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RED WARRIORS
GEAR UP FOR
LEBANON
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OMAN RANKS 6TH
IN MENA ON 2023
INDEX OF ECONOMIC
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FIVE POPULAR
MOSQUES
TO VISIT THIS
RAMADHAN

MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS
TO BANGLADESH

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mohammad Abdul Hamid of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him good health and happiness and more progress and prosperity for the friendly people of Bangladesh. — ONA

UPPER TROUGH
TO BRING RAINS

Gear up for yet another week of clouds and rains, as the latest weather updates and analysis of the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that an upper air trough is likely to affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Monday until Wednesday evening. The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said the peak would be on Tuesday, "Although the impact of the trough will begin on Monday, the peak would be on Tuesday afternoon until Wednesday morning as per the current situation."

DETAILS ON P2

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23 DIE ASTORNADO RIPS
THROUGH MISSISSIPPI

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A MONTH OF IMBIBING
MORAL PRINCIPLES

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WORLD OBSERVES 'EARTH HOUR'

The Sultanate of Oman joined hands with 160 countries around the world to celebrate 'Earth Hour' on Saturday. The Environment Authority switched off lights and electronic devices in the building in Muscat from 8:30-9:30 pm. This comes as part of Oman's efforts to increase public awareness on climate change, energy conservation, meeting the challenges of global warming, and protecting ecosystems from environmental degradation.

Newly-discovered
asteroid to fly between
Earth and moon

PARIS: An asteroid big enough to destroy a city is scheduled to zoom between Earth and the moon in the coming hours, but astronomers assure there is no threat of collision.

The large rock, named 2023 DZ2, was only discovered in late February. Its estimated diameter is between 40 and 100 metres, the European Space Agency (ESA) said.

Such a fly-by "happens only about once per decade," wrote Nasa's Planetary Defence Co-ordination Office on Twitter, adding that the track of 2023 DZ2 takes it "safely" past Earth.

At its closest point to our planet - expected at 19:50 GMT on Saturday - the asteroid will be about 168,000 km away, according to the ESA. By comparison, the moon is 384,400 km from Earth. With a clear sky, the asteroid can be observed with binoculars or a telescope.

"There is no chance of this 'city killer' striking Earth, but its close approach offers a great opportunity for observations," said the ESA's planetary defence chief, Richard Moissl.

The agency put the chance of 2023 DZ2 hitting Earth within the next century at zero.

Last week, the UN-endorsed International Asteroid Warning Network decided it would take advantage of the close look, carrying out a "rapid characterisation" of 2023 DZ2, Moissl said.

That means astronomers around the world will analyse the asteroid with a range of instruments such as spectrometers and radars. The goal is to find out just how much we can learn about such an asteroid in only a week, Moissl said. It will also serve as training for how the network "would react to a threat" possibly heading our way in the future, he added.

— Agencies

Private sector told to
invest in water sector

GCC STATES UNDERSCORE WATER COOPERATION

NEW YORK: The member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) underscored the importance of the initiatives aimed at reinforcing scientific and technological cooperation and exchange of expertise in water field and the unrestricted provision of water technologies for developing countries at preferential prices.

This was stated by Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, when he delivered a statement on behalf of the GCC countries at the UN 2023 Water Conference, held at UN Headquarters from March 22-24.

In his statement, the Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations pointed that despite adverse environmental and climatic conditions suffered by the Gulf region which is classified among the most arid and water-stressed regions of the world, the region has made remarkable achievements in providing water in a sustainable manner to meet the needs of current and future generations, and keep pace with steady population growth rapid urbanisation and development.

Such an achievement represents a source of pride and an evidence of attention accorded by the governments of the GCC countries for providing the basics of a dignified and safe life for their citizens.

He explained that 40 per cent of the production of potable water and water for agricultural and industrial purposes through desalination plants is in the Gulf region, confirming that the GCC countries have been able to achieve 100 per cent of the sustainable development and that all the population should have access to drinking water and sanitation services.

TURN TO P2

Maintenance of Al Batinah Road Complete

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced that accomplishment rate at the restoration of Al Batinah highway and service road affected by 'Shaheen' from Al Tharmad roundabout to Hafeet roundabout, a length of 60 km, has reached 92.5 per cent. At the same time, the ministry continues implementing projects for periodic maintenance of roads and repair of roads affected by the cyclone at a cost of RO 250 million.

DETAILS ON P2



FEAST OF SOLIDARITY



People seated for iftar in Al Alia village in Wadi Bani Kharus in the Wilayat of Al Awabi.

Repair of Al Batinah road portions hit by cyclone Shaheen on track



SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said it has restored 60 km or 92.5 per cent of Al Batinah highway stretch between Al Tharmad roundabout and Hafeet roundabout that was damaged by cyclone Shaheen.

The MoTCIT continues to implement projects for periodic maintenance of roads and repair of roads affected by the cyclone at a cost of RO 250 million. This includes an amount of RO 27 million for covering the cost of maintenance contracts for dirt and mountain roads for a five-year period, and RO 57 million for the cost of asphalt road maintenance contracts for a five-year period.

The repair works at Wadi Hai road, Wadi Al Jahawir road, Wadi Al Sarimi road, Al Khad-Al Aqeer road, Wadi Al Qanoot road and Wadi Bani Omar road have



reached an advanced phase. The projects involve construction of viaducts at several wadi crossings, repaving of asphalt layers and installation of traffic safety requirements. Among the roads opened to traffic following the completion of restoration work is the Wadi Al Qanoot road in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah in North Al Batinah Governorate which starts from Wadi Al Sarimi and ends at the town of Al Qanoot with a total length of 7.5 km, Wadi Al Hawasneh road in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah in North Al Batinah

Governorate both of which were affected by cyclone Shaheen. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that the repair and restoration of Wadi Bani Omar in the Wilayat of Saham is almost complete with 99 per cent of the work accomplished thus far and many parts of it have already been opened to traffic. The project involves repair of damaged protections along the road and the implementation of concrete valley crossings at 11 locations as well as construction of viaducts at three locations in Wadi Al Jahawir area.

Decentralisation of health services essential to make them accessible

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, has said that some new hospital projects will come up in the near future.

Speaking during the Ramadhan Nights programme, he said that the new Sultan Qaboos Hospital project in Salalah is 40 per cent complete while work on the Suwaiq Hospital is nearly 60 per cent complete.

The minister added, “We are in the stage of improving trust between health institutions and citizens by facilitating easy access and by raising the level of quality and efficiency.”

The minister said the decentralisation of the health sector is important to provide services to citizens in various governorates and avoid the need to travel to the capital for treatment.”

“Every work entrusted to employees of the health sector is carried out with responsibility and ensures that basic principles are not violated.”

The new Sultan Qaboos Hospital in the Dhofar Governorate, when completed, will have seven floors and 700 beds.

The new hospital will be equipped with the latest devices



The new Sultan Qaboos Hospital project in Salalah is 40 per cent complete while work on the Suwaiq Hospital is nearly 60 per cent complete

as well as its ability to recover from the pandemic.

Ted Chaiban, UN Global Lead Coordinator for Covid Vaccine Country Readiness and Delivery, conveyed the eagerness of the international community to cooperate with Oman in its efforts to curb the pandemic and limit its effects.

Chaiban said that the international community has learned a lot from the pandemic, and has become more prepared to deal with it and any other in the future.

He also stressed the importance of cooperation between countries, and the need to provide assistance to the least developed and most affected countries, especially those currently undergoing challenges, including Yemen.

and construction will be completed by the end of 2024.

The main building of the hospital will include units for accident and emergency, medical imaging, rehabilitation, chemotherapy, dialysis, burns, day clinics, and pediatric and intensive care.

Recently, a top official of the United Nations praised the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in controlling the spread of Covid-19

Upper trough to bring in rain this week

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Gear up for yet another week of clouds and rains, as the latest weather updates and analysis of the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Center indicated that an upper air trough is likely to affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Monday until Wednesday.

The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said the peak would be on Tuesday, “Although the impact of the trough will begin on Monday, the peak would be on Tuesday afternoon until Wednesday morning as per the current situation. The direction it’s heading from is the area between Saudi Arabia and Iran.”

Clouds advection, he said, in some areas could be with isolated rain but could be occasional thundershowers in other regions. The initial impact is expected over



the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and Dhofar and is expected to extend till Tuesday and then it will expand to cover the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta along with occasionally thunderstorms associated with downdraft wind

and hail. During this period wadis are expected to flow. The wind speed is expected to be moderate to rough along most of the coasts with maximum height ranging between two to three metres. The Civil Aviation Authority has requested the public to follow official weather bulletins and stay away from flowing wadis.

Venus hides behind the moon in rare celestial event

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

A unique phenomenon in the skies coincided with pleasant and breezy weather as most residents and citizens preferred to throng in open areas, beaches and parks for a pleasant evening on Friday.

On Friday, the planet Venus seemed to be hiding behind the moon, evident up in the skies anywhere in the world, including the Sultanate of Oman.

Venus is one of the brightest planets in the Solar System and is also the closest to Planet Earth. As Venus and moon aligned in the same line, the former looked slowly disappearing behind the dark edges of the moon, its brightness was dimmed by 250 times, according to reports. On March 28, five planets Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Uranus and Mars will align together, creating a rare spectacle in the sky. All these planets are set to

align between March 25 and March 30 as Earth will enter the equinox but the sighting of this rare conjunction in the sky will be clear on March 28 as five crossways come in one line. On Thursday, Nasa’s official account said, “Look westward to find the moon as a beautiful, slim crescent this evening after sunset, hanging just below blazing-bright Venus. Tomorrow evening, look west again to spot the moon once more, this time shining from above Venus.”





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Private sector told to invest in water sector

FROM P1
The Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations spoke about several initiatives embraced by the GCC countries to strengthen environmental systems, meet the growing demand for water, achieve efficient water supply and recycling, reduce leakage rates in water networks, and increase societal awareness of the importance of water including about the water strategy of GCC countries. These include the GCC Water Interconnection Network Feasibility Study Project, the Saudi Green Initiative and the Green Middle East, the Middle East Water Desalination Centre, King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology initiative to use solar energy for seawater desalination, the Masdar initiative for renewable energy for water desalination, and Qatar's Kahramaa's initiatives for sustainable development, and the Water Valorization and Inspired initiatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The Permanent Representative called on governments and the private sector to invest in the water sector in a manner that enhances the national capabilities of countries, especially in the field of technical and vocational training, operation and maintenance, rehabilitation of stations, manufacturing of spare parts, and qualification of national labour. The goals, he said, are to conserve groundwater and strategic reserves, reuse of treated wastewater and to fully integrate treated water into comprehensive water resources management plans.

— ONA

ITALIAN SHIP DROPS ANCHOR AT SALALAH



The Port of Salalah received the Italian cruise ship 'Costa Toscana', with 3,179 passengers, including 1,653 tourists, as part of its visit to a number of ports around the world. The passengers of the Italian cruise ship coming from Port Sultan Qaboos in the Governorate of Muscat included visiting archaeological, tourist and historical monuments of the Governorate of Dhofar is famous for, in addition to visiting the beaches and traditional markets in Salalah.

'iTech Marathon' concludes at UTAS

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The seventh national level IT competition titled 'iTech Marathon' involving 148 students concluded recently at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) Ibri.

The competition is part of the academic goals of the colleges in the Sultanate of Oman. The completion had challenge based learning that contributed to innovation, creativity, and employability.

"The annual event "iTech Marathon" consists of series of challenges and sense of competitions among students from higher educational institutes on the first day to encourage the students to outperform in the field of scientific research and innovation challenge, project demonstration, programming competition, mobile development competition, networking competition, and mathematics competition, followed by technical exhibitions under the name "iTech Techno" on the second day," said a faculty member involved in the competition.

It aimed to enrich industrial



and business cooperation and to enhance the knowledge of the students and graduates about the applications of the technologies in the market and industries, "iTech Techno" event gives a place for the companies and institutes that are related to information technology and innovation to exhibit their services and products to the students and alumni. Several companies demonstrated their innovative IT products on Robotics, 3D Printing, IoT, Digital Designing, Security and Programming on the second day of the event.

Hind bint Salim bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, said the event was

aimed at "meeting the goals of the Oman Vision 2040, to achieve academic excellence, to identify and extract problem solving skills among students, to provide a platform and share student's ideas and innovations, and to provide a platform for students to view the latest innovative products displayed by companies."

Dr Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Ali al Manthari, Dean of UTAS-Ibri and Dr Nasser bin Salim bin Mohammed al Kalbani, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs attended the opening ceremony. They lauded the student participants who joined from 10 different universities in the country.

Licenses granted to operate piers to boost marine tourism, transport



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) have said licenses have been issued to manage and operate tourist piers at marinas in different parts of the governorate, which will boost tourism and maritime transport.

Licenses have been issued for the tourist pier by the Al Marsa Travel and Tourism Company (250 metres), Muscat Bay (105 metres), Jabal Sifah (864 metres), and Hawana Salalah (482 metres).

Two licenses have also been issued to manage and operate the commercial boats of Oman Natural Gas Company in Sur (150 metres) and Al Shorouk Marine Handling and Navigation Company (305 metres).

Once the basic terms and requirements for obtaining a

licence are met, a decision on the application is made within 30 days.

Maktoum bin Rashid bin Said al Shehh, Director at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that initial approvals were granted to a number of local and foreign commercial companies for tourism purposes, and they are now in the process of completing the requirements of the regulation to issue licenses for managing and operating marine berths. He said licenses were granted to large companies.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shamaki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, recently told the Observer that the tender for water taxis will be floated soon with sites identified in Muscat, Musannah, and North Al Batinah.

Jusoor launches cycling training in North Al Batinah



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Jusoor Foundation launched the Cycling Training Programme for the age group of 13-16 in collaboration with the Oman Cycling Association in Suhar Sports Complex.

Jaber bin Sulaiman al Busaidy,

Jusoor Executive Manager, said, "The cycling programme aims to establish a professional sport dedicated to Omani youth, besides supporting the national teams and high-performance sports. Besides, it aims to provide fitness and mental health growth activities for youngsters since the skill pool of this training programme includes

fitness, mental, physical and technical skills reflected through activities and programmes that meet the requirements of 25 participants in the age group of 13 to 16 years."

In his comments, Shaikh Saif bin Sabba al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, said, "The programme will

continue for six months divided into different phases designed according to plan that supports the growth of the cycling participants, as well as preparing them to compete as well as achieve high results in cycling competitions."

"The programme consists of multiple stages, starting with the



selection of the participants within the age group mentioned, then undergoing the assessment which consists of four parts: physical and body measurement, fitness tests, technical and cycling tests and finally groups distribution based on the levels of assessment. Therefore, each level is assigned into a special training programme

based on their capabilities and growth rate. The training programme is divided into 2 phases: fitness training and cycling training, where the last includes mountain bike training, bicycle training, technical cycling training and sessions about the built and part of the bicycles, as well as mechanical sessions."

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EATING HEAVY MEALS AND FRIED ITEMS CAN CAUSE HEALTH COMPLICATIONS



DRINK LOTS OF WATER IN THE EVENINGS TO REMAIN HYDRATED



JURY IS STILL OUT ON EXERCISE WHILE FASTING BUT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE TRIED IT, IT WORKS WONDERS



AVOID SPICY AND NON-VEGETARIAN FOOD AT SUHOOR. IT MAKES ONE THIRSTIER AND FEELS FATIGUED



AVOID COLD WATER AND SOFT DRINKS. HAVE NATURAL JUICES INSTEAD



TIME TO SEE BEAUTY IN EVERYTHING

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
[@shadadm](#)

Muslims in Ramadhan always turn inwards, much more so than usual during the month. It is the time to seek beauty in every form and part of an attempt for a spiritual renewal. It is an ennobling process, but the first days are always hard.

For now, our bodies are already used to fasting and more so with withdrawal symptoms for morning coffee at work. The headache that most people usually get because of lack of water has also started to subside. One thing most people are sure of is that Ramadhan is here to teach us how to see beauty in everything. Whatever we do in Ramadhan, we should try as much as we can

to see beauty in them – whether positive or negative.

Despite the efforts by many to keep healthy, we should always remember that walking and exercises are essential. On this note, there has been a debate over the merits and demerits of exercise while fasting but following the advice of those who have tried it, it works wonders.

A point to remember is that since this Ramadhan falls in the summer months, we will have to fast longer hours. Therefore, we have to take note of that and drink lots of water in the evenings to remain hydrated.

During Ramadhan, we should be aware of our actions and choices. Most times, outside of Ramadhan, we do not give too much thought on what we eat. However, the fasting month helps us live more deliberately with Allah on our minds, which Muslims are encouraged to do not just during the month,

but every day of our lives.

For Muslims, this world is the ultimate test to find out if one is able to withstand the lure of fame and wealth to be a believer. Muslims are expected to go about their regular lives even if they are fasting.

And this means going to work and exercising and keeping the same level of activity as the non-fasting months.

Now, getting back to the real point – eating healthy during Ramadhan – health experts emphasise that eating heavy meals and fried items can cause health complications. We need to stop overeating and watch what we eat.

According to health experts, we should avoid spicy and non-vegetarian food at suhoor. They say such foods make one thirstier and feel fatigued, so need to be avoided.

There is also need to avoid cold water. Cold water further increases thirst; it does not quench thirst. Laban is a more favourable drink. In addition, dates and bananas provide extra calories, so one should add these to the main course.

On what to avoid, all health experts advise against soft drinks. Have natural juices instead.

Additionally, oral hygiene is particularly important during Ramadhan as fasting can cause oral bacteria to build up. Fasting and, therefore, abstaining from liquids can lead to the development of oral bacteria – the primary culprit of bad breath, cavities and gum disease.

We need to adapt our oral hygiene routine during Ramadhan, being sure to brush our teeth after iftar as well as suhoor to prevent bacteria from forming.



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5



A helicopter loads water near the village of Los Peiros to fight a wildfire that began on March 23 near Villanueva de Viver, some 90 kilometres north of Valencia. — **AFP**

Major wildfire in Spain rages out of control

MADRID: Some 700 firefighters were battling Spain's first major forest fire of the year on Saturday, which was raging out of control 48 hours after it began, forcing 1,500 people to flee.

In an update on Twitter, the regional emergency services said the fire in Villanueva de Viver, some 90 kilometres north of Valencia, was a "highly-complex blaze taking place in weather conditions similar to those of the summer".

"700 people have been mobilised for the operation (to fight the fire). It has affected 3,900 hectares and has a 35-kilometre perimeter," they said, indicating the number of people forced out of their homes on Friday, some 1,500, had not changed.

They said the huge blaze remained "very voracious" with the work to put it out "very

complicated".

Firefighters tweeted that they had deployed some 20 aerial units to help tackle the fire.

"Clearly the fire has not stabilised because it is still burning with great ferocity given that the weather conditions are almost like summer," Ximo Puig, leader of the Valencia region, told Spain's RTVE public television.

The fire began just after midday on Thursday.

Firefighters said the blaze was more typical of summer than of late March.

With the vegetation dried out by a lack of moisture in the atmosphere in recent months and large amounts of combustible biomass in the forests, conditions were "perfect" for such a blaze, Manolo Nicolas of the Castellon firefighters had told public radio on Friday. — **AFP**

Zelensky sees delay in Ukrainian offensive due to lack of equipment

KIEV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said an expected counter offensive against Russian forces cannot happen now because his country lacks weapons, equipment and ammunition.

Zelensky's assessment, made in a report published on Saturday in the Japanese daily Yomiuri Shimbun, comes as reports from the front in the eastern city of Bakhmut show that Russian forces have stalled and Ukrainian defenders have consolidated their positions.

"We cannot start yet," Zelensky said. Without tanks and artillery, "no brave soldiers" can be sent to the front, Zelensky told the paper in an interview conducted on Thursday, on a train on his way back to Kiev from visiting the front.

The British Defence Ministry, in its daily assessment of the war in Ukraine, said Russia's attempt to take Bakhmut has stalled because of "extreme attrition" of Russian forces, likely made worse by infighting between Russia's regular army and the mercenary Wagner Group, both of whom supply forces to the area.

It suggested that Russia has now turned its forces towards the town of Avdiivka further south and to the frontline section near Kremina and Svatove north of Bakhmut. This suggests that the Russians are returning to a more



People take part in a military exercise for civilians conducted by members of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps of the Right Sector near Lviv, Ukraine. — **Reuters**

Bakhmut has been virtually emptied of civilians over months of fierce fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces

defensive position after their offensive effort, begun in January, has failed.

This dovetails with the assessment from Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian army.

"Thanks to the titanic efforts

of the defensive forces, the situation is managing to stabilise," Zaluzhnyi announced on his Facebook account following a phone call with his British counterpart Tony Radakin on Friday night.

However, the section around

Bakhmut is still one of the most difficult areas of the front. The British Defence Ministry noted that Ukraine has also suffered heavy casualties from fighting there.

Meanwhile, Kyiv said its forces were "managing to stabilise" the situation around Bakhmut, a now-destroyed city in eastern Ukraine that has seen the longest battle of the Russian war.

— **dpa/AFP**

■ PROTEST OVER ACCESS TO WATER

French gendarmes stand next to gendarmes' cars burning on the sideline of a demonstration called by the collective 'Bassines non merci', the environmental movement 'Les Soulèvements de la Terre' and the French trade union 'Confederation paysanne' to protest against the construction of a new water reserve for agricultural irrigation, in Sainte-Soline, central-western France. More than 3,000 police officers and gendarmes have been mobilised and 1,500 activists are expected to take part in the demonstration, around Sainte-Soline. The new protest against the 'bassines', a symbol of tensions over access to water, is taking place under tight surveillance in the Deux-Sevres department. — **AFP**



14 perish in Somalia flash floods

MOGADISHU: At least 14 people have been killed in southern Somalia after torrential rains triggered flash floods that have caused havoc in several towns and villages.

Bridges, roads and houses have been damaged or destroyed and many people have been forced to flee their homes in search of safer ground.

In the town of Baardhere in Jubaland state, 14 people were killed including three members of the same family, district commissioner Mohamed Weli Yusuf told reporters.

"Most of the casualties were

caused after the victims were trapped across a bridge in the town on Thursday evening which was swept up in the floods," he said.

"It was very difficult to rescue these people because of the time the incident happened and the lack of resources in the town."

The rains signal the early start of the April-June rainy season, and have brought some relief to areas of the country suffering from the worst drought in four decades.

But the UN's humanitarian response agency OCHA warned in a statement on Saturday of the risk of an increase

in diseases such as cholera as living conditions likely deteriorate.

Baardhere resident Ahmed Omar said there had been heavy rains in the region over the past three days.

"Floods devastated Baardhere town, my house was destroyed and most of my belongings swept away by the flood. Thanks to God my family survived but five people died in my neighbourhood including children and women," he said.

"Now the whole town is under water and most families fled to higher ground," he added. — **AFP**

Brazil's Lula postpones China trip

BRASILIA: Brazil's leftist leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who was due to head to China for key talks with President Xi Jinping, has indefinitely postponed his trip to recover from pneumonia, the government said on Saturday.

Lula, who succeeded the far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro at the start of the year, had hoped to use the trip to reclaim his country's role in global diplomacy, with discussions in Beijing expected to focus on reinforcing trade and the war in Ukraine.

No new date was given for the

77-year-old Lula's trip, which had already been put back by a day due to what his office called a case of "mild pneumonia."

The press secretary released a medical note stating that after a clinical evaluation, Lula was diagnosed with bacterial and viral bronchopneumonia caused by influenza A, and treatment has been initiated.

"Despite clinical improvement, the medical service of the Presidency of the Republic recommends postponing the trip to China until the viral transmission cycle ends," the note said.

The Brazilian government has informed the Chinese authorities of the postponement and its intention to reschedule the visit.

The trip, which included a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday, was viewed as a significant effort by the new leftist president who took office in January to enhance relations with Brazil's largest trading partner. — **Reuters**



Tender Number		T-11-2023		Tender Announcement	
"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:					
Tender Name		Framework Agreement For Supply of Spare Parts of MAN Coaches and Buses.			
Project Summary		The scope of work is to supply a comprehensive list of spare parts for the mentioned fleets for period of three (3) years. The Supplier must ensure available stock according to the Company operational requirement and need.			
Tender Fee		Free		Grade & Specialty	Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field
Start date for tender document distribution		Last date for tender document distribution		Last date for submission	
Sunday, 26th March, 2023		Tuesday, 4th April, 2023		Thursday, 4th May, 2023	
The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.					
Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email					
The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.					
Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter Oman National Transport Company SAOC (MWASALAT) at Ghalia, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.					
"Mwasalat"		For more information please send to:			
Head Quarter, Ghalia Tel: +968 1551		tenders@mwasalat.om			
P.O.Box: 911 / Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman					



A supporter of Donald Trump holds an oversized hat while at an overnight tailgate party ahead of the Trump's first campaign rally in Waco, Texas, on Friday. — Reuters

Trump holds first election rally overshadowed by legal threats

TEXAS: Donald Trump will hold an election rally in Texas on Saturday at a site that critics say will play to his far-right supporters as he seeks to boost a presidential campaign dogged by the threat of criminal indictments.

In what the former president has billed as his first major rally of the 2024 presidential race, Trump has called on supporters to assemble at an airport in Waco, Texas, and cheer on his bid for the Republican Party nomination.

Waco is marking the 30th anniversary of a raid by federal agents on the Branch Davidians religious sect there that resulted in 86 deaths, including four law-enforcement officers. Some right-wing extremists view the raid as a seminal moment of government overreach.

In an email, a Trump campaign spokesperson said Waco was chosen because it is situated between several major population centres and has the infrastructure to host a large event. Trump faces growing legal peril from a series of ongoing criminal investigations, including

one in Manhattan related to an alleged hush-money payoff to Stormy Daniels during his 2016 White House campaign.

Trump has sought to paint the Manhattan case as politically motivated, raised money off it and used it to rally supporters to his side. On Friday, he issued an apocalyptic warning, saying the country faced potential “death and destruction” if he was charged with a crime.

“Trump is walking on a high wire without a net, telegraphing that he has nothing to lose and is willing to risk dangerous outcomes to rally support,” said Ron Bonjean, a Republican strategist in Washington.

Few supporters have heeded his calls to take to the streets to protest his possible indictment in the Manhattan case. Those calls will likely invite closer than normal scrutiny of how many people attend Saturday’s rally, where Trump, who is due to start speaking at 5 pm CDT (2200 GMT), is expected to rail against the potential prosecutions.

— Reuters

At least 23 dead as tornado, storms rip through Mississippi

WASHINGTON: At least 23 people died as violent storms and at least one tornado ripped through the southern US state of Mississippi, tearing off roofs and flattening neighbourhoods, officials and residents said on Saturday.

The state’s emergency management agency said at least four people were missing and dozens were injured, while tens of thousands of people in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee were without power.

In the hard-hit town of Rolling Fork, all that was left of an entire row of houses and buildings was scattered debris. Cars were overturned and smashed, fences were ripped up and trees uprooted, according to local television footage.

“At least 23 Mississippians were killed by last night’s violent tornados. We know that many more are injured. Search and rescue teams are still active,” Governor Tate Reeves said on Twitter.

“The loss will be felt in these towns forever. Please pray for God’s hand to be over all who lost family and friends.”



A general view shows a damaged building, following a tornado in Silver City, Mississippi, US, on Saturday. — Reuters

Town resident Shanta Howard said residents had to help remove the dead from the wreckage of their homes.

“That is very disturbing, actually seeing people losing their lives over bad weather like this,” she told ABC affiliate WAPT.

Woodrow Johnson, a local official in Humphreys County, told CNN his wife woke him up and they heard what sounded like a train. He said his home was destroyed.

“It was a very scary thing,” Johnson said, adding his neighbour’s house, a trailer, was

“completely gone.”

The National Weather Service warned residents that as clean-up operations continue, “dangers remain even after the storms move on.”

A local tornado watch expired in the early hours of Saturday, meteorologists said. More thunderstorms were expected, but they were not forecast to be severe.

Malary White, a spokeswoman for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, said damage assessments would not be possible until officials could do a complete survey in the daylight.

“Our main priority right now, especially for the local first responders, it’s life safety and accounting for the people and making sure they are safe,” she told CBS News affiliate WJTV.

In Rolling Fork, Walker said several people were rescued from the wreckage of their homes and taken to hospital for treatment.

“A lot of families are hurting. This community is in a situation that we never expected,” he told CNN.

“Houses that are torn up can be replaced but we can’t replace a life.”

— AFP

A scorched southwestern France braces for fires to come

HOSTENS, France: As France frets about an extended drought and prospects for more wildfires in another long summer, one blaze that erupted eight months ago in the southwest of the country still smoulders away underground.

Columns of white, acrid smoke rise from a forest floor outside the town of Hostens in the Gironde region, south of Bordeaux. The smell of burning tyres is caused by the brown coal in the area’s peaty soil which is fuelling the fire underground. “It’s been burning since mid-July,” said Guillaume

Carnir, who works for France’s National Forest Agency (ONF). “To this date, we don’t have a clear answer as to how to stop it.”

The blaze at Hostens is a remnant of huge wildfires that ravaged southern Europe last summer when the worst drought on record was compounded by successive heatwaves which scientists say are consistent with climate change. The Gironde region was particularly badly hit with 20,000 hectares of forest destroyed, and the risk of renewed fires is a great concern.

“All the greenery will come



A man cycles in front of trees, which burned during last summer’s wildfires that sorely impacted the forests of the Gironde region. — Reuters

back in the spring, which will be flammable, so we have to make sure new fires can’t start from these hot spots,” Carnir said.

Pascale Got, a local official in charge of environmental protection, said that the fire at Hostens was under constant surveillance from drones measuring heat levels.

When it comes to wildfires risk, she said that prevention was crucial, as well as swift intervention when a fire first starts, which is easier to do from above. “It is obvious that we need an urgent answer from the

government on air assets,” said Got.

The interior ministry said measures for fighting forest fires across France will be presented in the coming weeks.

An unusually dry winter across parts of the south of the European continent has reduced moisture in the soil and raised fears of a repeat of 2022, when 785,000 hectares were destroyed in Europe - more than double the annual average for the past 16 years, according to European Commission (EC) statistics.

— Reuters

MOSCOW

Putin, Erdogan discuss grain deal on phone

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call with his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan, the Kremlin said. Erdogan thanked Putin for his “positive attitude” in extending the Black Sea grain deal and expressed his “understanding of the Russian side’s principled position to achieve the full implementation of the second part of the agreement, removing barriers for Russia’s agricultural products,” the Kremlin said in a statement. Russia laid out



conditions on Monday for agreeing to any further extension of the Black Sea grain deal, and Putin said that Moscow could send free grain to African countries if those conditions were not met. — Reuters

TUNIS

34 missing as boat travelling from Tunisia sinks

At least 34 people went missing after a boat carrying migrants trying to reach Europe sank off Tunisia’s coast, a judicial official has said. Tunisian coastguards rescued four other people after the boat had sunk, Fawzi El Masmoudi, a court official in the city of Sfax, said.

“The ill-fated boat was the fifth to sink off the region’s coast in two days,” he said on Saturday. Four other boats went down off Sfax on Wednesday and Thursday, he added. Coastguards



recovered bodies of seven Sub-Saharan migrants drowned in those incidents while the search was ongoing for at least 30 other missing people, he added. Eighty-four others survived.

— dpa

BEIRUT

Death toll in US strikes in Syria rises to 19

The death toll in US air strikes on installations in eastern Syria has risen to 19 fighters, a Syrian war monitor said on Saturday, in one of the deadliest exchanges in years.

The US carried out strikes in eastern Syria in response to a drone attack on Thursday that left one American contractor dead, and another one wounded along with five US troops.

The retaliatory strikes by the US on what it said were facilities



in Syria used by groups affiliated to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps left a total of 19 dead, according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. — Reuters

A refuge for Russians and Ukrainians, Bali rethinks its open-door policy

SUI-LEE WEE AND
MUKTITA SUHARTONO

For most of last year, thousands of Russians and Ukrainians flocked to the Indonesian island of Bali to escape the war. There they found refuge in a tropical paradise where locals rolled out the welcome mat for Ukrainians fleeing the shelling and Russians dodging the draft.

Then, a Russian influencer scaled a 700-year-old sacred tree.

After that, a Russian street artist painted an anti-war mural on a private house, and a Russian teenager was caught vandalising a school.

A string of recent motorbike collisions involving Russians and Ukrainians has raised questions about traffic safety on the island.

Now the once-welcoming Balinese people have had enough. Confronted with a barrage of complaints, the governor of Bali, Wayan Koster, announced earlier this month that he asked the Indonesian government to revoke Russia's and Ukraine's access to the country's visa-on-arrival programme.

He said many of those who have flocked to Bali to avoid the war have not only violated a number of local laws but also have been seeking jobs while on short-term tourist visas. (Obtaining a visa on arrival is usually instantaneous, requiring a \$33 fee and no paperwork.)

The Balinese have long endured badly behaved tourists in mostly isolated incidents. Now they complain regularly of foreigners riding motorbikes and desecrating objects that are considered sacred on the predominantly Hindu island.

"It's like they live in a bubble, and they don't care about what's outside the bubble," said I Wayan Pardika, 33, a Balinese tour guide for a hotel.

"For them, it is OK to be half dressed, and driving around without a helmet. But they don't see that it's not so for the locals around them."

The Balinese were initially sympathetic to the plight of the new émigrés. Many extended credit for car and home rentals to Russians, who found themselves cut off from the international payments system because of sanctions. After being sealed off for two years during the coronavirus pandemic, they were eager for income.

But later, they discovered that many Russians had taken jobs on the island — as surfing instructors and tour guides. Some started their own car and home rental businesses, violating the laws governing tourist visas and taking away from local income.

"We opened our doors, we opened our



Niluh Djelan tik, a luxury shoe brand founder, talks with young Muscovite tourist Yuri Chilikin, right, at her home in Mengzi on the island of Bali.

arms, and we welcomed them with a big smile," said Niluh Djelantik, the founder of a luxury shoe brand in Bali. "But our kindness has been taken for granted."

Many Balinese say part of the issue is that authorities are struggling to cope with the sudden influx of Russians, who now make up the second-biggest group of tourists on the island after Australians. Last year, 58,000 Russians and 7,000 Ukrainians visited Bali. This January alone, 22,500 Russians arrived in the province.

Sandiaga Uno, the minister for tourism, indicated that the government was not going to revoke the visa programme as requested by the Bali governor. In a weekly address earlier this month, he said that the number of people causing trouble was "not too significant." Last November, Sandiaga had told The New York Times that the government would help renew the tourist visas of those fleeing the war.

But authorities in Bali have zeroed in on the rising traffic violations involving Russians and Ukrainians that have sometimes turned deadly. In response, Wayan, the governor, announced last week a ban on all foreigners riding motorbikes, a decision that Sandiaga said should be reversed.

Bali's tourism agency said it would put up signs in English, Russian and Ukrainian next week, urging tourists to follow "common-sense rules." "Do not post offensive, vulgar pictures to social media," read one poster. "Confine



Niluh Djelantik, founder of a luxury shoe brand.

skimpy beachwear to appropriate venues." Offenders, it warned, would face "large fines and deportations."

Ukraine's ambassador to Indonesia, Vasyi Hamianin, told reporters last week that he was offended that Wayan had lumped Russians and Ukrainians together. Hamianin called on the governor to show him the crime statistics involving Ukrainians and cited Indonesian government data that showed that Russians were responsible for 56 traffic violations in Bali in the past week, dwarfing the five Ukrainian cases.

Hamianin said the 5,000 Ukrainians currently living in Bali contribute to the local economy, pay their taxes and are "nice and obedient citizens." He said they

were there because of the war but that "the absolute majority of them say they want to get back home."

"I think it's just human to allow the people who run from the war to stay some time in your country," Hamianin said.

Elena Pozdniakova, 33, an engineer from Moscow who arrived in Bali last September with her husband and their 3-year-old daughter, said the multiple accounts of Russian tourists behaving badly made her "feel ashamed."

"I just want to say that not every Russian is like this," she said.

Pozdniakova's husband, Sergei Pozdniakov, said he understood the frustration because he has also witnessed some of his countrymen behaving rudely. Despite the anger on social media, he and his wife say they remain touched by the hospitality of the Balinese people. "We've never met a Balinese person who has said, 'Because you are Russian, you are bad,'" said Pozdniakov.

In an interview, Silmy Karim, director general of immigration for the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, said he was still reviewing Wayan's proposal to revoke the visa-on-arrival programme for Russia and Ukraine. He said his primary focus is weeding out foreigners who violate local law and that he is studying the examples of other countries with large numbers of Russian tourists, including Thailand, where there are more than 350,000 Russians on the Thai island of Phuket alone.

Sorry you were laid off. 'CFBR'



KALLEY-HUANG

Abbreviations including "LOL" and "ILY" are popular expressions used across the web, and these days chances are you have probably seen "CFBR," which stands for "commenting for better reach" and appears regularly under posts on LinkedIn.

People comment "CFBR" on others' posts to signal solidarity, and sometimes

people ask commenters to write "CFBR" on their own posts to give them traction.

The expression is becoming ubiquitous on LinkedIn as tech workers who have lost their jobs in recent months are turning to the platform to look for new opportunities.

A short comment from a stranger could mean hundreds more people see a post about layoffs and come across a jobseeker's profile.

Last year, more than 161,000 people were laid off from

technology companies and startups, according to Layoffs.fyi, a site that tracks job cuts. So far this year, more than 148,000 people have been laid off.

Over the past six months, as the tech sector has had its worst contraction since the dot-com bust in the early 2000s, the number of people who have turned on the "open to work" feature on LinkedIn has increased 20 per cent, to 18 million, a spokesperson for the company said.

Stephan Meier, a professor at Columbia Business School, called commenting on a layoff post "a completely altruistic act," especially if the commenter doesn't know the poster. The activity around layoffs shows how much people rely on LinkedIn — and its algorithm — to network, he said.

Late last year, when Amazon began to lay off what would become 18,000 employees, Heather Harris, 34, posted on LinkedIn about the cuts, asking people to "like, share, comment for better reach" on her posts.

Since then, strangers have tagged Harris, who works in human resources, in posts about job openings and sent her encouraging messages.

"I don't know if the 'CFBR' did it, but I kind of feel like



The use of the acronym CFBR, which stands for commenting for better reach and appears regularly under posts on LinkedIn, has become even more common as tech job layoffs multiply and users of the business oriented social media site use it to boost the reach of one another's job searches. — The New York Times

it did," she said. "The more that people comment on your posts, the more it pops up on other people's feeds."

But Harris doesn't comment "CFBR" on other people's posts. She prefers the solidarity underpinning "CFBR" over the term itself. It can seem "spammy," she said, akin to "like for like" comments on Instagram.

"My personal preference is to comment something that is sincere and genuine and encouraging, rather than just 'CFBR,'" she said.

Ankit Singh, 30, writes "CFBR" only on posts about layoffs because he believes those posts need to be more visible on LinkedIn than other posts.

He has noticed people commenting "reach+" — with varying amounts of pluses — on layoff posts, and said those comments also represented professionals looking out for one another.

"As a job seeker, I know how people feel," said Singh, who studies electrical engineering at New York University. "Even if I just click like or comment 'CFBR,' it's something to help them. If someone comments on my post, and a recruiter sees it, it could help me."

What is wrong with you?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

When you visit a doctor, he or she will start by asking what brought you to the clinic?

You will then be examined and if needed asked to do some tests, and before you leave you would ask ‘what is wrong with me, dr?

The doctor will then tell you the name of your condition, be it migraine, high blood pressure or stress. This is known as the diagnosis; it’s simply giving a name to what you are experiencing and helping doctors communicate with each other if you need input from other doctors.

If the doctor you are seeing is a psychiatrist, however, the process may be a little different as the examination starts the moment you step in the room.

How you dress and walk can say a lot about your mood and how

you feel. What you say and the way you say it talk about your thought process.

A good psychiatrist listens to the patient’s experience instead of just asking questions in a tick box manner just to arrive at a diagnosis, which is important yet should not be the main focus of the encounter.

A group of psychologists suggested shifting the focus from ‘what is wrong with you?’ to ‘What has happened to you?’ so people can build a narrative around their suffering.

This is believed to give importance to personal experiences instead of just giving it a medical name as some people present with grief or experience poverty or loneliness so the distress one experiencing could be a normal reaction to a life event.

HAVING A GOOD DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP BASED ON MUTUAL RESPECT AND NON-JUDGMENTAL LISTENING IS THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

So, exploring such feelings would be an important step to help the person deal with them.

The word trauma is used to describe an event that puts you or someone close to you at risk of serious harm or death which eventually makes you feel frightened and unsafe.

An example of trauma is being subjected to violence, accidents or

natural disasters, or living in an unsafe environment. Such traumas can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, addiction to drugs and alcohol or even psychosis which is a severe form of mental illness where a person loses touch with reality.

The way we react to trauma would vary according to our previous experiences and the amount of support we get from people around us.

In mild cases one can deal with trauma without professional help by acknowledging the trauma and trying to keep a daily routine.

Regular exercise, healthy eating and adequate sleep help as well as seeking support from a person you trust.

Sometimes such interventions may not work and more

professional help is needed. In such cases a trained therapist will work with you to overcome the trauma and start your journey towards recovery.

Having a good doctor patient relationship based on mutual respect and non-judgmental listening is the key to a successful journey yet in reality the road can be bumpy sometimes especially when the patients start to see his therapist as some on from his previous life, say a strict father figure, or an overprotective mother.

Being aware of such dynamics is important for both doctors and patients to keep the relationship strictly professional.

Finally, while the road toward recovery can be very long, one eventually will get there, with sheer dedication and hard work.

Libya revives cannon salute to break Ramadhan fast

AZIZ EL MASSASSI

The blast of a cannon booms across Tripoli, but it doesn’t signal another round of fighting in the Libyan capital -- rather, the revival of a long-lost Ramadhan tradition.

Officers in berets rolled out a red carpet on the iconic Martyrs’ Square on Thursday for the 600-year-old weapon, setting of a resounding blast moments before the sunset call to prayer.

The cannon, announcing the end of the first daytime fast of the holy month, is a tradition observed across the Muslim world, but Libya had not seen it since the end of the 1970s as Muammar Gaddafi tried to wipe the slate of Libyan history clean.

But today authorities say they want to bring back the cannon announcing iftar, the meal breaking the fast.

“It’s a way to bring joy to the people of Tripoli,” said Akram Dribika, the city official organising the event. “It sends a message that life has returned” to Libya. The 2011 revolt that toppled and killed Gaddafi sparked a complex, often violent power struggle that has lasted more than a decade.

But many Libyans long to express the country’s rich and ancient heritage.

The origin of the iftar cannon remains unclear, but it was likely born in Ottoman-ruled Egypt in the 19th century, when authorities wanted to inform a population with few watches or clocks that the fast was nearly over.

In Martyrs’ Square, Nouri Sayeh said he just happened to be passing when he saw the cannon, a “beautiful surprise”.

“This is part of our Ramadhan heritage. It’s really important and it’s a tradition we should continue,” the 32-year-old said.

The cannon firing is part of a wider effort by authorities and civil society to revive the old medina of Tripoli, after decades of neglect during Gaddafi’s 40-year rule and the chaos that followed.

Artists, craftsmen and shopkeepers have brought new life to the cobbled alleys, where Roman, Greek and Ottoman subjects walked before them.

After breaking fast, Libyan families flock to the old city and Martyrs’ Square, buying candyfloss for their children. Young people sit on benches and drink coffee or take selfies in front of the Ramadhan decorations.

For the second year running, the municipality has adorned the main squares and alleys with bunting, traditional lanterns and shapes of the crescent moon, a symbol of Islam.

Rasha Ben Ghara, who grew up in the neighbourhood, said she loves seeing the crowds and lights. — AFP

A river choking on fish corpses, and a community full of anger



Yan Zhuang

The writer based in Melbourne is a reporter in NYT’s Australia bureau

“Welcome to dead fish central,” said Graeme McCrabb, a local resident, as he navigated his speedboat through fields of rotting fish carcasses bobbing in the acid-green water of the river that runs through his town.

Millions of fish have died in the Darling River near his town, Menindee, in outback New South Wales, Australia, their bodies packing the surface of the water from bank to bank for miles. After days under the sun, their bodies had started to “break up and turn into fish soup,” as McCrabb put it, transforming the river that locals rely on for drinking and showering into an ecological wasteland.

Authorities have said the mass death was caused by a lack of oxygen in the water, called hypoxia, a result of recent floods and a heat wave. But furious locals say the true root of the problem is the overuse of Australia’s biggest and most vital river system.

The disaster is the latest episode in a long-running battle over the Murray Darling Basin, a vast network of lakes and rivers stretching across four states in eastern Australia, which sustains much of the country’s agriculture and dozens of communities along its banks. In an arid country where social, economic and environmental interests clash whenever water runs scarce, the issue has pitted states against one another, and riverside communities against farms upstream.

In Menindee — population: 551 — residents have endured the stink of decaying fish for several days. At its worst, one resident, Barry Stone, described it as “eye-watering. It stung the inside of your nose and made you want to throw up.”

And they fear for their drinking water, which is treated river water.

More frustratingly, they said, is how they have been raising concerns about the declining health of the river for years, to little avail. Even after a previous mass fish death in 2019, little was done to address the problem, they said.

Out on the river Wednesday, McCrabb pointed out various species of dead fish: bony herring, gold perch, endangered silver perch, some invasive species. Five days into the die-



Some of the millions of dead fish choking parts of the lower Darling River in Menindee, Australia.

THE MASS DEATH WAS CAUSED BY A LACK OF OXYGEN IN THE WATER, CALLED HYPOXIA, A RESULT OF RECENT FLOODS AND A HEAT WAVE. BUT FURIOUS LOCALS SAY THE TRUE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM IS THE OVERUSE OF AUSTRALIA’S BIGGEST AND MOST VITAL RIVER SYSTEM

die-off had further depleted oxygen in the water, causing more fish to die. Carp, which endure low-oxygen environments better than other fish, swarmed around the carcasses, thousands of tiny mouths opening and closing incessantly at the water’s surface.

McCrabb, a grape grower, has become an unofficial face of the disaster. During both the 2019 fish death and the current one, he has regularly taken his boat onto the water, documenting the carnage to raise awareness — and “rub salt in the wounds of the government,” as he puts it.

He is not the only one in the area to become an accidental activist. In Menindee, as in other towns along the river, small-business owners, retirees and Indigenous people traditionally associated with the area have mobilized in the face of what they see as an existential threat to their communities and livelihoods.

Authorities have called the cleanup a “logistical nightmare,” acknowledging that it will be impossible to completely remove the carcasses because of the scale of the disaster.

“I need to be very upfront with the community in saying, ‘Will every fish be removed? I don’t think so,’” said Brett Greentree, the state police assistant commissioner overseeing the effort.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Ministry of Information
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Where the price is right too high!

Yet another banking giant, Silicon Valley Bank, has collapsed stateside, heralding yet another global financial collapse according to the doomsayers, and again, uncomfortable ‘bonus payment’ revelations have emerged, drawing criticism of the moral and ethical perspectives of the sector, a critique we must all, surely, support.

Banks have always polarised opinions, but in a back-of-the-hand, intimidated manner, we have always remained respectful of their power. Henry Ford said of the banking industry that it’s as well we don’t understand how it works, “or there would be a revolution by tomorrow morning,” while Karl Marx wrote of the aristocracy of finance, loan promoters, and speculators in public funds, “that their interests coincide with those of the state power,” so we are entitled to ask why this traditionally respectable industry has fallen so far from grace.

Ever since my youth, I have been in awe of their having the gravitas almost, of a place of worship. Where we would queue silently, without complaint, not daring to even look askance, to speak only when spoken to, and then in the hushed tones of a confessional. We were intimidated by the bank’s panopticon-like supervision, and scornful disapproval. Yet, for all that obeisance and respect, what has the banking industry done for us in these most recent fifty years?

The sector, banks, finance houses, pension funds, share markets, and insurance companies continue to play fast and loose with our money! They can call it trading if they want, yet what we learned from the notorious ‘Wolf of Wall Street’ excesses of the 1980’s, the Fanny Mae and Freddie Mac ‘sub-prime’ scandals of the early 2000’s, and the current crypto-currency crisis that started just a couple of weeks ago, on March 8, with the Silvergate Bank, and now the Silicon Valley Bank, is that global finance is no more than gambling, a sophisticated shell game. “Finance, like time,” wrote Honore de Balzac, “devours its own children,” yet



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BANKS HAVE ALWAYS POLARISED OPINIONS, BUT WE HAVE ALWAYS REMAINED RESPECTFUL OF THEIR POWER

we are still reticent to challenge them.

Foreign exchange trading, commonly known today as Forex, is not trading. The Forex market was recently described as, “the process of speculating on currency prices to potentially make a profit.” Speculating is gambling! Share trading is trading and investing they say, “where gambling is chance, betting on a roll of the dice, the spin of a wheel, or the random order of cards.” Yes, but share trading is like a card game, but knowing which card is coming up next, so worse... rigged gambling! Insurance companies don’t invest in you, they freely admit that they are gambling against you, using social and behavioural algorithms so... gambling, and cheating!

Cryptocurrencies are the worst of all, susceptible to extreme volatility, cyber-insecurity, and the irreversible nature of its transactions, with this ultra-gullible society having been convinced that money can be made from nothing. maybe not gambling, but surely deceptive, a mirage, an illusion!

Let’s reflect upon an industry that once offered us surety, certainty, confidence, and vaults where our money was considered safe, but of late has more recently taken on as much respect and reputation as a betting shop or gambling den, to the extent that if we didn’t have that historical reverence for banks of the elder generation, we could quite rightly consider that the gambling industry has demonstrated greater proprietary, more compassion, more sense of who they are, more humility, and considerably less arrogance and avarice, than the banking industry has today.

Much of the reputational credit the banks once had, is going down the gurgler. They are robbers as much as the Kelly Gang, the Beagle Boys, Bonnie and Clyde, and Jesse James, ever were... they just don’t wear masks.

And just one thought as to the truth of banking’s talk of social responsibility and ethics today. Of the seven billion people on our Earth, it is genuine food for thought that four million do not qualify for bank loans. Reflect on that you bankers!

EARTH HOUR IN SYDNEY



This combination of photographs shows the Sydney Harbour Bridge (bottom) with its lights switched off during the Earth Hour environmental campaign and after they were turned back on, in Sydney, on Saturday. – AFP

Ramadhan — A month of imbibing moral principles

The holy month of Ramadhan has started a few days ago. Muslims around the world observe the holy month of Ramadhan, the 9th in the Hijri calendar, at any one time every one Hijri year.

Ramadhan is eagerly awaited by Muslims, who look forward to receive it. Muslims stay enthusiastically and impatiently in a state of readiness and expectation, in advance of Ramadhan.

The rituals start with moon sighting, for which Muslims are at all times keen to make certain that the moon is sighted, acting in accordance with the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), when he said “Fast upon seeing the moon and never cease fasting without sighting the moon”.

During Ramadhan, Muslims refrain themselves not only from eating food, drinking water and other fluids, but they should restrain from their driving and overmastering desires.

Fasting is practiced annually, Muslims practice this ritual not because of fear or obligation, nor are there someone who supervises the conduct.

Muslims fast during Ramadhan with profound reverence and awe towards Allah.



Dr Musallam Al Ma'ani

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

WHILE RAMADHAN IS GLORIFIED AS OF SUPREME WORTH, CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 12 ARE ENCOURAGED TO START FASTING DURING RAMADHAN, SO THAT FASTING IS KEPT AND CULTIVATED WITH CARE



A worshipper prays at dawn during the holy month of Ramadhan, in front of the Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem’s Old City. – Reuters

While Muslims, on the one hand, observe Ramadhan, proceeding from their own choice and consent, it is a moral obligation one is bound to do.

Muslims act and observe Ramadhan of their own will without legal obligation.

On the other hand, such rituals are not stone hard. For those travelling for any reason or who are not in good health during the month of Ramadhan, they can break the fast during those days and fast in lieu at any time during the year before the commencement of Ramadhan the next year. Muslim clergymen, irrespective of their sect, exhort and urge strongly the followers to act in accordance with the Prophet’s teachings, especially in honouring and respecting this holy month. In fact Muslims of different sects unite in their adherence to Ramadhan beliefs and practices.

While Ramadhan is glorified as of supreme worth, children as young as 12 are encouraged to start fasting during Ramadhan, so that fasting is kept and cultivated with care.

One of the greatest lessons one can take from this month is that people are absolute equal with

one another. The length of time one has to abstain from eating and drinking applies to all, since fasting starts from the moment the light begins to grow as the sun rises until the apparent descent of the sun below the horizon.

Health is another advantage and benefit to those who fast in Ramadhan.

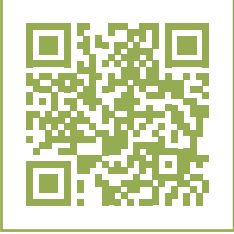
Fasting produces good and healthful results and effects as it promotes the well-being of people. It is beneficial to one’s physical, mental and emotional state. It is conducive to and associated with good health and reduces the risk of diseases.

Ramadhan is also a time when family members unite to break the fasting at the sunset. Families have good times during the days of Ramadhan and take pleasure and satisfaction when they sit together.

The end of Ramadhan, is crowned with Eid, which is bestowed as a mark of honour and recompense. The first day of the month of Shawwal, the 10th month in the Hijri calendar commemorates the beginning of Eid and is usually observed as a legal holiday by Muslim countries.

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RED WARRIORS GEAR UP FOR LEBANON FRIENDLY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The Oman national football team will take on Lebanon on Monday in a friendly during its domestic training camp currently underway in Muscat. The match will begin at 10 pm at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and it is the only warm-up game in the ongoing gathering.

The current local training camp is part of the team's preparations for the forthcoming assignments including the top participation at the AFC Asian Cup championship in Qatar which is scheduled to take place during January 12, 2024 until February 10, 2024.

The AFC Asian Cup's draw will take place on May 11, 2023. Oman placed in the second ranking of the draw. Asian favourites Japan followed by Iran, South Korea, Australia and Saudi Arabia are positioned in the first ranking.

The national players are undergoing the training sessions at the camp, which started on Monday, under the watchful eyes of Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic.

The duration of daily training programme of the Red Warriors varies from two hours to one and half hours. The training sessions timing during the holy month of Ramadhan starts from 10 pm and will conclude at midnight. The previous practice sessions focused on the physical, fitness, technical and tactical sides. Also, coach Ivankovic implemented different techniques in attacking

The national players are undergoing the training sessions at the camp, which started on Monday, under the watchful eyes of Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic

and defending plans to address some weakness areas. In the latest sessions, Branko finalised the starting line-up which will enter in Lebanon's encounter.

Despite that there is no close events soon but the existing warm-up camp and the preparatory game against Lebanon will assist the coaching staff to stand on the progression of the player's technical performance and to evaluate the new faces in the Red Warrior's squad. It is also an opportunity to utilise the Fifa days and gain more points for the monthly Fifa world ranking.

OMAN SQUAD:

Ahmed al Rawahi, Juma al Habsi, Salah al Yahyaei, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ahmed al Matroushi, Sami al Hasani, Ali al Hinai, Omar al Malki, Al Munther al Alawi, Fayez al Rushedi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Khalid al Buraiki, Harib Jameel, Essam al Subhi, Abdulrahman al Mushefri, Musaab al Mamari, Ahmed al Adawi, Sameh al Hamrashdi, Abdullah Fawaz, Fahmi Said, Saud al Maqbali, Zaher al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi and Arshad al Alawi.



World Beach Games, Asian Games to top OOC agenda

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Oman is expected to take part in four sports championships in the coming period which include the second World Beach Games at Bali in Indonesia, the 19th Asian Games at Hangzhou in China, the sixth Asian Indoor Games at Bangkok in Thailand and the first GCC Youth Sports, which will be held in the United Arab Emirates.

The General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will hold discussions on the participation of the national teams in the above events during its meeting on Tuesday at the Crowne Plaza Hotel - Al Irfan, headed by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC Chairman.

During the meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting of the General Assembly, which was held on February 28, 2022, will



be ratified, and the annual report will be reviewed, which includes a report on the administrative status and activities of the committee for the year ending 2022.

In 2022, many domestic events were organised, including the

Olympic Day in the Wilayat of Sur, the activity of Our Active Society in the Wilayat of Salalah, the event of the Omani Youth Day in the Wilayat of Suhar, the establishment of the Sports Track Programme over a period

of three days, in addition to the organisation of the first and second athletes' forum, and a symposium on sports medicine and combating doping.

The Oman Challenge Programme for Women Sports

Leaders was held in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

The report also includes the most important business and administrative decisions taken by the Board of Directors, the Executive Office and sub-

committees in their meetings held during the year.

The reports and technical results of the external participation of the OOC, which were represented in the third GCC Sports Games that were held in Kuwait in May 2022, and the fifth Sports Games of Islamic Solidarity held in Konya, Türkiye, in August 2022. OOC activities and events for the current year 2023 will also be reviewed, the most important of which are the international participations for which the official invitations was received by the OOC.

Internal events such as the Olympic Day, the approved Oman Olympic Academy programmes for this year and a group of sports, awareness and social events that were included in the activities of the Board of Directors' sub-committees, and other programmes will also be discussed.

New Zealand's Shipley tears through Sri Lanka



New Zealand's Henry Shipley (L) reacts while bowling during the first ODI against Sri Lanka at Eden Park in Auckland. — AFP

AUCKLAND: Henry Shipley tore through Sri Lanka's batting line-up as New Zealand romped to a 198-run win in the first one-day international in Auckland on Saturday.

Playing just his fourth match for the Black Caps, tall seamer Shipley took 5-31 as the tourists were skittled for 76 at Eden Park, their lowest ODI score against New Zealand and their fifth-lowest ever.

Sri Lanka's capitulation in 19.5 overs made it their second shortest innings.

The visitors never recovered after slumping to 31-5, with only three batters reaching double figures, including top scorer Angelo Mathews (18). It comes just two months after Sri Lanka's world-record 317-run loss to India in Thiruvananthapuram — when they were out for 73.

Captain Dasun Shanaka identified some glaring shortcomings that would need to be improved on for game two in Christchurch on Tuesday.

"Especially with the bat, we need to tighten up the techniques," Shanaka said.

"The way Shipley bowled, the movement he got and the bounce, I think all sorts of things happened tonight.

"Credit should be given to Shipley, it's outstanding bowling."

Sri Lanka's batters succumbed to a series of loose shots, allowing Shipley to claim New Zealand's first five-wicket bag in the format for more than four years.

The 26-year-old worried his opponents with steep bounce and pace throughout his seven overs, beating the bat routinely and prompting a series of shots to be lofted aimlessly to waiting fielders.

Daryl Mitchell took 2-12 and Matt Henry 2-20 in an innings that lasted less than two hours.

New Zealand captain Tom Latham said he was unsure if their score of 274 all out would be enough at the small Eden Park venue where international teams regularly surpass 300. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
New Zealand 274 all out in 49.3 overs (F Allen 51, R Ravindra 49, D Mitchell 47; C Karunaratne 4-43, K Rajitha 2-38, L Kumara 2-46) bt Sri Lanka 76 all out in 19.5 overs (H Shipley 5-31, D Mitchell 2-12, B Tickner 2-20)



SHARJAH: Veteran all-rounder Mohammad Nabi guided Afghanistan to a six-wicket win over a new-look Pakistan in the first Twenty20 international of a three-game series on Friday.

Nabi took 2-12 and was ably assisted by Mujeeb Ur Rahman (2-9) and pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi (2-13) to restrict Pakistan to 92-9 after they won the toss and batted at Sharjah Stadium.

Nabi then kept his cool with a cautious run-a-ball 38 not out and added 53 for the unbroken fifth wicket with Najibullah Zadran (17 not out) to help Afghanistan overhaul the target in 17.5 overs.

Nabi hit his first boundary off his 27th ball and then hit two more in the next over from Naseem Shah before sealing the win with a six off Ihsanullah.

This becomes Afghanistan's first win in four Twenty20 internationals against Pakistan.

Pace bowler Ihsanullah (2-17) dismissed Ibrahim Zadran (nine) with the first ball of his T20I career and then had Gulbadin Naib (nought) to leave Afghanistan tottering at 45-4 but Nabi and Najibullah made sure victory was achieved. "It was a tough score to chase in these conditions," said Nabi after being named man of the match.

Nabi stars as Afghanistan stun Pakistan



"As a bowling unit, we wanted to keep them under 100 and that's what we did.

"With the bat, I wanted to take responsibility and close the game. Most of the guys in our squad are playing big leagues, some have been here in the UAE for 15 days. So we were set. Thirty eight on this wicket can feel like a hundred."

Stand-in Pakistan skipper Shadab Khan confessed his new players were nervous.

"Tactics wise, we were fine," said Shadab. "But sometimes this can happen due to youngsters being nervous. They need to be given chances, they will get better."

With five key players — skipper Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Fakhar Zaman, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf rested for the series — Pakistan handed T20I debuts to Saim Ayub, Tayyab Tahir, Ihsanullah and Zaman Khan.

Pakistan were 41-5 in the eighth over on a low and slow Sharjah Stadium pitch that gave assistance to Afghanistan's three-pronged spin attack. Imad Wasim top-scored with 18. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 92-9 in 20 overs (Imad Wasim 18, Saim Ayub 17, Tayyab Tahir 16; Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2-9, Mohammad Nabi 2-12, Fazalhaq Farooqi 2-13) v Afghanistan 98-4 in 17.5 overs (Mohammad Nabi 38 not out; Ihsanullah 2-17)

LOCAL

FLAVOUR



Ramadhan table tennis tourney begins today

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Ramadhan table tennis tournament competitions will begin on Sunday under organisation of Sports Mania Oman in cooperation with Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA). The event will be hosted by Spin Table Tennis Academy which is located in Muscat. The Ramadhan table tennis event will be open for all the age categories and the competitions will be held at singles and teams levels. The deadline of registration was set on Saturday and several participants confirmed their presence in the event.

The tournament is open for all the categories and will begin

with the qualifiers stage and then followed by knockout stages. The competitions will be held in many tables while few tables are dedicated for training and warm-up purposes in the academy. The draw of the tournament will take place ahead of the tournament. All the participants will form a team among them to compete for the top places awards. More than RO 1,000 cash prizes are set for the top winners.

The Ramadhan table tennis tournament will act as a vital preparation stage for the players to shape their readiness for the forthcoming official OTTA's events which will resume after Eid Al Fitr break. The tournament will assist the players to play more games and gain more experience.



MUSCAT: It's just four days to TATA IPL 2023, which is assumed to be the most awaited cricketing event of the year, considering its valuation, fan following and viewership combined together. This brings the 'IPL Strokes' back, which was a great success couple of years ago.

IPL Strokes is presented to you by Oman Observer, and is written by Pranav Mehta.

Pranav Mehta is an ex-national player to Oman and has shared the field with many cricketing greats such as Shikhar Dhawan, Parthiv Patel, Angelo Mathews, Mohammad Nabi, Asghar Stanikzai and many others as well.

Pranav Mehta at the age of 12 was selected to play for Oman U-17, which made him the youngest player at the time to represent Oman. Ever since, he

was a regular member of all the age category tours that Oman made and soon he was promoted as the captain as well. He repaid the confidence of the board with the excellent and consistent performance as a wicket-keeper batsman, which helped him to be selected for the Asian Team on two occasions, an achievement, which has been obtained by only five players till date.

Being an absolute stand out player in the local arena, he was invited by Vasu Paranjpe to test his skills in Mumbai. His credentials got him to RA Podar College, one of the stand outs for cricketing excellence for youngsters. Immediately after, he was picked by Abey Kuruvilla (ex-Indian fast bowler) to play for his high profile and premium side DY Patil. Despite doing incredibly well, he had to move back to Oman, considering his father's health and soon later, his father passed away, which forced his entire commitment to the family business.

Ever since, Pranav has

continued to play the domestic professional cricket in the A-division/Premier League, which requires way less of a commitment and has done incredibly well for himself there as well. As a matter of fact, since the last four years, he owns a professional cricket team in the competitive circuit of cricket in Oman.

Since the last year and half, he has been a professional commentator for international games as well. Within this span, he has been able to be a part of more than 50 international cricket games and another 25 domestic games as well.

When asked Pranav what aids him to have a stand out analysis of the cricket game, he mentioned that, "there are three things – first, I have been a cricketer for the last 22 years and I have always had the best place in the ground as a wicket-keeper. There is no better person on the field that understands the game flow and strategy than a good wicket-keeper. Secondly, I have been

a rank holding certified level 1 Umpire, which allows me to understand the laws of the game and their execution. Finally, while I was representing the corporates in the domestic leagues, I learnt on how politics, player favouring and money has a role to play in cricket."

This is the 16th edition of the IPL and we will be giving you everything that's related to IPL, from prediction analysis, team politics, player mentality, pitches and stadium.

One special part of this edition will be the addition of the readers comments, where they could ask the most difficult questions and he would be obliged to answer them honestly.

You could post us the question on the following social media handles, TWITTER - @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM - @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. DON'T FORGET TO USE THE #OOIPL2023 FOR BETTER REACH.

IPL showdown comes through Observer



Ministry's Shield tourney begins today

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Basketball Shield 2023 tournament is set to kick off on Sunday, featuring the participation of six clubs distributed into two groups.

The first group includes Nizwa, Al Bashayer and Oman Club while the second group features Al Seeb, Ahli Sidab, and Salalah clubs. The competitions will be held in the sub-hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher and will conclude on April 1.

The tournament will begin with a match in the second group between Al Seeb and Salalah. On Monday, the Ahli Sidab and Salalah teams will meet in the same group.

The first group matches will start on Tuesday, with a match

between Al Bashayer and Oman Club. On Wednesday, Ahli Sidab will take on Al Seeb in one of the strongest confrontations in the group.

The tournament will feature a one-round league system in its preliminary round. The first-placed team in the first group will meet in the semifinals with the second-placed team in the second group. Similarly, the first-placed team in the second group will meet the second-placed team in the first group. The winners will advance to the final, and the two losers will play for third place.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is organising this prestigious basketball tournament, which is one of the most popular events in Oman. Basketball enthusiasts can look forward to an exciting and entertaining tournament in the coming days.

ASIAN HOCKEY ELECTS NEW EXECUTIVE BOARD



OHA Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma (right) and OHA board member Zuhair al Ajmi at the AHF Congress.



MUNGYEONG, South Korea: The Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) elected its new executive board in its Ordinary Congress 'AHF Congress Mungyeong 2023' on Friday.

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma and Zuhair al Ajmi, OHA board member, represented Oman in the congress.

To enhance the women leadership in Asia, AHF formulated the Women's Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel consists of the women leaders from all over Asia. The role of this advisory panel is to advise the AHF Executive Board on various affairs ensuring the equal participation by women. The advisory panel also has to contribute towards the enhancement of women participation in hockey. They will be encouraging the National Associations to ensure gender equality, also helping the Asian women face the challenges and paving the way for them to enhance their participation.

The women's advisory panel will primarily secure the interests of women in Asia Hockey and they will encourage women to participate in hockey.

The AHF Congress demonstrated in detail by various initiatives how they value their athletes. In 2022, the appointment of the AHF Athlete Ambassadors was initiated, furthering this initiative AHF appointed four more athlete ambassadors during this congress.

The AHF Athlete Ambassadors play a distinguished leadership role in international representation, development and advocacy of athletes. They promote awareness about athletes' rights and athletes' welfare. Out of these four newly appointed athlete ambassadors, two female athlete ambassadors were appointed to ensure gender balance. The athletes were presented with the cash prizes of 2k for senior athletes and 1k for junior athletes. Player of the year and emerging player of the year were also presented to the athletes. As a special honour by the AHF

Vice-Presidents, the Hockey India Junior National Women's Athlete Salima Tete was seated alongside the AHF Vice-Presidents on the head table while the AHF Congress was still in session. Sri Lankan men and women athletes won a prize of USD 10k to support their development and welfare.

Both men's and women's teams of India won the Best Achievement Award for their performances in various competitions held during 2021, 2022 and 2023. Best Achievement Award was presented to the Iran national men's indoor hockey team upon winning a bronze in the recently held Indoor Hockey World Cup.

FIH President Dato Tayyab Iqram attended the AHF Congress 2023. He delivered his remarks at the beginning of the congress. He emphasised to primarily work on the athletes rights, athletes welfare, encourage athletes to raise their voice against issues, enhance athletes' representation, empowerment of athletes and their involvement in the decision

making in AHF.

Tayyab encouraged the NAs and AHF to work and find sustainable solutions, and to promote sustainability. He appealed AHF to go green and run a campaign through hockey. Hockey India responded immediately to the appeal of FIH president and announced to plant a 100k trees in India.

Tayyab appreciated the achievements of AHF in gender equality, he said that the real values of sports should be explored through hockey. We should promote peace through sports, we should make hockey more inclusive for the underprivileged and deserving. He congratulated AHF to have made their significant contribution in this cause. Tayyab encouraged the AHF leadership to continue this journey and keep on making strides to achieve more and more. He also advised AHF to develop synergy with other continents and promote global solidarity and enhance collaboration in every aspect.

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Oman malls invest in solar power to offset energy costs



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

A growing number of shopping malls and commercial complexes are moving to harness the sun's energy to power their establishments and reduce their dependence on subsidy-free electricity supply from the local grid.

The switch to green electricity will not only contribute to lower energy bills for these establishments, but crucially also bolster their reputation as eco-friendly corporates. In particular, multinational corporations among them also have a commitment to reducing their carbon footprint by transitioning to greener and sustainable energy sources.

Last week, Solar Wadi — an independent Omani renewable energy developer — announced the signing of an agreement with Muscat-based Tamani Global Development & Investments LLC for the development of a solar PV plant to power the latter's Mall of Muscat property in Maabelah in Muscat Governorate.

In a statement, Solar Wadi said it would install solar PV panels on the rooftop as well as the car parks of the mall, with an aggregate capacity of 5 MWp. When operational, the solar system will generate close to 9,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) of green electricity annually, which is enough to meet around 40% of the electricity requirements of the mall and its tenants.

The project will help the Mall of Muscat and its tenants to "decarbonise their operations while reducing operational costs and realising their ESG ambitions," Solar Wadi stated.

It added that the agreement is in line with the goals of Oman's National Energy Strategy, which seeks to secure a 30% share of the country's electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2030.

Significantly, the agreement builds on a portfolio of private-wire solar PV projects that Solar Wadi has committed to delivering in collaboration with fellow Omani clean energy firm Nafath Renewable Energy.

The projects, covering an aggregate capacity of around 30 MWp, will be undertaken on behalf of a number of clients in the Commercial & Industrial sector in Oman.

Just earlier, Majid Al Futtaim (MAF), the leading developer of shopping malls and lifestyle projects in the Middle East, signed an agreement with well-known renewable energy contractor Yellow Door Energy to provide solar power to its chain of shopping malls in the Sultanate of Oman.

The deal is part of a 36MW Master Supply Agreement that commits Yellow Door Energy to providing solar-powered electricity to a total of 18 shopping malls distributed in Oman, as well as the UAE and Bahrain. As part of the long-term agreement, Yellow Door Energy will develop new solar systems, as well as acquire existing ones, with the underlying goal of enabling MAF to achieve its Net Zero target by 2040.

As the appointed solar power developer, Yellow Door Energy will be responsible for financing, designing, building, commissioning, operating, and maintaining the solar plants for the duration of the agreement.

Oman ranks 6th in MENA on 2023 Index of Economic Freedom

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Sultanate of Oman is ranked sixth in MENA region in the 2023 Economic Freedom Index published by the Heritage Foundation, Washington's No.1 think-tank.

"Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labour and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please.

In economically free societies, governments allow labour, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself," the Index noted.

The Index measures economic freedom based on 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into four broad categories, or pillars, of economic freedom: (1) Rule of law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness); (2) Government size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health); (3) Regulatory efficiency (business freedom, labour freedom, monetary freedom); and (4) Open markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).

According to the report, the degree of economic freedom in Oman reached 58.5 points out of 100. Oman's 2023 score improved by 1.9 points compared to last year.



Oman is ranked sixth out of the 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The top 5 in the MENA region include UAE, Israel, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan. Oman's overall score results are above the global and regional average.

The report explained that Oman's economy is being modernised and the rule of law is relatively well maintained. Recognising the importance of a dynamic entrepreneurial environment, the government of Oman is trying to diversify the economy.

The Index says that the overall rule of law in Oman is relatively well respected. The country's property rights score is above the world average; its judicial effectiveness score is below the world average; and its government integrity score is above the world average.

The top individual and corporate tax rates are, respectively, 0% and 15%. The tax burden is equal to 3.4% of GDP. Three-year government spending and budget balance averages are, respectively, 40.5% and -8.1% of GDP. Public debt equals 62.9% of GDP.

Oman's regulatory environment is still evolving. The labour laws enforce the 'Omanisation' policy that requires private-sector firms to meet quotas for hiring native Omani workers. The state influences prices through an extensive subsidy system. The most recent available inflation rate is 1.93% as of February 2023, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Oman's open trade-weighted average tariff rate is 4.4%. Efforts to increase transparency and streamline the investment framework are ongoing. Most credit is offered at market rates, but

the government uses subsidised loans to promote investment. The Muscat Securities Market is open to foreign investors, the Index noted.

Globally, Singapore, Switzerland and Ireland topped the 2023 Index of Economic Freedom, followed by Taiwan, New Zealand and Estonia in the fourth, fifth and sixth positions respectively. They are followed by Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Denmark in the seventh, eighth and ninth positions respectively, and then Sweden, Finland and Norway in the 10th, 11th and 12th positions respectively.

As for the least economically free countries for the year 2023, North Korea bottomed the list at 176, preceded by Cuba (175), Venezuela (174), Sudan (173), Zimbabwe (172), Eritrea (171), Burundi (170), Iran (169), and Algeria (168).

Inflation stabilises at 1.93% in February

MUSCAT: The inflation rate of consumer prices in the Sultanate of Oman during the month of February 2023 was about 1.93%, according to the monthly survey of consumer prices published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data showed an increase in the prices of the following main commodity groups in February 2023 compared to the same month of 2022: food and non-alcoholic beverages (5.08%), furniture, fixtures, household equipment and routine home maintenance group (3.83%), restaurants and hotels group (3.79%), culture and entertainment group (2.08%), miscellaneous goods and services (1.61%), health group (1.23%), clothing and footwear group (1.02%), transportation group



(0.77%), education group (0.05%), and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels group (0.03%). However, the communication group showed a decrease of 0.15%, while the tobacco group dipped 0.02%.

Price indices within the food and non-alcoholic beverages group also showed an

uptick during the period under review: the oil and fats price index (19.57%), fish and seafood (12%), milk, cheese and eggs (10.11%), non-alcoholic beverages (5.23%), and bread and cereals (5.04%).

The prices of meat increased by 4.29%, other foodstuffs by 4.25%, sugar, jam, honey and sweets by 3.22%, and fruits by 2.74%. The vegetables group however showed a decrease of 4.95%.

The Governorate of Al Buraimi witnessed the highest rate of inflation at 2.93%, followed by the Governorate of Al Dhahirah at 2.21%, Governorate of Muscat at 2.12%, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah at 2.04%, Governorate of Dhofar at 2.03%, and North and South Sharqiyah at 1.65 and 1.37% respectively. — ONA

Experts say global oil prices expected to recover

MUSCAT: Energy and economic analysts expect that oil prices would will to normal level in the coming weeks, after witnessing a decline due to fears of an expected financial crisis stemming from recent banking crisis in the United States and Europe.

According to Ali bin Abdullah al Riyami, an expert in oil and gas marketing, oil prices began to drop dramatically a week ago, from about \$85 per barrel to a low of \$65 per barrel.

The slump, he said, was triggered by the collapse of large

financial institutions as many investors in the energy sector in general and the oil sector in particular have close linkages with the banking sector, having lent to oil companies.

He said in a statement to ONA, "I do not rule out that there will be attempts by the US administration and also by the Swiss government to find solutions to the collapse of these banks, direct intervention in supporting them, change of some regulations and laws in the US banking system, and the desire of some major financial institutions



to buy Credit Suisse.

As UBS, one of the major Swiss institutions, expressed interest in purchasing this bank, in addition

to the intervention of the Swiss government in supporting Credit Suisse."

He pointed out that these

attempts constitute a concern for those dealing with the oil market, as it is closely linked to banks, and all dealings of traders, exporters and suppliers of oil with international banks, so any impact on these banks will be affected by other markets, including the oil market. Developments in the banking sector tend to have an impact on oil price trends, he noted.

"We noticed that during the previous period, as prices rose slightly due to the attention directed to the position of the US Federal Bank with regard to

increasing interest to confront inflation, and on this basis it is likely that this fluctuation will continue for a period to come, especially if there are banks that may fall into a downward spiral."

Commenting on the impact of these developments for the price of Omani crude, he said the knock-on effect would be across the board encompassing the wider global oil market, which includes the Omani benchmark.

This is because Omani crude is an integral market of the global oil market, he said. — ONA



Chevrolet Tahoe Z71: Perfect SUV for every desert adventure

MUSCAT: Built for action, the Chevrolet Tahoe Z71 has been designed and engineered to take on the rugged landscapes of the Sultanate of Oman, and indeed the wider Middle East. From towering sand dunes to rock-strewn gravelly plains — and every patch of terrain in-between — the Z71 is up for the challenge.

After all, this powerhouse is at home amid the rugged topography of this region, chugging away with relative ease even with heavy loads in tow. Indeed, the Tahoe Z71 has been crafted to unlock maximum performance, no matter the environment.

The perfect SUV for every desert adventure, it has specifically designed off-roading performance features for the region's most adventurous drivers. With a best-in-class approach angle of up to 34.0 degrees, the Z71 is capable of handling all kinds of natural landscapes. Car equipped with air ride adaptive suspension and magnetic ride control.

Muscular in character, the all-new Tahoe Z71 encapsulates the 'bigger, bolder, better' signature styling of the legendary Chevrolet brand.

An adventure-packed standalone trim from the legendary Tahoe line-up, the Z71 benefits from a styling

reboot, best-in-class interior, superior performance and advanced technology.

Powering the all-new Z71 is a 5.3L V8 engine mated to an advanced 10-speed automatic transmission.

Delivering a substantial 355 horsepower and 519 Nm of torque, it packs enough power to tow heavy loads of up to 3,800 kg with hardly a peep.

Helping balance efficiency with performance is the Tahoe's Dynamic Fuel Management system that optimises engine efficiency across a broad range of driving conditions.

A key feature of the Z71 is its all-new independent multi-link rear suspension which allows each rear wheel to handle road conditions separately. This architecture also enables first-in-class Four-Corner Air Ride Adaptive Suspension which provides load-levelling at all corners of the vehicle and up to four inches of ride-height adjustment.

The smoothness of the journey is evident even as the Z71 makes its way across undulating terrain.

Leading automotive firm OTE Group is the exclusive distributor of Chevrolet models in the Sultanate of Oman. Check out the all-new Tahoe Z71 at OTE showrooms distributed across the country.

Bank Muscat AGM approves 15% dividend to shareholders

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat held an Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) of its shareholders on Wednesday, March 22, 2023 through the electronic platform developed by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company and accessed through www.mcd.gov.om.

The meeting was presided over by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani, Chairman of the Bank's Board of Directors. During the AGM, the bank's shareholders approved the report of the Board of Directors of the Bank and the report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended December 31, 2022.

Shareholders also approved the report of the Sharia Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Bank's Islamic banking window for the financial year ended December 31, 2022 and the appointment of statutory auditors for the bank as well as external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq Islamic banking.

Bank Muscat shareholders granted their approval to distribute a cash dividend of 15



bz per share for the financial year ended December 31, 2022.

Bank Muscat shareholders will thus receive a cash dividend of RO 0.015 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 112.596 million on the bank's existing share capital. The Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) after the cash dividend payout will be 21.25 per cent, which is well above the regulatory minimum.

Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani expressed his thanks and gratitude to the shareholders for their strong support and

confidence in the Board of Directors and in the bank's performance and progress.

He said: "Bank Muscat which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022, will continue to work to further consolidate its leadership position in the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector.

The bank is continuously enhancing its service offerings for different customer segments to provide better value, while also achieving enhanced value for its shareholders."

Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani added: "Bank Muscat's

Board of Directors welcome and support the measures undertaken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Markets Authority to strengthen and diversify Oman's financial and banking sector. We would also like to take this opportunity to wish success to all as we gear up for a new phase in the Sultanate of Oman's growth and development."

It may be noted that Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO 200.75 million for the year ended December 31, 2022 compared to RO 189.63 million reported in 2021, an increase of 5.9 per cent.

NBO gives 10% cashback rewards on weekend purchases during Ramadhan

MUSCAT: During Holy Month of Ramadhan, National Bank of Oman (NBO) is giving back 10% cashback rewards on weekends to Visa Credit Card holders. NBO Credit Card holders can avail 10% cashback on purchases of groceries, at restaurants and on apparel at retailers across Oman.

Cashback on eligible purchases made using NBO Visa Credit Cards on every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from March 23, 2023 to April 22, 2023 will be credited to customers through NBO Rewards, up to a maximum of RO 10 each weekend per customer.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager — Head of Retail Product at NBO, said, "In the spirit of Ramadhan, we are rewarding our customers by adding more savings in form of 10% rewards to enhance their day-to-day banking. NBO Credit Card cashback offer is one of the ways to make banking with NBO



more beneficial and personal for our customers. NBO credit cards offer variety of benefits that helps customers save money with almost every transaction. We at NBO always look for new

ways to offer reliable and convenient banking by enhancing the overall experience and making it more rewarding for our customers."

NBO customers can use their Visa Credit Card on eligible purchases at any vendor across Oman on the weekends of March 23, 2023 until April 22, 2023. Cashback will be reflected in customers' NBO Rewards accounts within 7 days, to be used at a variety of vendors, to pay bills, and much more.

Offering cashless convenience, NBO's collection of Visa Credit Cards support customers to reach new heights by helping them to access solutions that meet their needs.

Providing a secure alternative to cash, cardholders can enjoy a host of exclusive benefits including airport lounge access, free travel insurance, dining and hotel discounts, unique experiences, cash back and purchase protection.

Omani-crewed delivery startup to launch new logistics hub at Khazaen

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

A local delivery services startup, which prides itself as being the only service provider in the Sultanate of Oman with a 100 per cent Omani-crewed delivery network, has signed agreements to set up an integrated logistics centre in Khazaen Economic City at Barka.

Nool for Delivery Services, which established operations during the pandemic in September 2020, has grown exponentially over the ensuing 36 months to now boast a countrywide footprint with an expanding presence in the wider region as well.

Last week, the Muscat-based wholly Omani-owned company signed an agreement to invest in



a modern integrated facility at Khazaen to serve as a logistics hub catering to its diverse customer segments.

The move attests to Nool's ambitions to emerge as one of Oman's leading delivery service

providers.

Its all-Omani workforce of around 150 employees oversees a network of around 21 branches distributed across the length and breadth of the country. Operating a fleet of 62 delivery vehicles,

the company has garnered a reputation for speedy branch-to-branch deliveries at competitive prices, with home deliveries coming at a modest additional cost.

"As part of the progress and development witnessed by Nool Delivery Services Company, an investment agreement was signed with Khazaen to establish an integrated logistics complex, which will also create new job opportunities for Omani cadres," the startup said in a post on social media.

The Khazaen facility, it stated, will support the growth of the sharing economy, as well as the e-commerce sector, it stated. Nool already operates three shipment sorting centres at key locations around Oman.

Samsung Galaxy A54 5G and Galaxy A34 5G launched in Oman

MUSCAT: Samsung Gulf Electronics unveiled the Galaxy A54 5G and Galaxy A34 5G, two innovative smartphones that advance Samsung Galaxy's commitment to designing awesome mobile experiences.

These new additions to the popular Galaxy A series will help users in Oman shoot steady and crisp videos, see clearly even in bright conditions, and do more of the things they love with battery life that lasts more than two days.

Fadi Abu Shamat, Head of MX Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics said, "At Samsung, we place a huge focus on providing top of the line mobile experiences to our customers across our range of devices. With our latest additions to the Galaxy



A series, we are ensuring that our devices, with cutting edge innovation and technology, are accessible to more users across in the region."

Amid recent setbacks, Credit Suisse confronts uncertainty



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association.

Credit Suisse, the Swiss-based multinational financial services company, has recently been facing significant challenges that have raised concerns about its financial stability.

While the bank has been a longstanding leader in wealth management and investment banking, recent setbacks have led to speculations that it may be on the brink of bankruptcy. In this article, we will delve into some of the issues that have contributed to these concerns and the implications for the bank's future.

Let us start from the operational and financial challenges:

Over the past few years, Credit Suisse has encountered several operational and financial setbacks that have impacted its performance

and reputation:

1. The Archegos Capital Scandal: In March 2021, the collapse of Archegos Capital, a family office run by former hedge fund manager Bill Hwang, led to massive losses for several global banks, including Credit Suisse. The bank reportedly lost more than \$5 billion due to its exposure to the highly leveraged investment firm, leading to a significant decline in share prices and investor confidence.

2. The Greensill Capital Debacle: Credit Suisse suffered another blow when Greensill Capital, a supply chain finance firm in which the bank had substantial investments, filed for insolvency in March 2021. The bank was forced to freeze \$10 billion worth of investment funds linked to Greensill, resulting in further losses

and reputational damage.

3. Financial Performance: These high-profile incidents, coupled with the ongoing economic uncertainties due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have led to a decline in Credit Suisse's financial performance. The bank reported a significant drop in net income for 2021, raising concerns among investors and analysts about its ability to recover from these setbacks.

Now let us move to the bankruptcy speculations and future outlook:

The combination of these challenges has fuelled speculations that Credit Suisse may be facing the risk of bankruptcy. However, it is important to note that declaring bankruptcy is a complex and drastic decision for any organisation, particularly for a well-established

financial institution like Credit Suisse.

In response to these setbacks, Credit Suisse has taken several measures to mitigate risks and improve its financial position:

1. Leadership Changes: The bank has undergone a series of management reshuffles, with the appointment of new executives to lead its risk management and compliance functions.

2. Risk Management Overhaul: Credit Suisse has been working on revamping its risk management practices to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

3. Cost-Cutting Measures: The bank has announced plans to reduce expenses and streamline operations in an effort to improve its financial performance.

In light of the recent challenges

faced by Credit Suisse, the Swiss government has stepped in to support the bank, though it has refrained from using the term "bailout".

The deal in question, which involves UBS acquiring Credit Suisse for 3 billion Swiss francs (approximately \$3.25 billion), includes government guarantees and liquidity provisions. Specifically, the Swiss government is guaranteeing that UBS will receive up to 9 billion Swiss francs if they experience losses from certain assets. Additionally, the Swiss National Bank is providing 100 billion Swiss francs in liquidity support to both banks.

While not explicitly labelled a bailout, the government's involvement signals a significant effort to stabilise Credit Suisse during this tumultuous period.

War on cow gas is stinky but necessary job in climate change struggle

KAREN KWOK

Targeting cows to fight climate change may seem counterintuitive. Yet, governments from New Zealand to Europe are zeroing in on livestock, whose burps and farts help generate 15 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions each year, United Nations estimates show.

An industry backlash against plans to tackle the issue will teach punters to treat burgers as polluting fuel.

Digestion and waste from cows and other ruminants produce methane, a gas which is 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in trapping heat in the atmosphere in the first 20 years after its release.

Cattle is a major contributor to methane emissions from agriculture, which hit 142 metric tonnes in 2022, triple the amount of those from the oil sector, according to the International Energy Agency.

To meet the 2021 Glasgow pledge to reduce methane in the atmosphere by at least 30 per cent by 2030, European Union states are discussing a proposal to impose emission limits on farms in the 27-nation bloc, which would reduce livestock amounts. In New Zealand, where agriculture makes up more than half the country's harmful gases, the government is looking to tax farmers based on factors like the number of animals kept, the fertilisers used and energy efficiency.

Getting these plans off the ground won't be easy.

Farmers in Italy and Germany, which together make up over one quarter of Europe's beef production, are pushing back. True, milk and meat producers could use technology to curb emissions.

Dutch specialty chemicals company DSM and Kiwi milk producer Fonterra make feed additives that allow cows to burp less. French dairy giant Danone separates solids from liquids in milk production, a process that can cut the methane released by over a fifth. But it's not applicable to every farm and can be pricey.

The current regulatory push could also have some negative consequences. 'Cow fart' taxes will make New Zealand's milk exports more expensive, driving consumer goods companies and retailers to seek cheaper supplies from countries like Saudi Arabia, which emits even more methane.

Closing down farms will also kick small players out of a fragmented farming market.

Yet if the price of meat goes up, that will close a gap with plant-based burgers and steaks, which today cost twice as much as animal-based ones, according to the Good Food Institute.

That will deter consumers from purchasing chops and sausages and opt for less carbon-intensive alternatives. The debate will ultimately beef up consumers' awareness of the danger that a growing cattle population poses to climate change. The proposed government policies might not hit the bull's-eye. But like fossil fuels ten years ago, this will be the start of a long but necessary battle. — Reuters

How China benefits from another US banking crisis



STEPHEN S ROACH

The author, a former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, is a faculty member at Yale University and the author of the forthcoming *Accidental Conflict: America, China, and the Clash of False Narratives* (Yale University Press, November 2022).

No two crises are alike. That is true of recent financial upheavals — the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, the dot-com crisis of 2000 and the global financial crisis of 2008-09. It is also the case with crises sparked by geostrategic shocks, such as wars, pestilence, famine and pandemics.

Today, we are witnessing a potentially lethal interplay between these two sources of upheaval: a financial crisis, reflected in the failure of Silicon Valley Bank, and a geostrategic crisis, reflected in the deepening cold war between the United States and China.

While the origins of each crisis are different, in one sense it doesn't really matter: The outcome of their interaction is likely to be greater than the sum of the parts.

The failure of SVB is symptomatic of a far bigger problem: a US financial system that is woefully unprepared for the return of inflation and the concomitant normalisation of monetary policy.

SVB risk managers were in deep denial of such an outcome, and the bank was brought down by sharp losses on its unhedged \$124 billion bond portfolio, triggering a classic bank run by fearful depositors.

Depositors, even the hotshots of America's start-up culture, can hardly be blamed for not doing the due diligence on complex financial institutions they entrust with their assets. That task falls to the Federal Reserve, which, sadly, blew it again.

Starting with reckless monetary accommodation that perpetuated a dangerous string of asset bubbles — from dot-com and housing to credit

and long-duration assets — and continuing with the misdiagnosis of post-Covid inflation as "transitory," the Fed has now made a supervisory error of monumental proportions: It fixated on large banks and overlooked smaller regional banks like SVB, Signature, and First Republic, where accidents were waiting to happen.

This is particularly disheartening in the aftermath of the post-2008 implementation of a new supervisory regime. "What if" stress tests for banks quickly became the gold standard for minimising the risk of financial contagion.

The first stress test in early 2009 effectively marked the trough of that crisis, because it revealed that newly capitalised major banks could withstand the worst-case blows of a sharp deepening of an already wrenching recession.

In its February 2023 stress test, the Fed conceded that it needed to start thinking more broadly about different shocks, and it allowed for the possibility of a new "exploratory market shock" — still a recession, albeit one accompanied by higher inflation.

But, buried in terse language near the end of the latest stress-test report, the Fed noted that any firm-specific exploratory results wouldn't be available until June 2023. And there was no indication that such

results would be published for smaller regional banks. Too little, too late.

So, what does this have to do with China and the escalating Sino-American conflict? For the past 20 years, a group within the senior ranks of the Chinese leadership has argued that America is in a state of permanent decline, providing an opening for China's global ascendancy.

This view gained support in the aftermath of the US-made global financial crisis, and most assuredly will gain even more support as the SVB crisis hits a new segment of the US financial system.

A rising China could hardly ask for more. At a time when the Western financial system is once again suffering from self-inflicted impairment, the imagery of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping embracing each other in the Kremlin as "dear friends" pretty much says it all.

China apparently views a cold war and the carnage in Ukraine as a small price to pay to strengthen its push for geostrategic hegemony.

There is an important footnote to China's view of a declining America. While Mao alluded to it in broad terms — a US "paper tiger... in the throes of its deathbed struggle" — this argument was first

fully articulated by Wang Huning in his 1991 book *America Against America*.

Based on Wang's firsthand observations while living in the US, the book was a scathing critique of America's social, political and economic decay.

Wang is hardly an innocent bystander to China's new assertiveness. He was the chief ideological adviser to Xi Jinping's two immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, and has played a similar role for Xi in the exposition of "Xi Jinping Thought" as China's new ideological anchor.

And Wang, one of only two holdovers who remained on the top seven-man leadership team (the Standing Committee of the Politburo), has also just been named Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The demise of SVB only cements Wang's stature.

In the end, it pays to ponder Chinese etymology. In Mandarin, wéiji has the dual meaning of danger and opportunity. From SVB to Wang Huning, that's precisely the point of the increasingly worrisome interplay between another US-made financial shock and a sharply escalating Sino-American cold war. A rising China is taking dead aim at crisis-prone America.

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Traders gather at the post where First Republic Bank as the stock is halted from being traded on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — Reuters

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ramadhan

Photo by Abhilash Pillai

Five popular mosques to visit this Ramadhan

Muslims go to the mosques to offer their devotional prayers throughout this Ramadhan as part of their religious customs and rituals. Here are five of the most popular and grandiose mosques worthy to check out all year round.... **P20**



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

And say, "The truth is from your Lord. Whoever wills – let him believe. And whoever wills – let him disbelieve". We have prepared for the unjust a Fire, whose curtains will hem them in. And when they cry for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten brass, which scalds the faces. What a miserable drink, and what a terrible place.

(The Cave, 29)

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying:

Allah, the Majestic and the Exalted, said: Every act of the son of Adam is for him except fasting. It is done for My sake, and I will give a reward for it. By Allah in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.

HEALTH TIPS

A healthy Iftar follows tradition by beginning with two dates, then moving on to a glass of water or laban, a warm bowl of soup, a salad, and the main course. Always remember, the key to good health is moderation!

RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD



People sit together with food, on the floor of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, before breaking the fast in Dhaka. — Reuters



Women pray during Ramadhan in Blue Mosque, Taguig, Metro Manila, Philippines. — Reuters



People gather to buy food, on the first day of Ramadhan, at Chawkbazar's traditional makeshift Iftar market, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. — Reuters

RECIPE

Try Haleem — one of the popular Ramadhan dishes in Pakistan



ONE OF THE MOST popular Ramadhan dishes in Pakistan is Haleem. Haleem is a slow-cooked stew made with a combination of lentils, grains, and meat, typically beef or lamb. It's seasoned with a variety of spices and served hot with a garnish of fried onions, coriander, and lemon wedges. Here is a recipe for Haleem that you can try:

INGREDIENTS:
1 cup whole wheat grains
1/2 cup barley
1/2 cup yellow split peas
1/2 cup red lentils
1/2 cup boneless beef or lamb, cut into small pieces
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon ginger paste
1 tablespoon garlic paste
2 teaspoons cumin powder
2 teaspoons coriander powder
1 teaspoon turmeric powder
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon powder
1/2 teaspoon black pepper powder
1/2 teaspoon red chili powder
1/2 cup vegetable oil
Salt to taste
For garnish: fried onions, fresh coriander, and lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS:
Rinse the whole wheat grains, barley, yellow split peas, and red lentils in cold water and soak them overnight.

In a large pot, add the soaked grains and lentils along with the meat, ginger paste, garlic paste, and enough water to cover the ingredients. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and let it simmer for about 2-3 hours or until the grains and meat are tender.

Use an immersion blender to blend the mixture until smooth, or use a hand-held masher to mash the mixture until smooth.

In a separate pan, heat the vegetable oil over medium heat and fry the onions until golden brown. Add the cumin powder, coriander powder, turmeric powder, cinnamon powder, black pepper powder, and red chili powder, and fry for another minute or until fragrant.

Add the spice mixture to the pot of blended grains and meat, and stir well to combine. Season with salt to taste.

Let the haleem simmer on low heat for another 30 minutes or until it reaches a thick, porridge-like consistency.

Serve hot with a garnish of fried onions, fresh coriander, and lemon wedges.

Enjoy your homemade Haleem, a delicious and hearty Ramadhan dish that's sure to satisfy your hunger and your taste buds!



The rise and growth of Islam in Pakistan and the country's Ramadhan traditions

ISLAM IS THE second-largest religion in the world, with over 1.8 billion followers worldwide. In Pakistan, Islam is the dominant religion, with more than 96% of the population identifying as Muslims. The history of Islam in Pakistan is a long and complex one that dates back to the 7th century when the religion was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent. However, it was not until the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim, an Arab general, in the 8th century that Islam began to take hold in the region. Muhammad bin Qasim conquered the region that is now Sindh and established Muslim rule in the area.

Over the centuries, Islam became firmly established in the region that is now Pakistan. During the Mughal Empire, which ruled much of India from

the 16th to the 19th century, Islam was the dominant religion in the region. The Mughal rulers were Muslims and they patronised Islamic scholars, poets, and artists, leading to a flowering of Islamic culture in the region. The Mughal period also saw the construction of many beautiful mosques and other Islamic monuments, some of which still stand today.

In 1947, Pakistan was created as a separate Muslim state. The majority of the population of Pakistan is Muslim.

Ramadhan is an important month in the Islamic calendar, and it is widely observed in Pakistan. During Ramadhan, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, refraining from food and drink. The fast is broken at sunset with a meal called iftar. Iftar is a time of celebration and

socialising, and many families and communities come together to share the meal.

In Pakistan, there are many customs and traditions associated with Ramadhan. One of the most popular traditions is the preparation and consumption of special Ramadhan foods.

These foods are often rich and filling, as Muslims need to sustain themselves through the long hours of fasting. Some popular Ramadhan foods in Pakistan include samosas, pakoras, and fruit chaat.

Another important tradition associated with Ramadhan in Pakistan is taraweeh, a special nightly prayer that is performed during the month.

Taraweeh is typically held in mosques, and it involves reciting portions of the holy

Quran. The recitation is spread out over the course of the month, so that by the end of Ramadhan, the entire holy Quran has been recited.

CHARITY

Charity is also an important aspect of Ramadhan in Pakistan. Many people give generously to the poor and needy during the month, in keeping with the spirit of generosity and compassion that Ramadhan embodies. Zakat, a form of obligatory charity, is also collected and distributed during Ramadhan. Muslims in Pakistan recite the Quran more frequently during Ramadhan, and some may complete the entire Quran during the month.

It is common for people to host Iftars for their friends, family, and neighbours during Ramadhan. In addition, mosques and other organisations often hold community Iftars for those who are less fortunate. Pakistani cuisine offers a variety of special dishes that are traditionally eaten during Ramadhan, including samosas, pakoras, and dates.

As a time festivity, many night markets and bazaars open up during the month. These markets offer a variety of food, clothing, and other items.

Time capsules: Mauritania's precious Chinguetti manuscripts

SAIF EL ISLAM al Ahmed Mahmoud sat cross-legged on a sheepskin and gingerly turned the pages of an ancient manuscript.

"What would the world be without poetry?" he asked, using cotton gloves to handle the thin paper document, written in an ink concocted from charcoal and gum Arabic.

The manuscript is one of 700 that his family owns — in turn, part of a priceless legacy of knowledge, art and philosophy stored in Chinguetti, a town in the heart of the Mauritanian Sahara.

Across the UNESCO-listed city are 13 privately-owned libraries holding around 6,000 Arabic manuscripts, many dating from the Late Middle Ages.

The documents are a time capsule of human culture and advancement, dwelling on themes ranging from Islam and astronomy to law, mathematics and poetry.

Most of the manuscripts are paper or parchment, although some texts are written on sheepskin.

Chinguetti's treasure derives from its position straddling a trade route linking the Western shores of the African continent to Mecca, the centre of the Muslim world.

It was also historically a route well travelled by pilgrims on the way to the holy city for the annual Haj pilgrimage.

The manuscripts were collected by local families, who have been their custodians for generations.

"We are preserving the memory of the world which once crisscrossed these ancient streets," said Al Ahmed Mahmoud, with a theatrical gesture.

In Chinguetti's main square, Abdullah Habbot opened the doors of another library, which his family owns.

He said his family acquired its more than 1,400 documents thanks to the



travellers who halted in the dusty city. But the manuscripts are facing a modern threat: climate change is caus-



ing flash floods that threaten the old structures housing the documents. If the libraries collapse, Al Ahmed

Mahmoud warned, "ancient memories will be erased, and we will all be poorer."
— AFP



AROUND THE WORLD

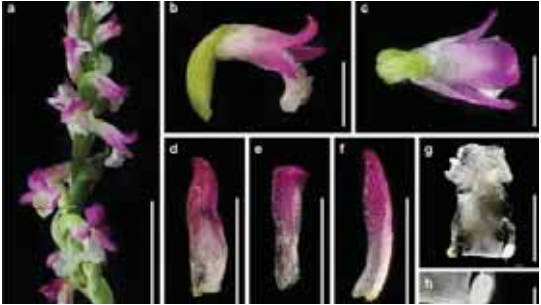
DISCOVERY

New ‘glass-like’ orchid species discovered in Japan



A NEW SPECIES OF ORCHID with delicate, glass-like blooms has been discovered by Japanese scientists, who found the pink and white plant hiding in plain sight.

Despite its presence in Japan's parks and gardens, it took researchers at Kobe University a decade to confirm that the plant — dubbed the “*Spiranthes hachijoensis*” — was a previously unknown species.



“It was a surprise to discover a new species of spiranthes, which is so common that you can see it in parks, gardens and among potted plants,” lead researcher Kenji Suetsugu said on Thursday.

Some of the samples were “from potted plants and gardens”, including ones kept at a high school in Japan's central Gifu region, the phytology professor said.

“From its curious look and dainty blooms that



resemble glasswork, this flower has long been loved by people,” the university said in a press release.

The plant, with its spiralling blossoms, was even mentioned in Japan's oldest anthology of poems, the eighth-century “Manyoshu”.

The discovery of the new type of spiranthes, sometimes known as “ladies’ tresses”, was announced last week in the Journal of Plant Research. It was given the name “hachijoensis” because many samples were found on Tokyo's Hachijojima island.—**AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Europe's first majority Black orchestra debuts stateside



AFTER MORE THAN three decades in the classical music industry, British double bassist Chi-chi Nwanoku began grappling with the question that had troubled her for years: Why was she consistently the only Black musician onstage?

“Why did I never ask anyone about it? Why did we never talk about it?” she describes wondering. “Was I being tolerated, or were people just completely unaware?”

“Or were people okay with the status quo?”

In 2015 Nwanoku took a leading role in creating a more diverse future for classical music, which, from musicians to conductors to repertoire, traditionally skews heavily white.

She founded Chineke!, Europe's first majority Black and ethnically diverse professional orchestra, which this week played at the prestigious New York Philharmonic's David Geffen Hall in Manhattan's Lincoln Center.

The performance was part of their long-awaited North American debut tour — it was among the many performances the pandemic pushed back — which included stops in New York, Ottawa, Toronto, Boston, Worcester and Ann Arbor.

The New York show featured the pioneering composer Florence Price's Symphony No. 1, along with a rendition of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto featuring the New York Phil's principal clarinet Anthony McGill.

DOOR-OPENER

The London-headquartered Chineke! echoes similar efforts in the United States, including the Detroit-based Sphinx Organization that promotes representation of



Black and Latino artists in classical music.

Yet the League of American Orchestras, which represents professional and amateur symphonies across the United States, found in a 2014 study on diversity that just 1.4 per cent of orchestra musicians were Black — and there's little reason to believe much has changed.

“Because the great majority of American orchestras are not individually transparent with racial and ethnic data on their artists, we do not know the percentage of Black orchestral artists in our orchestras today,” writes the Black Orchestral Network, a collective of Black musicians from more than 40 orchestras launched in 2022.

“From our vantage point, however, we have seen little meaningful progress.”

It's mind-boggling to Nwanoku, who said during a rehearsal break that “it seems to me that the only colleagues of colour that I see who have a job in an orchestra in this country are those who are exceptional.”

“We have to be that much better to actually be given a job.”

Nwanoku believes that especially for young people, seeing more diverse faces onstage is “an immediate door-opener.”

“It's the most incredibly winning thing to feel represented on a stage,” she said. “Even if when you walk through the front of house to buy a ticket, if you don't see

anyone who looks like you, that is immediately uncomfortable.”

“But when you see people that look like you in any place — in the supermarket, at the train station, at the concert hall, at the cinema — you immediately feel that is a place that I can walk into with confidence,” Nwanoku continued.

“You can be what you can see.”—**AFP**

FASHION

Iraq fashionistas champion climate-friendly vintage wear



IN A PALM GROVE north of Baghdad, bemused Iraqi shepherds looked on as models paraded second-hand garments down an improvised catwalk, seeking to raise awareness of the fashion industry's environmental impact.

Haute couture has given way to upcycled outfits, sourced entirely from used clothes, as the models strut, pause and pivot on the runway, a sign of the growing popularity of chic, environmentally friendly vintage wear among young Iraqis.

“We don't want overproduction of clothes, we have to reuse them,” said Mohamed Qassem, 25, a hairdresser and organiser of the fashion show near Al-Hussainiya village.

The global fashion industry accounted for two per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, according to the World Resources Institute.

Campaigners and a growing number of climate-conscious social media influencers have led a push toward sustainable fashion.

Many young people in climate-stressed Iraq, like Qassem, have become passionate about vintage clothing.

The palm grove event showcased fluorescent green puffer jackets, long black leather coats, ample double-breasted blazers, and modern takes on traditional costumes.

In many parts of Iraq, scarred by decades of conflict, peaceful rhythms are gradually returning to daily life and second-hand clothing offers aspiring fashionistas an affordable chance to express themselves.



CLIMATE THREATS

As Baghdad's streets see more “fast-fashion” and imported brands, the outfits at the Al-Hussainiya event predominantly feature green elements, a nod to the show's environmental message.

Iraq, synonymous with date production, has seen its iconic date palms placed under stress by the effects of climate change and the years of conflict.

“The goal is not to focus only on clothes, but also abandoned orchards, palm trees that disappear every day,” Qassem said.

The United Nations says oil-rich Iraq is one of the five countries most exposed to the impacts of climate change, already witnessing extreme summer heat, frequent droughts, desertification and regular dust storms, which will exacerbate as the planet heats.

The designs at the fashion show will not be put on sale. Organisers mainly hope the symbolic parade will raise awareness.

Ahmed Taher, a 22-year-old stylist who put together the sets for the show, said “second-hand pieces are clothes of excellent quality”.

“When you wear them, you have the impression of wearing luxury clothes. It's different from what you find in stores.”

A business student, Taher offers Baghdad's hipsters vintage clothes on Instagram — where he has around 47,000 followers — selling pieces for around \$20.

“We want to wear unique clothes and not all look like each other,” he said. — **AFP**



Five popular mosques to visit this Ramadhan

BY YERU EBUEN
Instagram: @yru_here

One of the finest ways to explore Oman's rich Islamic tradition and culture is by going to one of its mosques. In Oman, mosques serve as both places of prayer and architectural wonders that highlight the rich aesthetic and cultural legacy of the nation. Muslims go to the mosques to offer their devotional prayers throughout this Ramadhan as part of their religious customs and rituals. Here are five of the most popular and grandiose mosques worthy to check out all year round.

SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Muscat and is the biggest mosque in Oman. The mosque's stunning Islamic architecture includes a central dome, minarets, and elaborate floral patterns carved onto the marble walls and floor. It boasts a beautiful Swarovski crystal chandelier and can hold up to 20,000 worshippers at once.

AL ZAWAWI MOSQUE

This contemporary mosque is located right at the heart of Muscat. Its minimalist and modern design, which contrasts with conventional Islamic architecture, is its distinguishing feature. The mosque is open to visitors and is particularly beautiful at night when its exterior lighting illuminates the structure.

SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE, SUHAR

One of Oman's most stunning and recog-

nisable structures, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Suhar is a noteworthy example of Islamic architecture and a significant place of worship for the Omanis. The mosque is well-loved for its remarkable architecture and exquisite design. The mosque is adorned with beautiful Arabic calligraphy and intricate tilework, making it a true masterpiece of Islamic art.

SAID BIN TAIMUR MOSQUE

Named after the former ruler of Oman, the Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque has many nice features that make it an interesting place to visit. Its unique feature is its location in the heart of the Muttrah Souq, a bustling market district in Muscat. The mosque's ornate wooden doors and intricate stonework make it a popular attraction in the area.

MOHAMMED AL AMEEN MOSQUE

One of Muscat's oldest mosques, it is renowned for both its architectural beauty and historical value. The mosque's dome, which is turquoise and gold and can be seen from a distance, is its defining characteristic. The mosque's magnificent prayer hall and elaborate calligraphy are among the interior's rich elements that visitors can enjoy.

REMINDER

A visit to a mosque can be very educational and enjoyable, but it's vital to keep in mind that it is a sacred place and to show respect for the beliefs and traditions of those who pray there.

When visiting a mosque, make sure to dress appropriately, especially during the time of Ramadhan. Ensure that your arms, legs, and head are properly covered and avoid tight and revealing clothing. Do be quiet and respectful. Mosques are places of worship, so it's important to maintain a respectful and quiet demeanour while inside. Avoid loud talking, laughing, or making any unnecessary noise that could disrupt those who are praying.

Shoes are not permitted inside the mosque. You must take off your shoes to avoid pollutants and other harmful elements you might have stepped on with your footwear. If there aren't any shoe racks available, leave your shoes outside the entrance like most mosques do.

Also, avoid bringing food or beverages inside the mosque especially during Ramadhan when Muslim believers are fasting.