counter air defence shields”, adding that he believed it would take decades before a system capable of intercepting it is developed. — AFP

Khartoum islanders ‘under siege’ as Sudan fighting rages

KHARTOUM: Battles raged in Sudan’s war-torn capital of Khartoum on Tuesday, witnesses said, and the residents of an island in the Nile reported being “under siege” amid desperate shortages.

Eight weeks of fighting have pitted army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan against his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

A number of broken ceasefires have offered brief lulls but no respite for residents of the city, where witnesses again reported “the sound of heavy artillery fire” in northern Khartoum.

Witnesses also said there were “clashes with various types of weapons” in south Khartoum, where “the sound of explosions shook our walls”.

In the city centre, at the confluence of the White Nile

and Blue Nile rivers, the island of Tuti is “under total siege” by RSF forces, resident Mohammed Youssef said.

Paramilitaries have blocked the only bridge to the island and prevented residents from going by boat to other parts of the capital.

Since the fighting began on April 15, more than 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations says that more than a million and a half people have been displaced, both within the country and across its borders.

For those still in Khartoum and the western region of Darfur -- which together have seen the worst of the fighting -- the situation is growing increasingly dire.

The danger will increase with



People walk through the rubble as they inspect a house that was hit by an artillery shell in the south of Khartoum. – AFP

“the flood season fast approaching and the looming hunger crisis and disease outbreaks that now are becoming more inevitable”.

Sudan’s annual rainy season begins in June, and medics have repeatedly warned that it threatens to make parts of country inaccessible, raising the risks of malaria, cholera and water-borne diseases.

Some 25 million people — more than half the population — are now in need of aid and protection, according to the UN.

More than 425,000 people have fled to other countries — more than 100,000 west to Chad and 170,000 north to Egypt.

“There’s an urgent need for a massive injection of funds” to support those fleeing the violence, according to the IFRC.

The UN has also appealed for financing, as the fighting shows no signs of abating. — AFP

KUWAIT

Kuwaitis elect parliament hoping reforms

Polls opened on Tuesday in Kuwait’s seventh general election in just over a decade.

More than 793,000 eligible voters will have the chance to determine the make-up of the 50-seat legislature.

Polling stations opened at 8:00 am, with the results to be announced the following day.

Kuwait’s Emir Nawaf Al Ahmad al Sabah called the vote last month after he had again dissolved parliament amid a persistent deadlock with the executive



branch that has deterred investment and impeded growth.

A total of 207 candidates are running for a four-year term as lawmakers, the lowest number in a general election since 1996.

JEDDAH

Blinken visits Saudi Arabia to rebuild ties

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to strengthen ties with the long-time ally as the kingdom forges closer relations with America’s rivals.

Blinken’s three-day trip will also focus on efforts to end conflicts in Sudan.

Blinken is expected to meet Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, before heading to Riyadh on Wednesday for a Gulf Cooperation Council meeting.



US and Saudi diplomats have closely cooperated on efforts to broker a lasting ceasefire in Sudan’s eight-week-old war and Saudi help was crucial in evacuating thousands

KABUL

Aid group’s women staff resume work

A leading international NGO’s Afghan women staff have resumed their work in some provinces, months after the Taliban government banned them from working.

Several aid groups suspended operations in protest at the order that was announced at the end of December, and later extended to include Afghan women working for the United Nations.

“I am glad to confirm that we have been able to resume most of our humanitarian op-



erations in Kandahar as well as a number of other regions in Afghanistan,” Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the independent Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), said.



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7

Ukraine evacuates thousands after dam destroyed

KHERSON: An attack on a major Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine Tuesday unleashed a torrent of water that flooded a small city, two dozen villages and sparked the evacuation of 17,000 people.

Moscow and Kyiv traded blame for ripping a gaping hole in the Kakhovka dam in what Kyiv said was an attempt by Russia to hamper Ukraine's long-awaited offensive.

People in the city of Kherson, the largest population centre nearby, headed for higher ground as water, which had been held back by the dam and a hydroelectric plant, rose in the Dnipro River.

"There is shooting, now there is flooding," said Lyudmyla, who had loaded a washing machine onto a cart that was attached to an old Soviet car.

"Everything is going to die here," added Sergiy as water from the dam poured downstream into Kherson.

Ukrainian authorities said 17,000 people were being evacuated and a total of 24 villages had been flooded.



A general view of the Nova Kakhovka dam that was breached in Kherson region, Ukraine June 6, 2023 in this video. — Reuters

"Over 40,000 people are in danger of being flooded," Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin said, adding that 25,000 more people should be evacuated on the Russian-occupied side of the Dnipro River.

Vladimir Leontyev, the Moscow-installed mayor of Nova Kakhovka where the dam is located, said the city was underwater and 900 people had been evacuated.

He said 53 evacuation buses were being sent by the authorities to take people from

Nova Kakhovka and two other settlements nearby to safety. "We are organising temporary accommodation centres with hot meals," he said.

The Kakhovka dam and its power plant were seized by Russia in the first hours of the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of blowing up the dam, urging the world to "react." He said Russia had carried out "an internal explosion of the structures" of the plant at 2:50

am local time (2350 GMT).

"This crime carries enormous threats and will have dire consequences for people's lives and the environment," Zelensky told a Vatican peace envoy, Italian cardinal Matteo Zuppi, in Kyiv, the presidency said.

Kyiv also called for a meeting of the UN Security Council and warned of a potential "ecocide" after 150 tonnes of engine oil spilled into the river as a result of the attack.

Western powers also blamed Russia for the damage to the Kakhovka dam, with EU chief Charles Michel calling it a "war crime." NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said the dam breach was "outrageous" and "puts thousands of civilians at risk and causes severe environmental damage." Russia however said the dam was partially destroyed by "multiple strikes" coming from Ukrainian forces.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the destruction was the result of "deliberate sabotage by the Ukrainian side." — Reuters

About 83 bodies remain unidentified four days after Indian rail crash

BALASORE: Indian authorities made fervent appeals to families on Tuesday to help identify 83 unclaimed bodies kept in hospitals and mortuaries after the death toll in the country's deadliest rail crash in over two decades rose to 288.

The disaster struck on Friday, when a passenger train hit a stationary freight train, jumped the tracks and hit another passenger train passing in the opposite direction near the district of

Bijay Kumar Mohapatra, health director of Odisha, said that authorities were trying to source iced containers to help preserve the unclaimed bodies.

"Unless they are identified, a



post mortem cannot be done," Mohapatra said, explaining that under Odisha state regulations no autopsy can be conducted on an unclaimed body until 96 hours have passed.

The state government revised

the death toll upwards to 288, from 275 earlier, and said that 205 dead bodies have been identified and handed over. The remaining 83 will be preserved, Odisha Chief Secretary Pradeep Jena said. — Reuters

South Korea's Yoon says alliance with US 'nuclear-based'

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Tuesday he has upgraded the country's alliance with the United States to one that is "nuclear-based" in the face of North Korea's growing military threat.

Yoon was referring to his talks with US President Joe Biden in April on Washington's willingness to give Seoul more insight into its nuclear planning in the event of potential conflict with nuclear-armed North Korea.

"North Korea is enhancing its nuclear and missile capabilities, and has legislated the use of nuclear weapons," Yoon said in a speech marking South Korea's Memorial Day.

At their summit in Washington, the two leaders agreed to strengthen the so-called US extended deterrence, which



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol delivers his speech during a ceremony at the National cemetery in Seoul. — Reuters

envisions the use of US nuclear weapons to defend the South.

"The South Korea-US alliance has now been elevated to 'nuclear-based' alliance," Yoon said.

North Korea this year test-fired its biggest intercontinental ballistic missile and last week attempted to launch its first spy satellite, although the rocket and

the payload plunged into the sea.

North Korea made a rare and swift admission of the launch's failure but vowed to try again and put a satellite in orbit to increase its military surveillance capabilities.

The launch was widely condemned as violating UN Security Council resolutions that ban the use of ballistic missile technology by the North.

Pyongyang has rejected the ban as an infringement of its sovereign right to self-defence and space development.

While Yoon characterised his talks with Biden as an agreement to use US nuclear weapons in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack, Biden reiterated a pledge "to make every effort to consult" with allies on the use of a nuclear weapon. — Reuters

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2023/3	Redesign, Develop and Hosting of the website and Internal Portal for Ministry of Economy	25 Omani Riats	16/7/2023

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om

+ 96824402200

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-144/2023	Supply of Surgical Item (Telescopic Nail Surgery)	15/June/2023	28/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-145/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Rustaq Hospital in South Al Batinah Governorate				
MOH/HQ-148/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Cathlab in Expansion of Nizwa Hospital in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate				
MOH/HQ-149/2023	Provision of ITSM, ITAM and Remote Access Solutions				
MOH/HQ-152/2023	Supply and Commission of Electric Powered Forklifts at Directorate General of Medical Store				
MOH/HQ-153/2023	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services at Blood Bank Building in Bousher	15/June/2023	05/July/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	R.O 215,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-154/2023	Supply of Cardiac Anesthesia Items for The Royal Hospital				
MOH/HQ-147/2023	Replacement of Medical Equipment for Various Health Establishments				
MOH/HQ-150/2023	Provision of Operation & Maintenance Services for Equipment at Khasab Hospital in Musandam Governorate				
MOH/HQ-151/2023	Remaining Works for Construction of Directorate General of Health Services Building at Ibra in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate				
MOH/HQ-156/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Mahoot Health Centre in Al Wustaa Governorate	13/June/2023	21/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-168/2023	Supply and Installation of Mobile Blood Donor Couches for Various Health Facilities				
MOH/HQ-169/2023	Provision of Call Center Solution Service for MOH				
MOH/HQ-165/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Ministry of Health				
MOH/HQ-167/2023	Supply of Surgical Items (Rehabilitation, Orthotic and Prosthetic)				
MOH/HQ-170/2023	Supply, Installation of Water Treatment Plant (Ro) in Quality Control Lab at Directorate General of Pharmaceutical & Drug Control at Muscat Governorate	15/June/2023	12/July/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	
MOH/HQ-171/2023	Supply of Pharmaceuticals for Royal Hospital				
MOH/HQ-172/2023	Supply of Laboratory Items				
MOH/HQ-173/2023	Supply of Surgical Consumable Items (ENT)				

Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email idetenderhd@ita.gov.om

The power of believing in yourself



HYESHA BARRETT
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

THE level of success you experience in life is a direct result of the belief in yourself. Believing in yourself is the cornerstone of personal development and on-going achievement. It is the unwavering recognition and faith in your knowledge, skills, strengths and intuition to face challenges with a positive mindset, in order to keep the momentum flowing towards the continuous accomplishments of your goals.

Self-belief means embracing challenges as opportunities for growth, whereby each hurdle conquered will strengthen your credence and fuel your motivation to take on bigger challenges.

Believing in yourself will boost your self-confidence. This self-assurance will enable you to take more risks, become more assertive in making decisions, help you tackle challenges with resilience and approach new opportunities with enthusiasm. Instead of being discouraged by failures or setbacks, believe them to be growth opportunities. Remember

that mistakes do not define your worth nor potential.

However, self-doubt can easily take charge as the brain is hard wired to protect, which means fear can easily override courage. So, take the time to reflect on your triumphs and remind yourself of the instances when you overcame difficulties or achieved something significant. The added continuum of victories gained from trials and tribulations will boost your self-esteem and reinforce the belief in your abilities.

Embracing challenges with a positive mindset will allow you to pursue this powerful path of self-belief which contributes to a healthy overall well-being. When you believe in yourself, a sense of optimism and self-acceptance will be cultivated. This positive outlook reduces stress, anxiety and self-criticism. It also enhances your mental and emotional flexibility, allowing you to cope better with life's challenges.

Believing in yourself also positively impacts your relationships as your optimistic energy will attract like-minded individuals. Additionally, it allows you

WHEN YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, A SENSE OF OPTIMISM AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE WILL BE CULTIVATED. THIS POSITIVE OUTLOOK REDUCES STRESS, ANXIETY AND SELF-CRITICISM.

to set healthy boundaries, communicate effectively and establish fulfilling connections with others.

Self-belief is not an overnight achievement, but a lifelong journey. When you genuinely believe in your capabilities, you are more likely to set ambitious goals and work diligently towards achieving them. Focusing on your strengths will build the foundation of self-assurance that will propel you forward in life. Viewing any setbacks as temporary roadblocks rather than permanent failures, learning from your mistakes and celebrating each milestone reached will reinforce what you are capable of.

When you have faith in yourself, the commitment, persistence and willingness to put in the necessary work to succeed will automatically ensue. Self-belief provides the fuel that will drive you towards your aspirations and enable you to turn your dreams into reality.

Remember that building self-belief is an ongoing process and the road to success will be undeniably rocky.

Finland’s nuclear catacombs nearly ready to house waste

ELIAS HUUHTANEN

DEEP within the bedrock in western Finland, flashing lights from heavy machinery cast shadows in eerie tunnels that lead to a tomb that must remain unperturbed for millennia.

There is a reason the catacomb on the lush island of Olkiluoto was buried 400 metres (1,312 feet) below ground: It will house the world’s first spent nuclear fuel disposal facility.

The project, which aims to solve the age-old quagmire of what to do with nuclear waste, is nearing completion in a region that is already home to Europe’s largest nuclear reactor.

The Onkalo repository is designed to house a total of 6,500 tonnes of uranium, covering the spent fuel produced by Finland’s five nuclear reactors during their lifetime.

Low-carbon nuclear power has been hailed as a climate-friendly energy source as the world struggles to combat global warming.

Environmentalists, however, worry about their safety and warn that disposing radioactive waste carries huge risks.

Around 400,000 tonnes of used fuel have been discharged from reactors worldwide so far, the World Nuclear Association estimates, most of which is stored in temporary storage facilities near power plants. But the long-term storage problem has cast a shadow on nuclear projects.

Onkalo’s operator Posiva has developed its solution together with the Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Company (SKB).

The plan is to encapsulate the used uranium in thick copper shells and bury the up to five-metre-long canisters in the bedrock, before sealing the tunnel with a massive, wedge-shaped and steel-reinforced concrete plug.

Construction began at Onkalo — Finnish for “hollow” — in 2004, and final trials will be conducted in early 2024.

“Once we have established that we are ready, we can then move on to the actual operational phase in the mid-2020s,” geologist Johanna Hansen, Onkalo’s research and development coordinator, said. The immense amount of time it takes for radiation to decrease to safe levels poses significant challenges.

It can take around 250,000 years for the high-level toxic waste to reach the radiation levels of a naturally occurring uranium deposit. Put in context, 250,000 years ago Europe was in the midst of an Ice Age and was home to Neanderthals and mammoths, while Homo sapiens had only recently emerged in Africa. — AFP



PAUL KRUGMAN

THE GOOD GUYS WERE BY NO MEANS ENTIRELY GOOD. AMERICANS WERE STILL DENIED BASIC RIGHTS AND OCCASIONALLY MASSACRED BECAUSE OF THEIR SKIN COLOUR. BRITAIN STILL RULED, SOMETIMES BRUTALLY, OVER A VAST COLONIAL EMPIRE

The eyes of the world are upon Ukraine

SEVENTY-NINE years ago, Allied paratroopers began landing behind the beaches of Normandy.

World War II was a long time ago, but it still lives on in America’s memory. And the anniversary of D-Day, on Tuesday, seems especially evocative this year, as we await the moral equivalent of D-Day, coming any day now when Ukraine begins its long-awaited counterattack against Russian attackers (which may have already started).

I use the term “moral equivalent” advisedly. World War II was one of the few wars that was clearly a fight of good against evil.

Now, the good guys were by no means entirely good. Americans were still denied basic rights and occasionally massacred because of their skin colour. Britain still ruled, sometimes brutally, over a vast colonial empire.

But if the great democracies all too often failed to live up to their ideals, they nonetheless had the right ideals; they stood, however imperfectly, for freedom against the forces of tyranny, racial supremacy and mass murder.

If Ukraine wins this war, some of its supporters abroad will no doubt be disillusioned to discover the nation’s darker side. Before the war, Ukraine ranked high on measures of perceived corruption — better than Russia, but that’s not saying much. Victory won’t make the corruption go away.

And Ukraine does have a far-right movement, including paramilitary groups that have played a part in its war. The country suffered terribly under Stalin, with millions dying in a deliberately engineered famine; as a result, some Ukrainians initially welcomed the Germans during World War II (until they realised that they, too, were considered subhuman), and Nazi iconography is still disturbingly widespread.

DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

Yet like the flaws of the Allies in World War II, these shadows don’t create any equivalence between the two sides in this war. Ukraine is an imperfect but real democracy, hoping to join the larger democratic community. Vladimir Putin’s Russia is a malevolent actor, and friends of freedom everywhere have to hope that it will be thoroughly defeated.

I wish I could say that the citizens of Western democracies, America in particular, were fully committed to



Ukrainian victory and Russian defeat. In reality, while most Americans support aid to Ukraine, only a minority are willing to sustain that aid for as long as it takes. For what it’s worth, US public opinion on aid to Ukraine right now looks remarkably similar to polls from early 1941 (that is, well before Pearl Harbour) on the lend-lease programme of military aid to Britain.

What about those who oppose helping Ukraine at all? Some of those who oppose Western aid just don’t see the moral equivalence with World War II. On the left, in particular, there are some people for whom it’s always 2003. They remember how America was taken to war on false pretenses — which, for the record, I realised was happening and vociferously opposed at the time — and can’t see that this situation is different.

On the right, by contrast, many of those who oppose helping Ukraine — call it the Tucker Carlson faction — do understand what this war is about. And they’re on the side of the bad guys. The “Putin wing” of the GOP has long admired Russia’s authoritarian regime and its intolerance. Before the war, Republicans such as Texas Sen. Ted Cruz contrasted what they perceived as Russian toughness with the “woke, emasculated” US military; Russia’s military failures threaten such people’s whole worldview, and they would be humiliated by a Ukrainian victory.

The point is that the stakes in Ukraine right now are very high. If Ukraine’s

counteroffensive succeeds, the forces of democracy will be strengthened around the world, not least in America. If it fails, it will be a disaster not just for Ukraine but for the world. Western aid to Ukraine may dry up, Putin may finally achieve the victory most people expected him to win in the war’s first few days, and democracy will be weakened everywhere.

CHANCES FOR UKRAINE

What’s going to happen? Even military experts don’t know, and I have no delusions of being such an expert myself. For what it’s worth, Western officials are sounding increasingly positive about Ukraine’s chances. And military affairs aren’t like economics, where, say, the Federal Reserve basically works off the same information available to all those who know their way around the St. Louis Fed’s economic research website. Defence officials have access to intelligence the public doesn’t, and they don’t want to end up looking foolish, so their optimism probably isn’t empty bravado.

Still, you don’t have to be a military expert to know that attacking fortified defences — which is what Ukraine must do — is very difficult.

On the eve of D-Day, Dwight Eisenhower told the expeditionary force, “The eyes of the world are upon you.” Now the eyes of the world are upon the armed forces of Ukraine. Let’s hope they succeed.

— *The New York Times*

Ensure the air is not polluted

We have many international days aimed at conserving the planet — Earth Day, World Ocean Day, World Environment Day, and the list goes on.

On Monday, June 5, we celebrated World Environment Day. We planted trees, watered them, conducted clean-up campaigns, and participated in programmes like nature walks. We also took oaths to curb plastic pollution and food waste. We also heard our leaders and environmentalists deliberating on the perils that our planet is facing.

On Thursday, June 8, we will again be celebrating World Ocean Day. Although the day is aimed at raising awareness of the plight of the oceans and marine ecosystems, it also brings to the fore the vital importance that oceans play in sustaining a healthy planet.

The fact is that all these days remind us of what our contributions to nature need to be. All these days are a time to remember that we are fully dependent on nature for water, air and soil for growing plants that we consume.

In the midst of rapid development, big infrastructure building, growing population and escalating consumption and untenable lifestyles, taking care of the environment, and re-valuing its many functions, is even more urgent.

We blissfully forget that life cannot be sustained without a balanced environment! Even after shifting from one environmental disaster to another, from one climate change issue to another, from hot air to cold winds, vanishing beaches to dead rivers, dying forests to sinking islands, we have not given any heed to the cries of nature.

Take a big deep breath while walking on the street. The air is polluted. In every breath what we inhale is poison, not oxygen! We



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

IN EVERY BREATH WHAT WE INHALE IS POISON NOT OXYGEN! WE DISCUSS THIS EVERY TIME AND SCREAM, BUT WE FORGET AGAIN.

discuss this every time and scream, but we forget again. Pollution continues to get trapped in the air and we breathe it!

Scientists around the world have found that the concentration of oxygen in our water and air has already started declining due to the burning of fossil fuels and other kinds of pollution. While the decline won't directly affect humans, certain ecosystems are much more impacted, especially aquatic ones.

So it is high time we turned to clean and green energy. Every tech should try to be a "green tech" to bring more sustainable solutions. It is not just about you and me, but also about society, the environment, and future generations having equal access to the planet's natural resources.

Look back at the horrific Covid-19 pandemic when oxygen was the most important element we gasped for during the period. Think of the hours and days we spent finding oxygen for our loved ones; how we saw patients collapse and die because hospitals did not have oxygen in the tanks.

Oxygen cannot be secured in a cylinder or by an oxygen concentrator machine for life!

This then is what we must remember every year when we celebrate World Environment Day. The oxygen that we get from nature is about increasing green cover and ensuring that our air — our every breath — is not polluted.

This on the other hand gives all of us hope and an opportunity to do our bit for the protection of the environment and earth's well-being. The future of the environment will depend on building stronger natural connections between people and nature, creating acceptance and support for the environment, and forging new alliances.

Every individual needs to start taking steps, no matter how small or large they are. One small step can make a big difference in the future of our planet.

LIFTING PROTECTION



A communal worker takes off sand bags used to cover and protect the Monument to Princess Olga, St. Andrew the Apostle and the educators Cyril and Methodius in the centre of Kyiv on Tuesday amid Russian war of Ukraine. — AFP

Another episode of tension in Kosovo

Recent developments in Kosovo have witnessed a significant reversal in the government's stance. Prime Minister Albin Kurti reneged on a 2013 agreement, brokered by the European Union, which aimed to establish a separate association of elected mayors for the Serb minorities in the region. This decision led to Serb boycotts of the mayoral elections, resulting in the election of ethnic Albanian candidates in four mayoralties with strikingly low turnout figures of just 3.8 per cent. In response, the Serb community voiced concerns about the new mayors' lack of a legitimate mandate.

Tensions reached a boiling point as violent protests erupted when Kosovo-Albanian authorities sought to install the newly elected mayors last week. The consequences were dire, leaving over 60 casualties on both ends, thus painting a bleak picture of the region's stability. This tumultuous outburst of unrest stands as the most severe manifestation of violence observed within this territory in well over a decade, raising alarming concerns for the future trajectory of peace and security.

Amidst the volatile landscape of Kosovo, blame game politics have taken centre stage. Kurti swiftly pointed fingers at the "fascist mobs" under the control of Serbia's government as the orchestrators



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

THE CURRENT STEAM WILL SOON SUBSIDE BECAUSE THE KURTI REGIME HAS NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO LISTEN TO THE US AND ITS EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURS AND ANNOUNCE NEW ELECTIONS

behind the recent unrest. The protests stem from a culmination of grievances and a steady deterioration of relations between the Serbs and Albanians in northern Kosovo over a year and a half. The age-old dispute over Kosovo carries deep historical roots, dating back centuries. Serbia holds Kosovo dear, considering it the very core of its statehood and religious heritage, housing numerous Serb Orthodox Christian monasteries from medieval times.

For Serb nationalists, the 1389 battle fought against the Ottoman Turks on this very land serves as an enduring symbol of their national struggle. Conversely, Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority perceives the region as their rightful homeland, accusing Serbia of both occupation and repression. In 1998, ethnic Albanian rebels rose against Serbian rule, triggering a brutal response from Belgrade. The resultant Nato intervention in 1999 compelled Serbia's withdrawal and the transfer of control to international peacekeeping forces.

The intricate and unresolved status of Kosovo, once a Serbian province with a predominantly ethnic Albanian population, remains a persistent source of

contention. Despite Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, Serbia consistently refuses to acknowledge its statehood, asserting its integral connection to the nation. Approximately 100 countries, including the United States, have recognised Kosovo's independence, while Russia, China and five European Union nations have aligned with Serbia.

One truth emerges with stark clarity: the presence of Western troops, along with the Nato military intervention, remains a crucial deterrent against the rekindling of the relentless ethnic warfare that plagued the region in the 1990s. The recent clashes between Serbs and Albanians in northern Kosovo serve as a poignant reminder, dispelling any lingering doubts. This unsettling reality underscores the vital role played by external forces in preventing the region from descending into a full-scale conflagration of violence and deepening divisions. The United States and the European Union have been quite indignant at Kosovo for instigating the current episode.

French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have urged Kosovo to hold new elections in the north of the country to de-escalate tensions with Serbia.

The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo were invited to impromptu talks at the close of a summit of 46 European leaders in Moldova last Thursday. "It is very clear that the Kosovan authorities bear the responsibility for the current situation," Macron told reporters in Moldova. Similarly, the United States, which played a major role in the independence of Kosovo, is also quite furious at the Kurti government for its handling of the situation.

Despite the United States' request, the Kosovo government proceeded with certain actions that had been advised against. Regrettably, these concerns materialised, aligning with Washington's apprehensions. The United States finds itself perturbed as the Kosovo government took a decision that resulted in KFOR (Nato mission in Kosovo) and the United States grappling with the ensuing ramifications. The perception is that the burden of managing the consequences has been shouldered by the United States due to a decision made without due consideration for the broader implications. However, it would be unwise for the Serbian government to interpret the United States' dissatisfaction with the Kosovo

government as an invitation to exacerbate bilateral relations.

Contrary to such assumptions, the truth is that the United States would respond with great force if Serbia attempted to capitalise on the present circumstances. Serbian President Vucic has been trying to play a double game: attempting to champion stability and a European future for Kosovo while simultaneously leveraging Serbian nationalist sentiments. This duality has defined his approach for years, straddling two distinct paths with varying objectives and strategies. Probably Vucic is relying on the support from Moscow, but he seems to be miscalculating at this moment when Putin is too much occupied with the Ukraine imbroglio.

Primarily, the responsibility for this predicament lies with the Serbs, who persistently cling to the delusion of reclaiming Kosovo for Serbia, an unattainable aspiration. It is also clear that the current steam will soon subside because the Kurti regime has no other choice but to listen to the US and its European neighbours and announce new elections in four northern municipalities to deescalate the situation.

sport

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ARYNA SABALENKA



KAROLINA MUCHOVA

SABALENKA SETS UP MUCHOVA CLASH IN SEMIFINALS

PARIS: Belarusian world number two Aryna Sabalenka reached the French Open semifinals on Tuesday by beating Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina and was accused of fanning the flames by waiting for a handshake that would not come before making her stance on the war clear.

Czech Karolina Muchova earlier stopped former Roland Garros runner-up Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova with a 7-5, 6-2 win to cruise into the semifinals for the first time in her career.

She will meet Sabalenka for a place in the final.

Svitolina had said she would not shake hands with players from Russia or Belarus after Moscow’s attack of her country last year, which it calls a “special military operation”.

Belarus is a key staging area for Russia’s actions.

“I don’t know, to be fair, what she was waiting for, because my statements were clear about the handshake,” said Svitolina, who was booed by the fickle

French Open crowd for walking to her bench while Sabalenka waited at the net after winning 6-4, 6-4.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Having skipped two press conferences at Roland Garros after being grilled by the media about her personal stance on the war, Sabalenka finally addressed reporters again.

“I don’t want my country to be in any conflict, I don’t support the war,” second seed Sabalenka said.

“I don’t support war, meaning I don’t support (Belarus President) Alexander Lukashenko right now.”

Sabalenka, who had skipped the earlier press conferences citing mental health reasons and saying that she did not feel safe after being repeatedly questioned about the war, said she did not regret skipping her media duties.

“I really felt bad not coming here. I couldn’t sleep. Like all those bad feelings were in my head,” Sabalenka said.

“I don’t regret the decisions. I felt really

disrespected and felt really bad. I mean, (at a) Grand Slam, it’s enough pressure to handle, and I tried to focus on myself, on my game.

“I really hope you guys will understand me, my feelings. You know I really respect all of you and I’m always open. You can ask whatever you want. You will get all the information. “But in the last press conference, I felt like my press conference became a political TV show, and I’m not (an) expert in politics. I’m just a tennis player.” —Reuters

World Test final takes centre stage amid T20 boom

LONDON: The World Test Championship final between Australia and India at the Oval starts on Wednesday against a backdrop of fears for the long format given the growth of Twenty20 franchise leagues.

Not that there's anything new about cricket-lovers worrying about the future of their sport.

Indeed it was following an 1882 Test at the Oval, after Australia had inflicted England's first defeat on home soil, that the Sporting Times published a mock obituary of English cricket that referenced its cremation, with "the Ashes taken to Australia".

The Ashes has since become a shorthand for Anglo-Australian Test cricket, with a five-match series in England starting next week — just days after the scheduled finish of the WTC final.

One current concern is that the riches on offer to leading players from T20 tournament such as the Indian Premier League, and the vastly shorter time it takes to earn the money than by playing five-day Test cricket, makes the traditional format of the game much less attractive to leading modern-day players.

The International Cricket Council's response was to devise the WTC, a two-year cycle of games culminating in a final, in order to give Test cricket greater context.

This week's match marks the culmination of the second edition, with New Zealand having defeated India in the inaugural 2021 final at Southampton.

Australia and India are two of cricket's major on and off-field



India's Rohit Sharma during practice at The Oval, London. — Reuters

powers, together with England, and the 'Big Three' play the majority of five-match Test series.

The proximity of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston starting on June 16 has led to the WTC final being labelled a 'warm-up' game for Australia.

BIG WEEK

But Australia star batsman Steve Smith, whose side just missed out on the inaugural final,

after losing their last home series in India, is adamant it is a match his side want to win just as much as a 50-over or T20 World Cup final.

"We're all just looking forward to this (match against India)," Smith told reporters at the Oval on Monday.

"It's two years in the making, of getting to the final of the World Test Championship, it's a big week for us and India, so we'll get

through this then we'll focus after that. "Every game you play for your country is important."

And India coach Rahul Dravid said: "It's something you aspire to, to be in the top two teams so you get an opportunity to play this game."

The former India batsman added the fact New Zealand had won the first final after qualifying via the ICC's weighted points system, was proof of how teams whose cricket economics mean they are often restricted to two-Test series, could still be competitive at Test level.

"If you play less you still have the opportunity to make it to the final, as New Zealand showed last time," said Dravid. "Actually playing less gives you an opportunity to protect your resources."

When India, now cricket's financial powerhouse, won the 1983 one-day World Cup final, it transformed the format's status in the sport's most populous nation and with it the economy of the global game.

It was a similar story in 2007 when Indian officials' scepticism about T20 cricket evaporated after India's dramatic victory over arch-rivals Pakistan in the 2007 World Twenty20 final in South Africa.

Dravid, however, was sceptical over whether a victory for India, set to be roared on by thousands of passionate fans at the Oval, the south London headquarters of county side Surrey, would have a similar effect.

"Test cricket faces unique challenges, which are not necessarily going to change as a result of one game," he said. — AFP

Gabe Vincent helps Heat level finals at 1-1



Denver Nuggets' Kentavious Caldwell-Pope (5) battles for the ball against Miami Heat's Gabe Vincent (2) at Ball Arena. — USA Today Sports

DENVER: The Miami Heat benefited from a late finishing kick against the Denver Nuggets on Sunday to send the NBA Finals back to South Beach all square at one victory apiece.

Miami erased an eight-point deficit entering the fourth quarter and overcame a 41-point, 11-rebound performance from Nikola Jokic to record a 111-108 victory in Game 2 in Denver.

Gabe Vincent made 8 of 12 shot attempts from the floor — including 4 of 6 from 3-point range — as the Heat outscored the Nuggets by a 36-25 margin in the fourth quarter.

Vincent was asked on NBA TV's postgame show if his teammates are upset about a perceived lack of respect in the series against Denver. "I speak for my whole team when I say we don't give a damn. We just want to get four wins," Vincent said.

Bam Adebayo collected 21 points and nine rebounds and Jimmy Butler added 21 points and nine assists for Miami, which hosts Game 3 of the best-of-seven series on Wednesday. "Our guys love to compete. They love to put themselves out there in those moments of truth," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Denver's Jamal Murray added 18 points and 10 assists, however, he saw his 3-point attempt with 1.9 seconds remaining hit the iron. Aaron Gordon scored 12 points and Bruce Brown added 11 off the bench for the Nuggets, who fell to 9-1 at home in the playoffs.

Denver held an 83-75 lead through three quarters before Miami erupted for a 32-12 run over the first eight-plus minutes of the fourth. Duncan Robinson made a pair of treys and two layups and Butler converted a 3-pointer to highlight the surge. — Reuters

Dominos Team dominate OPBL League



MUSCAT: The current OPBL Basketball Division B Champions, Dominos Pizza/Elevate maintained their steady climb

atop their division standings by defeating Restaurant Author's Cuisine (RAC) Team, with a final score of

109-86 in last week's OPBL Basketball Summer League, organised by OPBL and Alasm New LLC.

The Dominos Pizza Team, dominated RAC defensively and cruised to a 23-point win, they were led by a balanced scoring attack led by top-scorer and player of the game, Joshua Alcarde who finished with 26 points, 8 rebounds and a whopping 11 steals. He was ably supported by the core team members, Austin Parole, Mark

Israel, Karl Lorion, Ronnie Hernando, Drey Gobris, Dave Fermin, Kenneth Katimbang, Garner Lazo and the rest of the team members, Benjie Oliveros, Danilo Mamaril, Keith Labrador, Noel Sarmiento, Jaycer Saldana, Andrew Tibayan and Karl Padlan.

RAC Team were paced by their main men, Jay Buan, Nards Gervacio, PJ Datalio, Otit Tipan, Harold Hilario and Roxyd Zamudio who battled fiercely but could not sustain their brilliant play.

The talent and deep bench of Dominos came into play and was the deciding factor in delivering the third win for Dominos Team who are now sporting a 3-1 record.

Dominos will continue their steep climb this week and try

to face a determined Vanguard Team in the coming weekend battle where they hope to continue their drive to repeat as champions once again.

In other games of Division B, Dr Joseph B Cuarteros' Team Cuarteros won over Dahabi 87-76 while in Division A action, OCTAL drubbed Mediacom 95-85 and Little Manila Shoppe defeated El Supreme 83-73.

The tournament is organised by OPBL under the leadership of Alain and Ruby Garcia and sponsored by Alasm New LLC headed by Hussein al Rasbi.

The games are held every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening at the Oman Club in Al Khuwair, all basketball enthusiasts and supporters are welcome to watch and enjoy the games.

Oman to head off to Uzbekistan for Cafa Nations Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Oman national football team will head off to Uzbekistan on Friday to take part in the inaugural edition of Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023. The domestic training camp which started on May 29 will conclude on Thursday. More than 14 sessions were conducted towards shaping the players for the central Asian event and the upcoming crucial assignments including also AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals and the qualifiers for Asian teams on road to the Fifa World Cup 2026 as well as the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

At Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Red Warriors men continued their daily sessions under watchful eyes of Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic and his technical coaching staff. The training sessions were attended by all the players except Al Mundher al Alawi who left the camp due to an injury while Ahmed al Kaabi trained individually on Monday night. The training programme normally started with warm-up practice in presence of the fitness coach. Later, the players focused



on ball training divided into two groups. Then, the players worked on implementing some tactical training, building up and creating attacking attempts towards more focus in the forward area.

The national team will compete against hosts Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in Group A in the Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 while Iran, Kyrgyzstan (hosts) and Afghanistan teams

comprised Group B. The event is scheduled in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan during June 10 to 20. The Oman team will utilise from their participation at the Central Asian event by playing some tight matches against the Asian teams from different schools.

Oman will begin their campaign against hosts Uzbekistan on June 11 and then they will take on Tajikistan on June 14 and will conclude their group games against Turkmenistan on June 17.

DOMINANT VERSTAPPEN RIPPING THROUGH F1 RECORD BOOKS

LONDON: Max Verstappen is rewriting the record books, ready to overtake some of Formula One's all-time greats in what looks ominously like becoming the most one-sided of seasons.

Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix 'Grand Slam' win was a career 40th for Red Bull's dominant double world champion and left him one behind Ayrton Senna, with Alain Prost's tally also in his sights.

The Dutch 25-year-old was quickest in every practice session, led every race lap from pole position at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya and also took a bonus point for fastest lap.

Fleeting hopes that Verstappen's Mexican teammate Sergio Perez could put up a fight seem to have evaporated, with Verstappen already a mighty 53 points clear after seven of 22 races.

A third title seems assured and if domination can be a turn-off for neutral fans, although a feature of the sport through the ages, there is still a fascination with the numbers as Red Bull and their driver press on.

Verstappen has led the championship for more than a year while Red Bull have won the last eight races in a row, including last year's season-ender in Abu Dhabi and all seven this season.

No team has ever won every race in a season -- McLaren won all but one in 1988 with Senna and Prost -- but Verstappen

recognised in Barcelona that Red Bull could do that, even if it looked unlikely.

Red Bull have won 17 of the last 18 races, compared to McLaren's 15 out of 16 in 1988.

Verstappen set the record of 15 wins in a season last year and he already has five in 2023, including the last three, with 15 more races to be run and no immediate end in sight to the domination.

"They are so far ahead," said Mercedes' seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton, after finishing runner-up on Sunday, of his team's chances of closing the gap. "And ultimately Max will continue to win this year.

"That means they can start on their development for next year sooner than everybody else, if they haven't already, and that's the danger."

POLISHED VERSTAPPEN

Verstappen can equal Senna's career tally of 41 in Canada next week and could match Prost's 51 before the end of the campaign.

Sebastian Vettel's 53 might even be within range, and Verstappen has already overtaken the German as Red Bull's 'winningest' driver, leaving only Michael Schumacher (91) and Hamilton (103) ahead.

"Max is continuing to evolve as a driver. He's getting more and more polished and the capacity he has in the car is truly impressive," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner.



Red Bull's Max Verstappen leads at the start of the Spanish Grand Prix race ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. – Reuters



Red Bull's Max Verstappen speaks to second placed Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton after winning the Spanish Grand Prix. – Reuters

Verstappen won by 27 seconds to Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso in Monaco and 24 seconds to Hamilton in Spain.

The winning margin in the season-opener in Bahrain from

Verstappen to Alonso, third and best of the rest, was 38 seconds.

"Let's keep our expectations real," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff after his team's encouraging improvement on Sunday with a

re-designed car. "There is such a long way to go in order to catch Red Bull."

Verstappen has finished lower than second only five times in his last 28 races, and not at all this

season, and has not retired from a race since April last year.

One thing has been clear for a while — the 2023 season is not going down to the wire.

— Reuters

FORMULA 1 8. Spanish Grand Prix

Barcelona-Catalunya circuit

F1 23

June 4

1	Max Verstappen (NED)	1:27:57.940
	Red Bull	
2	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 24.090
	Mercedes	
3	George Russell (GBR)	at 32.389
	Mercedes	
4	Sergio Pérez (MEX)	at 35.812
	Red Bull	
5	Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP)	at 45.698
	Ferrari	

Driver standings	
Max Verstappen (NED)	170
Sergio Pérez (MEX)	117
Fernando Alonso (ESP)	99
Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	87
George Russell (GBR)	65
Teams	
Red Bull	287
Aston Martin	152
Mercedes	134

AFP

Source: formula1.com

Tottenham appoint Postecoglou as new manager



LONDON: Tottenham have appointed Ange Postecoglou as their new manager on a four-year deal, ending their long search for a new coach.

The 57-year-old Australian, who won the domestic Scottish treble with Celtic this season, will replace Antonio Conte at the Premier League club.

Conte left Spurs by "mutual agreement" in late March, with Cristian Stellini and then Ryan Mason taking temporary charge.

Postecoglou will officially join the London club, who finished a disappointing eighth in the Premier League this season, on July 1.

"Ange brings a positive mentality and a fast, attacking style of play," Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said on Tuesday.

"He has a strong track record of developing players and an understanding of the importance of the link from the academy — everything that is important to our club."

The Greek-born Postecoglou enjoyed huge success during two years in Glasgow, winning five trophies.

But the lure of the Premier League proved too much to resist as he takes on the challenge of trying to revitalise Spurs after a disastrous 12 months.

The club were still challenging for a top-four place when Conte departed but they ended up missing out on European competition.

Former Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann and ex-Barcelona, Spain boss Luis Enrique and Feyenoord manager Arne Slot were among the big

names touted for the job.

But Levy has finally got his man in Postecoglou, who takes the next step on a nomadic career that has included spells in Australia and Japan.

He also managed the Australia team.

Celtic handed Postecoglou his chance in European football in 2021 and he did not disappoint, dethroning Rangers as Scottish champions.

More silverware followed this season as Celtic completed the eighth domestic treble in the club's history.

"It was an honour to be asked to be Celtic manager and during my two years I have given everything I have to deliver success to our supporters," Postecoglou said in a statement on the Scottish club's website.

But he faces an even bigger challenge to restore Spurs to the heights they achieved in reaching the Champions League final under Mauricio Pochettino in 2019.

He becomes the fourth permanent appointment as Spurs boss since Pochettino was sacked less than four years ago.

Postecoglou may also have to cope without the presence of talismanic striker Harry Kane.

Tottenham's all-time top goalscorer has just one year left on his contract and is attracting interest from Manchester United and Real Madrid.

Long-serving captain Hugo Lloris could also depart after a disappointing season for the French goalkeeper. — AFP

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CBO expands business activities of FLCs in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced significant changes in the authorised activities of Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs) in a move aimed at promoting growth and enhancing the sector's contribution to the economy. The decision, outlined in a recent circular, expands the scope of operations for FLCs and introduces new guidelines to govern their activities.

Under the revised regulations, FLCs are now permitted to accept deposits from corporate entities, with a minimum deposit size of RO 5,000.

This change opens up new avenues for FLCs to strengthen their financial position and diversify their services. However, it is important to note that deposits from corporations will not be covered by the Bank Deposit Insurance Scheme.

Additionally, FLCs are now authorised to engage in real estate financing, including providing loans for commercial projects and supporting developers in the



construction of real estate projects, including residential units.

To maintain financial stability, the CBO has set limits on the total amount of real estate lending, ensuring that FLCs do not exceed 50 per cent of their net worth. Furthermore, restrictions have been put in place to prevent excessive exposure to individual borrowers and connected counterparties.

In a significant development,

FLCs can extend personal loans to individuals without the need for collateral or security. The criteria for such loans include a careful assessment of the borrower's net salary and debt burden ratio.

The tenor of these loans is capped at seven years, with the possibility of up to two monthly deferrals per year upon customer request. The total personal loan portfolio of FLCs is limited to 50 per cent of their total

lending.

The Central Bank has also granted FLCs the authority to invest in rated corporate bonds

listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, up to a maximum of 10 per cent of their net worth.

However, they are prohibited from investing in bonds issued by related parties or borrower companies. These investment activities must adhere to a board-approved policy, ensuring prudent risk management. Regarding operational flexibility, FLCs are now empowered to adjust their business hours according to their discretion, eliminating conflicts with labour regulations.

They may also operate branches on all days of the year, subject to compliance with security, operational requirements, and notification to the CBO.

Furthermore, during the month of Ramadhan, FLCs can extend working hours at selected branches without seeking specific approval.

FLCs borrowing in foreign currency (exceeding 40 per cent of their net worth) will be exempt from creating an exchange reserve, provided the foreign exchange risk is fully hedged.

The CBO expressed confidence that these measures will invigorate the FLC sector and contribute positively to the overall economy. FLCs are advised to adopt well-documented policies and procedures, approved by their Board of Directors, to ensure compliance with the new regulations and effectively manage associated risks.

This move by the Central Bank is expected to stimulate growth and innovation in the Finance and Leasing sector, ultimately benefiting businesses and individuals across the Sultanate of Oman.

Plans firmed up for new airport in Musandam

Air gateway: International firms line up to bid for key consultancy services contract

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

A number of reputable local and international engineering firms are in the race for a contract to design and supervise the construction of a new airport in Oman's Musandam Governorate – a key project that will enhance the strategic enclave's appeal to tourism, investment and overall development.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is overseeing the development of the new airport in Oman's northernmost governorate overlooking the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.

The new modern facility will supplant Khasab Airport, an airbase that doubles as a civilian airport which, because of its location hemmed in by soaring mountains, cannot accommodate large passenger planes and most international flights.

The successful bidder will secure a consultancy services contract covering, among other things, the preliminary



and detailed design, tendering supervision, as well as overall supervision of an airport compliant with Oman and international standards.

Included in the design on the airside are facilities for a new runway, taxiway, apron and aircraft stands, as well as service and emergency roads, and navigation aids, among other fixtures.

Facilities envisioned on the landside include a passenger terminal building with passenger boarding bridges, Air Traffic Control Tower, security facilities, crash fire and rescue, and fuel farm building, along with offices for a range of service providers.

Significantly, the consultancy services tender marks the culmination of a multi-year effort

by Oman's aviation authorities to pinpoint a suitable site for the development of a modern airport in one of the most mountainous and rugged parts of the country.

Finding ample land to accommodate a 4-kilometre-long runway, which is the standard length of airports in Oman, has proven to be a huge challenge. More than a dozen sites distributed across the governorate were assessed for their suitability, leading authorities to eventually zero in on a greenfield site in the governorate.

Importantly, the new airport project will complement major infrastructure improvements underway across Musandam to support its positioning as a promising hub for tourism and investment. **TURN TO P15**



Electric Workover Rigs - A Technology in Transition

Publication: SPE / IADC Middle East Drilling Technology Conference and Exhibition, Abu Dhabi, 23rd May 2023.
Paper Number SPE-214516-MS

Al Baraka Oilfield Services SAOC has supported Oman's leading oil and gas exploration and production company in the Sultanate, in servicing wells in the Oman concession area using Conventional Workover Rigs since 2013. Workover includes primarily changing completions and casings, fishing, cementing, abandonment, milling, perforations, changing pumps/motors, upsizing wellhead, and various other integrity operations. The challenge given by the Client to the Contractor was to safely and successfully commission the first two new electric-powered 550 HP Hoists.

A Super Local Community Contractor (SLCC) has become the first oil and gas company in Oman to introduce ground-breaking electric-powered Workover Rigs. It is proud to declare itself as the first company in Oman to work intensively and proactively to design these modularized electric-powered workover units, able to optimize the move time between the wells, thereby creating faster turnarounds and reducing costs. This allowed the Client to bring early oil to the tanks, minimizing deferral, achieving ample savings in operations, and accelerating cash flow.

Conventional workover rigs are primarily hydraulic, not electric. Compared with the Conventional units, the new Electrical hoists are equipped with the latest technology and ergonomics that ensure safe operations and faster movement between locations which reflects in the increased number of wells attended so far in 2022. Other advantages are viz. modular, less space occupation; improved control features, ability to control both torque and speed accurately; fully automated pipe-handling systems; less maintenance expenditure, consequently leading to lower operating costs. The Electrical units are designed to enhance safety and overall performance efficiency defined by the specific application, the location of the well, and the type of work to be performed. These rigs have a more efficient power source, as electric motors convert more of the energy input into mechanical power compared to diesel engines. This is also reflected in the reduction in Non-Productive Time. Two critical features were the basis of the design of the Workover Unit, i.e. potential to take the lead in energy efficiency/decarbonization and minimizing "lifting and drops" hazards by



introducing automated handling mechanisms and reducing manual/human intervention.

In phase II, these units will be hooked up to the Overhead Electricity Transmission Grid instead of running from diesel generators. Oman's power grid is fed by electricity produced from clean natural gas-fired turbines which emit less pollution; therefore there will be an overall saving in energy consumption and reducing pollution from burning fossil fuels, with the aspiration to reduce global carbon emissions to Net Zero by 2050, as part of the decarbonization roadmap laid down by the Ministry of Energy & Minerals in Oman, in line with the Paris Agreement's objectives of limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

The electric-powered Hoist concept has been extremely successful such that the Client has incorporated these types of rigs in future new contracts as against conventional hydraulic rigs. Other service providers are also planning to switch to Electric Workover Rigs as the latest trend in Oman.

SPAR Oman
opens 26th outlet
at Al Khoudh



MUSCAT: Expanding its footprint across Oman, the leading supermarket chain, SPAR Oman opened its 26th store at Al Khoudh.

Strategically located near Sultan Qaboos University, SPAR will offer customers a premium shopping experience that combines freshness, convenience, variety, and affordability.

As part of the launch celebration, a special promotion themed 'Fresh and Local' will feature special deals until June 10.

"The SPAR brand has become a household name in Oman, thanks to our customers' trust and confidence," said M Sridhar, CEO of SPAR Oman.

Commenting on the Al Khoudh store opening, he mentioned: "Since the opening of the first SPAR store in Oman in 2014, SPAR has enjoyed exceptional growth and has continued to expand its operations.

Today SPAR has become synonymous with freshness, choice, and value with superior customer service. We are actively listening to customer feedback and

expanding our offerings."

As a trusted name in the retail industry, SPAR Oman aims to be at the heart of every neighbourhood, ensuring proximity to the community it serves.

SPAR Oman is consistently strengthening its presence to meet consumer needs and adding a range of offerings for local Shoppers.

The newly opened SPAR Al Khoudh has a retail space of 530 square-feet.

The supermarket chain will provide the best selection of local produce combined with top-quality products from around the world. It will feature an extensive choice of food and non-food products, fresh and vegetable departments, a premium butchery, and special offers section dedicated to different product categories.

Customers can expect the highest standards of hygiene and friendly customer service, alongside a premium, truly international, quality shopping environment. For more information about SPAR Oman and its offerings, please visit www.spar.om.

Alizz Islamic Bank announces
the enrolment of third batch in
Ruwad Alizz programme

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank is pleased to announce the enrolment of the third batch in the renowned Ruwad Alizz programme, aimed at cultivating middle-level leadership.

In partnership with Harvard Manage Mentor, the esteemed e-learning platform affiliated with Harvard University, the programme offers a comprehensive training experience. It aims to empower and develop 60 employees annually, divided into two batches of 30 individuals each. The programme entails six consecutive months of dedicated study, with the first and second batches having already produced 56 successful graduates.

The third batch comprises 34 employees from Alizz Islamic Bank as well as other esteemed government institutions.

The selection process involved evaluating individuals' job performance followed by a practical test in the form of a case study, assessing their crisis management skills, ability to overcome challenges, and decision-making acumen, all of which contribute to maintaining the company's productivity and employees' well-being.

Subsequently, a rigorous assessment and evaluation process was undertaken, ensuring a specific grade for successful candidates. Once accepted into the programme, participants receive comprehensive introductory lectures covering programme details, curriculum, accredited hours, lecture halls,



and field visits, all under the supervision of Alizz Islamic Bank's training and development department.

The programme encompasses a range of activities, including visits to CEOs to gain insights from their leadership experiences and learn how to effectively manage employees and institutions to drive growth and success.

Participants will also undergo continuous testing from Harvard University to apply their acquired knowledge in practical scenarios.

Furthermore, students will form groups and select a graduation project that adds value to the banking sector, showcasing its applicability and potential to make a significant impact.

An esteemed judging committee, selected based on their extensive banking sector experience, will evaluate and determine the winning graduation project.

Expressing his congratulations to the participants of the third

batch, Ali al Mani, the General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, emphasised the increasing responsibilities that lie ahead, particularly given the current focus on providing employment opportunities to young leaders.

In his address, he stated, "The empowerment of future leaders will yield fruitful results, even if it takes time.

True success can only be achieved when individuals love the work they do. Therefore, I eagerly anticipate witnessing the practical outcomes of this programme as graduates acquire the necessary skills. We are here to support you in every way possible."

The 'Ruwad Alizz' programme is a comprehensive leadership development journey that spans various stages of study. Initially, employees engage with Harvard University, accessing educational materials through technological means.

During this time, participants

conduct independent research on a specific leadership topic. To maximise the professionalism of the educational process, a specialised third-party resource in human resources is engaged to provide guidance on the practical application of the acquired knowledge during intensive face-to-face sessions condensed into a single day.

The programme's overarching objective is to develop middle-level leadership talent from both government institutions and the private sector, enabling them to remain competitive in future employment opportunities.

By offering a comprehensive and accelerated development journey, the programme facilitates enhanced learning and the assimilation of diverse experiences and leadership styles. It acknowledges the importance of harnessing individual, societal, and organisational experiences as a means for personal growth, going beyond mere observation.

SAUD BAHWAN GROUP HONoured
WITH PRESTIGIOUS AWARD AT AIM

MUSCAT: Recently Saud Bahwan Group was honoured with the 'Strategic Partner Award 2023' at the Annual Investment Meeting (AIM), held in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The event was held under the auspices of HH Shaikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council.

Accepting the award on behalf of the Group was Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director - Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group.

Speaking at the occasion, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, said, "I take this opportunity to thank the AIM Foundation and the organisers of the Annual Investment Meeting. Saud Bahwan Group has been associated with the Annual Investment Meeting since 2016.

A unique initiative like this, goes a long way in providing investors, industry leaders and entrepreneurs a distinctive platform for progressive partnerships."

The Annual Investment



Meeting (AIM) is an initiative of the AIM Foundation, an independent international organisation fully committed to empower the world's economy by boosting effective promotion

strategies and facilitating opportunities for economic productivity and expansion.

The Foundation also undertakes the operation and management of the AIM Global

Investment Network and its 15 affiliated Business Groups, including the supervision of the Annual Investment Meeting Global and Regional Chapters.

Since its inception, the

Annual Investment Meeting has established itself as a leading investment platform in the Middle East which aspires to ignite positive transformation by creating investment

opportunities, upholding solidarity and developing economic relations among nations, as well as addressing the global ordeals that will make a profound impact to economic growth.

The Annual Investment Meeting brings together all types of investors, entrepreneurs and government sectors from all over the globe. Annually held in the United Arab Emirates, the conference serves as a platform for all sectors to have an open discussion of the latest investment trends and opportunities and explore potential partnerships.

Every edition of the Annual Investment Meeting is an opportune event to address the fundamental challenges that nations are being confronted with on their journey to achieving development and to discuss investment trends and strategies that can be utilised to maximise the potential of every business, country and region to consequently fuel economic diversification.



Researchers discover 4,300-year-old copper ingots in Oman



© Conrad Schmidt

Aerial view of the central part of the site from the southwest.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Researchers from Goethe University have made an important discovery in the Wilayat of Ibra in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The discovery of three copper ingots provides new information about the trade networks of the Bronze Age and how copper was transported across long distances. This discovery is significant because it sheds light on the importance of copper during this time period and how it was used for making tools and weapons.

According to a statement released by Goethe University, while researchers Irini Biezeveld and Jonas Kluge were investigating traces of several settlement sites in eastern Oman, they recovered a lump containing three copper ingots from a test pit. The ingots are believed to be 4,300 years old.

The lump containing the copper ingots was found in a test pit in Ibra, Oman. The ingots are in the shape of a round cone and are corroded on the outside.

According to Dr Stephanie Döpfer, the academic supervisor of the two doctoral

candidates who made the discovery, "A find like this is extremely rare."

Oman was an important centre of copper production during the Copper Age.

The region had abundant copper deposits, and the metal was traded to other parts of the world. The discovery of the three copper ingots in Ibra provides new insights into the ancient copper trade in the region.

The discovery of these copper ingots is significant because it provides insight into the trade networks of the Bronze Age. The researchers believe that the ingots were produced in a local smelting facility.

Copper was an important commodity during this time period and was used for making tools and weapons.

The ingots were likely transported from the mines in the Al Hajar Mountains to the east coast of Oman where they were then shipped to other parts of the world.

They also speculate that the copper was traded to the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley. These civilisations were known to have traded with Oman during the Copper Age.

Nama restructuring to enhance power sector efficiency

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

In a significant move to restructure Oman's electricity sector and improve efficiency, Nama Holding has announced the commencement of operations for its distribution and supply companies.

This development comes in accordance with government directives issued in December 2021 and highlights the group's commitment to professionalism and equality.

Working closely with key authorities, including the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Oman Investment Authority, and the Public Services Regulatory Authority, Nama Holding successfully merged and restructured several companies into two main entities: Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply.

These companies will now be responsible for managing and providing electricity services to all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with the exception of Dhofar Governorate. Nama Dhofar Services Company will continue to oversee electricity, water, and sewage services in that region.

With a clear division of

Salem al Kamyani,
CEO of Nama Supply

responsibilities, Nama Electricity Distribution will focus on providing reliable distribution services, including metering, low-voltage networks, building lines, and transformers. Nama Supply, on the other hand, will handle billing and collection operations.

The appointments of Eng Alaa al Lawati as CEO of Nama Electricity Distribution and Salem al Kamyani as CEO of Nama Supply demonstrate the group's dedication to efficient leadership.

To ensure a smooth transition, Nama Holding efficiently transferred assets and employees from the merged companies to the new entities, aligning each individual's expertise with the appropriate roles. This meticulous approach guarantees business continuity and project completion. Additionally, this restructuring initiative aims to review costs within the electricity sector, enhance system

Eng Alaa al Lawati, CEO of Nama
Electricity Distribution

efficiency, develop services, and elevate customer satisfaction by embracing technological advancements in customer service. As part of its comprehensive restructuring efforts, Nama Holding aims to cover all aspects of the electricity sector and its services.

Unifying all electricity services under the name "Namaa Services" provides subscribers with a centralised platform. This unified platform includes a service hall and a single contact number, streamlining the customer experience. Furthermore, Nama Holding has prioritised the development of the electronic Nama platform, incorporating various digital media and mobile applications to deliver an all-encompassing service catering specifically to the electricity sector.

Eng Alaa bin Hassan al Lawati, CEO of Nama Electricity

Distribution Company, emphasised the significance of the merger, stating, "This merger will consolidate all services related to the distribution of electricity networks, including meter readings, network connections to households, and resolving technical challenges."

The total value of the company's assets exceeds RO 2 billion."

Ahmed bin Amer al Mahrezi, Acting CEO of Nama Group, highlighted the successful transition, saying, "We have efficiently distributed the assets and employees of Muscat Electricity Distribution, Mazoon Electricity, Majan Electricity, and Tanweer companies to the two newly formed entities: 'Nama Electricity Distribution' and 'Nama Supply.' Each company has been allocated responsibilities according to their expertise, ensuring uninterrupted operations and project completion."

Salem bin Said al Kamyani, CEO of Nama Supply Company, stated, "The consolidation of electricity supply companies will bring about significant advancements and enhancements in our service offerings. This initiative is set to boost operational efficiency, reduce costs, and greatly enhance the overall customer experience."

Plans firmed up for new airport in Musandam

FROM PAGE 13

Of late, the government – represented by Omran Group and the Governor of Musandam – have ramped up development of new tourist and cultural attractions with the goal of enhancing its overall appeal.

A new zipline has been brought into operation at Khasab, while a flurry of beautification projects are under implementation as well.

Last month, a contract was awarded for the construction of a carriageway linking Khasab, Dibba and Lima in the governorate at a cost of RO 151 million. The 95 km blacktop will serve as a new lifeline for overland travel in this mountainous governorate.

The deadline for submission of offers for the Musandam Airport consultancy services contract is July 2, 2023.

Tender Board urges SMEs to register in Esnad platform

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

The General-Secretariat of the Tender Board urged private sector in the Sultanate of Oman to register in the electronic platform Esnad for managing government tenders and procurement of the state's administrative apparatus units.

This platform enhances the competitiveness and transparency in the awarding process by issuing government tenders and procurement and monitoring the competing of the registered bidders in the platform in accordance with a systematic basis and a transparent process to ensure the right to compete for these tenders.

As a support for the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which obtained entrepreneurship card from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, these enterprises were exempted from registration fees through the Esnad website for electronic tenders till 22/08/2023.

The registration in Esnad enables the private sector companies to increase their chances of obtaining tenders and

procurement in the government and private sectors, as well as to acquiring technical and administrative experiences in submitting bids for tenders and procurement through working with government entities and the private sector companies.

Registering in this platform also provides chances for taking advantage of indirect business opportunities through companies that obtained contracts, in addition to benefiting from training and qualification opportunities in big companies.

During the registration, the category in which the institution wishes to register with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board is to be selected.

The activities in which it would like to register with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board are to be selected too, as well as to determine the degree in which the company or enterprise would like to register in the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, provided that it is not higher than the degree registered in the its certificate issued by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Passenger arrivals at Oman's airports rise by 88 per cent

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Passenger arrivals at Oman's airports have risen impressively, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

This surge in arrivals is being attributed to several factors, including increased tourism activity and the growing popularity of Oman as a travel destination in the Middle East.

The number of passengers who arrived at Oman's airports until the end of March 2023 increased by 88 per cent, recording 3,287,015 passengers, compared to 1,746,259 passengers during the same period last year.

Over the past year, Oman has taken several steps to boost its tourism industry. One such effort



has been the launch of a new visa system that makes it easier for tourists to visit the country. Under the new system which was launched in March, visitors from 103 countries are eligible for an e-visa, which can be obtained online within a matter of minutes.

In addition to these efforts, Oman's government has also invested heavily in promoting

the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage to potential visitors.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said the total investments in Oman's heritage and tourism sector is expected to reach RO 3 billion for 2021-2025.

Meanwhile, the number of passengers through Muscat International Airport by the

end of March 2023 reached 2,959,829 passengers, compared to 1,473,818 passengers until the end of March 2022, or an increase of 100.8 per cent.

The number of flights that used Muscat International Airport during the same period totalled 22,145 flights compared to 11,419 flights until the end of March 2022 or an increase of 93.9 per cent.

The number of passengers who arrived at Salalah Airport reached 304,538, an increase of 34.2 per cent. The airport recorded 2,184 flights, with an increase in flights of 33.2 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022.

On the other hand, the number of passengers arrived at Sohar Airport reached 5,401 passengers on 76 flights, while the number of passengers through Duqm Airport reached 17,247 passengers on 152 flights.

UK productive relations with EU an advantage for both



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

In contrast to the situation just a year ago, when the European Union was initiating court action against the UK, for problems arising from Brexit agreements, all 27 member states of the EU are now hailing the strong and strengthening

relationship between the two. Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought into focus just how many interests and values the UK and the EU have in common. A new approach by the UK government to negotiations with the EU on Northern Ireland has also helped to remove the major disputing issue in the relationship and replacing it with an agreement which the two sides see as an improvement. With this resolution, there is an opportunity for the UK financial services to once again engage productively with its partners in the EU for the benefit of both economies. It's an opportunity the UK must seize. Working together on sustainable finance in particular is imperative for all, given the shared environmental and energy security challenges being faced.

City of London Corporation's chairman, Chris Hayward said this matter was top of the agenda on his visit to Luxembourg last month, where he discussed green finance solutions with the Luxembourg Sustainable Finance Initiative. On the climate issue he had discussions with representatives from government, regulators and the central bank. Both sides need to build on the progress made so far. The House of Lords European Affairs Committee recently said that this should be seen as a reset in UK-EU relations and look at improvements to the relationship across the board. From the perspective of the City (London's financial district) this reset should be approached in a spirit of confidence, as London remains Europe's leading financial

centre and has much to offer – something which is appreciated by many of UK's European counterparts. UK's global financial centre benefits Europe as a whole, supporting businesses and consumers across the continent. Hayward said both governments are urged to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed two years ago. This will enable the UK and EU to establish an ambitious bilateral financial services dialogue. Such a dialogue will pave the way for strengthening supervisory cooperation through data sharing and electronic reporting and crucially, collaboration in financing the green transition. This will take time and won't remove all issues overnight, but it will get UK out of a state of limbo,

putting it on the right track. One other crucial issue is whether London's clearing houses will continue to serve customers in the bloc. In 2020 the London Stock Exchange's clearing house handled more than 90 per cent of interest-rate derivatives, denominated in euros. These interest-rate swaps are widely used by businesses to protect themselves against unexpected changes in borrowing costs. The current arrangement is expected to end in 2025; an extension would be preferable by both sides. But it can go further than the MOU. The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) leaves the issue of financial services to the MOU to cover. When the TCA comes up for

its five-year review in 2026, the firms in the financial district will be pushing for better coverage of financial and professional services in particular. With UK's relationship with the EU thawing, it is in a much better place than in 2022. The renegotiation of the trade deal with Switzerland is evidence of that. This new deal will strengthen UK's services trade relationship with a huge market whose bilateral trade is worth over £35bn annually to the UK. An enhanced trade agreement should also address cross-cutting issues including mobility, data flows and digital trade. Further improvements will take time, but UK financial services must press forward now while the momentum is there for even closer UK-EU cooperation.

Greece's reform labours are only half complete

HUGO DIXON

Hercules famously completed 12 labours. Today's Greece resembles the mythological hero when he was halfway through his tasks. The country has done a lot of work to rebuild itself after its debt crisis, but still needs to finish the job. Greece's large current account deficit and domestic corruption undermine its attraction as an investment destination. But it's far from clear that Kyriakos Mitsotakis will do what's needed to boost savings and improve the rule of law if re-elected as prime minister. Greece is no longer the problem child of the euro zone which a decade ago threatened to bring the single currency crashing. Investors are enthusiastic about the prospect of Mitsotakis' centre-right party winning an overall majority in the second round of elections, due to be held on June 25. Ten-year Greek government bonds yield just 3.7% , only 1.4 percentage points more than equivalent German debt . The issue, rather, is whether Greece will be able to attract investment in the quantities needed for it to fulfil its potential. This will require reforms which won't be easy. While Mitsotakis is rightly credited with attracting investment and pushing forward the digitalisation of the government, he didn't do much to tackle the country's other problems. Tax evasion is still rampant and the justice system is weak. What's more, Mitsotakis has shown little desire to investigate why the phones of Greek politicians, journalists and other prominent figures were bugged with spyware called Predator. Mitsotakis says his government was not involved. It is true that the Greek economy has enjoyed a speedier rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic than most European Union countries, growing a cumulative 15% in the past two years. But this is partly because the country was benefitting from reforms that the International

Monetary Fund and EU imposed as the price of three debt bailouts. Growth has also been strong because Mitsotakis poured large amounts into various handouts in recent years. For example, funding to shield consumers and firms from the energy crisis has been one of the highest in the EU at 5.2% of GDP, according to the Bruegel think tank. The government's fiscal deficit was only 2.3% of GDP last year while debt fell to a still eye-popping 171% of annual output. This was the result of inflation which boosted tax revenue and nominal GDP. In any case, the easy rebound is over. From now on, high growth will either fuel inflation or suck in imports, unless the underlying capacity of the economy also expands rapidly. Greece's current account deficit last year was 9.7% of GDP. The spike in energy prices accounts for about 40% of this, according to the Bank of Greece, the country's central bank. But that still means the underlying deficit is about 6%.

Greece is living beyond its means again. This time, it's the private sector that is running up debt at a rapid rate. Consumption is 67% of national income, compared to the EU average of 50%. What's more, investment is still only 14% of national income, even though this measure expanded during Mitsotakis' first term as prime minister. One of the brightest hopes is that investment will rise to closer to the EU average of 23% in his second term, thereby underpinning the country's long-term growth prospects. The central bank expects various EU funds to be a big contributor, injecting a total of about 70 billion euros by 2026. But in the long term the country will not be able to sustain a much higher investment rate unless it saves more. Otherwise, Greece will continue to run a high current account deficit. This could be risky in a world of higher interest rates and jittery global banks. Mitsotakis could fix the issue. For a start, he could wean the public off handouts, focusing government help on the neediest. — Reuters

How to restructure Chinese supply chains



ANDREW SHENG

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The old is dying and the new cannot be born, the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci wrote in the early twentieth century. We seem to be living in a similar interregnum today, likewise marked by “a great variety of morbid symptoms,” including, not least, the breakdown of global supply chains and the return of inflation. The only way forward is to support the development of new markets, industries, and institutions. But who will finance this effort? In good times, characterised by rapid growth and fat margins, commercial banks and private markets could help emerging and efficient firms raise enough capital to acquire and restructure their inefficient and failing counterparts and create new supply chains. But tighter financial regulation after the 2008 global financial crisis, together with a prolonged



Lines of trucks are seen at a container terminal of Ningbo Zhoushan port, China. – Reuters

period of low interest rates, has made mainstream financial institutions more cautious. They now prefer lower risks and shorter time horizons. As a result, debt levels are at historic highs, and market concentration has increased substantially, with a handful of listed companies enjoying huge market share, particularly in the tech sector. At the same time, with public markets tightly regulated, those in search of higher yields are turning to less liquid, opaquer, and less regulated private markets. But whether private markets will be able to serve the goal of deep financial restructuring remains to be seen. Though private-market AUM have grown faster than total global financial assets — which increased by 7.7% in 2021 — they account for just 2.4% of the total (\$486.6 trillion). Likewise, the non-bank financial intermediation (NBFI) sector, which includes pension funds, insurers, and investment funds, grew by 8.9% in 2021 — faster than its five-year average growth of 6.6%, but still much slower than private-sector AUM. Private AUM amount to only 4.9% of NBFI assets totaling \$239.3 trillion. Furthermore, enthusiasm for PE/VC funds seems to have cooled since last summer. After peaking in 2021, private-equity deal volume fell by 26% to \$2.4 trillion, and deal count declined by 15%, to just under 60,000. The Chinese PE/VC market has followed a similar trend. In 2022, Chinese private-equity deal volume shrank by 48.7%, to \$154.8 billion, and deal count fell 16%, to 9,695. In the first half of 2022, Chinese private-market AUM increased, but the total — \$539 billion — amounted to just 0.7% of China's total financial assets and 2.7% of its NBFI assets. But this gap may offer a valuable opportunity for China. The Chinese PE/VC market is clearly underdeveloped. With China accounting for 18% of global GDP, there is considerable potential for Chinese PE/VC funds to expand — and to support domestic economic restructuring. Already, Chinese PE/VC funds are handling a growing share of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) — more than 56% in 2022, compared to 49% in 2018. M&A transactions have proliferated in the wake of CovidD-19 lockdowns, and the number involving VC funds increased by 61% year on year in the first half of 2022. China's PE/VC funds have two distinctive characteristics. First, foreign funds play a significant role in the sector,

offering international expertise and market reach. The problem now is that, amid rising geopolitical tensions, foreign PE/VC investment in China has declined considerably. In 2022, only 114 new foreign-currency funds were created in China, down more than 40% from the previous year. And in the first quarter of 2023, there were only 87 instances of foreign-currency funds investing in the Chinese equity market — an 87.5% decline by number and a 57.5% decline by value from the previous year. The second distinctive characteristic of China's PE/VC funds is that a substantial share of their funding comes from various levels of government. As of the end of 2022, Chinese government entities had established 1,531 investment funds, worth a total of about \$380 million. The central government accounts for a very small share of these funds: just 1.5% by number and 7.5% by value. Central-government funds tend to focus on investments that advance national priorities, such as in high-end manufacturing, energy, and environmental protection. Provincial- and municipal-level investment funds, for their part, aim primarily to develop regional economies. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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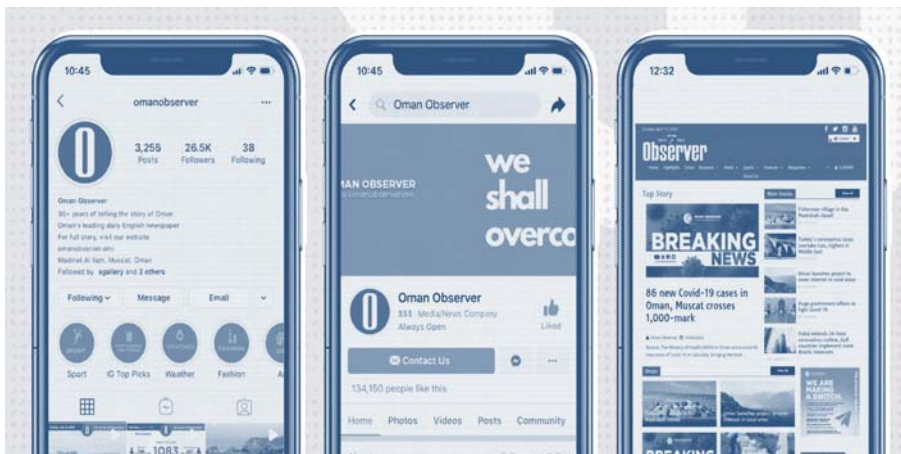
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ART

Visitors walked around an exhibition entitled “Salons by Diderot. 18th-Century Paris Exhibitions” during a press preview at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. — AFP

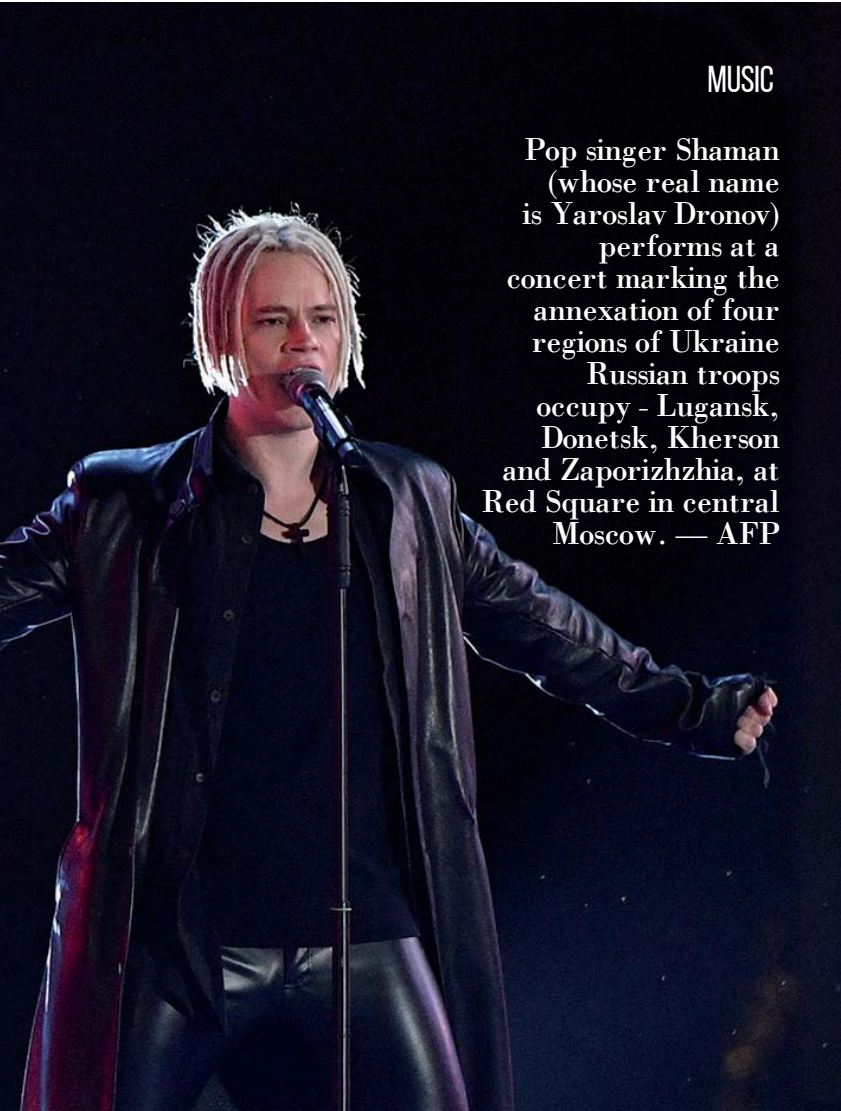
FASHION

A model presents a creation from the Emporio Armani Fall/Winter 2023/2024 collection during Fashion Week in Milan, Italy. — Reuters



MUSIC

Pop singer Shaman (whose real name is Yaroslav Dronov) performs at a concert marking the annexation of four regions of Ukraine Russian troops occupy - Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, at Red Square in central Moscow. — AFP



CULTURE

Villagers use nets to catch offerings thrown by members of the Tengger sub-ethnic group in the crater of the active Mount Bromo volcano as part of the Yadnya Kasada festival in Probolinggo, East Java province. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actress Jaya Prada poses after paying respect at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. — AFP



art & life

WEDNESDAY | JUNE 7, 2023 | DHUL QA'ADA 18, 1444 AH

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Milky Way: Photographers' delight

Oman is one of the best places in the world for astrophotography not just because of its geographical location but also because of the many spots that are not destroyed by light pollution. This photographer shares why he loves taking photos of the night sky

ENTERTAINMENT

Saudi Arabia's growing cinema soft power

ACCOMPANYING NAOMI Campbell on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival last week was one of cinema's most powerful men — and he represents a country where cinemas were banned until five years ago. Mohammed al Turki, 36, heads Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation, his name splashed all over posters and movie credits at the world's biggest cinema gathering on the French Riviera. The foundation, formed two years ago, holds its own annual festival and has already financed 168 movies, including eight in the official selection at Cannes this year. Among them was festival opener

"Jeanne du Barry" about a French prostitute falling in love with King Louis XV, played by Johnny Depp. Others seemed equally at odds with traditional Saudi values — female-focused films such as "Four Daughters" about the religious radicalisation of Tunisian girls, or "Goodbye Julia" about a Sudanese woman and her overbearing conservative husband. "We have learned to respect other cultures," Emad Iskandar, director of the Red Sea Film Foundation, said. He said the foundation focuses on Arab and African film-makers, though the precise definition seems flexible: the French director of



"Jeanne du Barry", Maiwenn, qualified thanks to her Algerian father. "As long as we have the resources, we want to serve the region, but also take the opportunity to learn more," Iskandar added. Al Turki's foundation also sponsored a gala for women, attended by Catherine Deneuve, Katie Holmes and supermodel Campbell. "MO!! Proud of all your doing @redseafilm creating history of many 1st's and Changing the narrative,"

Campbell wrote of Al Turki on her Instagram.

WHITEWASHING?

Saudi largesse for the arts has boomed under the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, with billions pouring into previously taboo areas such as music, fashion and sports. Human Rights Watch says this is designed to "whitewash its dismal rights record" and that, despite

recent reforms, Saudi Arabia continues to repress civil society, execute dissidents, discriminate against women and bury the investigation into the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. But most Saudis back the reforms, and its officials say it is absurd to expect the kingdom to turn into a liberal paradise overnight. Accusations of whitewashing "sadden us more than anything else," said Iskander. "Come to visit and get to know Saudi Arabia and then talk about us. The West has arrived where it is after years of wars and debates. We are a 90-year-old state — be patient." In any case, the relentless PR campaign is working. The Saudi presence at Cannes felt less controversial than that of Depp, still widely branded as toxic since his court battle with ex-wife Amber Heard. Cannes director Thierry Fremaux celebrated the kingdom's interest in "producing films and allowing artists to emerge". "Saudi Arabia is evolving," he told

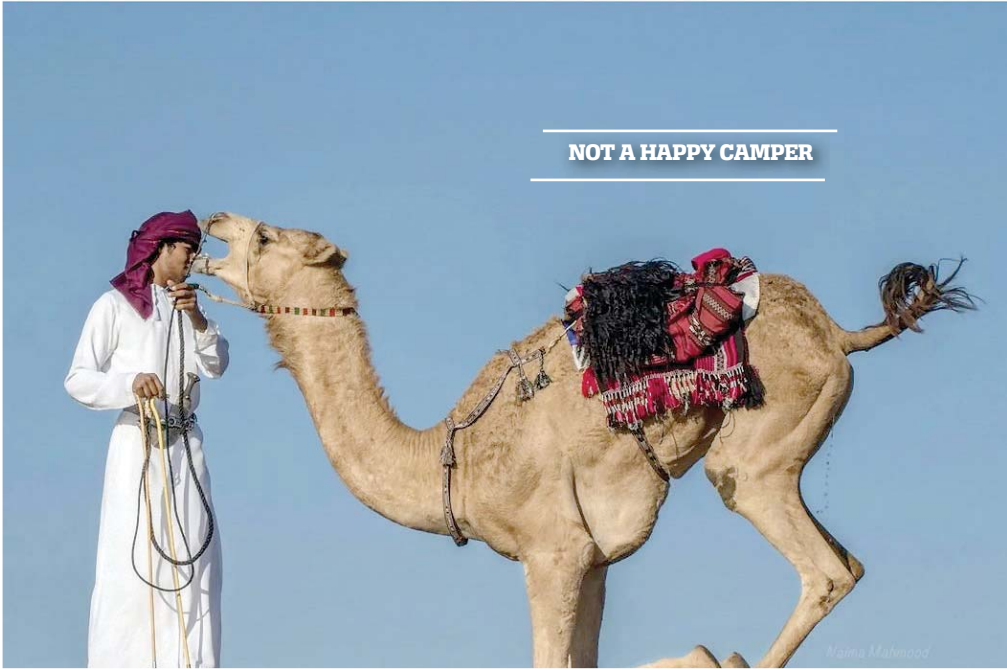
Variety. **'MORE AND MORE PRESENT'** All over Cannes were adverts calling on producers and directors to shoot in Saudi Arabia, while its pavilion showed off the work of its own young directors. "Every year Saudi Arabia asks for a bigger pavilion, more facilities, to be more and more present," said Guillaume Esmiol, head of the Cannes Film Market that runs alongside the festival. Saudi Arabia is not the only country in the region investing massively in cinema: rival Qatar financed 13 films at Cannes this year, including three in the main competition. Some have little or no connection to the Middle East. "We have a lot of French productions," Fatma Hassan Al Remaihi, Doha Film Institute CEO, said. "We don't want to be insular, we want our film-makers to be open to other regions and other film-makers and work with them." She had no qualms that such investments were aimed at spreading Qatar's soft power. "Who doesn't do that? The US does that with their Hollywood films... At least we are doing what we believe in, and we are not losing our identity at the same time." — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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By Kaushalendra Singh
@patkaushal

Photos by Dr Sachin Singh

Milky Ways are astronomers' challenge but photographers' delight. Of course, one needs passion and patience to have a good view of the Milky Way. For a photographer, it requires a lot of planning, including location, camera setting, and, most importantly, the time when the Milky Way is best visible from the lens.

Dr Sachin Singh, a medical practitioner by profession, is passionate about nature and nature photography. He keeps an eye on the natural cycles and devotes a reasonable amount of time to pursuing his passion.

Excited by the phenomenon of the Milky Way in Dhofar, he took his camera and the necessary equipment to get the best shot of nature's miracle.

For this, he had to travel several kilometres away from Salalah city, as the impact of the natural light of the Milky Way gets diluted by 'light pollution'. He ended up getting several good clicks and shared his experience with the Observer.

"The shimmering river of stars. The Milky Way is one of the most popular subjects for night photography and astrophotography, for obvious reasons. It is not as simple as pointing your camera at the night sky when the mood strikes. You have to be 100 per cent prepared. As such, behind every stunning Milky Way photo, some careful planning is necessary by the photographer in order to make it happen."

An avid photographer, Dr Sachin advises "two things of great importance to shoot the Milky Way." "Where to go and when to go. First, you need to go far away from the city to avoid light pollution, and the shoot location has to be completely dark," he says.

Dark locations, according to him, are diminishing due to progressive urbanisation. As Oman lies in the northern hemisphere, the visibility of the Milky Way during the night is from April to October.

A new global atlas of light pollution suggests that 60 per cent of Europeans and almost 80 per cent of North Americans cannot see the glowing band of our galaxy because of the effects of artificial lighting, while it is imperceptible to the entire populations of Singapore, Kuwait, and Malta.

"Overall, the Milky Way is no longer visible to more than one-third of the world's population," he says.

The night sky is part of our natural heritage. It is beautiful, it is awe-inspiring, and being able to see it is a way for us to connect to the wider universe and understand our place in



the natural world.

"The Milky Way has been an unfailing source of inspiration and wonder, as the fact that I live on Earth in our Solar System. Nothing can clear the mind, elevate the soul, or inspire curiosity more than the Milky Way."

He connects his love for natural phenomena with childhood memories. "For me, the Milky Way evokes a feeling of awe when I see it. It always has, and it always will. This is partly because it is rare to see now due to light pollution. It's analogous to spotting a rare bird in your back garden. But I have many memories of seeing this band of hazy light from the dark skies of my home when I was younger. To be able to see the collective light from the stars making up our own galaxy gives a tantalising sense of the enormity of our universe and the structures within it."

Convinced with the idea of modernisation, he says, "The more high-tech our lives become, the need more nature around us. We need nature; it keeps our senses alive; hence I always take my wife and kids with me to engage in outdoor activities like Milky Way photoshoots, stargazing, camping, and hiking to explore and connect with nature to fulfil our requirement for Vitamin N (Nature) because it spurs creativity and problem-solving skills, especially in kids and improves the immune system."

DISCOVERY

New dam saved France's Mont-Saint-Michel island status, Macron says

A NEW DAM AND infrastructure works have saved the famous Mont-Saint-Michel abbey's status as an island by reversing the silting up of its bay, French President Emmanuel Macron said in a speech on Monday.

An old dam across the Couesnon River in front of the mount protected agriculture and nearby town Pontorson from floods, but had also stopped the river's vigorous outflow during low tide that had flushed sediment out into the bay and for centuries helped Mont-Saint-Michel remain an island during high tide.

Gradually, the island was turning



into a rocky hill in the sand, surrounded by water only during spring tides a few times a year and connected to the mainland with a causeway that further slowed the water's flow and served as an unsightly parking lot.

"In order to transmit, one must preserve, but for decades Mont-Saint-Michel threatened to silt up completely, which would have realised the old dream of English generals, to take

the mount as if it was a hilltop amid fields," Macron said during a visit to celebrate the monument's 1,000th anniversary.

Macron said a new hydraulic dam project started in 1995 and completed in 2015 was now proving it is able to gradually flush sand out of the bay.

"In just a few years, the silting up of the bay has been stopped and we have restored the possibility of an island,"

Macron said.

In recent years, the parking lot has been moved inland, and visitors can now access the site only with shuttle buses, on foot or by bicycle via a new bridge on stilts that lets the water pass under it.

A Unesco world heritage site since 1979, the Mont-Saint-Michel is one of France's top tourist attractions, with nearly 2.8 million visitors in 2022. — Reuters

ART

Bavaria returns art and cultural artefacts to Italy

THE SOUTHERN GERMAN state of Bavaria has returned valuable art and cultural artefacts to Italy.

The vice president of the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office(LKA), Guido Limmer, handed over the 14 items to the authorities in Rome, officials said in Munich on Monday.

They were stolen from Italian museums or dug up illegally years ago and smuggled to Bavaria.

The items returned included a Corinthian bronze helmet that a man had illegally brought to Bavaria and four Roman-Byzantine gold coins stolen from the National Archaeological Museum in Parma in 2009.

The investigators discovered some of them in stores, while others were privately owned. In addition, a more than 2,500-year-old bowl with motifs from Greek mythology, which was reg-



istered as Italian Cultural Property, was returned. It had been illegally exported from Italy and was to be auctioned off in a Munich auction house.

The Cultural Property Protection Act came into force in August 2016, criminalising the illegal export and import of cultural property to and from Germany and illegal trade in it.

According to the office of Minister

of State for Culture Claudia Roth, around 2,000 objects have been returned to EU member states since the regulation came into force.

"Today's return not only secures and preserves important cultural heritage, it also once again proves the effectiveness of the Cultural Property Protection Act," Roth said in a statement in Berlin. — dpa



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WEDNESDAY | JUNE 7 | 2023

CULTURE

Papua New Guinea women weave their way to a living

INSIDE A COMPOUND in Papua New Guinea's capital, Betty Nabi is putting six decades of expertise to work, weaving traditional bags that can last a lifetime.

The boutique workshop in Port Moresby hosts a group of women who specialise in intricately lacing plant fibres together to make the roomy pouches known as bilums, a symbol of Indigenous pride.

The word bilum means "womb" in the local Tok Pisin language, and the women are giving the functional handwoven bags new life -- bringing them to an international audience in return for a steady wage in a country where about 40 per cent live below the poverty line.

"You can put everything inside," said Nabi, a 70-year-old weaver at Bilum & Bilas, who earns a monthly paycheck of 1,000 Kina (\$285), around 50 per cent more than the country's minimum wage.

"Go to the store, put the kaikai (food) inside. The big one, you can put the baby."

Bilums can take weeks to make, and are dyed using colours unique to the maker's heritage.

Nabi and the three other weavers each craft up to five bilums a month, attracting customers as far away as Iceland.

MAKES US PROUD

Demand is growing, with international customers in North America, Europe and neighbouring Australia increasingly looking for authentic bilums, says supervisor Maureen Charlie, 34.

The bags have also drawn attention from the fashion world, with coverage of the patterned pouches and the techniques used to make them landing in top magazines such as Grazia, Harper's Bazaar and Vogue Australia.

Some are concerned the bag that serves as a pillar of Papua New Guinea culture is being misappropriated by Westerners for fashion and profit.



But the weavers say they have little issue with its export.

"It makes us proud, like, 'Oh yeah, there's something from PNG there'," said Charlie.

"It's special. It's part of who we are and it's part of our culture. We are still doing it, and my children will be doing it."

Bilums are often given to friends and family, or used in welcome rituals, sometimes being laid on the floor in front of guests. But the women are capitalising on their increasing popularity to stitch together a living for their families and other weavers.

"In villages, women don't have any source of income. Sometimes they don't have time to come to the markets, or road access, so they just weave and store their bilums," said Charlie.

ANYTIME, FOREVER

At the lower end of the market, women in Port Moresby take their wares to stalls in shanty towns, risking the theft of stock in high-crime areas.

"It's a good income for my family. I make bilum and get income to sustain my daily living," said independent weaver Cathy Wariapa, 35, who sells her bags every weekend at a safer spot inside the grounds of a hotel.

"Sometimes we don't sell. When there are no buyers, we just take them back."

The bags are usually made and worn by women like Charlie, but Papua New Guinean men are increasingly donning them as pouches around their neck.

"If a woman doesn't wear a bilum... they say you're not a woman," said Charlie.

"When I carry a bilum, I feel like I'm a woman and I'm from Papua New Guinea."

So weaving the bags handed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers is about more than money.

"We can make bilum anytime, forever," said Betty Nabi.

"We will not stop." — AFP

LIFESTYLE



Strawberry boycott leaves Spain's farmers in a jam

A GERMAN-LED CAMPAIGN to boycott Spanish strawberries over environmental concerns has enraged farmers and Spain's right wing, forcing a German parliamentary delegation to suspend its work on Monday.

The issue touches on increasingly-scarce water resources in the strawberry-growing heartlands of southern Spain where a regional government plan to legalise illegal berry farms has angered environmentalists and worried Brussels.

Spearheaded by German consumer group Campact, the campaign urges top German supermarkets like Lidl and Edeka not to stock strawberries grown in Huelva, a province in the southern Andalusia region which is Spain's biggest exporter of red fruits.

So far, its online petition has garnered more than 163,000 signatures.

This is "a harsh and unjustified attack on our agricultural sector" said the ASAJA farmers' union, denouncing the boycott as an "attack on thousands of producers and their families who work hard all year round".

"This campaign is insidious and harmful to the entire strawberry and berry industry and its workers," said Interfresa, an association representing the Spanish strawberry industry.

"It shares false information and accuses the sector of serious misconduct and committing illegal actions."

Campact's campaign singles out a draft law introduced by the region's right-wing government to legalise illegal berry farms near Donana National Park, one of Europe's largest and fauna-rich wetlands.

If the bill passes, environmental groups say it could legitimise 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres) of crops, most of which are irrigated by illegal wells, which could jeopardise the future of this Unesco-listed nature reserve that is currently threatened by desertification.

"If the Andalusian regional government has its way, even more water will now be used for strawberry cultivation," the campaign says, warning such a move would "destroy this fragile ecosystem" and urging consumers to stop buying "drought strawberries".



INTOLERABLE INTERFERENCE

The campaign drew an angry response from the right-wing opposition Popular Party (PP) which runs the region, which said the bill sought to update a 2014 law that regularised 9,000 hectares of illegal crops but left out several hundred farmers.

Strawberries from Huelva are facing "unfair attacks driven by ideological reasons", said the region's agriculture minister, accusing the left-wing central government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of backing the German campaign.

On Monday, the controversy escalated with the arrival of a cross-party delegation of nine German lawmakers to discuss the implications of the ongoing drought in Spain and of the "illegal water extraction" in the Donana region.

This visit by German lawmakers who are "seeking to inspect our farmers' produce, notably of Spanish strawberries, is totally unacceptable," said Santiago Abascal, head of the far-right Vox which supports the legislation.

"It is interference that no decent government should tolerate."

CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL

Sanchez, who is resolutely opposed to regularising the illegal farms, has constantly accused the PP and Vox of climate change denial and warned the Andalusian government about possible European sanctions if it pushes ahead.

With tensions high, the German delegation on Monday morning said it was suspending the visit, which had been due to end on Friday, in light of "the considerable political significance" that such topics had assumed "in recent days in light of the upcoming Spanish election".

The trip's purpose had been "to exchange expertise and gather information" on climate change and its consequences, with the delegation expressing hope to "continue this exchange in the future".

Interfresa figures show Huelva produces an annual 300,000 tonnes of strawberries, accounting for more than 90 per cent of Spain's strawberry production, with the industry generating 100,000 direct jobs. Germany is Spain's main export market for strawberries, with annual sales of an estimated 186 million euros (\$200 million).

In early 2022, some 20 European supermarkets, among them Lidl, Aldi and Sainsbury's, called on the Andalusian government to shelve the controversial berry bill. — AFP