

Iranian president to visit Syria

Iran's President Dr Ebrahim Raisi will travel to Damascus on Wednesday, Iranian state media reported. "Dr Raisi's trip to Damascus next Wednesday is a very important trip due to the changes and developments that are taking place in the region," Irna state news agency on Sunday quoted Iran's Ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari, as saying.



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HISTORIC FIRST WORLD ENDURANCE PODIUM FOR AHMAD



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OMAN TRADE VOLUMES SOAR 33% TO RO 44.9 BILLION IN VALUE



P20

AUTHOR AND WORLD TRAVELLER NAMU HOPES OMAN RETAINS ITS UNIQUENESS



MUSCAT

QURAYAT PROJECT TO BOOST TOURISM

Al Madina Real Estate and Qurayat development company on Sunday launched the sale of Hayy Al Sahel tourism project in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Governorate of Muscat. The launching ceremony was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Al Mahrrouqi underscored the importance of the project in developing the tourism sector in the Wilayat of Qurayat and its role in vitalising tourism and economic movement in the Governorate of Muscat. Al Mahrrouqi said that the project, upon its completion, would reflect positively on the economic and social levels. **DETAILS ON P3**

GHEDEX TO FOCUS ON HUMAN CAPITAL

Building Oman's human capital is the theme for 'GHEDEX 2023', which was inaugurated on Sunday under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrrouqiyah, Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation. For three days the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre will see more than 100 educational institutions, more than 40 speakers, hundreds of delegates looking at the future of education and development of human capital. **DETAILS ON P3**

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Focus on enhancing joint cooperation

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND STATE COUNCIL HOLD JOINT MEETING

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and some ministers on Sunday received Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, and members of the council's office.

The meeting, which serves the public interest, came within the joint coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman.



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said during the meeting on Sunday.

PHOTO BY MOHAMMED AL RASHDI
MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 2

Such meetings seek to come up with a common ground among all state units with the prime aim of achieving integration to implement the desired national policies.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd underlined the

government's appreciation for the role of the State Council in cooperating with the Council of Ministers to implement the development plans and rendering best services to the citizens.

The meeting underscored

the importance of enhancing the joint cooperation and exchanging views to serve the supreme interest of the country. Such cooperation will ensure the maximum utilisation of the competencies of the State Council's members in boosting

the government's endeavours to execute development programmes and plans.

On their turn, Chairman of the State Council and members of the council's office stressed the importance of the topics covered by the joint meeting. They lauded

their meeting with His Majesty the Sultan and its outcomes which contributed significantly to work progress of the council.

The joint meeting between with the Council of Ministers reviewed a set of topics including means of supporting integration between the government units to serve the public interest. It also touched on ways of activating role of the State Council in presenting studies and proposals that contribute to consolidating the values of society and preserving sustainable development and continue exerting sincere efforts to accomplish more achievements in the country under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

— ONA

Oman evacuates citizens from Sudan

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Republic of the Sudan evacuated a number of Omanis and their families along with a number of Sudanese families residing in Oman, from the Sudanese capital Khartoum, the city of Omdurman and other regions.

The embassy has secured their arrival in Oman. Efforts are still ongoing to evacuate other citizens



A girl who was evacuated from Sudan, reacts as she arrives at Abu Dhabi airport on Sunday. — Reuters

and residents from Sudanese cities. The Foreign Ministry appreciated the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the cooperation in facilitating the evacuation of a number of citizens through Jeddah by Royal Saudi Navy, and to the brotherly Arab Republic of Egypt for facilitating the entry of a number of them through border crossings. — ONA



‘Aber’ taxi-meter for all public taxis from June 1

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology will introduce from June 1, Aber taxi-meter mobile app to determine the tariff for public taxis.

Introducing this digital meter 'Aber' aims to regulate taxis in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the plans of using modern digital technologies. The drive also comes in implementation of the Ministerial Decision No 195/2018 on determining the tariff for public taxis in Oman.

From June 1, all orange and white taxi drivers will charge their clients or passengers based on the fares calculated by the 'Aber' digital or mobile fare meter.

The Aber digital meter will be used only in public taxis, while the on-demand

services will operate as per the pre-determined fares in line with the ministry's regulations.

"All orange and white taxis will be operated using the newly launched 'Aber' taxi meter mobile app, where fares and distance will be calculated. All formalities have been completed, and the service will be launched soon," Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, told the *Observer* earlier.

With regard to rates, the starting fare of 300 baisa will be set on the meter at the beginning of the trip, 130 baisa will be added to the fare after every 1 km, while 50 baisa will be added as a waiting period after the free 5 minutes of waiting.

TURN TO P3

‘A grand occasion’: UK woman, 90, remembers 1953 coronation

LONDON: Joyce Lewis has just turned 90, a little over a week before King Charles III's coronation. But she still has strong memories of watching the last one 70 years ago.

In 1953 she and friends camped out on The Mall, the avenue leading to Buckingham Palace, to watch the coronation procession of Queen Elizabeth II.

At home in the Warwickshire countryside in central England, Lewis, who was born in London and spent 17 years in Malawi as a teacher and missionary, remembers the day — and night before — vividly.

The day before the coronation she and her friends camped out from about 5:00 pm, braving torrential overnight rain and huddled together, trying to catch some sleep. "It absolutely poured down," she said. "It wasn't comfortable at all."

But the summer rain failed



JOYCE LEWIS

to dampen the mood among the hundreds of thousands who turned out to watch the following day, June 2.

"One of my big memories is how joyful it all was," Lewis recalled. "There was a lot of laughter, a lot of happiness.

"People were expecting a really grand occasion — and a grand occasion it was."

Lewis and her friends were packed in at the side of the sweeping, tree-lined avenue.

But she said the father of a south Asian family, who had

spread out a rug to secure their spot, made space for her, just as the parade began.

"He took me and stood me on the curb next to his family, which was wonderful. So I had a lovely view," she said.

"I was very grateful to him for that."

Despite the hardship of a soggy night out in the open, Lewis said her abiding memory was the purple sky at dawn, quiet and still.

"Then, in the distance, we heard a voice saying, 'Everest is conquered, Hillary has conquered Everest'. So, of course, there was a great cheer," she went on. The ascent of the world's highest mountain by the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepalese sherpa Tenzing Norgay was backed by British funding.

The news was "like a sign of a new thing happening to us as a country", she added. — AFP



COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND STATE COUNCIL HOLD JOINT MEETING



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Oman, Palestine review cooperation in heritage

MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism received on Sunday Palestinian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Rula Maayah. The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation in heritage and tourism sectors. The two sides followed up the progress in the memorandum of understanding to be signed by the two countries in the field of heritage and tourism. — ONA

■ AL SAHEL TOURISM PROJECT LAUNCHED IN QURAYAT



MUSCAT: Al Madina Real Estate and Quriyat Development Company on Sunday launched the sale of Hayy Al Sahel tourism project in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Governorate of Muscat. The launching ceremony was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Al Mahrouqi underscored the importance of the project in developing the tourism sector in the Wilayat of Qurayat and its role in vitalising tourism and economic movement in the Governorate of Muscat. — ONA

GHEDEX 2023 begins, themed on building Oman’s human capital

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Building Oman’s human capital is the theme for GHEDEX 2023 inaugurated on April 30 under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

For three days the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre has more than 100 exhibiting educational institutions, with over 40 speakers, hundreds of delegates looking at the future of education and development of human capital.

Oman Innovation Oasis; Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Omani Schools, Colleges and Universities will be held on May 1, 2 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Teachers and professionals of innovation, entrepreneurship, or business can attend these sessions for free.

The features of GHEDEX 2023, in addition to the Global Higher Education Exhibition, Training Technical Education and Vocational Training Exhibition, Schoolex - Private, International and Boarding Schools Expo, Oman Innovation Oasis Expo, Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Omani schools, Colleges and Universities, as well as student enterprises,



GHEDEX Talks, Workshops and GHEDEXHhub.

TRAINING AND SKILLS APP
Visitors to the exhibition also can download the app for higher education, training and skills app for GCC and India.

A unique feature of GHEDEX 2023 is Student Enterprises. Shouq al Ghailani, SCHOOLEX and Student Enterprises said, “We are bringing together businesses from Universities and schools to network with each other and investors.”

Students with different projects, from different parts of Oman are eagerly waiting for the visitors. Their businesses involve 3D printers, reusing art, crafts, carpentry, customised art and coffee shops. Students

from Finland School of Oman expressed their delight in having their opportunity to show case their project.

They said excitedly, “We have had great response and there have 20 requests.”

GHEDEX is held under the patronage of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour.

Global Higher Education Exhibition for 21 years is considered an opportunity for local universities and colleges, accredited international universities and academic institutions to interact, recruit and connect with students, parents, officials and other academic representatives from Oman.

Oman Air at Arabian Travel Market from today

MUSCAT: Oman Air will participate today in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the region’s leading international travel and tourism event, being held at Dubai, UAE.

As many as 2,000 participants from the global travel community will come together for the four-day exhibits, discussions, and networking.

The 30th edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) will be held under the theme of ‘Working Towards Net-Zero’. The conference programme will address various sustainability issues in the travel industry with motivational speakers, entrepreneurs, and leadership figures across a variety of sectors such as destinations, travel technology, airlines, cruise,



hospitality, car rental, hotels and hospitality.

Eng Abdulaziz bin Saud al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air, said that Oman Air will work through this participation in promoting Oman as a lucrative and unique destination.

Al Raisi added, “With the high

level of exposure these kinds of events provide, we have a unique opportunity to market Oman, and our brand, on a global stage, as well as keep up to date with key travel trends, identify strategic business opportunities, and reach a wider audience of potential customers.”

He also said that Oman Air

We have a unique opportunity to market Oman, as well as keep up to date with key travel trends, identify strategic business opportunities

continues to pursue a network and fleet expansion, while tapping into new market opportunities such as cargo and investing in its digital capabilities.

In 2024, the airline is set to join the one world Alliance, which will see it broaden its global reach and provide guests with huge benefits and greater travel options, further strengthening its leading position in the Middle East. — ONA

3 DEAD IN NAKHAL LANDSLIDE



Three workers were killed in a landslide at a work site on the road leading to Wakan village in the Wilayat of Nakhal in Al Batinah South Governorate, on Sunday. Rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority pulled out the three bodies.

‘ABER’ TAXI-METER FOR ALL PUBLIC TAXIS STARTS FROM JUNE 1

FROM PAGE 1

The driver is obligated to use the meter at the start of the trip. Otherwise, the entire journey will be deemed free. In the case of multiple passengers, the fare will be equally divided among them.

While the decision to operate all taxis as per fare meters has been implemented several times in the past, it did not succeed due to resistance from taxi drivers who questioned the high cost involved in installing such meters, apart from the regular maintenance costs.

“The new app-based meter will address those issues, and we expect cooperation also from the customers, who should ensure that drivers operate as per regulations and report any violations,” sources in the ministry said. The process of revamping the orange taxi services has begun, including installation of electronic fare meters.

In 2018, the ministry announced the decision to implement fare meters, but it was never implemented. Passengers have welcomed the arrival of metered taxis but want the fares to be reasonable.

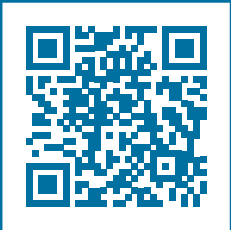
“People will accept a reasonable fare. If not, illegal operators will continue to thrive and eat into the business of genuine operators,” an expatriate employee said. This time, the decision is expected to succeed as several on-demand taxi companies are currently operating in the country, which permits instant or advance booking.

On-demand taxi services provide facilities such as tracking and fixed prices that are specified before the trip while ensuring privacy and security for the user. It also allows the users to contact the driver through the application and cancel the ride if required.

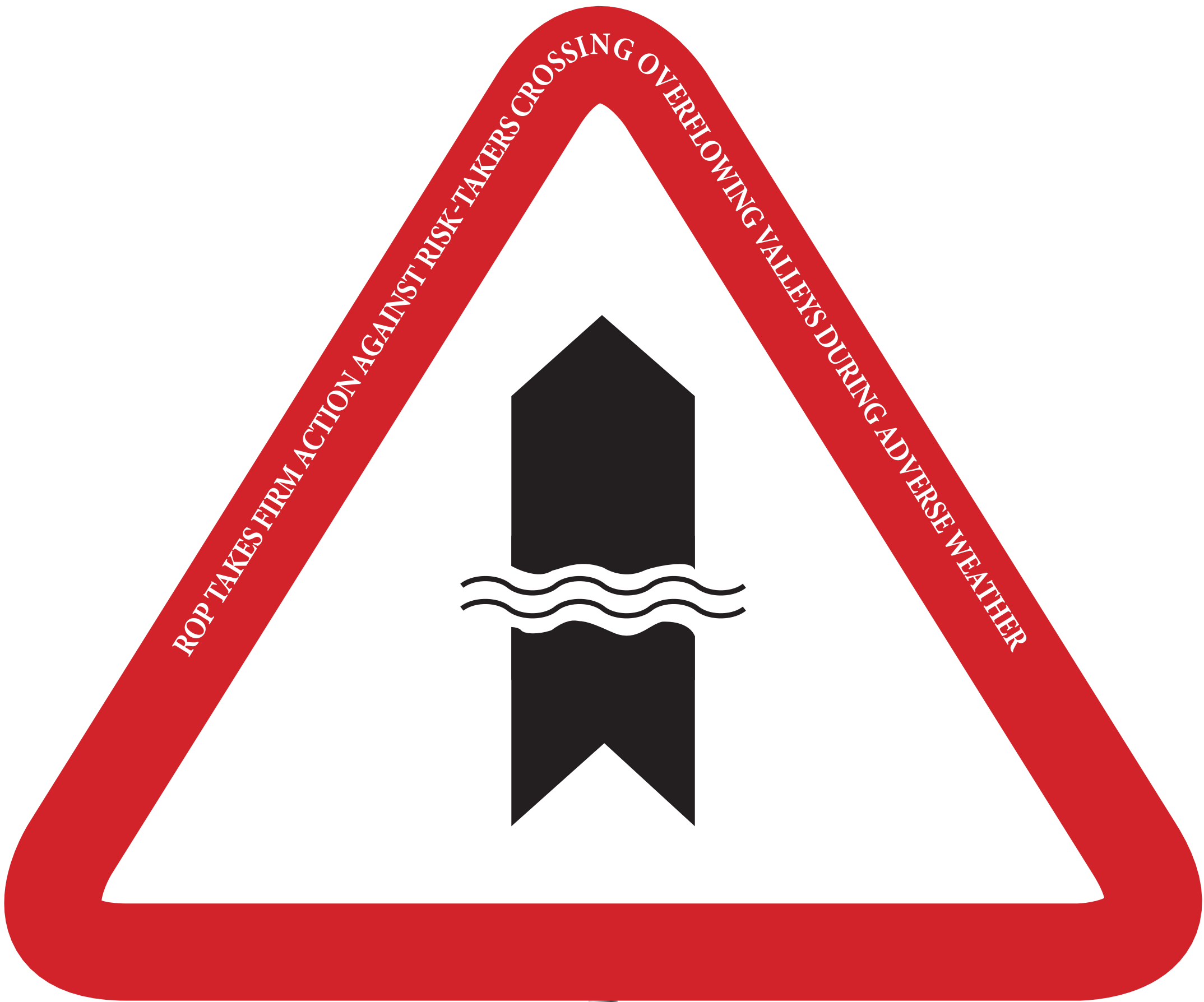
■ NEW BATCH JOINS ROYAL OMAN POLICE



A new batch of citizens holding GED and post-GED certificates has joined the Royal Oman Police (ROP) after completing the formalities in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, on Sunday. The new police recruits will join the Institute of Police Recruits and the Institute of Women Police at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences where they will undergo training, academic studies and military and sports skills.



ROP WARNS AGAINST CROSSING VALLEYS



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
[@Afrahalbalushia](#)

In the Sultanate of Oman, every adverse weather condition brings with it the temptation to cross the overflowing valleys, despite the risk it poses to one's life and of others. Some people do it to show off, while others do it to avoid longer routes or as a matter of wrong judgement about the ensuing danger.

Such irresponsible acts have a history of many tragedies, especially during heavy rains, when most of the valleys overflow.

Although the Royal Oman Police (ROP) deploys personnel to prevent crossing vehicles and even arrest the risk-takers, there are still some who slip from the police patrols. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has reported several incidents of people getting trapped in valleys due to irresponsibility and risk-taking.

To ensure public safety, the ROP and the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance have repeatedly advised against crossing valleys, paying attention to weather bulletins and taking necessary precautions to secure property. During inclement weather conditions, children must be kept away from water bodies.

ROP PENALTIES



Imprisonment for a period not exceeding **3 months**



Fine not exceeding **RO 500**

DURING ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS

- ✓ Follow safety norms thoroughly
- ✓ Do not cross valleys
- ✓ Pay attention to weather bulletins
- ✓ Take necessary precautions
- ✓ Keep away children from wadis

The Traffic Law in the Sultanate of Oman has provisions of penalty — imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months and a fine not exceeding RO 500 or one of these two penalties for those who deliberately cross the valleys in a manner that endangers life or the lives of their passengers or others.

Despite these warnings and penalties, some people still take the risk and cross valleys, causing societal tragedies and exposing rescue teams to danger.

The authorities concerned are always on the alert, with operational plans for weather conditions, but it is necessary for individuals to take responsibility and avoid crossing valleys, no matter how urgent or necessary it may seem.

Let us all listen to the warnings and exercise constant caution during weather conditions to preserve public safety.

The ROP firmly deals with anyone who exposes him or others to the danger of crossing valleys, especially after alerts from various sources. They have started dealing firmly with the violators, who, for the sake of fun, cause societal as well as other risks.

The idea here is not to let impatience or carelessness cost lives and property during bad weather.



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Oman at Rabat Arab Finance Ministers meeting

RABAT: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the joint annual meeting of the Arab finance ministers held in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, headed Oman's delegation which saw the participation of Arab Monetary Fund, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development, Arab Corporation for Investment and Export Credit Guarantee, and Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

The Minister also participated in the 14th meeting of the Council



of Arab Finance Ministers. In a joint speech of the Arab financial institutions, the minister referred to the joint efforts made by financial institutions, especially their role in financing development programmes, and dealing with development challenges resulting

from geopolitical events.

He also stressed the importance of making efforts to come up with decisions that enhance economic and social development efforts in Arab countries, stressing the importance of extending bridges of communication with international

financial institutions.

The minister of finance during his presidency of the 47th session stressed the importance of enhancing coordination between Arab development policies in the agricultural field, trade exchange relations and creating an attractive environment for investments.

The delegation included CEO, Central Bank of Oman, officials at the Ministry of Finance and the CBO.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi also met with the Prime Minister of Morocco, Aziz Akhannouch, on the sidelines of the joint annual meetings of Arab financial institutions and held talks. — ONA



Municipal Council discusses social strategy

SALALAH: The Municipal Council of the Governorate of Dhofar on Sunday held a meeting under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, Chairman of the Council. The meeting covered several topics, namely the developments of implementing the Social Work Strategy (2021-2030) and enhancing municipal services and action in various fields, among other topics. — ONA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO SUPERVISORY CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR MANAH I AND MANAH II SOLAR INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECTS



The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the provisions of the Law for the Regulation and Privatization of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 (as amended), as well as in accordance with OPWP's license.

Tender Description	OPWP wishes to appoint a suitably qualified and experienced consultant(s) to provide project management and supervisory consultancy services for Manah I and Manah II Solar Independent Power Projects (Projects) during the construction, commissioning and testing of the Projects.
Tender Number	OPWP/2023/08
Tender Purchase Period	From 27 April 2023 until 11 May 2023
Tender Fee	300 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card.
Submission date	11 June 2023 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time (GST)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in an electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be submitted through the company's website: https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx For any queries please contact: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.



Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP)
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
Tel.: +968 24508400 | Fax: +968 24399946 | www.omanpwp.com



Campaign to plant wild trees in Al Buraimi

AL BURAIMI: The Environment Department in Al Buraimi Governorate on Sunday organised a campaign to plant 1,200 wild trees, in implementation of the national initiative to plant 10 million Omani wild trees launched by the Environment Agency.

The campaign included planting wild trees at the Haya Company site, after

the rehabilitation phase of the site by removing more than 3,000 harmful trees.

A number of volunteers from the Al Buraimi Charity Team participated in the campaign, embodying the partnership between public and private sector institutions and the local community to support the goals of the initiative.

— ONA



OCCI chief receives Roscongress CEO

MUSCAT: Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Sunday received Alexander Stuglev Chairman of the Board and CEO the Roscongress Foundation. The meeting discussed means of promoting the Omani-Russian relations and utilising the investment opportunities available in the two countries. The meeting was attended by a number of officials from both sides.

— ONA



Sultan Qaboos University

ANNOUNCEMENT

Selling used computers and their accessories in sealed envelopes

Sultan Qaboos University announces its desire to sell used computers and their accessories in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used computers and their accessories in auction stores and receive the bidding form on Tuesday and Wednesday, 02-03/05/2023, from 03:00 to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) OMR in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the items, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used computers and their accessories and putting the envelope in the bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Sunday and Monday, 07-08/05/2023 from 08:00 am to 02:00 pm.
- The devices are sold in their current condition, and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold items if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) OMR will be imposed for each day after 09/05/2023.

Note:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through Visa Card.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact 24141272.



Al Awabi health committee meets

AL AWABI: The health committee in the Wilayat of Al Awabi in the Al Batinah South Governorate on Sunday discussed the health indicators and educational awareness programmes implemented so far.

The committee, chaired by Shaikh Mohammed bin Ahmed al Junaibi, Wali of Al Awabi, Chairman of the Committee, discussed the establishment of a radiology department at Al Awabi Health Centre, intensification of awareness campaigns to limit the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances, health programmes and activities that will be implemented during the coming period, in addition to raising a number of other issues related to the tasks of the committee. — ONA



TENDERS

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2023/14	FINANCE CALL-OFF SECONDMENT FOR TANWEER	7-May-2023	15-May-2023	0
EHC/2023/15	PRIVATISATION STRUCTURING SERVICES	7-May-2023	15-May-2023	OMR 100 Plus, VAT 5%

- Interested party may find the tender document through the company website (www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 3.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Monday 15 May 2023.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



Clashes rock Sudan despite truce as ex-PM warns of ‘nightmare’

KHARTOUM: Heavy fighting again rocked Sudan’s capital on Sunday as tens of thousands have fled the bloody turmoil and a former prime minister warned of the “nightmare” risk of a descent into full-scale civil war.

Army forces clashed with paramilitaries in Khartoum as deadly hostilities have entered a third week despite the latest ceasefire, which was formally set to expire at the end of the day.

A first Red Cross plane brought eight tonnes of humanitarian aid to Port Sudan, from Jordan, on Sunday. It carried surgical material and medical kits to stabilise 1,500 patients, the International Committee of the Red Cross said.

Millions of Sudanese have endured crippling shortages of water, food, medicines and other basic supplies, while tens of thousands have fled to neighbouring countries, with more on their way.

The turmoil could deepen further in the power struggle between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Sudan’s former premier Abdalla Hamdok warned on Saturday that the conflict could deteriorate into one of the world’s worst civil wars.

“God forbid if Sudan is to reach a point of civil war proper... Syria, Yemen, Libya will be a small play,” Hamdok told an event in Nairobi. “I think it would be a nightmare for the world.”

The violence has killed at least 528 people and wounded about 4,600, the health ministry said.



Sudanese Army soldiers rest near a tank at a checkpoint as clashes continue in Khartoum. – AFP

The UN World Food Programme has warned the unrest could plunge millions more into hunger in a country where 15 million people already need aid to stave off famine

The UN World Food Programme has warned the unrest could plunge millions more into hunger in a country where 15 million people already need aid to stave off famine.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged negotiations to end the bloodshed.

“There is no right to go on fighting for power when the country is falling apart,” he said on Saturday.

Fighting, looting and lawlessness have raged in the

Darfur region.

At least 96 people were reported killed in El Geneina, West Darfur, the UN said.

Darfur is still scarred by a war that erupted in 2003 when Bashir unleashed the Janjaweed militia, which left at least 300,000 dead and close to 2.5 million displaced according to UN figures.

“What’s happening in Darfur is terrible,” Guterres said. “The society is falling apart, we see tribes that now try to arm themselves.” — AFP

UN chief, envoys in key talks on Afghanistan crisis

DOHA: UN chief Antonio Guterres will gather international envoys at a secret location in Doha on Monday in an increasingly desperate bid to find ways to influence Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers.

Considered the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis by the United Nations, Guterres’s quandary has been deepened by the Taliban administration’s move to stop girls going to school and most women from working, even for UN agencies.

The Taliban government, which took back power in August 2021, will be absent from the talks with representatives from about 25 countries and international organisations, according to diplomats.

Ahead of the talks, a small group of women staged a protest in Kabul on Saturday to oppose any international recognition of the Taliban government.

But the UN and Western powers are adamant this will not be discussed.

“Any kind of recognition of the Taliban is completely off the table,” said US State Department spokesman Vedant Patel.

Apart from confirming that the Taliban leadership is not on the list of participants, the UN has refused to provide any specifics including the location in Qatar’s capital or



UN chief Antonio Guterres

who will join Guterres.

The Taliban’s deputy minister for refugees Mohammed Arsala Kharoti said on Sunday that “such meetings will not have any results.”

“As long as they don’t establish proper relations with the Emirate and no representation of the Emirate is present, these meetings won’t be successful to a great extent,” he said at Kabul airport.

In Doha, the UN secretary-general is also to give an update on a review of the world body’s critical relief operation in Afghanistan, ordered in April after authorities had stopped Afghan women from working with UN agencies, diplomats said.

The UN has said it faces an “appalling choice” over whether to maintain its huge operation in the country of 38 million. — AFP

Thousands rally in Tel Aviv in latest anti-reform protests

TEL AVIV: Over 160,000 people have taken to the streets in Tel Aviv again on Saturday evening to protest the controversial judicial reforms of Israel’s right-wing religious government, in what has become a regular weekly rally over the past four months.

Protesters also gathered in other cities, according to media reports, waving Israeli flags.

Israel has been roiled by mass protests for some four months since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government announced controversial reform plans.

With the judicial reforms, critics



Israeli security forces disperse demonstrators during a rally to protest the judicial overhaul bill in Tel Aviv. – AFP

say the government is seeking to curtail the influence of the country’s Supreme Court and expand the government’s power.

Among other things, the government would be granted more power in the appointment of judges and parliament would be able to overturn Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority.

Following widespread opposition from civil society as well as from within the government and the army, Netanyahu postponed the bill for a few weeks at the end of March to make “room for dialogue.”

The opposition, however, is sceptical that the government will

reach a compromise. So far, the talks have seen little progress.

Critics see the separation of powers in danger and warn of a state crisis if the reforms are implemented.

Some fear that the government might try to fast-track the reform through parliament which is due to reconvene for its summer session on Sunday.

According to media reports, however, the government first wants to pass the budget for the current and next year before taking further steps to weaken the judicial system.

If this is not achieved by May

29, new elections would have to be called. For their support, however, orthodox religious parties have been demanding the passing of a law that would de facto exempt strictly religious men from military service, sparking anger in the liberal camp.

Last week, Israel’s President, Isaac Herzog, has described the dispute over judicial reform as the “most serious internal crisis since the establishment of the state.”

At the same time, in an interview with an Israeli news site published that he expressed hope that the country could emerge stronger from the drama. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

AMMAN

Jordan to host regional meeting

Arab foreign ministers will gather in Jordan on Monday to discuss Syria’s long-running conflict and ending Damascus’s diplomatic isolation in the region, the foreign ministry in Amman said.

Monday’s meeting in Amman will bring together foreign ministers from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

The talks will “take stock of the contacts of these countries with the Syrian government to reach a political solution”, a



foreign ministry statement said. It called the gathering “a continuation of the consultative meeting which was hosted by Saudi Arabia” in mid-April.

— AFP

TEHRAN

Raisi to visit Damascus on Wednesday

Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi will travel to Damascus on Wednesday, Iranian state media reported, touting a “very important” two-day visit.

“Dr Raisi’s trip to Damascus next Wednesday is a very important trip due to the changes and developments that are taking place in the region,” state news agency quoted Iran’s Ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari.

Raisi will lead a “high economic-political delegation”



in his two-day trip at the official invitation of Syrian President.

“This trip will be very good event that other countries can also take advantage of,” Akbari added.

— AFP

AMRITSAR

Deadly industrial gas leak kills 11

A gas leak killed 11 people in India, an official said, in the latest deadly industrial accident. The gas leak happened in Giaspura, an industrial area of Ludhiana in the northern state of Punjab.

“Eleven deaths are confirmed,” Mandeep Singh Sidhu, police commissioner of Ludhiana, told reporters, adding that four people were hospitalised.

The cause of the leak was yet to be ascertained, Sidhu added. “When the blood sample is



matched with the sample that the National Disaster Response Force team takes, only then will we be able to tell you the exact cause, which kind of gas,” police commissioner said.

— AFP



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In brief

■ LONDON



ALL SAFE AFTER FERRY RUNS AGROUND

All 60 passengers have been rescued and brought back to land after a ferry ran aground by Scotland's Orkney islands, the coastguard said.

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) vessels went to the scene after the MV Pentalina issued a Mayday broadcast off Orkney.

Pentland Ferries said smoke was detected in the engine room before the MV Pentalina became grounded at the village of St Margaret's Hope.

The coastguard said: "St Margaret's Hope, Stromness and Kirkwall Coastguard rescue teams, alongside Stromness and Longhope RNLI life boats near St Margaret's Hope at approximately 7.30pm. — dpa

■ PARIS



MOTORBIKE-RIDING THIEVES GRAB MILLIONS

A robbery in broad daylight on Saturday of the luxury jeweller Bulgari yielded the motorbike-riding thieves a multi-million dollar haul, the Le Parisien newspaper reported on Sunday, citing police information.

Three men drove up on motorbikes in front of the jeweller's chic Place Vendôme Paris location, the paper reported. The robbery took place at around 1:45pm.

While one of the perpetrators stood guard, the other two, armed with at least two weapons, went into the shop. One hit a security guard on the head with a gun and knocked him out. The men then grabbed as many pieces of jewellery as they could and sped away on motorbikes, which had false plates. — dpa

■ MADRID



4 DEAD AFTER ULTRALIGHT PLANES COLLIDE

Two ultralight aircraft collided near an aerodrome in northeastern Spain on Sunday, killing four passengers, regional authorities said.

Firefighters found one plane on fire in a wooded area near the Moia aerodrome north of Barcelona after being alerted by a witness who saw it lose altitude and crash, the regional government of Catalonia said.

"Once the fire was extinguished, firefighters found two lifeless bodies inside the ultralight (plane)," it said in a statement.

— AFP

Pope appeals to Hungarians to be 'open' to migrants

BUDAPEST: Pope Francis on Sunday called on Hungarians to be "open" toward migrants, as he wrapped up a three-day visit to the central European country whose nationalist premier has taken a staunch anti-immigration stance.

Tens of thousands thronged a central Budapest square to hear the pope lead an open-air mass during which he urged all, including "those with political and social responsibilities", to be more open.

"Let us encourage one another to be increasingly open doors," the 86-year-old Argentine pontiff said, adding it was "sad and painful... to see closed doors".

"The closed doors of our selfishness with regard to others... the doors we close towards those who are foreign or unlike us, towards migrants or the poor," he said.

Throughout his visit to Budapest, Francis has emphasised a welcoming stance towards those fleeing poverty or conflict zones.

The comments have stood in stark contrast to those of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban who has regularly espoused anti-migration rhetoric. On Sunday, some 50,000 people thronged to hear the pope say mass under tight security at Kossuth Lajos Square, behind the parliament on the banks of the Danube, according to local authorities.



Pope Francis waves as he arrives to a meeting at the Catholic University 'Peter Pazmany' in Budapest. — AFP

"I feel emotional. He is very important in my life," onlooker Ferenc Toth, 43, said after the pope passed by in his Popemobile.

University student Levente Kiss said it was "unique" to see the pope up close.

"It was good to see that the pope has taken a stance that really calls us to our Christian mission to support the people in migration crises, especially the war in Ukraine," the 21-year-old added.

On Saturday, Francis gave a speech to refugees and poor people at a Budapest church.

Orban's government has welcomed those fleeing the war in Ukraine, which borders Hungary.

But activists say there is barely a support system in place and Orban's insistence on maintaining ties with Moscow has also alienated Ukrainians.

The visit comes a month after Francis was hospitalised for three months for bronchitis, so all eyes have been on the pontiff's health.

But despite persistent knee pain forcing him to move around in a wheelchair, the pope has appeared to be in good shape.

He will return to Rome in the early evening, giving his traditional press conference on the plane to journalists accompanying him on board.

— AFP

INDIAN WHEAT PROCUREMENT GAINS PACE

MUMBAI: The Indian states have procured more wheat so far in the current marketing year than total purchases made in the previous year, two government officials said.

Higher procurement will help the world's second biggest wheat producer bring down wheat prices, which jumped to a record high earlier this year and lifted food inflation.

Wheat procurement jumped to 19.5 million tonnes as of April 26, above the more than 18.8 million tonnes procured last year, said a senior government official.

"Procurement has gained momentum in the last few days," the official said.

Rain and hail in March and April damaged India's wheat crop just before harvesting, forcing the government to ease procurement norms to rebuild stocks and help farmers, who were getting lower prices on the open market for the damaged crop.



A farmer sprays pesticide in his wheat field on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. — Reuters

In all, India plans to buy 34.15 million tonnes of new-season wheat from local farmers.

In the first half of April procurement

gained momentum in central state of Madhya Pradesh, while in the second half of this month northern states of Punjab and Haryana contributed significantly, said another government official.

Farmers have been selling damaged wheat to state-run procurement agencies and their good quality crop to private players, said a New-Delhi based dealer with a global trade house.

"It seems at the current pace, government procurement can reach 30 million tonnes. That would be enough for the government to run welfare schemes but won't allow it to lift a ban on the exports," the dealer said.

India, also the world's second-biggest consumer of wheat, banned wheat exports in May 2022 after a sharp, sudden rise in temperatures clipped output, even as export demand picked up to meet the global shortfall triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. — Reuters

EU tech tsar Vestager sees political agreement on AI law this year

TAKASAKI: The European Union is likely to reach a political agreement this year that will pave the way for the world's first major artificial intelligence (AI) law, the bloc's tech regulation chief Margrethe Vestager said on Sunday.

This follows a preliminary deal reached on Thursday by members of the European Parliament to push through the draft of the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act to a vote by a committee of lawmakers on May 11. Parliament will then thrash out the bill's final details with EU member states and the European Commission before it becomes law.

At a press conference after a Group of Seven digital ministers' meeting in Takasaki, Japan, Vestager said the EU AI Act was "pro-innovation" since it seeks to mitigate the risks of societal damage from emerging technologies.

Regulators around the world have been trying to find a balance where governments could develop "guardrails" on emerging artificial intelligence technology without stifling innovation.

"The reason why we have these guardrails for high-risk use cases is that cleaning up ... after a misuse by AI would be so much more expensive and damaging than the use case of AI in itself," Vestager said.

While the EU AI Act is expected to be passed by this year, lawyers have said it will take a few years for it to be enforced. But Vestager said businesses could start considering the implication of the new legislation.

"There was no reason to hesitate and to wait for the legislation to be passed to accelerate the necessary discussions to provide the changes in all the systems where AI will have an enormous influence," she said in the interview.

While research on AI has been going on for years, the sudden popularity of generative AI applications such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Midjourney have led to a scramble by lawmakers to find ways to regulate any uncontrolled growth.

— Reuters



Digital and technology ministers shows during the G7 Digital and Tech Ministers' Meeting in Takasaki, Japan. — Reuters

Ukraine says it controls key supply route into Bakhmut

KYIV: Ukraine remains in control of a key supply route into Bakhmut, a military spokesperson said on Saturday, as the head of Russia's mercenary Wagner Group threatened to withdraw some of his troops from the eastern city if Moscow did not send more ammunition.

Russian forces have been trying for 10 months to punch their way into the shattered remains of what was once a city of 70,000. Kyiv has pledged to defend Bakhmut, which Russia sees as a stepping stone to attacking other cities.

"For several weeks, the Russians have been talking about seizing the 'road of life,' as well as about constant fire control over it," Serhiy Cherevatyi, a spokesperson for Ukrainian troops in the east, said in an interview with local news website Dzerkalo Tyzhnia.

"Yes, it is really difficult there ... (but) the defence forces have not allowed the Russians to 'cut off' our logistics." The "road of life" is a vital road between the ruined Bakhmut and the nearby

town Chasiv Yar to the west — a distance of just over 17 km.

If Bakhmut fell, Chasiv Yar would probably be next to come under Russian attack according to military analysts, though it is on higher ground and Ukrainian forces are believed to have built defensive fortifications nearby.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of Russia's Wagner Group, who has often claimed unverifiable successes, said that his forces have advanced some 100 to 150 metres in Bakhmut, leaving just under 3 square km of the city in Ukrainian hands.

"It would have had been five times fewer if we had more ammunition," Prigozhin said in an audio statement published on the Telegram messaging app of his press service on Saturday evening.

Prigozhin has often said the regular armed forces are not giving his men the ammunition they need. "We need to stop deceiving the population and telling them that everything is fine," Prigozhin said in the interview. — Reuters



Ukrainian servicemen gather at a military truck near the frontline city of Bakhmut, Donetsk region. — AFP

The writer is Associate
Professor, Dept of
English Language
and Literature Sultan
Qaboos University

Protecting the environment is never easy because the project

The United Nations has stated that the “impacts of a 1.1-degree increase are here today in the increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events from heatwaves, droughts, flooding, winter storms, hurricanes

To give responsibility to protect the earth to some agencies and

In a moving letter to the American President Franklin Pierce in 1855, Chief Seattle of the Suquamish tribe said, “The

We seem to have moved too far from Chief Seattle's idea of shared belonging, but this Earth Day should be a reminder of the fragility of our world and our duty towards it.

ANNA MALPAS

“I think it’s important to remind people that there is still a war going on,” said one, Nadiya, an interior designer. For this work, Ecuadorian Felipe Jacome, 37, photographed his collaborator Svitlana Onipko, 26, a Ukrainian ballerina now based in the Netherlands, using an UV-printer to transfer her image onto bullet casings mounted in resin. — **AFP**



Nora Walsh

The writer is a Latin America travel blogger specialising in luxury hospitality branding

A 700-year-old structure with a storied history, Hever Castle is about 35 miles from Buckingham Palace.

BRITISH CASTLES MAY
NOT BE BALMORAL,
BUT THEY STILL GIVE
TRAVELLERS A CHANCE
TO STEEP THEMSELVES IN
HISTORY AND GET A TASTE
OF LIVING, IF NOT LIKE
ROYALTY, AT LEAST LIKE
NOBILITY

An atmosphere of nobility reigns in the dining room, drawing room and

Panoramic views of the Irish Sea and the volcanic island Ailsa Craig complement a storybook facade topped with turrets, towers and crenellations, and a 110-acre private estate full of gardens and woodlands.

— **The New York Times**

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Dream it to believe it

Inspiration drives a person from lack of interest to possible opportunities; it changes the way capabilities are perceived. In fact, it revives one's hope in life towards having a better tomorrow, a brighter future! Inspiration is the reason behind keeping one enthused and optimistic; perhaps it is a remedy that we all need while chasing our dreams in life! Being inspired is what motivates one to believe in his dreams.

If you have faith in your dreams, you will hold on them and get them the breath of life.

Nobody does not have a dream, but what matters is how much we believe in our dreams. Some might assume that all they have is only thoughts and ideas or most likely beliefs, which will eventually be shaped as dreams.

Thus, those will get devoted to such concepts and chase them day and night to make them happen. It is not all what we think of can be a dream, but dreams always start with just a simple thought.

As Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can make it".

On the other hand, there are people who neither believe in their dreams nor the concept of dreaming.

They only live the moment and do not even care about how their future should look like! It is good to keep your life that simple and smooth, but not to the extent that you become careless, so you do not even bother to plan for what you want to do the next day! It is really a shame, but in fact there are people who have no clear goal in their life.

What concerns them more is the way of making a good living and enjoying life; as simple as that!

At least to those who believe in themselves and aim to achieve milestones during their lifespan; never say die no matter what challenges you come across on the way. Just remember there are always obstacles on your journey towards success.



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

Just keep hope alive and keep moving as sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life. Tip toe if you must, but take the step. All the dreams that you have will come true someday as long as your persistence is pushing it ahead and urging you to achieve them.

Life is meaningless without having a dream that you believe in and fight for. When we live without a dream our life would not be significant and when we live without love our life would not be valuable. Dreams add a flavour to our life as it becomes challenging and thought-provoking, but rewarding of course.

As Albert Einstein said, "Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than the one with all the facts".

Always a little of persistence results in getting more achievements and whatever looks a failure and disappointing might suddenly turn into a commendable victory. If you thought that you failed in achieving your dreams, change your techniques of doing things, but not your principles.

Similarly, trees change their leaves, but not their roots. It has been said that a pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, but an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

There is nothing impossible to do regardless how difficult it is; you just got to roll the dice and make it happen.

Successful people always keep trying until they get it right; that is what we all should do when things do not go right from the first shot. The road to success and making dreams come true is never an easy one; it is paved by challenges.

Nobody is too old, too bad, too late and too sick to start from scratch once again. Be confident and believe in your dreams that are possible.

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO NEITHER BELIEVE IN THEIR DREAMS NOR THE CONCEPT OF DREAMING

FLOATING EARTH



People paddle board around Luke Jerram's 'Floating Earth' art installation in the Albert Dock as part of the Eurovision celebrations in Liverpool, Britain, on Sunday. – Reuters

The coming crackdown on corporate greenwashing

Judging by the growing number of companies vowing to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions to zero these days, it may seem like the corporate world is finally taking the climate crisis seriously. According to the Net Zero Tracker, more than one-third of the world's largest publicly traded companies have announced such targets, up from one-fifth in late 2020.

While some of these corporate pledges appear to be genuine, others are clearly a fig leaf to obscure pollution as usual. One can easily imagine an oil executive telling an airline boss: "A net-zero target, some ads featuring trees, and everyone will love us."

If that was the plan, it is rapidly falling apart, owing to a slew of regulatory decisions and court actions that signal a crackdown on corporate greenwashing. And last year's report by the United Nations High-Level Expert Group on Net-Zero Emissions Commitments, which provided detailed recommendations for maintaining the integrity of such pledges, heralds limits on companies' ability to make promises they have no intention of keeping.

New regulations in France and the United Kingdom, for example, aim to prevent advertisers from making extravagant claims about the carbon neutrality of their products. Research commissioned by the UK's Advertising Standards Authority found that when people hear such



Richard Black

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MANY OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMPANIES HAVE ANNOUNCED PLANS TO ACHIEVE NET-ZERO EMISSIONS, BUT THEIR PLEDGES OFTEN RELY ON MISLEADING OR FALSE CLAIMS

a claim, they assume that an absolute reduction in emissions has occurred. So, the ASA's updated guidelines instruct companies to avoid claiming carbon neutrality if the emissions associated with the advertised product were merely offset.

The French climate law, passed in 2021 and amended last year, goes further. To claim carbon neutrality, the product must be neutral across its entire life cycle. Companies must disclose how emissions were avoided, reduced, and offset (the order is important). They must also show how these offsets qualify as measurable, verifiable, permanent, and additional. Companies that get it wrong could face a €100,000 (\$110,000) fine for misleading consumers.

Underlying this trend is the obvious mismatch between what some companies say and what they do. After all, one does not need to be a sleuth to figure out that when a company can claim that a barrel of oil, a cargo of liquefied natural gas, or some tar sands bitumen is carbon-neutral, something has gone wrong.

A spate of recent lawsuits promises to draw a line in the (tar) sand. Over the past year, companies such as food giant Danone Waters, cement maker Holcim, oil companies TotalEnergies, BP, and Shell,



Companies must disclose how emissions were avoided, reduced, and offset.

cosmetics manufacturer Beiersdorf (Nivea), and KLM have been sued in various countries for making misleading sustainability claims. The Australia Institute, a nonpartisan think-tank, has filed a complaint with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission claiming that the government's own certification scheme, Climate Active, is misleading under national consumer law, because it assures people that products are carbon-neutral when they are not.

Companies' net-zero pledges look just as flimsy under scrutiny. For example, a recent report by the Corporate

Climate Responsibility Monitor examined the net-zero plans of 24 major corporations purporting to be "climate leaders" and found numerous flaws, loopholes, and omissions. On average, according to the report, these companies will cut just 36 per cent of their emissions by their net-zero target year. Moreover, their plans imply a median reduction of 15 per cent by the end of the decade, rather than halving emissions, as the current science says is necessary. Similarly, an earlier report by CDP found that fewer than one in 200 companies that submitted climate data to its environmental-disclosure

platform have devised credible transition plans. The UN group's recommendations, commissioned and endorsed by Secretary-General António Guterres, are a potential game changer. As they become mainstreamed, companies will no longer be able to claim that they have a credible net-zero plan unless they have set a decarbonisation pathway compatible with the 2015 Paris climate agreement's targets. Such plans must include measures to reduce emissions along the entire value chain, phase out fossil fuels, invest in renewable energy, abstain from lobbying for high-carbon industries, disclose emissions annually, have reductions data independently verified, and so on. An ad campaign, a cheery speech, and some tree-planting will no longer do. Companies without detailed transition plans in place can expect regulatory as well as legal action, as more and more countries require corporations to disclose climate-related risks. The European Union, India, New Zealand, and Switzerland are expected to join the UK and China by introducing such measures this year, followed by Canada and South Korea in 2025. ©Project Syndicate, 2023

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Oman conclude West Asian athletics with 8 medals

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Oman athletes clinched two more gold medals on the concluding day to raise the tally to eight medals in the fourth edition of the West Asian Athletics Championship in Qatari capital of Doha from April 26 to 29 at the tracks of Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium. Oman's eight medals included four gold, three silver and one bronze.

The newly claimed gold medals were in men's triple jump finals and men's relay 4X100 m finals on Saturday. Oman's long jumper Salim al Yarubi managed to earn his second gold medal as he won triple jump after clearing 15.55 metres while the silver medal went to Kuwait's Talal al Salim who registered a jump of 14.27 metres. UAE's Salim al Balushi took the bronze as he cleared a distance of 13.56 metres. Salim al Yarubi claimed gold medal in men's long jump competition on Friday. He cleared a distance of 7.54 metres.

The second gold medal for Oman on the last day of the West Asian event came

in men's relay 4X100 metres team which included Oman's fastest sprinter Barakat al Harthy, Ali al Balushi, Rashid al Asmi and Mohammed al Saadi. The Omani team finished the distance in a timing of 39.43 seconds. The silver medal was claimed by the Saudi team as they registered a time of 39.86 seconds while Qatar came in third as they clocked 40.17 seconds and Iraq team ended in fourth place with a timing of 41.03 seconds. The registered timing of Omani team in the event was among the best records of West Asian meet in this edition.

Omani athlete Hussain al Farsi broke the national record in men's 1500 metres race as he finished in fourth with a timing of 3 minutes and 46 seconds.

On the second day, Salim al Yarubi claimed gold medal in men's long jump competition. He cleared a distance of 7.54 metres to clinch the gold. Also, Oman's sprinter Hussain al Farsi snatched silver medal in the men's 800-metre race with a timing of 1 minute 50.14 seconds. Dhuwa al Sinawi bagged the second silver medal

for Oman in women's hammer throw as she registered a throw of 46.01 metres.

On the opening day of the competition, sprinter Mazoon al Alawi got gold in the women's 100m hurdles race in a time of 14.35 seconds. Moreover, Mazoon captured bronze medal in the women's 100m race with a timing of 11.8 seconds. Fatik bin Abdulghafoor Bait Jaboob won the silver in high jump when he leapt over the 2.05m bar.

After completion of all the events in the championship, Qatar topped the medal's table with 28 (including 13 gold) medals and then Bahrain came as runners-up with 13 medals (9 gold). Iraq were third with 24 medals (8 gold) and Oman in fourth place with eight medals (four gold).

The fourth edition of the West Asia Athletics Championship for men and women (Qatar 2023) featured participation of many athletes representing 12 countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Oman and hosts Qatar.



Oman Sail's Dr Khamis named in Best 100 Arabian CEOs

MUSCAT: Dr Khamis al Jabri, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Sail, has been named in the top rated 100 Arabian CEOs of the year by the G2T Global Awards. Dr Al Jabri joins a group of leaders from across the region, representing a diverse variety of sectors including energy, industry, tourism, education, food production, health and sport. The announcement was made at the official G2T Global Awards ceremony that took place in Marrakech, Morocco, on April 27.

Since taking office in 2020, Dr Al Jabri has successfully led Oman Sail to a number of notable achievements. These include enabling Oman Sail to deliver socio-economic benefits for Oman through community programmes, the investment in sport development and attracting international events

to be hosted in Oman. Dr Al Jabri played an instrumental role in leading the sailing teams to continued excellence and success as well as enhancing community programmes that introduce the sport of sailing to wider audiences. Several national, regional, and prestigious international events in Oman since 2020, such as the Youth Sailing World Championship in 2021 and the RS Venture Connect World Championship in 2022 - the first-ever exclusively para-sailing event to be staged in Oman.

Moreover, Dr Khamis's leadership enabled Oman Sail to share its expertise with the sporting community, joining hands with World Athletics and Oman Athletic Association to bring the World Race Walking Team Championships 2022 and with the International Table



Tennis Federation and Oman Table Tennis Federation to host the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships 2023 in Muscat.

At the ceremony in Morocco, Dr Khamis al Jabri commented, "It is a huge honour to be included in this year's Best 100 Arabian CEOs and join a group of dynamic, innovative, and high-achieving leaders from across the region. This is an achievement to be shared throughout the organisation because without the tireless efforts of the dedicated team at Oman Sail we would not have accomplished the feats we have over the past year. The talent within the company creates unique opportunities to plan and lead in a variety of directions with complete confidence that the team will deliver an exceptional event."

"Oman Sail will continue to add to our reputation as a prominent

figure in the community, and our mission to rekindle Oman's maritime heritage, as we work together to develop the capacity of Omanis in sailing and para sailing, preserving the environment, teaching transferable skills and flying the flag of Oman proudly around the world," he added.

The Global 2T Group was founded in 2015 and has grown to become a leader in the market for tailored professional training and consultancy, specialising in market research and keeping clients ahead of the curve in order to achieve their targets.

The G2T Global Awards celebrate the achievement across the Arab world by recognising individuals and organisations, and companies that have made significant contributions to their respective industries and have had a positive impact on society.



‘King of the streets’ Perez leads Red Bull 1-2 in Baku

BAKU: Sergio Perez won Sunday’s Azerbaijan Grand Prix with teammate Max Verstappen in second to ram home Red Bull’s supremacy over the rest of the Formula One grid.

Ferrari’s pole-sitter Charles Leclerc completed the podium, a respectable third.

“Vamos!” exclaimed the Mexican on the team radio after making it a hugely profitable weekend in Baku where he also claimed Saturday’s sprint race.

Red Bull boss Christian Horner acknowledged Perez’s “sensational weekend”.

He added: “He’s always been outstanding on this track, I don’t know what it is about Azerbaijan, but he absolutely excels here.”

Red Bull’s roll through 2023 after four races now reads four wins plus Saturday’s sprint, three poles, and three 1-2s.

Verstappen leads the drivers’ championship by just six points ahead of the fifth round of the record 23-race season in Miami.

Perez’ engineer told him on the team radio he was the “king of the streets” and with justification as five of his six F1 wins — not counting Saturday’s sprint — have



Red Bull’s Sergio Perez celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning the race. — Reuters

come on street circuits, twice in Baku alongside victories in Saudi Arabia, Monaco and Singapore.

The popular Perez, who believes he can really challenge Verstappen for the title, said: “It really worked out today for us (me), we managed to keep the pressure on Max. I think it was very close between us, we pushed to the maximum, we both hit the wall a few times but we (I) managed to keep him under control.”

Leclerc conceded that for the



Red Bull’s Sergio Perez in action during the Azerbaijan Grand Prix race in Baku. — Reuters

time being at any rate Red Bull were in “another league once it comes to the race”.

“Over 51 laps it was not possible, they have so much more pace than we do. Everyone is working flat out to understand what we can do in the races to close the gap.”

SAFETY CAR
The warmest day of a frenetic

sprint weekend had the drivers arriving onto the grid, umbrellas perched on their cars.

After a resounding rendition of the national anthem the covers came off the tyres and the lights went out with pole-sitter Leclerc holding off Verstappen to the 90 degree turn one.

The Dutch ace had the Ferrari in his cross hairs though, waiting

to pounce.

The inevitable happened on lap four as the Red Bull star nipped past, leaving Leclerc sandwiching the Red Bulls.

Perez inched closer to the slower red rival and duly coasted past on lap six.

Verstappen pitted on lap 10 leaving Perez in control but then the safety car intervened to clear

Nyck De Vries’s stricken Alpha Tauri after hitting a wall.

All the leaders used the safety interlude to take a free pit stop with racing resuming under a safety car restart on lap 13.

Perez managed that slickly as Verstappen got the better of Leclerc to leave the Red Bulls in front.

At the midway point Perez led from Verstappen with Leclerc a forlorn 13sec behind, and that’s as it ended up in a race that will not figure on most fans top five of the season.

Fernando Alonso only narrowly missed out on a fourth consecutive podium, the 41-year-old Spaniard finishing fourth in the Aston Martin ahead of Carlos Sainz in the other Ferrari.

Mercedes’ Lewis Hamilton was in sixth ahead of Lance Stroll in the second Aston Martin.

George Russell, who secured the point for the fastest lap, was ninth for Mercedes with Yuki Tsunoda’s Alpha Tauri rounding out the top 10.

Verstappen was relaxed at his teammate taking the limelight.

“We know it’s a very long season, you keep learning — it can never be perfect all the time.” — AFP

Hyderabad down Delhi despite Marsh’s all-round show

NEW DELHI: Sunrisers Hyderabad overcame a sparkling all-round performance by Mitchell Marsh to down Delhi Capitals by nine runs in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

South Africa’s Heinrich Klaasen hit an unbeaten 53 to steer Hyderabad to 197-6, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Delhi to 188-6 at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

Marsh returned bowling figures of 4-27 including a maiden over and then hit a 39-ball 63 but the effort was not enough for bottom-placed Delhi, who fell to their sixth loss in eight matches.

“Took me a few games to get going, but a disappointing loss,” said Marsh, who became the third player to be named man of the match from the losing side this season. “We’ve been on the wrong end of a few (close matches) but



Sunrisers Hyderabad’s Abhishek Sharma plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

we do feel there is a long way to go in this tournament.”

Former champions Hyderabad bounced back from their three losses to move up one spot to eighth.

Warner fell for a two-ball duck but Delhi’s chase looked good

during a 112-run second-wicket partnership between Phil Salt, who made 59, and Marsh.

Hyderabad hit back with three wickets in three overs through their spinners and once Salt and Marsh departed the chase lost track. — AFP

Raza helps Punjab beat Chennai in last-ball thriller

CHENNAI, India: Zimbabwe batsman Sikandar Raza helped Punjab Kings pull off a stunning chase to edge out Chennai Super Kings by four wickets in a last-ball Indian Premier League thriller on Sunday.

Chasing 201 for victory, Liam Livingstone (40), Sam Curran (29) and Jitesh Sharma (21) played attacking cameos before Pakistan-born Raza sealed the win with his unbeaten 13 in Chennai.

Sri Lanka fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana was tasked with bowling the final over, with Punjab needing nine to win. Raza got three runs off the final ball, his arms outstretched in celebration.

Punjab moved to fifth in the 10-team table, one below Chennai. Holders Gujarat Titans top the standings.

Devon Conway’s 92 off 52 balls proved to be in vain after the left-handed New Zealand opener steered Chennai to 200-4, having elected to bat first.

Livingstone and the left-handed Curran, who became the most expensive player in the tournament’s history at \$2.23



Punjab Kings’ Sikandar Raza plays a shot at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. —AFP

million, revived the chase after Punjab fell to 94-3.

They put on 57 off 33 balls before Livingstone departed and Curran was bowled by Pathirana, called ‘Baby Malinga’ for a slinging action similar to that of countryman Lasith Malinga.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Jitesh took Punjab closer in his 10-ball blitz before he fell to Tushar

Deshpande, who took three wickets, but Raza held firm.

Punjab skipper Shikhar Dhawan (28) and opening partner Prabhsimran Singh (42) got the chase going in a quickfire 50-run stand but the team wobbled once the two departed.

Earlier, Conway laid the foundations of Chennai’s total in an 86-run opening stand with Ruturaj Gaikwad.

He reached his fifty — his fifth in the last six innings — in 30 balls with a boundary off Raza as he put up another attacking stand with Shivam Dube, who hit 28.

But it was skipper MS Dhoni’s sixes off the final two balls bowled by Curran that brought the house down at the Chepauk stadium, as the old warhorse dispatched the ball over backward point and then a pull over deep mid-wicket.

The season is likely to be Dhoni’s last as a player for the four-time champions and the superstar cricketer is getting a rousing reception at every venue, with many fans turning up in Chennai’s yellow to cheer him on. — AFP

RCB to have a crack at dominant Lucknow



Oman did bring home some remorse for its fan with some exponential performance towards the end of ACC Men’s Premier Cup by finishing in the third position, based on ICC rankings after the game was washed out. Although, one wouldn’t be wrong in believing that this was nothing more than a consolation prize for the tournament favourites.

With a series of comments on the social media, expressing their disappointment on the silliest of technical decision, which cost Oman the much-deserved spot in the final. Oman team might consider getting some modern

day tactical/strategical planners, which would allow better decision making for the support staff.

Oman’s fixtures has boosted the number of social media conversations in Oman, although the majority still remains towards the IPL and its related topics.

LSG VS RCB
PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER —

The last time when both these clashed in Bengaluru on April 10, it was a high-scoring nail bitter. In a 425-run match between both, Harshal Patel almost defended five runs in the last over. LSG won the game by 1 run, as Dinesh Karthik’s fumble allowed a last-ball bye.

● **TEAM INFO** – LSG, a team whose fans want captain KL Rahul to be getting out early because of his strike-rate issues. They are going to be inviting RCB, whose fans would blindly back Virat Kohli and their men, irrespective



of the results. RCB are placed at number 5 and they are coming from a home-game loss against Kolkata. LSG are third and they are coming after a thumping win against Punjab at Mohali, where they smashed 257 in 20 overs.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played — 3; Won by RCB - 2; Won by LSG - 1

● **LSG possible 12** – KL Rahul, K Mayers, D Hooda, M Stoinis, K Pandya, N Pooran, A Badoni, Naveen Ul Haq, R Bishnoi, A Khan, Y Thakur, A Mishra

● **RCB possible 12** – V Kohli, S Ahmed, G Maxwell, M Lomror, D Karthik, S Prabhudessai, W Hasaranga, D Willey, V Vyshak, H Patel, M Siraj, Faf Du Plesis

● **Pitch & Weather Report**
The pitch at the Ekana Cricket Stadium is a bit slow in nature. The ball tends to hold a bit on the surface and the batters will have to be on their toes while batting here. The spinners will play a major role while bowling at this venue. The temperature in Lucknow is

expected to range between 21 and 31 degrees Celsius. Expect rain to play a spoil sport in this one.

● **Match Prediction** – Somehow RCB have managed to hang on in this year’s IPL and this is one game that they would want to win by all means and that’s how desperate is the situation for them. Although, the only way for them to win is by making KL Rahul play a long innings in his usual fashion, which will give limited opportunity to other extremely dangerous strikers. But to cut it short, LSG are a brilliant team and RCB lack quality in their spin attack to stop the dominant Lucknow Super Giants.

FAN COMMENTS

“Both Oman Cricket team and RCB are extremely good at breaking my heart. Wonder why both can’t get a good experienced coaching team that can give

proper guidance.” – Rahul Asher, 41, Factory Manager, Indian.

“Would Lucknow have the capability to take tough decision and drop the captain KL Rahul, who is playing very poor cricket and costing Lucknow their chances.” — Sanjeev D’souza, 52, Chief Financial Officer, Indian.

“That innings from captain Zeeshan and Nadeem, reminds me of KL Rahul, who goes into defensive mode, even without any wickets falling.” – Piyush Vishwajeet, 42, Businessman, Indian.

“Guess, Andy Flower and Duleep Mendis are preparing the Oman team for either Hong Kong Sixes or Test championship. Both these teams only know to either play dot balls or hit sixes. Nothing in between.” – Rajan Balasubramaniam Muthuswami, 67, Advisor to the Board, Indian.

Maiden FIA WEC silverware for Ahmad al Harthy with P3 in Rd3

Omani makes history again for the Sultanate of Oman with first FIA WEC podium

Excellent team performance from Oman Racing delivers glorious reward

Historic first world endurance podium for Ahmad

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: History-making FIA World Endurance Championship racer Ahmad al Harthy secured his and Oman Racing's first podium finish in the globe's biggest endurance racing category on Saturday, during an action-packed TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps.

Already making headlines the day before with an absolutely scintillating maiden GTE Am pole position in qualifying, Al Harthy proudly flew the Omani flag on the FIA WEC podium 24 hours later after a fantastic performance with team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood.

In addition to the race result itself, of course, the Oman Racing with TF Sport trio have climbed the driver standings into a provisional eighth position – a move of six places – while the squad itself is an improved eighth in the team standings.

Saturday's race in Belgium began on a damp track and the No 25 Aston Martin Vantage was fitted with slick Michelin tyres for the start. Dinan began the race and while the early running was difficult with grip at a premium, slipping down to eighth place, the American did an outstanding job on the slick rubber to stay in contention and he battled back brilliantly as the track dried more and more.

Into the top five before the end of the first half hour, he returned to the podium placings ahead of the first round of pit stops. Moving as high as second before Oman Racing's initial pit visit, Dinan rejoined in fourth and stayed in the podium fight before handing over the car to Al Harthy.

Determined to keep the



podium challenge on course, the Omani raced superbly and held third spot with two and a half hours elapsed – delivering fantastic pace and racecraft. Positions changed fairly regularly with Safety Car interventions and different strategies in play, Oman Racing leading at points, and there was very little to chose between the front-running contenders.

The Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS supported driver didn't put a wheel wrong and after serving the team's fourth stop, Al Harthy continued in fourth and then made his way back into the top three before Eastwood took over for the final couple of hours.

With 90 minutes to run the Northern Irishman was fourth, but he moved inside the top three again. Gaining more and more ground, as the race entered its closing stages Eastwood was right on the tail of the No 33 Chevrolet Corvette. Trying everything to find a way past, at the end of six intense

hours the Oman Racing Aston Martin finished third and just 0.2 seconds shy of the runner-up spot.

Marking a true breakthrough weekend for Al Harthy and Oman Racing in FIA World Endurance, the Spa performance has been the perfect preparation for the crown jewel event of the season which comes next – the one and only Le Mans 24 Hours.

AHMAD AL HARTHY: "Amazing, amazing – finally! We've done it, making history again, I'm so happy to have taken the podium we've wanted for so long. After qualifying on pole position, the start to the race was challenging as Michael went with slicks on the damp track, so it was very difficult, but he drove amazingly well and did an incredible job.

"All the drivers and the team did an amazing job, the positions were changing and moving around with lots going on with Safety Cars. It went for us, and went against us at times, but in the end we got the

PROVISIONAL FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM DRIVER STANDINGS:

8th Ahmad al Harthy / Michael Dinan / Charlie Eastwood, 23pts

PROVISIONAL FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM TEAM STANDINGS:

8th Oman Racing with TF Sport, 23pts

podium and were less than half a second from second place. Charlie kept fighting right to the finish, he raced so well.

"I was very pleased with my drive in the battle with everybody all the time, although we were synched slightly differently with pit-stops. Sometimes we were fifth, sometimes leading, and then in the final hour we could see the podium was possible. Again, a historic moment for Oman and I am so very proud to be representing my country and Arabia in the biggest championship in the world.

"This motivates us even more for Le Mans and I must thank everyone behind the scenes, our partners and the supporters as, without them, this just wouldn't happen. It really means a lot to me for all of them to believe in our programme – and we have delivered."

Six weeks from now Al Harthy and Oman Racing with TF Sport will be at the world-famous Circuit de la Sarthe in France for the legendary Le Mans 24 Hours. The big race will be held on June 10-11 and will mark the Omani's maiden appearance in the endurance classic.



Oman qualify for ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup

MUSCAT: Oman's off-spinner Jay Odedra's five-wicket haul ended in vain as the third-place playoff match of the ACC Men's Premier Cup against Kuwait was abandoned due to persistent rains at the TU Cricket Ground in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Sunday.

The right-arm bowler ran through the Kuwait middle order to restrict them to a paltry 130 in 31.3 overs. Chasing a modest target, Oman looked good in their chase as openers – Kashyap Prajapati and Jatinder Singh raced to 41 in just six overs before rains forced the players to go indoors.

With rains continuing, the match was finally called off but despite the no result, Oman secured a place in the 2023 ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup in July.

Duleep Mendis' men made it to the Emerging Teams Asia Cup on the basis of finishing third in the Men's Premier Cup as they had a superior net run-rate (NRR) than Kuwait after both teams had ended with six points in their respective group stage. Oman finished with an NRR of +0.377 as compared to Kuwait's +0.223.

Earlier, a day after the disappointment of losing to the UAE in the semifinal narrowly, Oman bowlers proved their dominance as Kuwait batters

floundered against the sharp attack.

Kuwait opener Adnan Idrees top-scored with 34 and a late cameo from Sayed Monib, who hit 28 off 10 balls including five fours and a six helped the team cross 100-run mark.

Odedra returned with sensational figures of 5.3-1-14-5 and was on a hat-trick after dismissing Clinto Anto and Shiraz Khan off successive deliveries in the 26th over of the match. He then went on to pick three more as Kuwait crumbled to 130. Bilal Khan picked up two early wickets while skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, Ayaan Khan and Jatinder Singh also took a wicket apiece.

Prajapati was unbeaten on 13 while Jatinder was at the crease on 19-ball 26 when the match was called off.

The 2023 ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup will be the fifth edition of the event and is scheduled to be held in July 2023. The eight teams in the tournament are the A teams from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the top-three teams from the 2023 ACC Men's Premier Cup.

On Monday, hosts Nepal will take on UAE in the final with the winner qualifying for the Asia Cup.

Al Zubair, Schiller claim stunning win in Portugal

PORTIMAO, Portugal: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller made a fabulous start to their short 2023 International GT Open campaign by winning the opening round of the series at the Autodromo Internacional Algarve, in Portimao, Portugal, on Saturday afternoon.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 crew had qualified fourth for the race and second in the Pro category and delivered a stunning performance in favourable racing conditions to win the first 40-lap race of the campaign by 15.611 seconds.

Pro category cars dominated the upper echelons of the leader board and filled the first seven places in the classification after the first of two races over the weekend.

The Optimum Motorsport duo of Samuel de Haan and Charlie Fagg were their closest challengers in second place in a McLaren 720S GT3. Team Motopark's Diego Menchaca and Marcos Siebert rounded off the podium places in their Mercedes AMG GT3.

Al Zubair said: "It was an excellent race. We started from P4, 0.3 seconds behind the pole-sitter and we took the lead in the first stint. The team and I did a great job. Fabi took the lead in the second stint and he was fast, so we won. This is a great start to the 2023 season and we are looking forward to another win in the second race."

After taking advantage of the private test sessions on Friday, Al Zubair and Schiller were third quickest in the free practice stint behind Liqui Moli Team Engstler's Luca Engstler and Dylan Yip (Audi) and Kessel Racing's Frederic Jousset and David Fumanelli (Ferrari).

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed duo ran the Mercedes for 25 laps with a best tour of 1min 41.614sec to be classified second in the Pro category.

Al Zubair went on to qualify the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes fourth on the grid and second of the Pro crews behind Reece Barr and Mikael Pitamber in the SPS Automotive Performance Mercedes AMG GT3. The fastest lap of the session fell to the ProAm crew of Jousset and David Fumanelli.



Al Faisal al Zubair and Fabian Schiller after winning the opening round of 2023 International GT Open series in Portimao, Portugal.



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Oman trade volumes soar 33% to RO 44.9bn in value

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The value of Omani imports and exports soared 33 per cent to reach a value of RO 44.9 billion at the end of 2022, up from RO 33.8 billion a year earlier, underscoring the healthy growth of the economy in the post-pandemic phase.

According to the Directorate General of Customs (Royal Oman Police), the strong uptick in two-way trade will have a positive impact on the Omani economy and create new job opportunities as well.

Contributing to this growth is an increase in demand for Omani products in international markets, particularly oil and gas, petroleum and petroleum products, metals, chemicals, and textiles.

At the same time, Oman continues to rely on imports of food, machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals.

The growth in the trade volume indicates that the country's

economy is growing, and the demand for these products is increasing, the Customs Department noted.

Moreover, the surge in trade volume could strengthen Oman's economic ties with other countries,

expand its trade networks, and provide access to international trade agreements, it said. Meanwhile, the Institute of International Finance (IIF), the voice of the global financial industry, has predicted that GCC

countries will remain resilient despite headwinds.

According to the Washington DC-based institute, the positive outlook will remain undiminished by forecasts of average oil prices expected to fall from \$100 per

CONTRIBUTING TO THIS GROWTH IS AN INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR OMANI PRODUCTS IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS, PARTICULARLY OIL AND GAS, PETROLEUM AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, METALS, CHEMICALS, AND TEXTILES.

barrel in 2022 to \$85 in 2023 and \$80 in 2024.

"We revised our growth forecast for 2023 for the GCC region, from 2.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent, due to the expected decline in oil production in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Oman," the report said. However, non-oil growth is expected to remain robust (between 4-5 per cent), driven by consumption and private investment.

Inflationary pressures will remain low at 2.6 per cent, supported by pegged exchange rates, ceiling prices for food and fuel products, labour market flexibility (where foreign labour

accounts for more than 60 per cent of the workforce), and lower rental prices amid increased supply.

The IIF estimates that the combined current account surplus will decrease from a peak of \$373 billion in 2022 to \$194 billion in 2023, due to lower oil export volumes and lower prices.

The combined fiscal surplus is expected to shrink from 6 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2023.

"The expected improvement in non-hydrocarbon revenues, and continued rationalisation of non-priority spending, may offset the decline in the volume of oil exports, resulting in lower fiscal balanced oil prices."

The Institute believes that the current account and large fiscal surpluses will lead to more resident capital outflows, albeit much lower than in 2022.

As a result, the total general foreign assets of the GCC countries will peak at around \$3.3 trillion by the end of 2023.

400 kV national grid to enhance Duqm SEZ's appeal to heavy industry

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Multimillion dollar investments in a 400 kV transmission grid that connects the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm to the national grid will significantly enhance the mega hub's investment appeal – particularly to heavy industries.

Duqm Special Economic Zone, presently powered by modest-sized generation facilities, is being integrated into the national grid as part of the North-South Interconnection (Rabt) project spearheaded by Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the owner and operator of the nation's main transmission networks in the north and south of the country.

Phase 1 of Rabt, effectively extending the Main Interconnection System to Duqm, is slated for completion by around June this year.

"The Rabt project will provide secure, stable, and reliable electricity to the Special Economic Zone in

Duqm as it will connect the Duqm electricity network with the 400 kV national grid, ensuring that the factories and large companies in Duqm are provided with their needs of electricity, which will further help to attract more investors to the area, provide more employment opportunities and help the growth of the national economy," said OETC, a member of Nama Group, in its latest 2022 Annual Report.

Anchoring Duqm SEZ into the 400 kV National Grid are two major grid stations – Duqm (400/132/33 kV) and Mahout (400/33 kV) – built as part of Phase 1 of the Rabt project.

They are among a total of five large grid stations installed along the 660 km route of the first phase of the interconnection project.

With Duqm's integration into the 400 kV National Grid, the SEZ will be suitably geared to cater to the requirements of a new wave of energy-intensive investments slated to come on stream in the hub.

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Sohar Port and Freezone contributes RO 600 million to Oman GDP

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Sohar Port and Freezone, a key economic hub in the Sultanate of Oman, is currently contributing around RO 600 million per annum to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Jasper Hoes, Energy Transition Programme Manager of Sohar Port and Freezone, said.

In a webinar hosted by Asyad titled, 'How can targeted investments in logistics unlock faster paths to net-zero?', Hoes said "The cargo throughput at Sohar Port and Freezone last year reached 77 million tonnes, which is a double-digit growth compared to 2021 and is currently contributing RO 600 million to the Omani GDP."

The port and freezone — a 50:50 joint venture between Asyad Group and Port of Rotterdam — has become one of the most successful ventures in Oman, providing a boost to the country's economy and creating numerous job opportunities.

The development of Sohar Port and Freezone began in 2002 in response to Oman's need for a modern and efficient port that could handle the country's growing trade and commerce needs.

"Over the past 20 years, it generated a total investments of \$27 billion in the total port industrial complex and

is providing 25,000 direct and indirect jobs for the community in the Al Batinah North Governorate," he added.

Over the years, Sohar Port and Freezone has grown to become one of the largest port and freezone complexes in the Middle East, with world-class infrastructure and facilities that attract businesses from around the globe. It covers a total area 4,500 hectares and handles more than 3,129 vessels a year.

The port and freezone offer a range of services, including warehousing, logistics, and manufacturing facilities, making it a one-stop-shop for businesses looking to set up operations in Oman. It is currently serving 72 per cent of Oman's import and export activities and has reached

around 2.2 billion people by land, air or sea. In 2022, 52 countries are represented in the freezone.

In addition to its economic contribution, Sohar Port and Freezone has also been actively involved in social and environmental initiatives. The port and freezone have implemented numerous initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint and protect the environment.

"Due to the activities in Sohar Port and Freezone, we are responsible for, according to our assessment, 24 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in Oman due to the energy activities of the power plants which are natural gas-based and the industrial activities of the refinery, steel, methanol,

ammonia and urea. So knowing the ambitions of the government of Oman to become net-zero at 2050, if Oman wants to become net-zero, SOHAR needs to be net-zero," Hoes said. Sohar Port and Freezone adopted a road map to carbon neutrality and energy transition which focuses on increasing energy efficiency on existing activities, getting connected to renewables, hydrogen, Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage (CCUS), heat and others.

With this, Sohar Port and Freezone pledges to commit to Oman's goals of net-zero by 2050, develop decarbonisation road map together with its clients and seek for efficiencies, synergies and common measures for reducing emissions.

Bank Muscat promotes financial inclusion through a wide range of services

MUSCAT: To further enhance its pioneering role in providing the best banking services for all segments of society, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to implement plans and strategies to boost financial inclusion through facilitating banking services across Oman.

The bank recently celebrated the Arab Financial Inclusion Day, which falls on April 27, every year, confirming its commitment to improving financial inclusion across the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank, which currently has 174 branches spread across all governorates in Oman, offers customers easy banking accessibility.

The branch network is ably supported by the bank's large base of over 800 e-channel devices including ATMs, CDMs and statement printers.

Reflecting the latest technological trends in banking, Bank Muscat has been continuously launching new features and services on its digital channels too, including its state-of-the-art and Omnichannel mBanking and Internet Banking, Contact Centre and its e-payment gateway on a continuous basis over the years.

The bank's contactless cards and the more recent QR code scanning option have become very helpful



for the bank's merchant partners in accepting e-payments from their customers quickly and securely.

The positive results of these services have helped to enhance financial inclusion as they provide easy and fast accessibility to different banking services. Digital services have now become the future of the financial inclusion policy as they save time and effort for everyone.

As part of its financial inclusion strategy to reach out to different customer segments and provide high-quality banking facilities,

Bank Muscat has also launched a number of critical products and services for the persons with disabilities.

In 2019, Bank Muscat launched the first ATM in Oman for visually-impaired persons at the premises of the Al Noor Association for the Blind.

The bank continues to enhance financial inclusion amongst persons with disabilities by enhancing physical access and facilities at branches and training its employees to better serve customers.

Bank Muscat has trained a number of its employees at different branches in Arabic Sign Language in partnership with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired so as to facilitate better communication and customer service.

Moreover, the bank has established facilities dedicated to disabled customers in select branches. It may be noted that as many as 210 bank employees have completed two levels of sign language courses to provide better services for customers. The bank

also provides forms in Braille, audio and QR code, in addition to providing special rates on a number of banking products for people with disabilities.

As part of its efforts to broaden financial inclusion, Bank Muscat is also continuously launching several new products and services.

In 2020, the bank launched the Woqar Banking Package after studying in great detail and understanding the needs of retirees who were earlier working in both government and private institutions.

The bank also launched the Floosi account for youth in the 15-17 age group in response to this age group's financial needs and to raise personal finance awareness.

To improve financial literacy in Oman, the bank launched its free Maliyat financial literacy programme in 2019. It also offers free online training sessions through the Irshad financial coaching programme.

Meanwhile, the Little Investor financial literacy training for school students has also contributed to enhancing financial knowledge amongst school students.

Going ahead, the bank will continue in its efforts to enhance financial inclusion through both financial and non-financial services and products, in line with the strategic needs of the Sultanate of Oman's economy.

400 kV national grid to enhance Duqm SEZ's appeal to heavy industry

FROM PAGE 13

These investments are envisioned across the industrial, chemical, mining, fisheries, hospitality and other economic sectors.

Several world-scale green ammonia and clean energy projects are anticipated to come up in the hinterland of Duqm as well.

Duqm is currently served by a relatively small integrated generation and distribution system, owned and operated by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a member of Nama Group.

Tanweer owns and operates a 67 MW diesel-fuel fired power plant for supply to this zone. Tanweer also has a supply contract with Marafiq, the operator of a new integrated power and water plant that serves OQ Duqm Refinery, for surplus capacity.

With Duqm's imminent integration into the National Grid, industries and other consumers will have access to relatively low-cost electricity starting from later this year.

ahli Islamic launches 'Kaswat Eid' initiative

MUSCAT: As part of its Kaswat Eid initiative, ahli Islamic, which is dedicated to making a meaningful contribution to the community, provided assistance to families in need for Eid Al Fitr celebration.

This effort aims to provide financial support to those who might not have the resources to buy clothing and other necessities for the celebration of Eid festivities. ahli Islamic collaborated with local associations and charitable teams to make sure that the

initiative reaches as many families as possible throughout the Sultanate of Oman. ahli Islamic is mindful of the significance of Eid in Oman and the happiness it gives to families all over the country.

The Kaswat Eid initiative,

therefore, demonstrates the bank's dedication to engaging in the community by sharing the spirit of Eid and bringing joy to those who lack access to essentials.

The initiative was implemented in partnership with local groups and nonprofit organisations, who helped identify families in need and provide them with financial support. The bank's branches have been crucial in making sure that the initiative positively affects communities across every corner of the country. Commenting on

the initiative, Yousuf al Rawahi, DGM — Head of ahli Islamic, said, "We take pride in serving our community and assisting them in their time of need.

This demonstrates our dedication to giving back to our people and aiding families that require help. We have strengthened our corporate and social values by establishing a clear and concise CSR framework that ensures the bank's commitment to supporting the community's welfare and the society at large."

Geely Auto releases brand new logo



MUSCAT: Geely Auto Group is now at a critical moment of speeding up its transformation to an intelligent and electrified brand.

Recently, Geely Auto has released a brand-new logo with new colours, representing the milestone that the brand will integrate cutting-edge technologies into new products that will accelerate its development of intelligent and electrified products in response to the strategic development of the Group that will bring a new image to the brand.

For the past 25 years, Geely has been improving the driving experience of its users, adhering to the brand vision of 'let Geely be a widely known brand around the world'.

Today, riding on the tide of intelligent products and electrification, Geely will continue to invest in cutting-edge technologies with the advantages of scale and system strength and bring high-value product experience to users, creating a smarter life through technology and exploring infinite possibilities by imagination.

The new logo released by Geely Auto inherits and extends the visual DNA of the Geely brand. It adopts a minimal design from the original logo with shield and gemstone elements.

Its digital and borderless form employs minimalism and openness, showing Geely's determination to break the boundaries and pursue innovation while transforming electrification with intelligent technologies.

The new logo also conveys Geely Auto's brand connotation of being young, pure, and technologically advanced in the era of electrified mobility. The new logo shows a more 'creative, vigorous, and imaginative' Geely Auto.

The new Geely, with its creativity, spares no effort to create a product experience that exceeds user expectations with the most advanced technologies; the new Geely, with its vitality, is committed to making every product a mobile technological terminal; the new Geely, with the brand vision of — 'let Geely be a widely known brand around the world,' explores more possibilities with infinite imagination and transforms imagination into reality through systemic advantages and the implementation of forward-looking technologies.

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Omantel awards contracts to Omani freelance entrepreneurs

MUSCAT: Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) signed agreements with a group of young Omani male and female freelancers to award contracts for document archiving services. The initiative aims to support the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to keep pace with the rapid developments in the business environment in Oman.

The business development efforts, led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is intended to enhance the role of individual institutions and companies to contribute to the promotion of the national economy.

The agreements were signed by Ghassan bin Khamis al Hashar,



the Acting Chief Financial Officer of Omantel.

Ghassan stressed that Omantel is, as usual, at the forefront of companies seeking to promote initiatives that support the national economy and utilise the

capabilities of Omani graduates to empower entrepreneurs, in addition to contributing to the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Omantel's Acting Chief Financial Officer further said:

"These agreements represent an important milestone for Omantel's Strategic Sourcing & Procurement Division, as this initiative is being launched with the aim to support freelance local business owners by assigning direct contracts for document archiving services."

Ghalib bin Ali bin Hamoud al Mamari, Acting General Manager of Strategic Sourcing & Procurement at Omantel, said "By awarding direct contracts to this group of freelancers, we will make use of their skills to provide documents and archives management services.

After fulfilling the legislative and regulatory requirements, the selected freelancers can offer their services in accordance with the legal framework that was recently announced by the National Employment Programme."

STREAMLINING YOUR OPERATIONS

A guide to business operations management



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.



Effective business operations management can greatly impact the success and growth of a company. By streamlining processes, reducing waste and inefficiencies, and maximising resources, a business can achieve higher levels of productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction.

At the heart of business operations management is the principle of continuous improvement. By continuously

evaluating and refining processes, businesses can eliminate bottlenecks, minimise downtime, and optimise workflow.

This not only improves the bottom line, but also helps to build a culture of innovation and agility within the organisation.

One of the key elements of business operations management is process optimisation. This

involves mapping out all of the steps involved in a given process, and then analysing and improving each step to ensure that it is as efficient and effective as possible.

By reducing waste and streamlining processes, businesses can improve their performance and reduce costs.

Another important aspect of business operations management

is resource utilisation. This includes maximising the use of physical resources, such as equipment and materials, as well as human resources, such as employees and contractors.

By ensuring that resources are being used to their full potential, businesses can improve their overall efficiency and productivity.

In addition to process

optimisation and resource utilisation, effective business operations management also requires a strong focus on quality control.

This involves establishing and maintaining rigorous quality standards, and implementing processes and systems to monitor and ensure that these standards are being met.

By doing so, businesses can ensure that they are providing their customers with consistent, high-quality products and services.

One of the key benefits of effective business operations management is increased agility. By continuously improving processes and systems, businesses can respond more quickly and effectively to changes in the marketplace.

This not only improves their ability to compete, but also helps to create a culture of innovation and continuous improvement within the organisation.

In order to be successful, however, it is essential to have the right tools and systems in place. From project management software to workflow automation tools, there are many technologies and systems that can help businesses streamline their operations and improve their performance.

Ultimately, the key to success in business operations management is a commitment to continuous improvement. By regularly evaluating and refining processes, and investing in the right tools and systems, businesses can achieve higher levels of efficiency, productivity, and profitability.

In conclusion, business operations management is a critical component of success for modern entrepreneurs and small business owners. By streamlining processes, maximising resources, and maintaining a focus on quality control, businesses can achieve higher levels of performance and customer satisfaction, and position themselves for long-term growth and success.

What steps can a modern entrepreneur or small business owner take to improve their business operations management?

Oil AGMs presage awkward investor decoupling

YAWEN CHEN

BP, once seen as “best in class” for its ambitious green goals, kicked off the industry’s AGM season by trying to defend both its energy transition commitments and its pledge to remain “a predominantly oil and gas company”.

Bernard Looney, the chief executive of the British oil major, stressed that his group has gone above and beyond, with its spending on renewables, hydrogen and other clean power surging from just 3% of capital spending to 30% in the last three years.

Chair Helge Lund defended a sudden reversal in February to now cut less oil and gas production by 2030. Some shareholders, including the UK’s biggest pension funds, had questioned why the decision wasn’t held to a resolution and called for voting him down.

The fact that Lund was re-elected by 90% of the shareholders while a climate resolution advocating for more aggressive emission targets was shot down could give cover to BP’s European peers like Shell and TotalEnergies.

Big Oil had more than doubled its profits in 2022 as energy prices spiked after Western sanctions on Russian energy.

Central banks’ push to hike interest rates to tame inflation has made more questionable what used to be an acceptable return of 4% to 5% on solar and wind assets.

While those disruptions may reverse, BP has shown how oil companies are changing in the longer term to focus more on hydrocarbons like LNG, and is shifting its attention to lower-hanging fruits like EV charging in Asia. The risk is that such a middle ground will fail to please investors in both camps.

Pension investors like the Universities Superannuation Scheme, for example, are strengthening their climate investment policies and targeting board members to drive change.

Meanwhile, hedge funds and asset managers like BlackRock face awkward conversations with their own teams dedicated to climate solutions investments.

The traditional oil investor base may soon start to question why companies aren’t doing much more in oil and gas, if that’s what drives profitability and market performance. The oil world’s own awkward decoupling is happening fast. — Reuters

Sleepwalking into a global recession



ANDREW SHENG

The writer is a distinguished fellow at the Asia Global Institute at the University of Hong Kong.



XIAO GENG

The writer is the chairman of the Hong Kong Institution for International Finance and is a professor and director of the Institute of Policy and Practice at the Shenzhen Finance Institute at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.



THE CURRENT WAVE OF INTEREST-RATE HIKES HAS SLOWED INFLATION BUT ALSO POPPED SEVERAL ASSET BUBBLES, POTENTIALLY TRIGGERING ADDITIONAL DEBT AND FINANCIAL CRISES. WHILE A PROLONGED ECONOMIC DOWNTURN MAY BE INEVITABLE, THE G7 COUNTRIES CAN SOFTEN THE BLOW BY COORDINATING THEIR FISCAL AND MONETARY POLICIES.

financial risks, and a “rocky recovery” ahead.

The current wave of monetary tightening has slowed inflation but also popped several asset bubbles, triggering an interest-rate risk shock that wounded borrowers and fragile financial institutions.

In one extreme (but plausible) scenario examined by the authors, higher interest rates and credit supply shocks will pull down global growth to 1% this year.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s predictions are slightly more pessimistic than the IMF’s, projecting that the world economy will grow by 2.6% this year and 2.9% in 2024, largely thanks to post-pandemic recoveries in China and India offsetting slower growth in the United States, Europe and Japan.

Given the escalating Sino-American rivalry, former US treasury secretary Lawrence Summers puts the chances of a recession in the US at 70%.

When the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank began hiking interest rates last year, developing economies worried about the adverse effects of monetary tightening and a strengthening dollar on the global economy.

The current economic slowdown, together with the looming bifurcation of global supply chains,

has compounded those concerns.

In March, however, following months of quantitative tightening (QT), the Fed injected \$300 billion in liquidity into cash-strapped banks to shore up confidence in the financial system following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank. The move led capital markets to speculate that the Fed may soon revert to quantitative easing (QE) and loosen monetary policy in order to maintain domestic financial stability.

But QE is a double-edged sword. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, the G7 countries’ loose monetary and fiscal policies have led to more than a decade of relative stability for the world’s advanced economies.

But they have also led to near-negative nominal interest rates and higher debt levels, fuelled speculative asset bubbles, and encouraged investors to forsake long-term investments in favour of chasing short-term yields.

In addition to these trends, the massive monetary expansion that followed the 2008 crisis led to structural changes in the global financial system.

First, it changed the composition of assets and liabilities on the balance sheets of central banks, commercial banks, and non-bank financial intermediaries (NBFIs) such as pension funds.

According to the Financial

Stability Board, the G7 countries’ share of global financial assets fell from 75% in 2008 to 62% in 2020, reflecting the rapid growth of the G20’s other members (the so-called G13).

Second, the QE decade dramatically expanded central banks’ balance sheets. G7 central banks’ assets more than tripled, rising from \$5.7 trillion in 2008 to \$23.5 trillion in 2020.

By contrast, G13 central banks, which could not launch their own versions of QE because their currencies do not have global reserve status, expanded their balance sheets from \$6.7 trillion to \$16.2 trillion over the same period, mostly due to their growing foreign exchange reserves.

Third, post-2008 financial reforms encouraged banks to engage in regulatory arbitrage. As a result, the share of total G20 financial assets held by lightly-regulated NBFIs increased from 42% in 2008 to 47% in 2020.

Fourth, America’s net international investment position (NIIP) – the difference between foreign assets owned by US residents and US assets owned by non-residents and foreign entities – deteriorated. By 2020, Americans owed \$14.7 trillion more to the rest of the world than the world owed the US, up from \$4 trillion in 2008.

Meanwhile, rich countries increasingly borrowed from non-G7 countries. Consequently, the G7’s NIIP deficit widened sharply, from \$1.7 trillion to \$9 trillion.

The result is an unbalanced financial system in which the G7 still manages global monetary policy despite being deeply indebted to the rest of the world and controlling a declining share of international finance.

The economic sanctions imposed on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine have effectively weaponised the reserve currencies of G7 countries, spurring other countries to seek ways to boost their resilience through de-dollarisation and alternative trading and payment regimes. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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Author and world traveller Namu hopes Oman retains its uniqueness

Chinese author, Yang Erche Namu, popularly known as Namu, who is keenly followed as a traveller, has been exploring the Sultanate of Oman finding it a virgin land which she hopes will retain its uniqueness and does not get exposed to commercial tourism... **P20**



Brazilian legend Buarque receives prestigious literary award... four years late

BRAZILIAN WRITER AND musician Chico Buarque received on Monday the most prestigious literary award for Portuguese-language, with the ceremony happening four years after he won it due to an impasse caused by former President Jair Bolsonaro.

Buarque was awarded in 2019 the Camoes Prize, which every

year recognises an author from a Portuguese-speaking nation. It was previously given to writers such as Portugal's Jose Saramago and Mozambique's Paulina Chiziane.

The prize, named after Portuguese poet Luis de Camoes, was created by Portugal and Brazil in 1988. Each country contributes 50,000 euros (\$55,125.00) to the award.



When Buarque won, Bolsonaro refused to sign the award diploma, delaying the ceremony.

The artist, who is revered in Brazil as a national hero best known for his political songs against military dictatorship, is a supporter of current President Luiz Inacio

Lula da Silva and openly criticised Bolsonaro's cultural policies.

Far-right Bolsonaro shut down the culture ministry, reducing it to an office of the tourism ministry.

"Four years of a disastrous government lasted forever because time seemed to go backwards,"

Buarque said at the ceremony, which took place at a palace in Queluz, near the Portuguese capital.

"The (Bolsonaro) government was defeated at the polls but we can't be distracted because the fascist threat persists in Brazil and elsewhere," he added.

The glittering palace room was packed with politicians, well-known writers and other artists, who gave Buarque a standing ovation when he walked in. Buarque's work includes prize-winning novels, such as Estorvo and Budapest.

Buarque was also an opponent of the two decade-long military dictatorship in Brazil that began in 1964.

Lula arrived in Portugal on Friday for a five-day visit, his first to Europe since taking office as president, and attended Buarque's event.

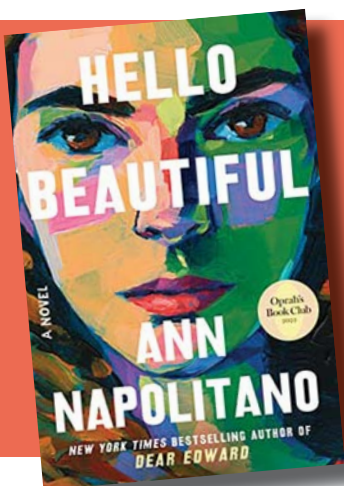
"It is for me a satisfaction to correct one of the biggest mistakes ... committed against Brazilian culture in recent times," Lula said. "The attack on culture ... was an important dimension of the project the extreme-right tried to implement in Brazil" — **Reuters**

READ

HELLO BEAUTIFUL

BY ANN NAPOLITANO

In a homage to Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," a young man's dark past resurfaces as he gets to know the family of his college sweetheart.



LIFESTYLE

This storage in La Plaine-Saint-Denis, near Paris, has been keeping models of the Cast workshops of the Ateliers d'Art of the "Reunion des Musees Nationaux — Grand Palais" (RMN-GP). — **AFP**



ART

Brazilian artist known as O Bastardo (The Bastard), 25, poses for a picture next to his artwork at his first solo exhibition in the Rio Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A new generation of young black artists from Rio de Janeiro's poor neighbourhoods is gaining prominence at contemporary art fairs and prestigious museums. — **AFP**



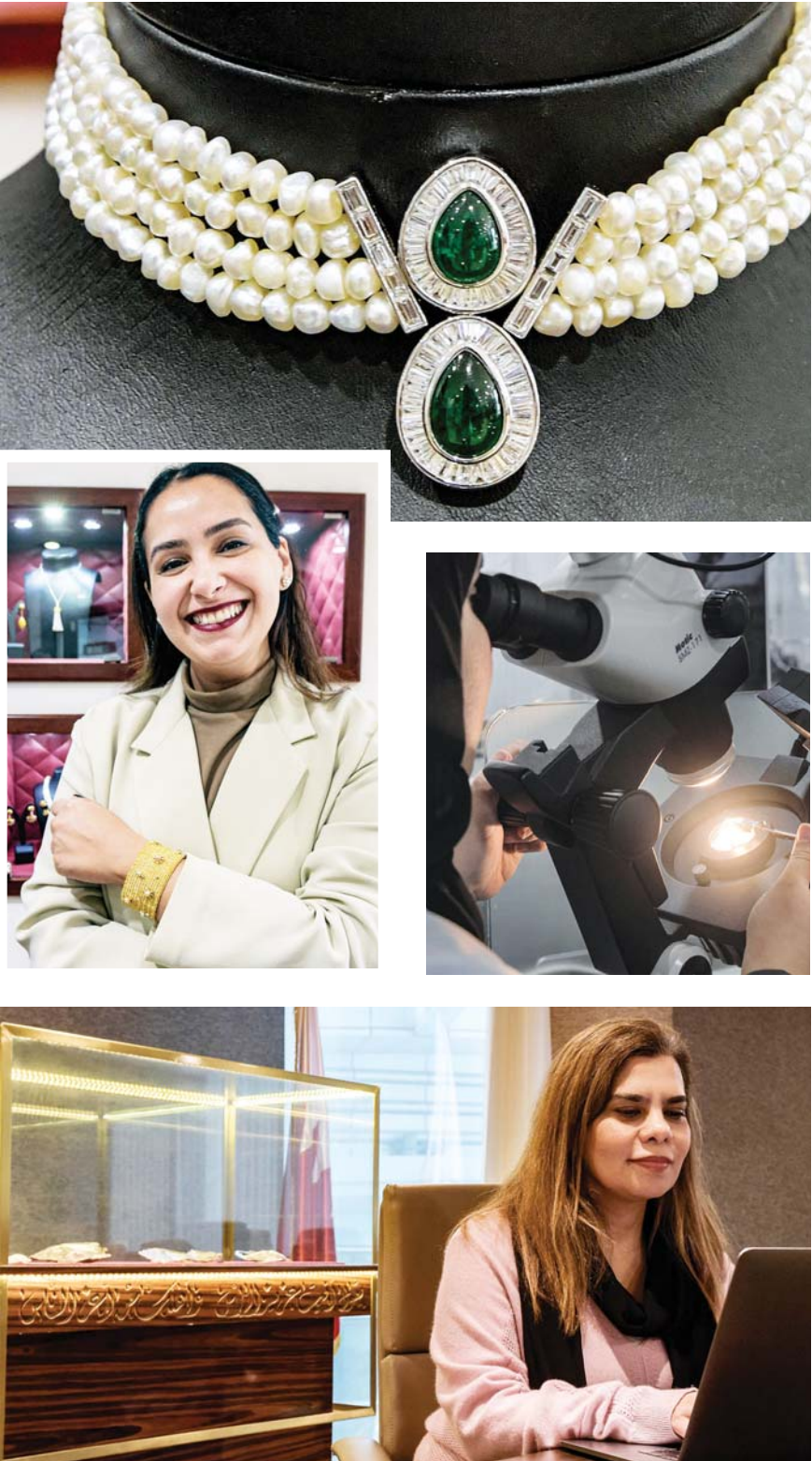


A real gem: in Bahrain, only natural pearls will do

CUSTOMERS AT A BAHRAIN jewellery store study displays of pearls that are, unusually, 100 per cent natural – the result of attempts to preserve a centuries-old industry. While rare elsewhere, natural pearls prised from seabed oysters by divers are the only variety produced in the Gulf kingdom, which is fiercely proud of its pearling tradition. Bahrain, a tiny island state neighbouring Qatar, is the sole country worldwide to have banned the cultivation of artificial pearls, which have flooded the market since the 1920s. “We can’t mass-produce,” said Faten Mattar, who works at the family-run jewellery shop. It can take up to five years to complete one strand of a necklace by sourcing pearls directly from divers, she said, admitting it is “a challenge”. And larger pieces, which can go for up to \$25,000, might take more than a decade to complete. But with no two natural pearls identical, Mattar said that was part of the appeal. “Each person... who owns or gets a piece of jewellery that contains natural pearls knows no one else has the same.” Mattar is one of the first women to work in a family business which was established more than two centuries ago, making it one of the oldest in Bahrain. Pearls adorn bracelets, necklaces, cufflinks and other items in the small store. “One of our goals... is to make pearls more attainable for everyone, so we created different lines instead of having just big pieces,” she explained, mentioning designs for men and “daily jewellery for a younger crowd”.

CULTURED ‘SHOCK Like other Arab Gulf states, Bahrain’s economy before the discovery of oil had relied on pearl harvesting. Bahraini free-divers would spend months aboard traditional dhows,

the wooden sailboats that have plied Gulf waters for centuries, to capture pearls prized by the region’s royal families as well as European fashion houses. But the natural pearl trade crashed after the Great Depression of the 1930s and the development in Japan of cultured pearls, artificially propagated in freshwater mussels, which are cheaper and easier to produce. Muharraq, in Bahrain’s north, is home to “the last remaining complete example of the cultural tradition of pearling”, according to Unesco, with a heritage site featuring oyster beds and a fortress where dhows used to set off. Today, young gemologists at the Bahrain Institute for Pearls and Gemstones (DANAT) – nestled among the capital Manama’s skyscrapers – scrutinise pearls using modern machinery or the naked eye. One researcher passes a pearl through an X-ray machine under the watch of Fatima Almahmood, a graduate in physics and gemology. The X-ray detects “growth lines” that distinguish natural pearls from cultured ones, she explained, pointing to an image of the scan projected onto a screen. Created in 2017, DANAT appraises pearls at the request of merchants and individuals. “You’d be surprised by how many clients come to DANAT that have inherited pieces and are then shocked to know... (they) contain cultured pearls,” says Noora Jamsheer, who heads the research centre. Apart from appraisal, DANAT also monitors conditions in the water where natural pearls are harvested. Jamsheer said climate change is a cause for concern. “We have a research team that is continuously going to the field, researching and collecting data – the water temperature, water quality, salinity – to determine and study the impact of these factors.” — **AFP**



ROYALS King Charles' coronation to include invitation to public to swear allegiance



Britain's King Charles III

KING CHARLES' CORONATION on Saturday will include an invitation to the public to swear allegiance to the monarch and to his heirs and successors, the Archbishop of Canterbury's office said, as it published the liturgy to be used for the event. The invitation to people to make their homage by participating in a “chorus of millions of voices” was listed among the new elements of an ancient ceremony in a statement from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's office. That part of the liturgy reads: “All who so desire, in the Abbey, and elsewhere, say together: I swear that I will pay true allegiance to Your Majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law. So help me God.” In other firsts, the service will include other languages associated with the British Isles – a prayer in Welsh and a hymn in Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic, and female bishops will be able to participate, the statement said.



Royal fan John Loughrey poses for a photo on The Mall, in central London, on Sunday ahead of the coronation ceremony of Charles III and his wife, Camilla, as King and Queen of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth Realm nations, on May 6. — **AFP**

Charles, who became monarch of the United Kingdom and 14 other realms on the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth in September, is due to be crowned on May 6 at London's Westminster Abbey in a ceremony full of pomp, pageantry and religious significance. “This Coronation celebrates the traditions of over 1,000 years,” Welby said on Twitter. “It also features new and revised texts and other elements, and the participation of people of all ages and many faiths and backgrounds – as we look forward together with hope.” The new parts will reflect the theme of serving others and represent and celebrate the country's diversity, with members of other faiths set to play an active role in the service for the first time, Welby's office said. In the latest details it has released on the event, Buckingham Palace said on Saturday Charles will wear robes of crimson and purple silk velvet that were once worn by his grandfather King George VI at his own coronation in 1937. — **Reuters**



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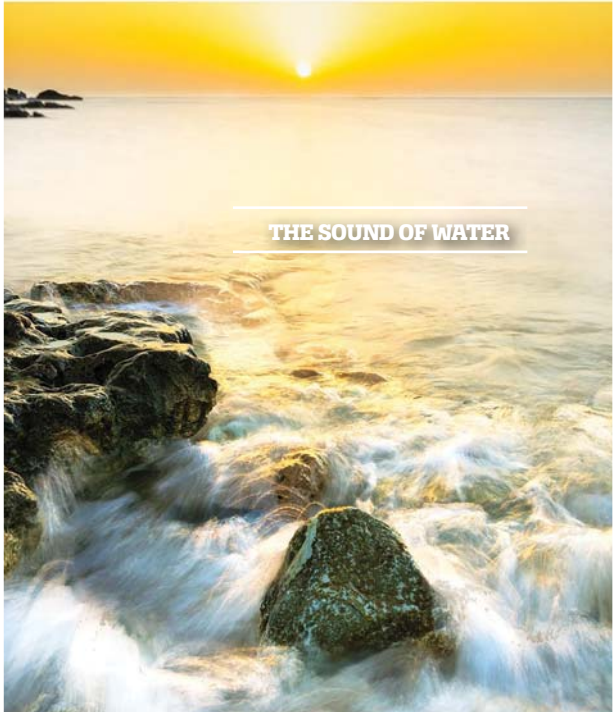




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AROUND THE WORLD

CONSERVATION

Pollution, bird flu threaten ‘very fragile’ Chilean dolphin population



GROWING POLLUTION, industrial activities and now bird flu are threatening the Chilean dolphin, one of the world's smallest cetaceans, in the cold Pacific waters off Chile's western coastlines.

Also known as the “tonina negra,” the dolphin's small population lives along the Chilean southern and central coasts, in bays also used for industrial activities such as sea farming and seaweed extraction.

Chile's long coastline helps make it one of the world's top exporters of fish and aquatic crops.

“Chilean dolphins share spaces with humans,



and knowing this, we have to work even more to protect this unique species,” said veterinarian Cayetano Espinosa, adding that the species is “very fragile, because there are only a few of the dolphins left.”

Espinosa is a member of the Yaku Pacha study centre on marine ecosystems.

Jose Luis Brito, curator of the Natural History Museum at the country's main maritime terminal, San Antonio, said he receives constant reports of dolphins stranded on beaches, sometimes tangled in nets and other times killed by pollution after consuming plastic or other waste.

“The Chilean dolphin is disappearing at an alarming rate,” he said. “Every day we see less of them on the coast.”

One official also pointed to the threat of bird flu, which has been detected in Chile's wild birds, marine animals and industrial complex. A human case was also reported in March.

Soledad Tapia, the director of the country's fisheries service, said two species of dolphins had been infected by the virus. “They are also a vulnerable category,” she said. — Reuters

LIFESTYLE

Staying zen with ‘slow design’ at Milan Furniture Fair



“SLOW DESIGN” WAS all the rage at this year's Milan Furniture Fair, featuring sustainable creations made with carefully selected and hand-crafted natural materials in sharp contrast to industrial manufacturing.

Amid the frenzied buzz of visitors stood Atsuya Nakamura, quietly sewing a leather sheath to cover part of a side table, his movements calm and precise despite the comings and goings at his stand.

He is one of some 20 craftsmen who work in a factory opened by the Ritzwell design company on a bay surrounded by lush vegetation near Fukuoka in Japan, a site designed to be “in osmosis with nature”.

“We don't do mass production, all our furniture is finished by hand. Design and comfort are very important,” Wataru Yano, Ritzwell's marketing director, told AFP.

“Our products are timeless, they last a lifetime and are passed on to the next generation. They are a synthesis of Japanese tradition and contemporary design,” he said.

Among the favourite materials of this high-end brand, which promises its customers “relaxation and calm”, are solid walnut and oak, combined with thick leather and steel.

LOWERING BLOOD PRESSURE

Nature and sustainability are also the watchwords of Finnish wooden furniture designer Nikari, located in Finland's oldest machinery workshop.

Set in the village of Fiskars, west of Helsinki, the workshop is powered entirely by water from a nearby river.

“We want to lower our customers' blood pressure and create a comfortable home where harmony and calm prevail,” says CEO Johanna Vuorio.

The wood Nikari uses “comes from Finnish forests. The trees grow very slowly, some are over a thousand years old. Our tables and chairs can last for more than a century,” Vuorio said.

One of the latest creations, a

handmade “century-old” coffee table, sat at the entrance to the stand, its cracks a sign of its authenticity.

“We are not looking to make easy money with cheap solutions. We produce at our own pace without rushing,” she said.

The “slow design” movement was launched in the early 2000s by the English academic Alastair



Fuad-Luke.

Like the equivalent “slow food” or “slow fashion” movements, it advocates the use of natural or recycled materials and campaigns against over-consumption.

‘BEAUTIFUL, SUSTAINABLE’

The concept is applied to the letter by independent designer Francesco Meda, who collaborates with several brands, including Alias and Acerbis, based in northern Italy.

“Instead of presenting, like in fashion, 20 or 30 new collections every year, and putting so many objects on the world market, it is better to make fewer, but beautiful and sustainable ones,” he said.

Meda reinvents “iconic objects created by great masters who have marked the history of design” by giving them “a contemporary touch”.

“A quality chair can last 150 years,” he said.

The iconic ash wood chair designed in 1996 by Riccardo Blumer, Laleggera, has been updated by Meda for Alias with new finishes and leather upholstery.

Another requirement is “virtuous production processes”, with everything Meda designs produced in Italy using materials sourced

CHANGING WORLD

Scientists save ancient Arctic ice in race to preserve climate history



SCIENTISTS HAVE SUCCEEDED in saving samples of ancient Arctic ice for analysis in a race against time before it melts away due to climate change, they said this week.

The eight French, Italian and Norwegian researchers camped in Norway's Svalbard archipelago in March and April, braving storms and mishaps to preserve crucial ice records that can be used to analyse what the Earth's climate looked like in the past and chart the devastating impact human activity is having on it now.

The Ice Memory Foundation team extracted three huge tubes of glacier ice on Svalbard. They, like others collected by the 20-year project launched in 2015, will be preserved for future scientific analysis at a research station in Antarctica.

Analysing chemicals in such deep “ice cores” provides valuable data about centuries of past climatic and environmental conditions, long after the original glacier has disappeared.

But it is a race to preserve this “ice memory”. Experts warn that as global temperatures rise, meltwater is leaking into ancient ice and risks destroying the geochemical records it contains before scientists can collect the data.

When the Ice Memory team set up camp in March on Høltedahlfonna, one of the highest and most northerly glaciers in the Arctic, the first hitch was the weather.

Instead of the expected -25 degrees Celsius (-13 degrees Fahrenheit), fierce winds forced the temperature down to -40C, delaying drilling for several days.

Then, once they had bored a 24.5-metre (80-foot) hole in the ice, water from the melting glacier rushed into it.

Even though radar data collected since 2005 showed there was some meltwater inside the Høltedahlfonna glacier, “we did not expect to find such an extended, abundant and saturated aquifer in the selected drilling site, at the end of winter”, explained Jean-Charles Gallet, snow physicist at the Norwegian Polar Institute and expedition coordinator.

“Glaciers are not only dramatically losing their mass but also their cold content.”

‘DRAMATIC CLIMATE CHANGE’

Aquifers are underground reservoirs of freshwater or saltwater that permeate the ice crystals in glaciers and weaken them.

“Seeing all that water in the glacier gave us the clearest evidence yet of the effects that dramatic climate change is having in the Arctic,” said Daniele Zannoni, a member of the team from the Ca' Foscari University in Venice.

Human-caused carbon emissions have warmed the planet by 1.15 degrees Celsius since industrialisation, powered by fossil fuels, began the 19th century. Studies indicate that the Arctic is warming between two and four times faster than the global average.

Last week, the United Nations said the world's 40-odd “reference glaciers” — those for which long-term observations exist — are more than 26 metres thinner now on average than in 1970.

The pressure of the meltwater rushing into the Høltedahlfonna drill hole damaged two of the team's driller motors, forcing them to relocate to the summit of the Dovrefjell glacier, 13 metres higher up.

When drilling resumed, the researchers succeeded in extracting three ice cores 50-75 metres long. The strata and air bubbles trapped in these precious translucent cylinders, just a dozen centimetres in diameter, could contain up to 300 years of climate history. — AFP



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Author and world traveller Namu hopes Oman retains its uniqueness

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Chinese author, Yang Erche Namu, popularly known as Namu, who is keenly followed as a traveller, has been exploring the Sultanate of Oman, taking travel notes. "I landed in Oman and I have been just exploring places. It has been so exciting. There is so much to see and there is also similarities (to where I came from). I am a mountain person from the Himalayan region, and I can see familiar things here," Namu said.

She enjoyed exploring Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Nizwa, Muscat, Muttrah Souq, and the different museums, and is yet to explore the desert of Oman but looks forward to the experience as she has been to the Sahara Desert during her travels.

"Wherever I go, it is a must for me to visit museums and explore the art scene. Art is part of the culture," she pointed out.

"The Museum, Oman Across Ages in Manah, was amazing as it has brought about the narration of history using technology. I spent three hours there," she said.

She added, "I did not know much about Oman. I just heard it is developing and might be expensive because everything is imported. But all that changed once I arrived. I love the water here."

She added, "I saw the lush farms in Qurayat and it reminded me of my hometown farms, although it is impossible to see mango trees up where we stay as the altitude is so high. I saw the vegetables grown here and ate the fruits too. The Falaj system and the flowing water are beautiful. Oman is still a virgin land, but I hope it retains this uniqueness and does not get exposed to commercial tourism."

Namu's journey to explore the world began at a young age. Her aspirations began as a young girl sitting by the Lake Lugu and playing with her friends in her hometown. She would watch the migratory birds arrive and wonder where they came from and where they go when the season changed.

"I just knew I had to see the lands beyond our mountains," she said.

By the time she was 13, she quenched her thirst to move by walking through the mountain path for seven

days to reach a destination that opened doors to the world with her talent.

She became the first member of the matrilineal minority in China to win a gold medal. At the age of thirteen, she won the gold medal in the folk song competition in the Great Hall of the People in Tian'anmen Square in Beijing.

She graduated by majoring in vocality at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and Chinese Language, becoming the first female college student in the history of her clan.

As the youngest singer in the Beijing National Song and Dance Troupe, she participated in the most important Spring Festival Gala in China.

She sojourned in San Francisco, USA, for six years. And this is when she studied fashion.

In 1989, she published her personal autobiography, "Out of the Matrilineal Clan", which successfully made her hometown in the mountains known to the world and became a tourist hotspot.

She has gone on to publish 18 books, including autobiographies, lifestyle books, and travel books, and they have been translated

into more than a dozen languages. She was the seventh Chinese writer to have imprinted her handprint on Hollywood Boulevard in the United States.

But in Oman, in addition to enjoying travelling after the pandemic, she has been able to rekindle her passion for the arts.

"I have my dream project taking place overlooking Lake Lugu—it is an art museum called Voice of Women. The museum will feature art by Chinese female artists as well as international artists. What has been wonderful is that two artists from Oman and two artists based in Oman are donating their work to the museum with their unique message to women. Sometimes a woman needs just a sentence to motivate her," she explained.

Art work by pioneer artist Maryam al Zedjali, renowned photographer Dalia al Bassami, Oman based Radhika Hamalai, who has been expanding from canvas to fabric to textile and Elizabeth Davis who has been capturing her inspiration of Oman on canvas, mats and glass will be displayed at the Art Museum, Voice of Women.

