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BARCA RECLAIM LA LIGA TITLE



P13

TOP DESTINATION FOR CHINA'S OVERSEAS DIRECT INVESTMENT



P19

ROHM CLOSSES SEASON WITH ASSI EL HALLANI, MARWA NAGY CONCERT



MUSCAT

TRA REACTIVATES WARNING SYSTEM

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the telecom services providers Ooredoo and Omantel, resumed experiments to activate early-warning system in coastal areas via mobile phone, the first-of-its-kind service in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the scheduled timeline. The service provides several features including broadcasting instructions and a number of awareness messages to alert of catastrophes such as hurricanes, tsunamis, heavy rains, strong winds and poor horizontal vision in four languages: Arabic, English, Hindi and Urdu. **DETAILS ON P2**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$73.21 A BARREL

Oman oil price for July delivery on Monday reached \$73.21, comprising a drop by 17 cents from the price of Friday, which was \$73.38. The average price of Oman oil for May delivery has stabilised at \$78.49 per barrel, thus \$3.74 per barrel lower than April delivery. Brent crude and US crude futures rose 0.3 per cent to \$74.36 per barrel and \$70.26 per barrel, respectively. Gold futures gave up gains and traded 0.1 per cent higher at \$2,013.46 per ounce.

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Gain 12 black points and face driving test again

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Black points gained through traffic violations have adverse consequences on the driver's licence. A driver accumulates three points each for jumping the red light three times, and driving under the influence of alcohol. Both these violations have provisions for jail and fine along with accumulation of black points.

A new driver who is given a temporary licence for a year will have to undergo the complete procedure of taking a new licence, which starts from applying afresh, attending an eye test, signal, drum and road tests to qualify to drive on Oman roads, if he is found to have secured 12 such negative points.

"This point system is applicable to new drivers who are given temporary driving licence for the first one year and when



he/she is found to have been given 12 or more such points, he/she will be required to take the tests all over again," a top official from the Traffic Department at Royal Oman Police (ROP) Al Seeb told the Observer.

Similarly, reckless overtaking, dangerous driving, and using mobile phone while driving and the like will attract negative points varying from 2 to 3 and will have similar impact on issuing permanent driving licence of 2 years.

AUTHENTIC BEAUTY AND RICH CULTURE



Malini Angelica, a popular travel documentary presenter and advocate of 'slow travel,' recently embarked on a mesmerising journey to Oman, where she delved into the country's stunning landscapes and vibrant culture. Her experience serves as a testament to the rewards of taking time to immerse oneself in the local culture, connect with the friendly locals, and seek out authentic encounters. **DETAILS ON P19**

Makasab for low-income families

The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the World Network for Information Technology Solutions Company, has introduced the 'Maksab' platform, designed to assist and support low-income families, families under social security, and SMEs in finding markets for their products and services, as part of the social security initiative. The platform consists of three applications and each offers different features to support families. **DETAILS ON P3**

SPOTLIGHT



BREAKING STEREOTYPES

P4

RAFO RESCUES RUSSIAN SAILOR

A Russian sailor was evacuated from a commercial ship by a helicopter belonging to the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) after he experienced a medical emergency. He was transported to the Royal Hospital in Muscat Governorate for medical care. The operation comes within the framework of the humanitarian and national efforts delivered by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the other departments of the Ministry of Defence to citizens and residents and travellers passing by the country.



Moody's hails efforts to bring down debt

MUSCAT: Moody's credit rating agency on Monday issued its credit rating report for the Sultanate of Oman, in which it raised the country's financial status from 'Ba3' to 'Ba2', while still maintaining a positive outlook on Oman.

The step comes as a result of the decline in Oman's indebtedness, as well as the improvement in Oman's ability to meet its financial obligations during the year 2022.

The agency attributes this improvement both to the increase in public revenues and the tangible efforts made by the Government of Oman in controlling financial conditions.

The progress also reflects the soundness of the government's decision to channel financial surpluses into public debt reduction tracks. It referred to sustained improvement in the effectiveness of fiscal policy and the efficiency of financial governance.

In its report, Moody's stated that government's efforts had a tangible impact on maximising fiscal surpluses. It noted that Oman's measures led to a 15 per cent decline in total public debt during 2022. It quoted a trend

The positive future outlook promises sustained amelioration in the public debt reduction rate over the next few years, despite the decline in oil prices provided that the level of spending is kept under control and more developed financial measures are endorsed

MOODY'S

that brought the debts down from 68 per cent in 2020 to 40 per cent in 2022 as a ratio of GDP.

The international agency pointed out that the positive future outlook promises sustained amelioration in the public debt reduction rate over the next few years, despite the decline in oil prices, provided that the level of spending is kept under control and that more developed financial measures are endorsed.

Heat wave to continue with little relief soon

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

While all cities in the Sultanate of Oman have recorded high temperatures (above 40) for the third straight day on Monday, a little reprieve is expected in the coming days.

Temperatures are likely to come down marginally to around 40°C in some places during the course of the week, the Met official said. Nizwa with 43°C, Bidbid 44°C, Al Rustaq 42°C, Salalah 33°C, while in the capital Al Seeb (42°C) and Al Amerat (45°C) will be the hottest on Tuesday. Several malls have been witnessing an increase in footfall as they offer easy breaks from the summer heat for local residents.

With the mid-day break rule yet to come into effect, construction workers are seen in action during the afternoon even when the heat is at its peak, sparking demands that this rule should be advanced to mid-May as the summer sets in early in Oman compared to other GCC countries.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) urged people, especially outdoor workers, to avoid

exposure to direct sunlight, especially during the afternoon, as there is a possibility of experiencing sunstrokes, heat exhaustion, and other symptoms associated with high temperatures.

"Many jobs and field activities require workers to be exposed to sunlight and high temperatures," the report said.

It urged that work hours for workers should include rest periods during the peak heat hours. The WHO has warned people to avoid going outside during the hottest time of the day.

"Take cool showers or baths. Alternatives include cold packs and wraps, towels, sponging, footbaths, etc. Wear light, loose-fitting clothes made of natural materials. If you go outside, wear a wide-brimmed hat or cap and sunglasses. Use light bed linen, sheets, and no cushions to avoid heat accumulation," the WHO added.

During a heatwave ideally, the room temperature should be kept below 32°C during the day and 24°C during the night. This is especially important for infants or adults over the age of 60 or who have chronic health conditions.



Oman, Libya strengthen ties; address regional challenges



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received here on Monday Najla Mohammed El Mangoush, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Collaboration of Libya.

The Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Collaboration expressed her appreciation for the march of relations between Oman and Libya. She also lauded the efforts and roles of the Sultanate of Oman in tackling regional and international issues. Moreover, she valued Oman's backing of efforts to establish peace. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters and means of developing them. — ONA

OMAN, LIBYA DISCUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday held a session of political talks with Dr Najla Mohammed El Mangoush, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Collaboration of Libya, who is on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides affirmed their keenness to cement ties between the two countries and two peoples. They discussed aspects of bilateral cooperation in political, economic and cultural fields, in addition to ways of maximising mutual benefits for both countries. — ONA



Al Buraimi Governorate launches 48th Arab Deaf Week

AL BURAIMI: The 48th Arab Deaf Week activities kicked off on Sunday focusing on the theme 'The importance of modern technologies in educating and raising the level of deaf culture'. The event, approved by the Arab Federation of Bodies Working with the Deaf, is hosted by the Department of Social Development.

Sultan bin Saif al Alawi, Director, Social Development Department in Al Buraimi Governorate, highlighted the collective efforts of governmental, private, and non-profit institutions within the joint team for the care of persons with disabilities. The primary goal of the event is to integrate these efforts, studying and improving services for individuals with disabilities in the governorate, while fostering a collaborative team spirit in programmes and activities that cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

The annual celebration aims to raise awareness about the rights of deaf individuals and utilise various capabilities and resources to improve their lives and enhance communication through sign language. The activities on the first day included informative presentations by participating parties, recognition of outstanding deaf individuals who have achieved personal and societal accomplishments in Al Buraimi Governorate, and an accompanying exhibition showcasing projects and technical devices that aid in the integration and adaptation of deaf individuals in educational and community settings. — ONA

Oman at Middle East Rail 2023 Conference



ABU DHABI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, participated in the opening of the two-day Middle East Rail Events & Conference 2023 in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Oman was represented in the opening by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of

Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The minster and his accompanying delegation viewed the latest development projects, global infrastructure and technical railways in the Middle East.

They also went on tour of a number of pavilions of companies specialised in transport and railways. — ONA

Majlis Ash'shura forwards Draft Tourism Law to State Council

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura on Monday held its 14th regular session of its 9th term's fourth annual convening under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura.

During the session, the council forwarded the Draft Tourism Law to the State Council. The draft law consists of five chapters containing 20 articles. It covers regulation of the tourism sector in Oman



in line with Oman Vision 2040 and developments in the tourism sector on the local, regional and international spheres.

The draft law will contribute in improving the quality of hotel and tourist facilities, ensuring their performance's efficiency, simplifying procedures regulating various tourism activities and augmenting the quality of these facilities in accordance with international standards. — ONA



MEDC poised to achieve 100 per cent automated meter reading in Muscat

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Modernisation of the electricity sector has made substantial progress in the capital, especially the transformation to Automated Meter Reading (AMR) and prepaid meters.

In its annual report published on Monday, Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), which is solely responsible for the distribution and supply of electricity in the Muscat Governorate, said major operational achievements evolved around improving customer convenience.

Prepaid subscribers form 22.45 per cent of the total customer base

MEDC said 80,000 accounts switched to Automated Meter Reading (AMR) from Manual Meter Reading, accounting for 65.2 per cent of the total revenues at the end of 2022.

"The forward-looking plan is to cover the entire accounts in Muscat Governorate to have automated meter reading activity with efforts made to deliver against a pre-defined schedule with the number of accounts to be read each

month within each zone. Overall performance was 95.23 per cent in 2022, compared to 90.8 per cent in 2021."

The prepaid meters (SABIQ) that enable people to have a bill-free service with full monitoring of their consumption are now used by 98,000 subscribers, representing 22.45 per cent of the total customer base, compared to 20.30 per cent in 2021. MEDC said it has moved the entire bill delivery methods to e-mail and personalised SMS since 2021, covering 95.46 per cent of the total subscriber base.

The complaint resolution performance has recorded an

average of less than one day compared to the target of 3 days.

Responded complaining customers satisfied with the resolution were recorded at 98.37 per cent in 2022, compared to 94.30 per cent satisfaction recorded in 2021.

Overall, the customer base grew by 2.63 per cent in 2022 to 437,958 accounts from 426,746 in the previous year.

The revenue for the year is RO 367.220 million, up 1.29 per cent from 2021, reporting a profit of RO 45.596 million and conclusively a net profit of RO 6.506 million in the year.

TRA reactivates mobile phone warning system

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the telecom services providers Ooredoo and Omantel, resumed experiments to activate early-warning system in coastal areas via mobile phone, the first-of-its-kind service in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance to the scheduled timeline.

The service provides several features including broadcasting instructions and a number of awareness messages to alert of catastrophes such as hurricanes, tsunamis, heavy rains, strong winds and poor horizontal vision in four languages: Arabic,



English, Hindi and Urdu.

The first experiment was applied in the coastal wilayats of the South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates. Experiments will be applied in Muscat Governorate today and in Dhofar Governorate tomorrow (Wednesday), provided that the situation is evaluated and solutions for any further challenges are found. — ONA



Platform launched to support low-income families

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the World Network for Information Technology Solutions Company, has introduced the 'Maksab' platform. This platform is designed to assist and support low-income families, families under social security, and SMEs in finding markets for their products and services, as part of the social security initiative.

The launch ceremony took place under the patronage of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, and was attended by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, as well as ministry officials and other dignitaries.

The 'Maksab' electronic platform consists of three applications: Maksab, Tawseel Maksab, and Taagir Maksab. Each application offers different features to support families, aiming to provide a



unified platform for both vendors and customers.

Omaima bint Ali al Mahriyah, the head of the Makasib platform for Muscat Governorate, explained that Maksab serves as a virtual shop, enabling social security families to connect with customers and explore new opportunities for their products and services. The platform is accessible via mobile phones, ensuring widespread availability.

E-platform 'Maksab' launched in cooperation with WebWire IT Solution Company

Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidyah, Director-General of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, emphasised that this platform will contribute to the economic and social empowerment of participating families. It will also



facilitate communication between these families and potential customers.

Al Busaidyah added that the 'Maksab' platform aims to provide smart sales outlets for the products of social security and limited-income families. It creates a digital

marketplace within Oman and abroad, generating revenues for these families.

To benefit from the platform, eligible families must register and comply with the principles and conditions established by the competent authorities. This involves diversifying and preparing products according to the required standards, aligning with the principles of sustainable economic

and social development in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr Ahmed bin Sulayem al Junaibi, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the World Network for Information Technology Solutions, expressed support for the ministry's efforts in improving the conditions of these families. He also highlighted the platform's role in promoting healthy competition and facilitating the faster and easier availability of local products.

The Maksab platform caters to local home project owners, individuals, institutional consumers, and delivery companies. However, it imposes certain conditions, including ensuring good packaging, possessing valid home licenses approved by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, maintaining product quality, and providing food safety guarantees.



Oman joins Arab League preparatory meeting in Jeddah

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the ministerial meeting of the Economic and Social Council, held in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Monday.

Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The meeting comes within the framework of the ongoing preparations for the meetings of

the Arab League during its 32nd session, hosted by Saudi Arabia.

The meeting reviewed the report of the Arab League's Secretary General regarding joint Arab action in the economic and social field.

It also touched on a spectrum of topics, including Arab transport agreements and the Arab Tourism Strategy, among other topics. — ONA



Oman at CWC conference at The Hague

THE HAGUE: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the 5th Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), held at The Hague on Monday.

The 5-day event is attended by representatives of countries that are part of the CWC.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Oman's Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Further, the conference discussed the role of the CWC in promoting

global peace and security. It also reviewed means of achieving the goals of CWC.

The conference also highlighted what was achieved in terms of eliminating chemical weapons and their production facilities, among other topics.

— ONA

Companies warned against holding employees' passports without consent

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Companies are advised not to keep employees' passports unless they request for it, according to the Ministry of Labour.

According to the ministerial decision 2/2006 issued by the Ministry of Labour dated November 6, 2006, keeping employees' passports is against the basic statute of the Sultanate of Oman's Labour Law.

"The passport belongs to the state that it issues to its citizens and must be with the person. An employer can keep the passport in case the worker desires for fear of losing it," a source in the ministry told the Observer.

Some workers feel the document is safe with the employer for the document renewals etc. In that case, the passports can be kept safely with the employer.

"There have been many violations reported to the ministry, and appropriate actions



were taken against the offenders," said the source.

"Employers should return the passports to its foreign employees because keeping them is against the labour practices in the country, and a passport is a personal document of an individual that proves his or her nationality and should be in his or her possession," he added.

The aforesaid ministerial decision further says that keeping the legal nationality document of any foreign worker is illegal, and it should be returned to the

document owner.

"The Sultanate of Oman has on several occasions clearly said no company has the authority to keep the passport of an employee without his own free will," he adds.

If passports are retained without consent, their owners can approach the Ministry of Labour to get them back.

"Similarly, if an employee is terminated from services for his/her failure to surrender his passport, the termination may be judged illegal," said the source.

Gain 12 black points and face driving test again

FROM P1

"The driving licence issued to an aspirant for the first time is a temporary one valid for one year, and the next licence issued will be permanent for two years. Having found to have more such black points on one's licence will impact the procedure of issuing permanent licence which is valid for 2 years," he added.

The new revision of traffic rules is in the wake of the recent increase in the number of accidents involving new drivers.

According to the statistics released by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the total number of road accidents increased by 15.5 per cent to touch 76,200 compared to the previous year. These include 60,900 minor accidents and 15,300 major accidents during the year.

However, a recent report released by the National Centre



for Statistics and Information (NCSI), traffic safety in the last five years has improved considerably, highlighting a reduction in road accidents.

Statistics reveal the number of accidents in the Sultanate of Oman fell by 60 per cent in five years from 3,845 in 2017 to 1,539 in 2021. The NCSI report further shows that 640 people were killed in road accidents in 2017, 637 in 2018, 511 in 2019 and 371 in 2020.

Moody's upgrades Oman's rating

FROM P1

In a word of praise, the agency pointed out that, despite having achieved additional financial revenues in 2022, the government of Oman maintained a controlled level of spending.

Moody's noted that it had made an assessment about the shift in the government's approach to manage fiscal policy during the period of high oil prices. In this context, the agency stressed the effectiveness of Oman's fiscal policy. It stressed that this management improved in an unprecedented manner and that it will enhance the credit position of the Sultanate of Oman in the medium term and the long term.

The agency said that the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan and initiatives undertaken by Oman to enhance non-oil revenues contributed to this improvement. From this perspective, the agency commended the removal of expenses associated with the oil sector from the state's general budget. This measure, it said, would contribute to reducing financial risks that result from fluctuations in oil prices.

The agency projects that oil prices will average between \$80 and \$85 per barrel during the years 2023 and 2024. It expects that the green hydrogen sector will contribute to cutting down the risks associated with long-term credit rating, due a global trend towards achieving carbon neutrality.

Moody's affirmed that there is an increasing confidence that 2022 improvement in financial indicators will prevail in the medium term. This, it noted, would contribute to raising credit rating.

Moody's stressed that Oman's credit rating is not likely to decline in the near future.

The international agency confirmed that this confidence comes from the government's continuation of fiscal control measures that led to financial balance and consolidated the country's ability to address future oil market fluctuations.

— ONA



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HANDS
MASTER
HEAVY
STEERING

MAI AL ABRI

IMAGES of rugged-looking men or sturdy construction workers dressed in blue jeans and work boots come to mind instantly when you think of pickup truck owners. While this image may reflect a segment of the expanding truck market, however, it doesn't portray all truck owners accurately.

The old notion of pickup trucks being exclusively for men is outdated, as there is an increasing trend of women owning them. This could be linked to the location where they reside. Like for example, women living in isolated rural areas, such as the Bedouin community in Al Wusta Governorate, are freely driving pickup trucks. However, it is rare to see women driving pickup trucks in urban areas like Muscat and other regions.

As part of her responsibility to transform the perspective of women from diverse regions, Raya al Kharousi, who owns a pickup truck, enjoys motivating women to consider driving pickup trucks. She believes these vehicles are practical and convenient for activities such as picnics and enables women to carry bicycles and camping gear with ease.

Raya strongly opposes the notion that being a female should refrain from entertainment opportunities and outdoor recreation. She advocates to break down gender-based stereotypes that restrict women from experiencing these joys.

"Why shouldn't I indulge in a vehicle that has all the bells and whistles? A car that comes equipped with the latest technologies that could help a woman navigate comfortably, while providing safety, luxury, and a sense of grandeur, as well as being the ideal choice for picnics," Raya exclaimed.

She believes that owning a pickup truck promotes self-sufficiency and enables drivers to assist others, which she values greatly about owning a truck.

According to Raya, one of the main reasons women adore their pickup trucks is that it makes them feel secure. The larger and taller size of the truck gives them a sense of protection that neither cars nor SUVs can match.

Raya said that she opted for a truck because of safety reasons. It provides her with better visibility while driving and she that in the case of an accident, she will be better protected.

Also, when it comes to dependability, pickup trucks outshine other types of vehicles. They possess off-road and towing capabilities that allow drivers to navigate through various terrains such as concrete, gravel, sand, or mud, she explains.

Maya is of the view that pickup truck owners need not worry about getting stranded in isolated locations because their vehicles can handle both off road and rough terrain.

FEMALE
PICKUP
DRIVERS
HIT THE
ROAD

WOMEN
ADORE THEIR
PICKUP
TRUCKS
WHICH
MAKES THEM
FEEL SECURE

TO BREAK
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STEREOTYPES
THAT RESTRICT
WOMEN FROM
EXPERIENCING
THESE JOYS

OWNING
A PICKUP
TRUCK
PROMOTES
SELF-
SUFFICIENCY
ENABLING
DRIVERS
TO ASSIST
OTHERS





Muscat embraces vibrant LCD signboards

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

More and more businesses in the capital are installing LCD or digital outdoor commercial signboards, bringing a vibrant look not only to their businesses but also to the capital and its busy streets.

Till recently, LCD commercial displays were visible only in certain areas of the city like Al Ghubra, hypermarkets, and a few retail stores, but one can come across LCD advertising displays installed by several small and medium outlets in various parts of the city, including in the commercial district of Ruwi.

Speaking to the Observer, one of the merchants said, "We are just taking advantage of the relaxed procedures announced by the authorities apart from the rationalisation of fees. I assume LCD audio-visual display boards are more

attention-seeking as they are communicative compared to the commercial signages."

As part of the efforts to streamline the process of conducting commercial activities and to improve the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman in the ease of doing business index, it was recently noted that the authority responsible for issuing permits for commercial signboards would rest with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) via Invest Easy platform.

The decision comes into effect from April 4 and is initially applicable only to new branches of the establishments.

The service fee will be RO 15 once at the time of registration, and there will be no need to renew permits.

Earlier, the permit for commercial signboards was issued by the local municipalities.

Oman hosts food additive safety summit



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Monday hosted sessions of the Food Additive Safety Summit, which aims to take measures to protect the health of consumers.

The two-day summit focuses on procedures of global systems and data requirements for endorsement of food additives.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the chief guest at the summit, said in a statement that the

issue of food safety and quality assumes great significance to consumer health, as well as economic and commercial implications.

The event includes seminars and roundtable sessions dealing with several topics, such as global coordination and international regulations on food additives, GCC technical specifications and regulations on food additives and partnership between the public and private sectors in developing food safety systems, with special focus on food additives.

The summit is attended by

representatives of government departments and private establishments from Oman and other GCC states, in addition to experts from international institutions.

Organised by the GCC Standardization Organization and international organisations concerned, the summit is held in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the American Business Council.

— ONA



Holy Quran contest winners feted

IBRA: The Ibra Cultural Center, located in the Wilayat of Ibra, North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, celebrated the recognition of exceptional students in the fourth edition of the 'Read and Raise the Holy Quran Competition.'

The competition attracted over 1,000 participants from various governorates.

Muhammad bin Salem Al Harthy, a member of the Board of Directors of the Ibra Cultural Center, highlighted the competition's objective of promoting the memorisation of the Holy Quran in its entirety.

The event aimed to instill the educational vision of enabling participants to memorise and contemplate the divine teachings. This year's edition witnessed the participation of over 1,000 contestants representing wilayats from across the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

FRENCH SENATE DELEGATION HOLDS TALKS



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Monday a delegation from the French Senate. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Nasser bin Abdullah al Qutabi, Head of the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies at the Academy. — ONA

CORRIGENDUM

The first line of the **Chairman's Statement Q1 2023** released yesterday in **Oman Daily Observer** by Renaissance Services should read **"On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present the unaudited accounts for Renaissance Services SAOG for the first quarter ended March 31, 2023."**

Oman promotes cultural exchange at Tehran International Book Fair

TEHRAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministries of Culture, Sports and Youth, Information, Awqaf and Religious Affairs, is actively participating in the 34th Tehran International Book Fair, which commenced on May 10.

With the fair hosting approximately 3,000 publishing houses from both within and outside of Iran, the event serves as a platform for the Omani delegation to showcase the nation's vibrant culture, rich heritage, intellectual contributions, and literary and historical aspects.

The participation aims to strengthen intellectual and literary cooperation between Oman and Iran, foster cultural exchange in the realms of writing and publishing, and provide a global stage for Omani authors.

The Omani pavilion at the fair boasts an extensive collection of publications spanning various disciplines, including intellectual, linguistic, jurisprudential, literary, artistic, and scientific fields.



Under the theme 'We Read for the Future,' the 2023 Tehran International Book Fair features the participation of approximately 2,700 local publishers, over 100 foreign publishers, and 200 institutions

Under the theme 'We Read for the Future,' the 2023 Tehran International Book Fair features the participation of approximately 2,700 local publishers, over 100 foreign publishers, and 200 institutions specialising in printing, translation, and publishing. Additionally, a virtual book fair is being held alongside the physical event, enabling book enthusiasts to make online purchases around

the clock.

The international section of the fair proudly presents a remarkable display of approximately 45,000 book titles across diverse fields of knowledge, academics, and children's literature.

With the participation of more than 30 countries, this year's international section celebrates the Republic of Tajikistan as the guest of honour. — ONA

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY Advertisement No. (17/2023)					
Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board , may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.					
Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/084 2023/MM/ HQ-12	Construction of Storm Water Drainage System in Al Mahaj Area - Wilayat Al Amarat Phase 2	250	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Excellent
PRE/22/055 2023/MM/ HQ-5	Design and Improvement of Al Jami Roundabout and Drainage Works Near to Maizoon Mosque (Re-Call)	300	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Excellent
PRE/22/113 2023/MM/ HQ-13	Consultancy Services for Geotechnical Study and Design of Slopes Protection in Darsait Area	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	First
PRE/22/128 2023/MM/ QS-30	Design and Construction of Bus Bays at Muscat Governorate	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	First
PRE/23/002 2023/MM/ QS-31	Supply and Fixing of Lighting Poles/Electrical Connections for Msar Project at Al Amarat	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/027 2023/MM/ HQ-14	Design & Construction of Roads in Al Khouth Village	150	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	First
PRE/23/040 2023/MM/ HQ-15	Consultancy Services for Design of Internal Roads in North Falaj Sham	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	First
PRE/23/070 2023/MM/ HQ-16	Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) of Oracle E-Business HRMS & Financial System	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/091 2023/MM/ QS-32	Power Supply to Mubaila Park at As' Seeb	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/092 2023/MM/ HQ-17	Supply and Installation of Benches in Public Parks in Muscat Governorate	25	05/06/2023	26/06/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/096 2023/MM/ HQ-18	Development of One Way Road System in Al Khawir	225	26/05/2023	31/05/2023	Excellent

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcl.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



Israeli forces kill Palestinian man in West Bank raid

RAMALLAH: Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian during a raid in the city of Nablus, the Palestinian health ministry said, the latest incident in more than a year of surging violence in the occupied West Bank.

The Islamic Jihad group claimed the dead man was a member, identifying him as 22-year-old Saleh Sabra.

The Israeli military said suspects hurled rocks and explosives and fired at its forces in Nablus, a flashpoint city where there have been regular raids and clashes.

It added that the forces were in Nablus to prepare for the possible demolition of the home of a Palestinian suspected of killing two brothers from a Jewish settlement near the village of Huwara on Feb. 26.

The attack prompted a settler rampage in Huwara, during which a Palestinian man was killed and cars and homes were set alight while people were inside.

Monday's raid, near a refugee camp in a part of the West Bank where Palestinians exercise limited self-rule, sparked "intense confrontations" with Palestinian fighters, the Palestinian WAFA



Palestinians react during a rally as they mark the 75th anniversary of Nakba in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. – Reuters

news agency reported. Reuters could not immediately verify whether Sabra took part in the clashes.

Israel says its policy of demolishing the homes of perpetrators of attacks bolsters deterrence and contributes to

security. Palestinians and rights groups have criticised the practice as a form of collective punishment that harms innocent families.

The Nablus raid came after an Egyptian-mediated truce ended five days of fighting between Israel and Islamic Jihad in Gaza

last week, in which 34 Palestinians and an Israeli were killed.

Palestinians on Monday marked 75 years since what they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe", when hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes or fled in the 1948 war that accompanied the foundation of Israel.

Israel-Palestinian violence has been intensifying for months, with frequent Israeli military raids and settler violence in the West Bank amid a spate of Palestinian attacks on Israelis. Since January, more than 140 Palestinians and at least 19 Israelis and foreigners have been killed in the West Bank and Israel.

Israel captured Gaza and the West Bank, areas Palestinians want for an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in a 1967 war. Israeli forces and settlers withdrew from Gaza in 2005. Statehood talks have been frozen since 2014.

Meanwhile, many cities in Israel went on strike on Monday over a plan to reallocate their tax income, opening a new front against the government that is already under pressure over a contested judicial reform.

— Reuters

Air strikes pound Sudan's capital as conflict enters second month

DUBAI: The Sudanese army carried out air strikes in the north of the capital Khartoum on Monday, attacking its paramilitary rivals around a hospital that witnesses said was damaged in the bombardment.

Intense battles in Khartoum and its sister cities of Bahri and Omdurman have raged despite Saudi and U.S.-brokered talks between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Jeddah aimed at securing humanitarian access and a ceasefire.

The fighting has spread to the western region of Darfur, but has been concentrated in the capital, where RSF fighters have taken up positions across neighbourhoods and the army has used air strikes and heavy artillery fire to target them.

Army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Hemedti held the top positions on Sudan's ruling council following the 2019 overthrow of former leader Omar al-Bashir during a popular uprising, and staged a coup two years later as a deadline to hand power to civilians approached.

The war began after disputes over plans for the RSF to join the army and the chain of command



Smoke billows in the distance in Khartoum amid ongoing fighting between the forces of two rival generals. – AFP

in a new political transition. It has caused about 200,000 to flee into nearby countries and over 700,000 have been displaced inside Sudan, triggering a humanitarian crisis that threatens to destabilise the region.

Residents report a rise in looting and lawlessness after police vanished from the streets at the outset of the conflict. On Monday, Burhan replaced the head of the police, in one of several of changes of senior officials after the central government largely ceased to function.

The unrest has killed at least 676 people and injured 5,576,

according to official figures, though the real toll is expected to be much higher.

On Monday an employee of Sharq el-Nil hospital said the southern part of the facility had been hit by an air strike.

The army said it had hit arms and fuel depots around the hospital, which it said had been occupied by the RSF, and that there were no civilian casualties.

Last week the two sides agreed a "declaration of principles" to protect civilians and secure aid access, but enforcement mechanisms and a ceasefire are still being discussed. — Reuters

Türkiye faces election runoff, Erdogan seen with momentum

ANKARA: Tayyip Erdogan led comfortably on Monday after the first round of Türkiye's presidential election, with his rival facing an uphill struggle to prevent the president extending his rule into a third decade in a runoff vote on May 28.

Turkish assets weakened on the news, which showed Erdogan just below the 50 per cent threshold needed to avoid sending the Nato-member country to a second round of a presidential election viewed as passing judgment on his rule.

Erdogan's People's Alliance, comprising his religious-rooted AK Party and its nationalist partners, also appeared set to win a majority in the new parliament with 321 of the 600 seats, further boosting his chances in the presidential runoff. With 99 per cent of ballot boxes counted in the presidential vote, Erdogan led with 49.4 and his main opposition rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu had 44.96 per cent, High Election Board chairman Ahmet Yener told reporters. Turnout was a very high at 88.8 per cent.

Further boosting Erdogan's hopes, nationalist candidate



Supporters of President Erdogan holds a flag of his portrait outside the AK Party headquarters after polls closed in Ankara. – AFP

Sinan Ogan, who placed third in Sunday's election, said in an interview that he would only endorse Kilicdaroglu in the runoff if the latter ruled out any concessions to a pro-Kurdish party, parliament's third largest.

The election has been closely watched in Europe, Washington, Moscow, and across the region, where Erdogan has asserted Turkish power while strengthening ties to Russia and putting strain on Ankara's traditional alliance with the United States.

Erdogan is one of President Vladimir Putin's main allies and his strong showing is likely to encourage the Kremlin but unnerv the Biden administration, as well as many European and Middle Eastern leaders who had troubled relations with Erdogan.

The Kremlin said on Monday it expected Russia's cooperation with Türkiye to continue and deepen whoever wins the election.

The political uncertainty is expected to weigh on financial markets over the next two weeks. — Reuters

NAIROBI

Kenya and Somalia agree to border reopening

Kenya and Somalia have agreed to reopen their common border after more than a decade, Kenya's interior minister said on Monday as ties warm between the two neighbours following years of tensions. The announcement came after a high-level joint ministerial meeting in Nairobi on cooperation including on security, as well as trade and the movement of people.

Kenya and Somalia share a 680-kilometre land border and have been locked in a dispute



for years over a potentially oil-and-gas rich chunk of the Indian Ocean. In October 2021, the UN's top court handed control of most of the vast area to Somalia but Kenya rejected the ruling. — AFP

DHAKA

Cyclone Mocha causes extensive damage

The powerful category five Cyclone Mocha caused severe devastation in coastal areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh with wind speeds of more than 250 kilometres per hour.

It was the strongest cyclone to hit the region in more than a decade. The full extent of the damage is only slowly becoming clear because most communication links to the coastal areas have been cut.

Aid organisation Oxfam on Monday said that it was



constantly receiving reports of destruction from new areas.

In both countries, hundreds of thousands of people were taken to temporary shelters as a precaution which saved many lives, said Oxfam. — dpa

RIYADH

Syria attends the Arab League meeting

Syria's officials took part in a preparatory session ahead of the Arab League Friday's summit in Saudi Arabia.

"I... take this opportunity to welcome the Syrian Arab Republic to the League of Arab States," Saudi finance minister Mohammed al-Jadaan told the meeting, which was broadcast live by state TV channel.

Saudi King Salman has invited Assad to attend Friday's summit in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah.



The Arab League's Secretary-General, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, said on Monday that Syria's return could revive "the principle of Arab solidarity", according to a statement delivered by his deputy, Hossam Zaki. — AFP



In brief

■ SOFIA



CHIEF PROSECUTOR DEFIES CALLS TO RESIGN

Bulgaria's chief prosecutor Ivan Geshev refused to resign on Monday amid rising pressure after an explosion near his car earlier this month that his opponents say was staged. Geshev was appointed chief prosecutor in late 2019 for a seven-year term, setting off protests accusing him of corruption. His critics say that he has become a symbol of the inefficiency and lack of transparency of Bulgaria's prosecution. "I will finish my mandate... I am not afraid," Geshev, 52, told journalists at a press conference, demonstratively tearing to pieces what he said was his resignation. — AFP

■ MUNICH



NURSE GETS LIFE TERM FOR KILLING TWO PATIENTS

A Munich court sentenced a 27-year-old male nurse to life in prison on Monday for murdering two patients by deliberately administering unprescribed drugs so he could be "left in peace". The nurse, identified only as Mario G., was also found guilty on six counts of attempted murder, a spokesman for the Munich district court in southern Germany said. During his trial, Mario G. admitted to injecting patients with sedatives and other drug cocktails while working in the recovery room at a Munich hospital. The two patients who died as a result of Mario G's actions were 80 and 89 years old. — AFP

■ WARSAW



POLAND GETS FIRST HIMARS ROCKET SYSTEMS

Poland has received the first batch of the US-made HIMARS rocket launchers it has said it plans to deploy in the region bordering Russia, the Polish defence minister said on Monday. "This weapon will be deployed in the northeastern part of our country... its task will be to deter the aggressor," Mariusz Blaszczak told reporters. Blaszczak said the HIMARS launchers would "strengthen the Polish army on the eastern flank of Poland and the eastern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance." Poland, a country bordering Ukraine which it staunchly supports, bought 20 HIMARS from the United States in 2019 and has now received first delivery of the systems. — AFP

Zelensky meets Sunak in London as UK promises extra military aid

LONDON: The UK will provide Ukraine with air defence missiles and attack drones, Downing Street has announced, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. In the latest leg of the Ukrainian president's tour of western allies, Zelensky said the two leaders had also discussed western fighter jets and he anticipated "very important decisions" to be made soon. Downing Street said the Prime Minister had welcomed the president to his countryside manor Chequers as the UK continues "sustaining (its) support" for the war-torn country. It follows meetings in Paris, Berlin and Rome and comes three months after the Ukrainian leader's first trip to London since the start of Russia's attack. Following the meeting, the president said the two countries were "real partners", with Sunak knowing details of developments on the battlefield. "We want to create this jets coalition and I'm very positive with it," he said. "We spoke about it and I see



Sunak and Zelensky talk during a joint press conference in the garden at Chequers, the prime minister's official residence, in London. — AFP

that in the closest time you will hear some, I think very important decisions but we have to work a little bit more on it." The Prime Minister stressed that the provision of warplanes

was "not a straightforward thing" but said the UK was committed to training Ukrainian pilots to use Nato-standard aircraft. No 10 said an elementary flying phase for cohorts of Ukrainian pilots will begin this summer, going hand in hand with British efforts to work with other countries on providing F16 jets. Sunak said: "This is a crucial moment in Ukraine's resistance to

a terrible war of aggression they did not choose or provoke. "They need the sustained support of the international community to defend against the barrage of unrelenting and indiscriminate attacks that have been their daily reality for over a year. At the start of the meeting, Zelensky thanked the UK Government, the King and the British people for their support. "We are thankful from all our hearts, from Ukrainians, from our soldiers, we are thankful," he said. The president said his talks with the Prime Minister would cover "very important issues, urgent support for Ukraine". The crisis was a matter of "security not only for Ukraine, it is important for all of Europe". The latest package of military assistance will see hundreds of air defence missiles and further unmanned aerial systems including long-range attack drones with a range of more than 200 kilometres. The new equipment will be delivered over the coming months. — dpa

Slovakia's new technocratic government takes office

BRATISLAVA: Slovakian President Zuzana Caputová appointed a technocratic government under the leadership of non-party central banker Ludovit Odor on Monday. The 46-year-old former deputy governor of the National Bank of Slovakia (NBS) will lead the country until a new government emerges from the parliamentary elections on September 30. Odor's cabinet of experts replaces the conservative-populist minority government under Eduard Heger. Heger was rejected in December by a vote of no confidence and has only served on an acting basis since then. Bordering Ukraine, Slovakia is among Kiev's most ardent political and military supporters. Caputová has ensured that the new government will continue backing its neighbour with key appointments. Miroslav Wlachovsky, who previously worked as a diplomat in Washington and London, became the new foreign minister. The



Slovakia's PM Ludovit Odor speaks during a press conference with newly appointed members of the government in Bratislava. — Reuters

defence ministry was taken over by security and defence expert Martin Sklenar, who also represented Slovakia as a diplomat in Washington, as well as in Slovakia's EU representation in Brussels. — dpa

US candidate Amy Pope wins tense contest to run UN migration agency

GENEVA: Former White House advisor Amy Pope won a vote in Geneva on Monday to head the US migration agency, prevailing in a tense contest against a Portuguese incumbent who had the support of European countries. European countries and the United States were running rival candidates to head the US migration agency in an unusually tense contest between allies. More than 100 million people are forcibly displaced around the world and the International Organization for migration (IOM) seeks to ensure humane and orderly migration and intervenes where needed. Its 175 member states took part in a first round of voting on Monday by secret ballot in closed-door meetings.



Amy Pope delivers her acceptance speech after being elected as new UN migration chief in Geneva. — AFP

The International Organization for Migration said Pope would become the first woman to lead the organisation when she begins her five-year term on Oct. 1. Pope, who served as Deputy Director General for Management

and Reform at IOM, took leave to campaign against her boss António Vitorino, who has been in the position since 2018. In 2021, Pope served as Senior Advisor on Migration to US President Joe Biden, who publicly backed her candidacy. "As IOM's largest bilateral donor, the United States strongly supports Pope's vision and looks forward to working with her to implement the critical reforms necessary to create a more effective, inclusive IOM," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. More than 100 million people are forcibly displaced around the world and IOM seeks to ensure humane and orderly migration and intervenes where needed. — Reuters

Macron, Musk meet in Paris on investing in France

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron met billionaire businessman Elon Musk on Monday to discuss future investment projects, as the French leader hosts a conference aimed at persuading business leaders to put their money in France. Macron hosted the world's second richest man, six months after their last encounter in the United States, his office said. They met at the Elysee Palace before heading to Versailles for the latest edition of the president's Choose France conference where Macron seeks to drum up investment in the country. "We talked about the attractiveness of France and the significant progress in the electric vehicle and energy sectors," Macron wrote on Twitter afterwards. Musk smiled and waved at reporters as the meeting got



Macron meets with businessmen, including Elon Musk during "Choose France" Summit at the Chateau de Versailles, outside Paris. — AFP

underway but made no comment. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the BFMTV broadcaster that "negotiations are ongoing" with the magnate. Le Maire gave no details of Monday's talks with Musk,

saying simply that "all of today's investments are the fruit of months or even years of negotiations". Macron said that some 13 billion euros of investment would be announced at the summit, equating to the creation of some

8,000 jobs. "When a foreign investor chooses France, it's good for jobs and for our regions," he said. Some 200 foreign business bosses are expected at the summit. The meeting is being hosted at

the Palace of Versailles, the former residence of France's monarchs, around which a tight security perimeter has been erected. Macron remains the target of angry protests after signing into law his controversial pension reform last month, leading to new accusations from the opposition he was only a president for the rich. During a US trip in December, Macron held an unannounced face-to-face meeting with Musk, saying later the two had had a "clear and honest" discussion during an hour-long meeting, including on electric cars and batteries. He had also conveyed to Musk his — and Europe's — concerns about content moderation on Twitter since Musk bought the influential platform. Macron confirmed the pair "also talked about digital regulation" in their Paris meeting. — AFP

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

The threatened value...

Life is about living, coexisting, learning, working, facing challenges, sacrificing, accepting and of course all of that comes in with great amount of trust.

When we leave children at school for their first day we do so by entrusting our most precious possession in life with the professionals. The same goes when we are in hospitals or depend on others for any service.

There is an element of trust.

But now here is a time when the phone rings and you pick up to answer and a lady on the other side of the line asks in Arabic and English the race and origin of the person.

Gullible me, the first reaction was, “Why?”

She went on and when she realised I couldn't catch up with the Arabic, she continued in English that she is from a company and I have won free gifts especially for the kitchen.

My friend's immediate reaction was to cut the call and she said block the number after I gave the phone to her to speak to the lady.

Many questions went through the mind. My other friend said she gets so many of these calls.

The voice had asked, “What's your name?”

I had asked her, “For what?”

Reflecting on my own response I realised how wary we have become. Phone calls were so well appreciated once upon a time. There used to be excitement in receiving the calls and making calls. Of course many of us would have enjoyed making prank calls to family members and friends and laughed our hearts out.

At the same there is also the prevalence of telemarketing who are paid to do marketing by calling people on the phone. One might not even be their customers.

But this call was not just marketing they wanted information from the call recipient. Yet again another friend received a message from an international number that said if you have one hour each day you can make money in commission from the online store. It is amazing to think that there are people making a living at other people's expense.

People feel the need to have second



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

IT IS AMAZING TO THINK THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE MAKING A LIVING AT OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPENSE

jobs and love the feeling of winning something. And there are others who are using this vulnerability as a source of income.

It goes on to prove how the world continues to change and evolve in this regard. But if you look at it even in the fraudulent projects people are using all the skills whether it is data as a resource or communication as a skill.

In the 1990s it was about someone inheriting a whole lot of money and they were on the look out for people to invest with. Then there were individuals who used to steal identities and contacts by hacking into emails to write to the contacts that their friend was stranded in a foreign land and needed money urgently.

Then they moved on to social media messaging and creating friendships telling them they would like to send parcels which never reach and they fake calls as if from customs to clear parcels by sending money only to know that one has been tricked. Then there were the cases of people who were stuck at airports with fines to be paid.

People, the victims, got smarter and began to share their stories and complained to the authorities so awareness could be addressed. But their ideas evolve too. So it is now online jobs. To succeed is everyone's right and so is making a living.

There are people who work indulging in a variety of projects and they thrive too. For sure they have a sense for satisfaction.

But what about the stress to conduct and hold on to these projects that are baseless?

So people think again many times about the trust worthiness of new contacts.

In the olden days the issue was regarding marriage alliances. People would fall for the baseless success stories of individuals and get their daughters married off only to find out about the disastrous reality later. It is too late they believed then.

Today it is the cyberspace that is luring the people. So we would think others who are not in this territory are safe. Not quite so, because they are active with mobile phones.

If we were worried about mistaken identities in the past now it is about stolen identities.

BEATING THE HEAT



A man drinks water from a running pipe during a hot summer afternoon in Prayagraj, India, on Monday. – AFP

Potential to make provincial media global!

There is a saying in the media that goes: “If you want to be global, you have to pay attention to the local”, which indicates that the local media, whether in a state or in a village, could become the issue of the hour worldwide and transmitted by the global media. This could take place only if the material was well selected and smartly circulated in the media by focusing on the themes of influence in the media.

Today, there is a great deal of exciting and dazzling media coverage in the Omani villages, let alone the governorates that reflect the cultural and moral heritage of the citizen through the ages, which deserve to be publicised. There are many exciting, attractive and incredible natural resources, and cultural and archaeological milestones, which could be circulated through newspapers with attractive and overlapping colours, shapes and symbols that please the viewers, and which could contribute in supporting media coverage locally, regionally and globally. These are facts we must pay attention to and look at seriously, which means we really, truly, and honestly have things in our beloved country that we can proudly present to the world.

All we need is to take the first



Ali Al Matani alimatani2@gmail.com

WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE MEDIA IN THE GOVERNORATES AND BOOST THE ROLE OF CORRESPONDENTS

courageous step forward and announce to the public that we have treasures of stories, mysteries, wonders and curiosities accumulated from an ancient country. We have Omani values, morals, and legacies that deserve to be told about, and which are tolerant in form, and magnificent in name and content. All of these, by the grace of God, deserve to be revealed to fascinate the whole world.

Therefore, there is a need to pay full attention to those bright points that are capable of capturing eyes in a way that contributes in reflecting the wealth of this ancient country that have troves of priceless treasures.

The Ministry of Information's workshop on provincial media could be an attempt within this framework to open wider horizons for media professionals from various public, private, print, radio, and the television media to review their viewpoints towards broader, more comprehensive and in-depth coverage of the wealth of the invaluable things. This media coverage needs to be used with innovative and novel methods to highlight the places of attraction

in the country. These are the media mechanisms that we need in the coming stage that must compel the reader, the viewer, and the listener to motivate him to explore this beautiful country.

Over the years, correspondents in governorates made commendable efforts in conveying and reflecting the advancements of the development process by relying on legacies and other things, to an extent that they contributed in highlighting these governorates and presenting them to the world in a beautiful way. However, the media treatment in the coming period needs to be more in-depth, comprehensive, and more accurate, after selecting the audio



Over the years, the provincial media has achieved commendable strides.

and visual stories that affect not only in the Sultanate of Oman, but also in the whole world. This can be achieved through good selection, innovative handling and integrated treatment of all stories, regardless of their topics and angles.

On the other hand, we need to strengthen the media in the governorates and boost the role of correspondents in particular in our media and empower them in every way as the sources we rely on. This will only come after strengthening and supplying the material and other aspects. Then we will find that their press and media messages have fulfilled all the new requirements. So that the reward is equal to the magnitude

of the effort without any imbalance. This is an equation that has been ignored for a long time, and it is now time to reveal it. The media is an industry that must be taken care of, something that will motivate reporters to improve their performance and then fall in love with the profession, and if the matter develops to (adoration), then there is nothing wrong with that.

Of course, news follow-up is an integral part of the media, but the covered topic must also be refined in quantity and quality, rather than characters. After that, there is a need to dive more into what is behind the news, which will lead to achieving the deserved attention as a prelude to creating the impact on the audience. This will ensure that the coverage will confidently and competently draw international attention afterwards.

We hope that what was discussed in the seminar on provincial media would be taken into consideration to advance the media message, and we should strive for development, improvement and enhancement to reach the specific goals that must be sought and then achieved in the end.

sport

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Alcaraz stunned by Hungarian qualifier

D J O K O V I C B A T T L E S P A S T D I M I T R O V I N R O M E

ROME: Carlos Alcaraz crashed to a humbling 6-3, 7-6(4) defeat by Hungarian qualifier Fabian Marozsan in the third round of the Italian Open on Monday as his quest for a third straight title on clay before the French Open ended in disappointment.

The 20-year-old had come into the tournament on the back of triumphs in Barcelona and Madrid and will replace Novak Djokovic as the world number one for top billing at Roland Garros which begins later this month.

But Alcaraz was far from his best and got off to a shaky start in his second match in Rome, dropping serve to love in the fourth game as world number 135 Marozsan built a big lead and dominated the late exchanges to easily win the opening set.

Marozsan continued to heap the pressure and broke for a 4-3 lead after Alcaraz saved three breakpoints earlier in the second set, but the 23-year-old Budapest native immediately let his opponent off the hook before forcing a tiebreak.

Alcaraz raced to a 4-1 lead but Marozsan hit back in superb style to reel off six points and hand the world number two only his second defeat on clay in 22 matches this season.

“It’s not easy to say something,” Marozsan said immediately after the biggest win of his career. “I’m very happy, I could have never



Hungary's Fabian Marozsan with Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, after winning his round of 32 match. – Reuters



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his round of 32 match against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov. – Reuters

ITALIAN OPEN ATP/WTa RESULTS

MEN (THIRD ROUND):

Yannick Hanfmann (GER) bt Marco Cecchinato (ITA) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3; Borna Coric (CRO x15) bt Roberto Carballes Baena (ESP) 7-6 (7/3), 6-1; Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x26) 6-3, 4-6, 6-1; Cameron Norrie (GBR x13) bt Marton Fucsovics (HUN) 6-2, 7-6 (7/4); Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt Roman Safiullin 7-5, 7-5; Holger Rune (DEN x7) bt Fabio Fognini (ITA)

6-4, 6-2; Casper Ruud (NOR x4) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 6-1, 4-6, 7-6 (7/0); Laslo Djere (SRB) bt Christian Garin (CHI) 6-3, 2-1 - retired; Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x24) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-7 (0/7), 6-2, 6-2; Jannik Sinner (ITA x8) bt Alexander Shevchenko 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2

WOMEN (FOURTH ROUND):

Zheng Qinwen (CHN x22) bt Wang Xiyu (CHN) 6-4, 3-6, 6-1;

Anhelina Kalinina (UKR x30) bt Madison Keys (USA x19) 2-6, 6-2, 6-4
Third round: Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) 6-2, 6-0; Donna Vekic (CRO x21) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS x16) 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) bt Maria Sakkari (GRE x9) 7-5, 6-3; Elena Rybakina (KAZx7) bt Anna Kalinskaya 4-3 - retired; Paula Badosa (ESP) bt Marta

Kostyuk (UKR x32) 6-4, 6-2; Karolina Muchova (CZE) bt Camila Giorgi (ITA) 7-6 (7/4), 6-2; Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x20) bt Barbora Krejckova (CZE x10) 7-6 (7/2), 6-0; Daria Kasatkina (x8) bt Julia Grabher (AUT) 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2); Marie Bouzkova (CZE x27) bt Coco Gauff (USA x6) 4-6, 6-2, 6-2; Madison Keys (USA x19) bt Victoria Azarenka (x14) - walkover

imagined this. It was my dream last night.
“I said I’d try to do something special by winning a few games and maybe a set and I just beat

the (soon to be) world number one, the best player in our sport now. “Everything was perfect today.” It was the first defeat for Alcaraz to a player ranked

outside the world’s top 100 since the 2021 Paris Masters when he fell to Hugo Gaston.
Zheng Qinwen earlier beat Chinese compatriot Wang

Xiyu 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 to reach the quarterfinals in the women’s draw while American Madison Keys lost 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 against Ukraine’s Anhelina Kalinina.

DJOKOVIC THROUGH
In late Sunday action, Novak Djokovic continued his Italian Open title defence with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-1 victory over Bulgarian 26th seed Grigor Dimitrov.

Djokovic, who will lose his world number one ranking at the end of the Masters 1000 tournament to Carlos Alcaraz, overcame a sluggish start and a late comeback attempt by familiar opponent Dimitrov to get over the line in their third-round meeting. Both players surrendered serve early in the first set before Djokovic raised his game to pull away for a 4-1 lead, and an 11th victory over Dimitrov in 12 meetings began to look inevitable.

Dimitrov, whose only win over the Serbian world number one came 10 years ago in Madrid, produced a tight hold but could not prevent his opponent from running away with the opening set and grabbing the advantage in the next. The former world number three did however reel off four straight games from 2-4 to take the second set and force a decider. But Djokovic responded strongly and let out a roar after securing a double break in the third set and held firm this time to advance.

Seventh seed Holger Rune was equally impressive in his 6-4, 6-2 win over local favourite Fabio Fognini and will meet Alexei Popyrin in round four after the Australian overcame Roman Safiullin 7-5 7-5. — Reuters

Oman U23 team getting set for West Asian challenge

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

After an absence of 45 days, Oman Olympic (under-23) team will complete their first gathering camp after the long break on Tuesday. The camp was a great opportunity for the players to return back to action and reporting to their training sessions. The domestic camp began on Wednesday and run for almost a week period in Muscat at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex under supervision of national coach Akram Habreesh.

The main objective of the preparatory camp was to raise the fitness level and enhance the physical condition of the players for the forthcoming events. Moreover, the local gathering was a chance for the squad which featured mixed members to increase the harmony among them. The coaching staff headed by Habreesh and assisted by coach Majeed al Nazwani implemented some technical and tactical sessions.

The closest participation for the Olympic team will be in West Asian Championship in Iraq which will be held during June 10 to 20. It will followed by Arab Cup for Olympic Teams which will be held in Algeria in July.

The main assignment for the



national Olympic team will be taking part in the U23 Asian Cup qualifiers in September. The draw of the Asian qualifiers

will be held on May 25 while the dates of the matches will be during September 4 to 12 for all the groups. Oman team did not

qualify in the previous edition of U23 Asian Cup which was held in Uzbekistan in July and August 2022. The championship ended

with crowning Saudi Arabia as champions while the hosts ended as runners-up. Japan finished in third place after beating Australia

3-0 in the third and fourth play-off.

Oman will be in third and last level of the draw in the upcoming U23 Asian Cup. The U23 Asian Cup finals, which will be held in Doha, will act as qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Another major event for the Oman Olympic team players will be attending the Asian Games in China from September 23 to October 8.

The final squad for West Asian Championship will be announced after one more gathering. The coaching staff will evaluate the readiness and fitness level of all the players and will select the most appropriate candidates for the championship.

OMAN SQUAD: Khalid Yazeed, Asaad al Balushi, Ayman al Nabhani, Hudhaifa al Mamari, Qusai al Mamari, Sameer al Hatmi, Salim al Dawoodi, Abdullah al Fulaiti, Hammam al Mawali, Salim Abdulsalam, Khalid al Ghatrefi, Abdulrahman al Yaqoobi, Abdulhafidh al Mukhaini, Abdullah al Mukhaini, Omar al Hadabi, Said al Rawahi, Said al Salami, Ahed al Mashakhi, Mazin Saleh, Nibras al Mashari, Omar al Balushi, Mohammed Abdul Hakeem, Mohammed Moosa, Mohsin al Dawoodi and Abdullah al Alawi.

All-round Kolkata down Chennai to keep play-off hopes alive

CHENNAI, India: Fifties from skipper Nitish Rana and Rinku Singh led Kolkata Knight Riders to a six-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings and stay alive in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Kolkata kept Chennai down to 144-6, a total they overhauled riding on a key stand of 99 between Rinku (54) and Rana (57 not out) in Chennai.

Spinners Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine took two wickets each to set up victory as Kolkata jumped a spot to seventh in their attempt to finish the league stage on top four for a play-off berth.

“I said at the toss that if we do well in all the three departments, then our chances are good,” Rana said after his team’s sixth win in 13 matches.

Four-time winners Chennai remain second in the 10-team table led by holders Gujarat Titans and on course for the play-offs.

Kolkata looked in trouble at 33-3 after Chennai pace bowler Deepak Chahar’s third strike to send back Jason Roy, before the left-handed pair of Rinku and Rana guided the team home with nine balls to spare.

Rinku, who became an IPL sensation with his five sixes off the last five balls to conjure up a miracle win for Kolkata last



Kolkata Knight Riders’ Rinku Singh plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) match between Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — AFP

month, struck his third fifty of the season before being run out. He was named man of the match.

Rana made most of a dropped catch on 18 to reach his fifty and stood firm to hit the winning runs.

Four-time winners Chennai started strongly but slipped from

61-1 to 72-5 in the space of 19 balls before Shivam Dube revived the innings with his unbeaten 48.

Dube kept up the fight in his 34-ball knock laced with three sixes but it was superstar and skipper MS Dhoni who brought the house down in his team’s last

league game at MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Dhoni, who many suspect is playing his final IPL, walked in to a deafening roar as he faced four balls including a wide and no-ball on which he was bowled but ended on two not out. — AFP

Spin to play big role in Lucknow vs Mumbai



IPL has come to a phase where even the best of mathematical experts would be breaking their heads with the number of permutations and combinations. Suddenly, we see Chennai in a must win position. Currently, 16 points is expected to be the safe number for qualification.

With just 6 days and 8 matches left in the league stage, the points table is so close that even the team that’s ranked number 9, still has a chance at qualification and teams that are placed second could very well be out of the race of play-offs.

With most teams having just 1 or 2 games left, it’s almost a must win situation for all teams and one team that’s out of contention is looking to play spoil sport for Punjab and Chennai.

LSG VS MI AT LUCKNOW

● **QUALIFICATION CRITERIA** – For a normal person, it might look like Mumbai and Lucknow are well placed on third and fourth positions respectively in the points table. But imagine, if Mumbai lose this, then they would be in a position to not only be in a must win for their last game against SRH, but also have to work on their poor NRR. Now if Lucknow lose this one, then they could at best reach 15 points and then they would hope for RCB and Punjab to both lose one of their remaining two games.

● **TEAM INFO** – Hence, it is clear that the team that losses this encounter could fall in a lot of trouble and could very well be out of the play-offs as well. Mumbai lack any serious quality in spin



except for the veteran Piyush Chawla. Lucknow would very well like to have a spin friendly wicket. Mumbai are on a brilliant run with 4 wins from the last 5 games. Lucknow had put themselves in a difficult situation, but just in time, they finally found their winning ways against Hyderabad. Expect this to be a nail-biter contest.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played — 2; Won by LSG – 2; Won by MI – 0

● **LSG possible 12** – Q De Kock, K Mayers, K Pandya, P Mankad, M Stoinis, N Pooran, A Mishra, Y Thakur, R Bishnoi, Y Singh, A Khan, A Badoni

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

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – We have seen Lucknow’s wicket producing both low scoring and high scoring encounters. Although expect this one to be a 150-160 run wicket, which supports spin. The hot and humid Lucknow conditions would just support for that as well. Temperatures are expected to be between 29 to 42 degrees, with no chance of rain.

● **Match Prediction** – It’s a

no-brainer that with Mumbai having three away players who bowls medium pace and with the batting line-up of Mumbai not having that kind of quality against spin, Lucknow should go for a spin friendly track. Lucknow have three front line spinners. Although the hot and humid conditions of Lucknow will get dew into play in the evening. ‘SKY’ is obviously the difference between both the sides and Lucknow would want to see his back soon. I feel that this one is going in favour of Lucknow and the famous ‘Malai ki Giliori’ will be the dessert.

FAN COMMENTS

● In today’s world, for any action or effort to be successful, its utmost important for the people and mass audiences to get involved and that’s exactly what I am able to see here. Being a hardcore football fan, Pranav Mehta puts things in such a way that I look forward to seeing the matches and I must say that this man has some serious knowledge of this game to be so good.

Congratulations to *Oman Daily Observer* and team for standing up against the tide and finding success. — **Nishit Saxena,**

Executive Director & Advisor to the Oman Cricket Board, 52 years, Indian.

● I am very thankful to *Oman Daily Observer* for this column that has helped me to get both my son’s Rishabh (10 years) and Swastik (9 years) to get to a habit of reading. Both have always had an attraction towards cricket and this column targets their anxiety to know about things before they have happened and now, they go towards the e-paper as soon as they wake up to prove the writer of this column wrong. — **Shruti Shankar, 36, Fashion Designer and mother of three, Indian.**

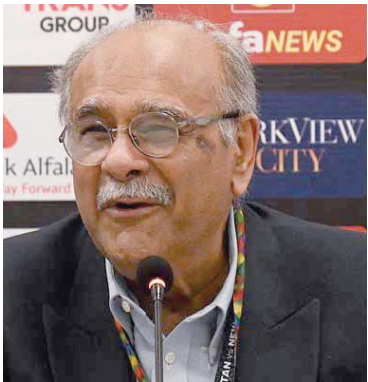
● Every time that I am going for a family function, I check on what’s happening in the sports world so that I am on track for the discussions that arise with the younger generations and I am not out of place. I was shocked to see the younger generations talking about cricket. My daughter Asma al Mamari showed me these articles and how it has helped her son get out of the tragic incident. I am writing with a lot of emotions in my heart for what this article has done for my family. Thank you, *Oman Daily Observer*. — **Ahmed al Mamari, 71, Businessman, Omani.**

● I have been reading this column regularly and as a hardcore cricket enthusiast, I was expecting that with time people will start posting hate speeches in the comments section to create hype. Being a sports journalist with an experience of over 45 years, I would like to bow to the people of Oman and to the team of this national newspaper for keeping things clean and yet connecting with people. — **Lt Ankit Gandhi, 82, Freelance journalist with over 100 documentaries, Indian based in Africa.**

Pakistan may boycott World Cup if we lose Asia Cup hosting rights: PCB chairman

NEW DELHI: There is a “very real possibility” that Pakistan will boycott this year’s World Cup in India if they lose hosting rights to the Asia Cup, the chairman of the country’s cricket board Najam Sethi said.

Bilateral cricket has been a casualty of the soured political relations between India and Pakistan over the last decade and the neighbouring countries now play each other only in multi-team events in neutral venues.



India, citing safety concerns, have ruled out travelling to Pakistan for the Asia Cup in September and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has offered to let them play their matches in the United Arab Emirates in what has been dubbed a “hybrid model”.

While the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has yet to deliver a formal response to the offer, Sethi said India wanted the entire tournament moved out of Pakistan.

That could have serious ramifications for the 50-over World Cup in India this year as well as the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan, he added.

“They want all the matches in a neutral venue,” he said in a Zoom interview.

“BCCI should take a good, rational decision so that we don’t have any problems going forward.

“India should not be looking at a situation where we end up boycotting the Asia Cup and also the World Cup, and then India ends up boycotting the Champions Trophy.

“That will be a huge mess.”

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have also come out against playing in the UAE, citing the heat and logistics issues, heightening speculation in local media that the Asian Cricket Council may look to move the entire tournament out of Pakistan.

Sethi said that was “not acceptable” and reaffirmed that Pakistan may boycott the World Cup if that happened.

“That’s a very real possibility, of course,” he added.

Should India agree to the hybrid model for the Asia Cup, Sethi said, Pakistan would expect reciprocal terms for their team at the World Cup in October and November.

“We also have security concerns for our team in India,” he said. “So let Pakistan play its matches in Dhaka or Mirpur, or UAE or in Sri Lanka.

“This is the solution going forward, until such time that India agrees to play Pakistan, in Pakistan and outside Pakistan, bilaterally.”

The ICC was not immediately available for comment. — **Reuters**

Competitions under way in schools basketball league

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The international and private schools league for basketball is under way with participation of six teams from boys and six teams from girls. The tournament is under organisation of Oman Schools Sports Association (OSSA) in cooperation with Azan Bin Qais School (Madinat Sultan Qaboos branch) which hosted the tournament matches.

The semifinals matches will begin on Tuesday and the winner will advance to the final match that is scheduled on Wednesday under auspices of Al Zubair Mohammed Al Zubair in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The tournament began on Sunday and will run for three days. As many as six teams from boys schools and another six teams from girls are taking part in the under way tournament. The list of participated schools are: International School of Choueifat, Ahmed bin Majid School, Al Shomoukh International School, Seeb International School, Azan Bin Qais School, Madarsty School, Indian School Muscat, French School, Seeb International School and Ahmed Bin Majid Private School.

The schools league is a suitable event to discover for the potential candidates in basketball to join the junior national teams.



BARCA RECLAIM LA LIGA TITLE

BARCELONA: Barcelona won La Liga for the first time since 2019 by thrashing Espanyol 4-2 on Sunday, wrestling the title back from rivals Real Madrid.

The Catalan giants clinched their 27th Spanish championship at the home of their neighbours, with scenes turning ugly at full time as celebrating Barcelona players were chased from the field by pitch invaders.

Robert Lewandowski struck twice for Barcelona, along with goals for Alejandro Balde and Jules Kounde, while Javi Puado and Joselu pulled two back late on for the hosts.

Barcelona have endured a troubled period on and off the pitch in recent years but their triumph signals significant improvement, with coach Xavi Hernandez winning his first major trophy since taking over in November 2021.

President Joan Laporta's rebuild was widely criticised last summer in light of the club's perilous financial situation.

Early Champions League elimination was a blow, but the club won the Spanish Super Cup in January, before sealing La Liga glory with four games to spare.

"It was a very emotional moment, a moment very hard not to celebrate after so many months of work," said Xavi.

"We didn't celebrate just because it was Espanyol's stadium."

The coach said that the victory was proof that the club was heading in the right direction.

"(It brings) a lot of calm, a lot of hope for the future," said Xavi.

"I am very happy. We did a great job, a league won with four games remaining, that's to the absolute merit of the team."

Xavi did not spring any surprises with his line-up and Barcelona's first team took to the pitch with one goal firmly in mind, the end finally in sight.

They conjured an electric display, one of their finest this season, to seal their triumph and leave their city rivals 19th, four points from safety with four matches remaining.

Barcelona took the lead through Lewandowski, finishing from close range after a fine Alejandro Balde assist.

The left-back scored the second himself, with Pedri scooping a cross to the back post for him to pounce. Barca grabbed the third before half-time when Raphinha put the ball on a plate for Lewandowski to roll home.

The Polish striker's arrival from Bayern Munich

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Celta Vigo 1 (Seferovic 60)
Valencia 2 (Kluivert 8, Mari 88)

Elche 1 (Fidel 41) Atletico Madrid 0

Real Valladolid 0 Sevilla 3 (Mir 50, Gomez 78, Corona 90+3)

Espanyol 2 (Puado 73, Joselu 90+2) Barcelona 4 (Lewandowski 11, 40, Balde 20, Kounde 53)

ON SATURDAY

Real Sociedad 2 (Oyarzabal 5-pen, Silva 24) Girona 2 (Couto 37, Stuani 45+3)

Osasuna 3 (Budimir 46, Abde 51, Gomez 81) Almeria 1 (Lazaro 90+2)

Villarreal 5 (Baena 24, 90, Jackson 37, 50, Paredes 61-og) Athletic Bilbao 1 (Sancet 45+3-pen)

Real Madrid 1 (Asensio 70) Getafe 0

ON FRIDAY

Real Mallorca 1 (Maffeo 16) Cadiz 0

Andre ter Stegen denied Puado when through on goal, determined to earn a La Liga record-equalling 26th clean sheet of the season in the top flight.

However moments later the Espanyol forward found himself through on goal once more and this time scored with a sublime lob — small consolation in the face of Espanyol's defeat and Barcelona's glory.

Joselu pulled another goal back in stoppage time, but it was too little, too late.

Xavi's side celebrated at full-time, to the anger of Espanyol fans, who invaded the pitch, with Barcelona players sprinting down the tunnel to escape.

"I haven't seen the images, I always go in at the end of a game and from what I've been told, it's something that should not happen and should be condemned," said Espanyol coach Luis Garcia.

"Measures were in place to avoid it, but it was not possible."

Earlier Atletico Madrid fell to a surprise 1-0 defeat at relegated Elche.

Valencia snatched an important late victory at Celta Vigo to climb provisionally to 14th, three points above the relegation zone. — AFP

was a key part of last summer's rebuild and despite a dip in the second half of the season, has paid the Catalans back in goals. Raphinha, who joined from Leeds, played superbly against Espanyol and has been an important figure in the second half of the season with Ousmane Dembele sidelined for a long stretch.

"I am very happy and not just for myself, the whole team worked so hard," said Raphinha.

"Only a few of us had won the league, it's the first for a lot of players, it's special. We worked so hard for this."

ANGRY FANS

Kounde headed home the fourth early in the second half from Frenkie de Jong's perfect chipped pass as Espanyol's defence crumbled yet again.

Some Espanyol fans headed for the exits early while others demanded the board resign, including aiming one unsavoury chant at the club's Chinese owners.

Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-



Barcelona's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring the opening goal during the Spanish league match between RCD Espanyol and FC Barcelona at the RCDE Stadium in Cornellà de Llobregat. — AFP



Barcelona's players celebrate winning their 27th Spanish league championship after the Spanish league match between RCD Espanyol and FC Barcelona at the RCDE Stadium in Cornellà de Llobregat. — AFP

BARCA WILL 'DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE' TO SIGN MESSI

BARCELONA: Barcelona president Joan Laporta said on Monday the club will "do everything possible" to bring Argentine superstar Lionel Messi back in the close season.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward is set to leave in the summer when his contract expires and new La Liga champions Barcelona are hoping to lure their all-time top goalscorer back, despite strong interest from Saudi Arabia.

Messi has had two lacklustre seasons in Paris after a glorious era at Barcelona where he won four Champions League and 10 La Liga titles, and is still worshipped by the fans there. Laporta said he has spoken with Messi to try and rebuild the relationship between them, which was damaged when he left in 2021.

Messi wanted to stay at Barcelona but the club could not afford to keep him because of debt of over one billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

"I have spoken to Leo to somehow redirect a situation that occurred, in which I had to put the club ahead of everything, even him, who is the best player in the world," Laporta told Catalan regional public television station TV3.

"The truth is that it was a very



affectionate conversation, very pleasant, and we have also been sending each other messages lately — I congratulated him on the World Cup."

In the early hours of Monday morning after Barcelona won 4-2 at Espanyol to clinch La Liga, Laporta said on Twitch that "we will do everything possible" to sign Messi.

However, speaking on TV3, he was more cautious.

"He is a Paris Saint-Germain player and what we will do is improve the team in all areas, we have already worked on that," said Laporta.

"I think it would do me a disservice to talk about these questions about Leo, because he belongs to a team like Paris Saint-Germain, and we have to wait until the end of the season, until it is over and then we can talk more calmly about this."

AFP reported last week that sources close to negotiations said it was a "done deal" that Messi would move to Saudi Arabia next season.

However, Laporta said that despite the money on offer in the Middle East — a reported 400 million dollars a year — Barcelona could compete for Messi's signature.

"With all due respect to Saudi Arabia, Barca is Barca, and it is his home," added Laporta.

"We can compete with everyone. History backs us, the feelings are too strong, we have 400 million fans around the world too." Barcelona need to make over 200 million euros in savings, or new income, to be able to operate without restrictions under La Liga financial fair play rules. — AFP

WHAT THEY SAID



"It was a very emotional moment, a moment very hard not to celebrate."

— **Barcelona coach Xavi** after the 4-2 win over Espanyol. His players had to leave the pitch in a hurry after angry Espanyol supporters invaded the pitch.

"It's a magnificent feeling, (of) work well done. Ten months of work and sacrifice. The fans deserve it, the club, it gives us stability and security that things are being done well. We sealed La Liga with a fantastic game, we were brilliant." — **Xavi**



"I wanted to leave the club winning titles, an important title like La Liga. It is the crowning glory. The one we set ourselves as a goal from the start."

— **Barcelona skipper Sergio Busquets** who will leave the club at end of the season.



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SMEDA, OCCI partner to help small businesses thrive

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) have partnered to help small businesses in Oman thrive. The partnership will focus on providing SMEs with access to financing, training, and market opportunities.

The partnership was announced at a workshop held in Muscat on May 15, 2023. The workshop was attended by representatives from SMEDA, OCCI, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, commented: "This partnership is a major step forward for the SME sector in Oman. By working together, SMEDA and OCCI can provide



The partnership has the potential to make a significant contribution to the growth of the SME sector, and to the overall economic development of the country

HALIMA BINT RASHID AL ZARIYA
Chairperson, SMEDA



SMEs with the support they need to grow and succeed."

Halima bint Rashid al Zariya (pictured), Chairperson of SMEDA: "We are excited to partner with OCCI to help small businesses in Oman thrive. This partnership will allow us to pool our resources and expertise to better serve the needs of SMEs."

The partnership between SMEDA and OCCI is a welcome development for the SME sector in Oman. The partnership has the potential to make a significant contribution to the growth of the SME sector, and to the overall economic development of the country.

country.

The partnership will focus on the following areas:

- Financing: SMEDA and OCCI will work together to develop new financing products and programmes for SMEs.
- Training: SMEDA and OCCI will work together to develop training programmes for SMEs in a variety of areas, such as business management, marketing, and finance.
- Market opportunities: SMEDA and OCCI will work together to connect SMEs with potential customers and partners.

The partnership between SMEDA and OCCI is a positive development for the SME sector in Oman. It will provide SMEs with the resources they need to grow and succeed.

Moreover, the partnership is also aligned with the government's vision to make Oman a knowledge-based economy.

Forum explores avenues for fisheries sector cooperation



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

A conference to explore Omani and French investment opportunities within the fishery industry took place yesterday in Muscat. The forum was organised by the Omani-French Friendship Association and Oman Arab Bank under the patronage of Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries.

Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, shared the following in her keynote speech: "I'm very happy that today we have an opportunity to seriously explore a new area of partnership, one that is so important for Oman Vision 2040, with a lot of expectations in terms of activity and employment."

"Our two countries share a lot in this area. You may know that France has a large

maritime coastline as well with abundant seafood resources. We have actually the largest Exclusive Economic Zone in the world.

A well-established track record in managing [fishing] ports .., privileged access to the EU market and expertise on how to meet the regulations. And last but not least, an experience and it's an ongoing one on how to add value."

Ambassador Aulagnon recalled in her address the Omani government's decision in 2020 to choose the French port of Lorient to be its main partner to develop the first modern fisheries port of the country at Duqm. Key Omani stakeholders in the project are Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and Asyad. "The French government strongly supported this win-win project...and we'll continue to do so..." she added.

The conference consisted of two main panel discussions, followed by a series of presentations. **TURN TO P15**

Oman among the top destinations of China's overseas direct investment

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Sultanate of Oman is among the top destinations for China's overseas direct investment. This marks a significant development in the economic relationship between the two countries and bodes well for Oman's economic growth.

China's overseas direct investment (ODI) has been increasing rapidly in recent years, with the country's outward investment reaching \$40.47 billion in Q1 2023, an increase of 18% compared to the same period last year.

In particular, non-financial direct investment reached \$31.54 billion, an increase of 17.2%, while China's ODI in countries along the Belt and Road reached \$5.76 billion, an increase of 9.5% on an annualised basis, according to Ernst & Young's report titled 'China's Foreign Investment Survey Q1 2023.'

Asia is the most popular ODI destination, with both deal value and volume ranking, with four of the top ten top-investment countries in the world come from Asian region, including Oman, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. These four countries collectively account for 87% of China's total investment value in Asia.

According to the report, China's investment in Oman reached \$193 million during the Q1 2023. The growth of China's investment in Oman is also a sign of the



strong economic ties between the two countries.

China is Oman's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade between the two countries reaching \$32 billion in 2021. Chinese imports from Oman increased 18.5 per cent to 44.082 million tonnes in 2021.

In 2022, trade exchange during the first seven months of the year totalled \$20.5 billion in value, representing an increase of 40 per cent over the corresponding period of 2021.

One of the biggest areas of investment has been in the energy sector. China has been investing heavily in Oman's oil and gas industry, with Chinese companies taking stakes in a number of major oil and gas projects in the country. These investments have helped to boost Oman's energy sector and have contributed to the country's economic growth.

In addition to the energy sector, China has also been investing in Oman's infrastructure. Chinese companies have been involved in a number of major infrastructure projects in the country, including the construction of a new airport and the development of a new port.

These projects have helped to improve Oman's transportation infrastructure and have made the country more attractive to investors.

In 2019, the State Grid Corporation of China purchased a 49% share in the Oman Electricity Transmission Company, the Sultanate of Oman's first significant privatisation of its kind.

Additionally, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has grown to be a crucial source of finance for Oman's projects; in 2016, the Bank authorised loans totalling \$36 million and \$265 million for the nation's first railway system and maritime infrastructure at Duqm Port, respectively.

In March 2020, AIIB committed \$60 million in non-sovereign investment for Oman's Ibri II 500MW Solar PV Independent Power Plant Project.

In 2017, AIIB invested \$239 million in the national fibre Internet network.

The growth of China's investment is a positive development that bodes well for Oman's economic future.

China's investment is helping to boost Oman's economic growth and is creating new opportunities for businesses in the country. It's also helping to diversify Oman's economy and reduce the country's dependence on oil and gas.

The Sustainable City -Yiti launches property sales

MUSCAT: Embarking on a significant path towards achieving net-zero emissions, The Sustainable City – Yiti announced the much-anticipated launch of property sales for phase one of the largest sustainable community in the region, with 422 residential units designed in line with the highest social, environmental, and economic sustainability standards.

A diverse selection of 136 eco-friendly residential villas will be available for purchase, each showcasing an elegant and energy-efficient design with spacious three and four-bedroom units.

Additionally, a wide variety of 286 modern apartments will be offered, ranging from cozy studios to expansive three-bedroom units.

All are designed to enhance the quality of life for residents while reducing their carbon emissions. The development provides an environment for its residents



to live, work, and thrive within the community. It boasts a comprehensive masterplan that includes a plaza featuring commercial outlets, a school and nursery, 5-star Nikki Beach resort

& Spa, a 4-star hotel, a wellness centre, an autism centre, and an educational institute.

Commenting on the monumental occasion, Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, Chairman

of Sustainable Development and Investment Company (SDIC), and Omran Group's Chief Executive Officer said, "It gives us great pride to partner with Diamond Developers on The Sustainable

City – Yiti, with joint efforts and determination in establishing the first project of this scale in Oman as one of the largest urban developments in the Middle East, that meets global green practices and is in adherence to the highest sustainability standards. Therefore, the project is a significant milestone in growing and developing the local tourism sector, as well as attracting external investment."

He added, "With such developments, we are paving the way towards Oman's target of Net-Zero Carbon by 2050, whilst providing immense in-country value through job creation, tourism and services, with a focus on a sustainable impact to the circular economy all of which resonates with Omran Group's sustainability ethos.

The model ensures a reduction in carbon footprint,

from design to operation, using disruptive innovation to achieve transformational societal change."

Salah Habib, CEO of Diamond Developers said, "The resounding success of The Sustainable City concept and the high demand for our brand are testaments to the growing appetite for eco-friendly living.

As we expand our footprint in the region, we are confident that our commitment to delivering world-class, sustainable developments will resonate with investors who understand the value and impact of embracing sustainable communities".

He added: "We deeply value our partnership with OMRAN, a relationship that is founded on our shared vision of contributing to a greener economy. This aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and our commitment to a net-zero emissions future."

OCEC to host Oman Perfume Show



MUSCAT: The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) proudly presents the most extensive edition of the Oman Perfume Show, running from May 31 to June 4, 2023.

With over 70 exhibitors, including established brands and emerging SMEs, visitors will experience unique scents and aromas from countries such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Thailand, Vietnam, and Japan.

Sponsored by renowned brands like Abdul Samad Al Qurashi, Arabian Oud, Andy Oud, D.D. Oud Oil, Raydan Perfumes, and Aramex Oman, this event offers a one-of-a-kind platform to explore the latest trends in the perfume industry, featuring exclusive offers and unique products available only at the Oman Perfume Show.

The Oman Perfume Show will be inaugurated by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Innovation and Research, with the presence of key government officials, industry experts, and distinguished guests. Taking place at Exhibition Hall 1 in the OCEC, the event will run for five days, open from 12 pm to 10 pm daily.

OCEC's Chief Executive Officer, Eng Said al Shanfari, expressed his enthusiasm: "We are delighted to organise the 3rd edition of the Oman Perfume Show, which has become a highlight in OCEC's busy event calendar. By bringing together international, local, and SME brands, we aim to showcase the latest trends in the perfume industry all under one roof. We, as a convention centre, are always in the lookout for opportunities to promote the event industry by creating memorable and unique experiences to our visitors."

Alizz One receives award as an exceptional banking value proposition

MUSCAT: Alizz One, the enhanced banking value proposition for salaried customers from Alizz Islamic Bank, has been honoured with the 'OER Business Excellence Award for Meeting customer requirements through a comprehensive value proposition and enhanced banking experience' at the OER Business and HR Excellence Awards held as part of the OER Business Summit 2023.

The award ceremony recognises outstanding organisations and individuals who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision, and achievement in setting new benchmarks for excellence in the business world.

The award was received by Asaad bin Hilal al Kharousi, Assistant General Manager and Chief Operating Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank. Alizz One offers a comprehensive range of services, encompassing financing, accounts, and savings plans specifically designed for individuals seeking to transfer their salaries to Alizz Islamic Bank.

With a wide variety of options available and flexible financing rates, the programme not only caters to customer's diverse financial needs but also enhances the overall customer experience, empowering them to pursue their investment goals with confidence.

Featuring a range of versatile options Alizz One includes a current account, designed to facilitate various customer transactions.



Oman Arab Bank hosts conference exploring evolving global opportunities in fisheries sector

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has joined hands with Oman France Amitié (OFA) to explore evolving global opportunities between the two nations in the burgeoning blue economy, under the auspices of Eng Yaaqoub bin Khalfan bin Khamis al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries.

The 'Omani-French Opportunities in Fisheries Sector' business conference, gathered Omani and French stakeholders from different economic sectors, and discussed and explored potential investments in the Duqm Multi-Purpose Port Project between the Port of Lorient in France and Fisheries Development Oman Company.

Sulaiman al Harthy, OAB's CEO, who also acts as OFA's Chair, said: "The opportunities were explored during the event can undoubtedly help to push the already friendly relations between the two nations to new levels of excellence and productivity, with huge potential impact on Oman's blue economy."

He added, "OAB provides a full suite of industry-leading services for investors from Oman and across the world, and our team were on hand throughout the event to provide information on any financing needs that are required."

Marie Eliçagaray, the Oman French Friendship Association's Coordinator, said: "Partnering with



OAB for this conference adds an extra dimension to the event, as we bring together our two communities to explore ways forward in the fisheries sector and how Oman and France can work together more effectively and innovatively. I want to extend my deep appreciation to OAB for their collaboration and look forward to working with them again."

The conference welcomed more than 100 guests, including prominent government officials as well as reputable French and Omani companies in sectors such as fisheries, agro-food industries, shipbuilding and ship repair. Bretagne Pole Naval, which brings together 280 Breton companies in areas including the shipbuilding, construction, maintenance and seafood research, will also be represented.

Bank Nizwa, Asyad Group ink financing pact

MUSCAT: As the first bank to launch sustainability-linked financing in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has consistently been setting new benchmarks in the realm.

In accordance with the same, the bank recently signed a financing agreement with Asyad Group a global integrated logistics services provider in Oman to extend sustainable finance to its subsidiary, Duqm Development Company (DDC).

This is the first-of-its-kind sustainable finance deal to be signed in Oman with the terms of financing linked to predefined key performance indicators (KPIs) that encompass various Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) norms.

The agreement was signed during a ceremony held at the Asyad Group headquarters, with Bank Nizwa represented by its Chief Executive Officer, Khaled



al Kayed and Asyad Group represented by Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, the Chief Executive Officer of Asyad Shipping and Drydock at Asyad Group.

The ceremony was attended by Khalid al Barwani, Deputy General Manager — Head of Wholesale Banking Group at Bank Nizwa and Muhsin Alrustom Group Chief Financial

Officer at ASYAD Group, along with several officials from both sides.

Dr Ibrahim said, "Asyad Group has crafted a comprehensive sustainability strategy that aligns with our core values, aiming to minimise our carbon footprint. It reaffirms our unwavering dedication to environmental and social responsibilities, whilst

adhering to the principles of good governance.

Our objective is to establish a dynamic and supportive logistics sector that accommodates holistic development pathways, effectively addressing current demands without compromising the future generation's capacity to fulfil their aspirations and requirements."

"This strategic partnership with Bank Nizwa demonstrates our commitment to incorporating innovative sustainability elements throughout our diverse business operations, with an aim to continually improve our integrated solutions. Our main focus is to optimise efficiency, reduce costs and sustainably enhance performance.

Simultaneously, we want to cement our reputation as a company that deeply supports Oman's ambitious vision of attaining carbon neutrality by

2050. To accomplish this, we actively engage in collaborations with a wide array of government and private entities. As such, our alliance with Bank Nizwa stands as a pivotal milestone in our ongoing endeavour to pioneer cutting-edge sustainability solutions," he added.

Commenting on the agreement, Khaled said, "Bank Nizwa and Asyad Group have enjoyed strong corporate ties and we are indeed delighted to join hands with the Group as it further develops its businesses sustainably. While DDC is a strategic venture with immense potential, it also reserves the capacity to impact the environment and people. In this regard, the sustainability-linked financing agreement solidifies the commitment of the company to ensure that sustainable operations take utmost priority and that the said impact is a positive one."



Net-Zero transition: What's involved?

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Tejarah Talks, the popular Oman Business Forum initiative organised in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is back with a new discussion session titled 'Oman's Journey to Net-Zero: An Environment for Enterprise?'

This edition of Tejarah Talks is supported by Jindal Shaded, Sustainable City — Yiti, Nortal, Omantel and OmanFM and will take place at 7:30pm on Wednesday May 17 at Omantel's Head Office in Airports Heights.

The event aims to provide a platform for Omani SMEs to learn about the latest developments in sustainable practices and climate-related regulations, helping them develop strategies to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

As SMEs make up 90 per cent of all businesses and employ 70 per cent of the world's workforce, their role in achieving climate goals is key. This Tejarah Talks session is also designed to inform, inspire and empower local businesses to seize the opportunities presented by Oman's green transition.

Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP Director, Public Private Partnerships and organiser of Tejarah Talks, highlighted the importance of helping small businesses develop net-zero strategies, saying: "SMEs are the backbone of Oman's economy. They play a significant role in creating jobs and contributing to our GDP. However, they also have a responsibility to reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to Oman's 2050 net-zero emissions target."

Every step an SME takes on its journey to net-zero adds up — not only in protecting the health of the planet but also in future-proofing their business, attracting new investment and customers as well as creating new opportunities for growth."

The May 17 session will cover a range of topics related to net-zero, including renewables, energy efficiency, carbon pricing and climate legislation. The panel of experts include His



TEJARAH TALKS: HELPING INFORM AND INSPIRE OMANI SMES TO TAKE MEANINGFUL CLIMATE ACTION

Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Co-founder of The Firm; Fadi al Shihabi, KPMG Partner & ESG Services Lead; Hilal al Ghaithi, Director, Energy, Authority for Public Services Regulation; Walter Simpson (pictured), Managing Director, CC Energy Development; and Ammar al Kharusi, Group Head of Development, OMRAN.

In line with Oman's ambitions to become a low-carbon economy, the country's CO2 emissions per capita fell 16 per cent between 2015-2020, according to an EY MENA Climate Change Readiness Index report. Within the GCC, Oman's carbon emissions per capita were the lowest at 15.3 metric tonnes.

The report also highlighted Oman's National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change 2020-2040 and its support for sustainability focused start-ups. The strategy is intended to be a catalyst to spur local climate action and facilitate Oman's move to a low-carbon economy.

According to MoCIIP's Al Adawi, the May 17 Tejarah Talks will help businesses understand the new commercial opportunities presented by Oman's ambitious green transition.

"We have an exciting opportunity to come together to tackle climate change. We all need to play our part and as SMEs make up the majority of Oman's business community it is critical they get involved," said Al Adawi.

"Achieving net zero emissions is a crucial step towards ensuring a sustainable future for ourselves and future generations."

100% jump in small-scale solar systems installed in Muscat

Modernisation: Around 80,000 smart meters installed in capital region by MEDC under Automated Meter Reading initiative

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 15

As many as 114 small-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) systems have been connected to the local network in Muscat Governorate as of end-2022, up from 70 systems a year earlier, representing a jump of over 100 per cent year-on-year.

It underscores the growing uptake of renewables as an alternative to gas-based electricity to power public and private establishments in the capital city.

According to Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), the licensed distributor and supplier of electricity in Muscat Governorate, the installed solar systems offered 9,201 kW of production capacity as of end-2022, up from 6,996 kW a year earlier.

Salman bin Ali al Hattali, Acting CEO, commented: "Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy sets out a target of 20 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2030. MEDC remains committed to support this in view of its scope and



regulatory obligations."

He further added: "We have connected 41 Solar PV systems with DC capacity 2,276.07 kW in 2022 compared to 27 systems and AC capacity (kW) 3,177.5 in the prior year."

This makes us reach total of 114 Solar PV systems connected with a total production capacity of 9,201 kW since the beginning of Renewable Energy Implementation in 2017." Investors in small-scale solar capacity include, among others, government and private schools, shopping malls and commercial establishments,

property developers and leading corporates.

Listing some of the successes of the past year, Al Hattali said the rollout of Automated Metering Reading (AMR) continued to make headway in 2022 in line with the utility's Digital Strategy. A total of around 50K smart meters were installed in 2022, taking the total to over 80K since the start of the programme, he noted.

"This is a step forward towards smart transformation, increased reliance on Artificial Intelligence, Data Accuracy, and enhanced ability to provide consumption and billing insights to the

customers.

This is also expected to result in operational efficiencies and reducing system losses," the Acting CEO stated in the company's newly launched 2022 Annual Report.

MEDC, part of Nama Group, generated revenue of RO 367.220 million in 2022, which was marginally up by 1.29 per cent over the previous year's total. The company recorded a gross profit of RO 45.596 million and a net profit of RO 6.506 million for the year. MEDC has a customer base of around 438K accounts in its licence area.

International experts attend SU's research conference

BUSINESS REPORTER
SUHAR, MAY 15

Over 250 people attended the sixth research conference of Sohar University (SU), which took place recently under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Hinai, Member of SU Board of Governors, and former Secretary General of The Research Council (TRC) of Oman. The Vice Chancellor of Sohar University, Dr Hamdan al Fazari, and the Sohar University Executive Management were also present.

The four keynote session speakers joined from the UAE, Australia, the UK, and Malaysia. A number of international guests joined virtually. The opening plenary was broadcast live on the SU YouTube channel which has viewership around the world.



This 6th SU Research Conference saw an increase in the number of presentations, rising from 40 in 2017 to 195 this year.

Since 2020, moreover, selected papers have been considered for publication in Scopus journals. In 2022, a total of 20 papers were published. The conference has

grown in stature to include eleven sessions with presenters coming from nine different countries.

In his speech, the Guest of Honour Dr Hilal al Hinai emphasised the role of funding as a catalyst for research development and underscored the need for universities to move towards being entrepreneurial. Sohar University is currently repositioning itself as an entrepreneurial university, with the intention of growing its footprint and impact both locally and internationally.

The University has increased its endeavours to achieve increased research innovation and knowledge transfer. Its research visibility is growing, as shown by the Scopus university figures with regards to improved research metrics and ranking.

Asyad Group, ESO launch lecture series on climate change

MUSCAT: Asyad Group and the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) have joined forces to launch an insightful series of lectures that shed light on the challenges facing Oman in its fight to tackle climate change.

The lectures and technical seminars are planned to take place from late May 2023 to early January 2024. The global integrated logistics provider partnered with ESO to implement this joint undertaking in line with Asyad's sustainability strategy and commitment to strengthen cooperation on environment and climate issues between business and civil society organisations across Oman.



This dedicated series of lectures and workshops will leverage the combined resources and expertise of Asyad and ESO to highlight the urgency of adapting to environmental challenges and the need for impactful transformative action.

Local and international experts will join representatives from both organisations to explain how individual, organisational and national action is needed today, more than ever, to achieve Oman's climate change goals, starting from its national objective of

net zero by 2050.

Explaining the value of the joint initiative, Essam al Sheibany, VP Sustainability at Asyad Group, said: "As a national and global corporate citizen, we are proud to take part in this initiative as one of our many impactful environmental and sustainability programmes.

Through this awareness-raising series, our group is following through on its unwavering commitment to support Oman in its endeavour to achieve net-zero by 2050 and play our global part in helping realise the UN Sustainable Development Goals related to climate change and sustainability."

Forum explores avenues for fisheries sector cooperation

FROM PAGE 13

The first panel discussed the Duqm fishing port built by the SEZAD and is expected to be operated by a consortium consisting of FDO, Oman Food Investment Company, Asyad Group and the French Port of Lorient.

FDO Chief Executive Officer Nabil al Bimani explained that the Port of Lorient was chosen as a partner in the port of Duqm's operation due to its outstanding record in the fishery industry.

"The Port of Lorient is one of the top three ports in France, with a strong capability in the fishery sector. The port has also demonstrated technical capability and readiness to transfer that know-how to Oman."

According to Al Bimani, the Port of Lorient's application met the Government's conditions for developing an expedited project

based on a guaranteed blueprint.

Louis Le Boulout, a shareholder of SAS Lorient Keroman, reaffirmed the Port of Lorient's commitment to sharing its expertise in the industry. According to Boulout, the Port will share a wide range of services beyond just operational expertise.

The second panel explored potential investment opportunities within the sector in Oman. It was followed by a series of presentations by French enterprises within the industry.

OFA Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Oman Arab Bank, Sulaiman al Harthi, shared: "The opportunities explored during the event can undoubtedly help to push the already friendly relations between the two nations to new levels of excellence and productivity, with huge potential impact on Oman's blue economy."

Opportunity Oman: Salalah



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
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Salalah, the second-largest city in Oman, historically renowned for being a vital hub for trade and commerce, is a land of endless investment opportunities for foreign, local, and regional investors. The city is known for its natural beauty, vibrant culture, natural resources, and strategic location on the Arabian Sea.

The city has been actively promoting its business-friendly environment and been taking steps to attract investors from all over the world.

The city also has several universities and colleges that offer courses in a range of disciplines, including engineering, business, and tourism which positions Salalah labour as high performing skilled candidates.

One of the key factors driving investment in Salalah is the government's commitment to economic diversification.

Diversity in Salalah's opportunities are many with great potentials for growth. Key sectors with potential for investment and growth identified being;

■ The logistics sector of Salalah, which is strategically located on the Arabian Sea, makes it an important hub for trade and commerce. The region is home to the Port of Salalah, which is one of the largest ports in the Middle East and Africa and a global hub on the East-West trade route.

The port offers easy access to markets in Asia, Africa, and Europe, and America making it an attractive destination for investors looking to expand their operations in the region.

The Port of Salalah handles a wide range of cargo since it has three terminals for containers, dry bulk, and liquids. The government has invested heavily in expanding



and modernising the port, creating opportunities for foreign, local, and regional investors to invest in logistics, transportation, and other related sectors.

This growth is expected to continue, with the government planning to invest in new logistics infrastructure, including the expansion of the port and the development of a new logistics park.

■ The tourism sector in Salalah is well known for its natural beauty, including the Khareef (monsoon) season with visitors from around the world.

Salalah is also home to several natural attractions, including the Unesco World Heritage Site, the Frankincense Land, and a pristine coastline, which has attracted an increasing number of tourists in recent years with the number of visitors increasing annually.

This trend is expected to continue as the government has been investing heavily in developing the city's tourism infrastructure. The growth in tourism has led to an increase in demand for accommodation, transportation, and other tourist-related services, creating lucrative opportunities in the sector as the growth is expected to continue

■ Manufacturing is a rapidly growing sector driven by the government's efforts to diversify

THE CITY'S STRATEGIC LOCATION, GROWING ECONOMY, AND BUSINESS-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT MAKE IT AN IDEAL DESTINATION FOR FOREIGN, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL INVESTORS AS WELL AS THE OPTIMAL GATEWAY FOR EXPANDING OPERATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA. THE SALALAH PORT EXPANSION PROJECT AND THE SALALAH FREE ZONE ARE AMONG THE LEADING PROJECTS AND LOCATIONS THAT PRESENT PROMISING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN SALALAH.

the economy away from oil. The city has several industrial estates that offer investors access to affordable land, green energy, access skilled manpower and water resources. Others include food processing, chemicals, and textiles.

■ Furthermore, Salalah has significant natural resources, including minerals. The government has also been investing in the development of the mining sector, which has the potential to contribute significantly to the country's GDP. In 2020, Oman's mining exports increased by 33.6 per cent compared to the previous year, reaching a total of RO 1.48 billion. Untapped potential in minerals is inviting investors to explore and capitalise on the opportunities.

■ Salalah is also home to thriving agricultural and fisheries industries, thanks to its fertile land, its fish production and favourable climate. Salalah Free Zone (SFZ) showcases outstanding competitive advantages tailored

to the global food industry as it is a main food producer in the Arabian Gulf with only 150 km away from Najd agricultural land.

Meanwhile, SFZ offers easy, unrestricted access to the world's greatest regional and global agricultural production areas such as East Africa, one of the fastest growing agricultural regions, and India, the second largest producer of rice and wheat.

The region is also known for its production of frankincense, which has been traded for centuries and is highly valued in international markets. In addition to frankincense, Salalah produces a wide range of crops, including fruits, vegetables, and livestock.

The agricultural and fisheries sector in Salalah has attracted significant foreign investment in recent years with more impact in food production projects with more capacity to be catered for.

■ In addition, Salalah has the potential to become a centre for green hydrogen and green ammonia production,

by attracting several projects to establish ammonia production plants using green hydrogen thanks to the abundant renewable energy sources in Salalah, as it enjoys rich resources of solar energy and wind energy, supported by a world-class shipping infrastructure through the port of Salalah which is equipped with liquid jetty and a 4.6 km of pipelines connecting the port of Salalah directly to Salalah Free Zone, and is currently exporting ammonia, methanol and LPG through that infrastructure.

■ Salalah Free Zone also proudly supports the pharmaceuticals industry's needs with well-equipped, purpose-built facilities for cargo handling and cold storage. All this is supervised by trained personnel who are determined to provide a most inclusive ecosystem of service and solution providers.

In addition, Salalah's proximity to developing markets such as Yemen, , Africa and the Indian subcontinent ,which shows an increasing need for medicines and medical supplies, making Salalah the ideal geographical location for the pharmaceutical industries. Salalah Free Zone is also home to the biggest pharmaceutical production plant in Oman.

■ The petrochemical sector can also flourish in the

Salalah Free Zone thanks to the availability of the locally manufactured petrochemical materials such as PET, Methanol, Ammonia, LPG etc and the cross-border trade facilitation platform for petrochemicals shipments at port of Salalah.

The Salalah Free Zone (SFZ) has become a prominent magnet for investors seeking investment opportunities in the city. With an impressive anchor investment of RO 3.8 billion and the generation of 2490 job opportunities, the SFZ encompasses a vast area of 4,500 hectares.

It presents investors with a tax-free environment and a host of incentives, including duty-free imports and exports, complete foreign ownership, and unrestricted repatriation of profits.

Additionally, the SFZ has established an investment-friendly ecosystem, offering highly competitive manufacturing and logistics costs within the MENA region.

To encourage investment in these sectors, the government other stakeholder including other stake holder Oman Investment authority, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, ASYAD, OPAZ has taken several measures, including offering tax incentives, streamlining regulations, and providing infrastructure support.

The abundance of investment opportunities in Salalah has been driven by the government's commitment to economic diversification, its efforts to improve the business environment, and the region's untapped potential.

The city's strategic location, growing economy, and business-friendly environment make it an ideal destination for foreign, regional, and local investors as well as the optimal gateway for expanding operations in the Middle East and Africa. The Salalah Port expansion project and the Salalah Free Zone are among the leading projects and locations that present promising investment opportunities in Salalah.

With the government's support and commitment to economic diversification, Salalah is poised to become a leading investment destination in the region and warmly welcoming investors to explore the untapped potentials in the ocean of opportunities.

Global petroleum stocks normalise after SPR drawdown



JOHN KEMP

The author leads a group of specialist energy and commodities analysts for Reuters. His expertise lies in oil and gas, refining, energy policy, international trade, and the financial and foreign policy aspects of energy.

Global commercial oil inventories were close to their long-term seasonal average at the end of the first quarter of 2023 following massive releases from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) over the previous 12 months.

In the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), commercial stocks of crude and refined products stood at 2,804 million barrels at the end of March. Commercial petroleum inventories had increased by 200 million barrels compared with the same month a year earlier but over the same time the US SPR was depleted by 195 million barrels.

By the end of March,



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Cushing, Oklahoma. – Reuters

inventories were just 15 million barrels (-0.5 per cent or -0.09 standard deviations) below the prior 10-year seasonal average, down from a deficit of 192 million barrels (-7 per cent or 1.10

standard deviations) a year earlier.

The progressive normalisation of inventories took the upward pressure off oil prices and calendar spreads over the past year.

Front-month Brent futures

slipped to around \$80 per barrel at the end of March 2023 from \$108 at the end of March 2022 and a high of around \$130 in May and June 2022, after adjusting for inflation.

Real prices in March 2023 were in the 40th percentile for all months since 2000, down from the 68th percentile in March 2022, and similar to March 2019 before the pandemic.

Brent's six-month calendar spread slipped to a backwardation of \$2.50 per barrel (79th percentile), down from over \$10 (98th percentile) a year earlier.

The spread is correlated with current stock levels as well as traders' expectations about the future balance between production, consumption and inventory changes.

The rise in commercial

inventories has therefore been accompanied by a weakening of the calendar spread and downward pressure on spot prices.

But downward pressure on prices and spreads would not have been possible without the massive draw down of the SPR – which is unlikely to be repeated.

More than one-third of the SPR has been depleted over the last 12 months and the remaining stock is the lowest for almost 40 years since November 1983.

For the remainder of 2023 and 2024, there is little prospect of another similar drawdown in the US strategic reserve.

Prices and spreads will be much more directly responsive to the balance between the impact of Opec+ restraint on production and the global business cycle on consumption. — Reuters

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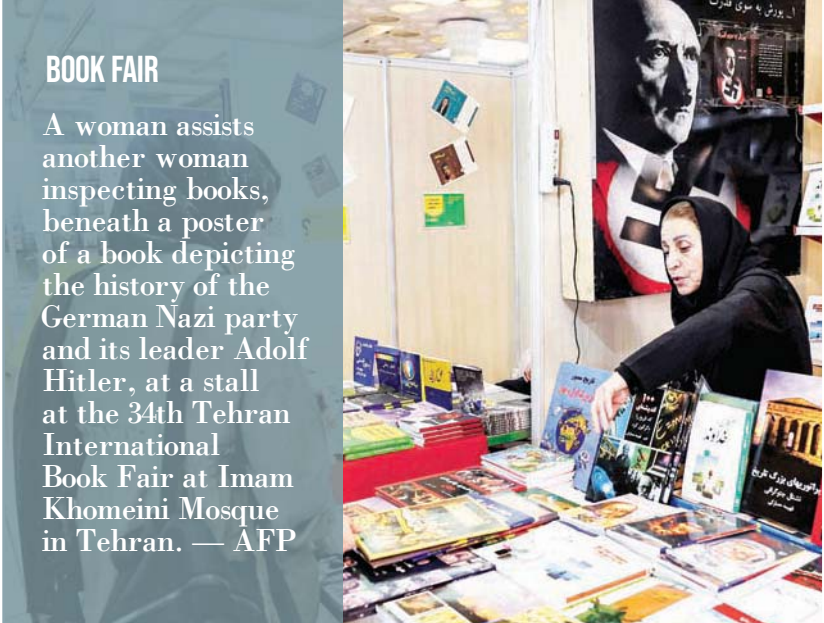
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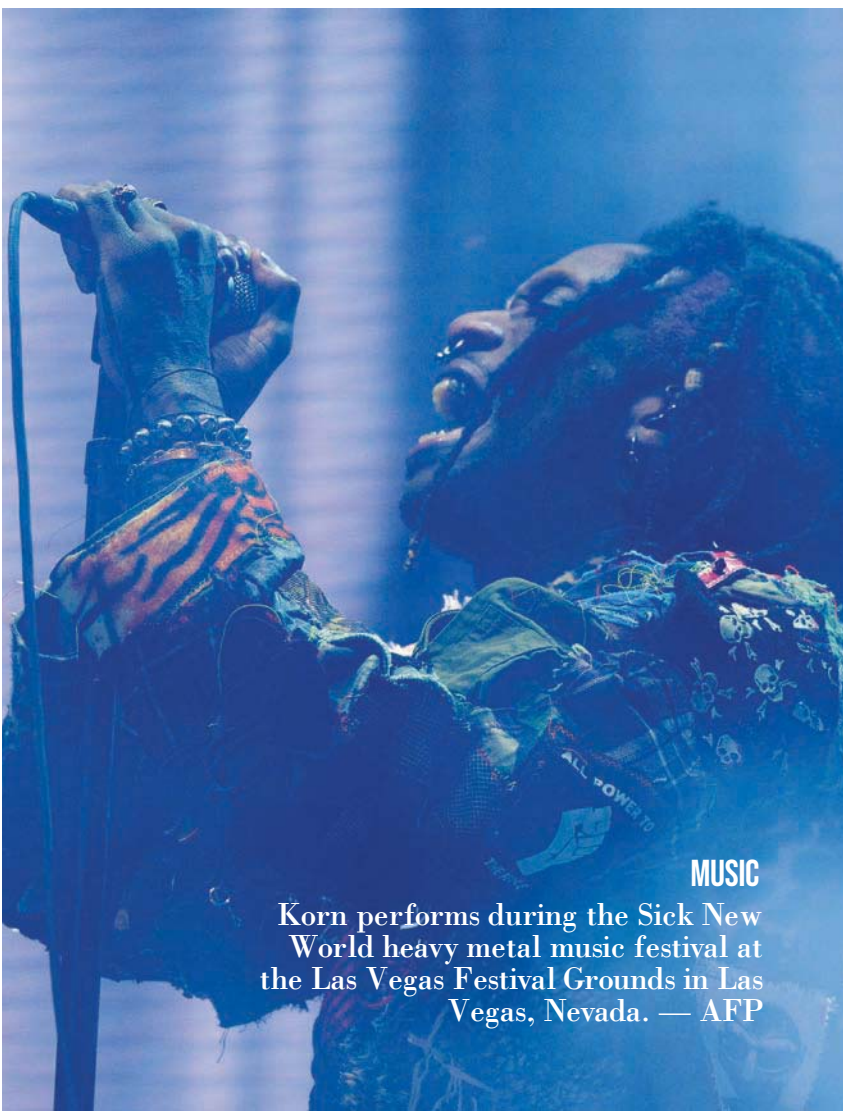




LIFESTYLE
A visitor walks at a superheroes statue gallery in Lotte shopping mall in Jakarta, Indonesia. — AFP



BOOK FAIR
A woman assists another woman inspecting books, beneath a poster of a book depicting the history of the German Nazi party and its leader Adolf Hitler, at a stall at the 34th Tehran International Book Fair at Imam Khomeini Mosque in Tehran. — AFP



MUSIC
Korn performs during the Sick New World heavy metal music festival at the Las Vegas Festival Grounds in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP



FASHION
One of the models presented a creation by Colombian Sostenibles creations during Bogota Fashion Week, in Bogota. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Cellist Yo-Yo Ma speaks after being presented with the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History Great Americans Medal during a ceremony and performance at the National Museum of American History in Washington, US. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | MAY 16, 2023 | SHAWWAL 25, 1444 AH

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Discovering Oman's authentic beauty and rich culture through 'slow travel'

Join travel documentary presenter Malini Angelica as she ventures to Oman, uncovering the country's breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Through her immersive approach to 'slow travel,' Malini delves deep into Oman's history, traditions, and warm-hearted people, fostering a profound connection with the country which leaves an indelible impression on her.



CULTURE

Iraqi museum damaged by IS works towards reopening

IRAQI OFFICIALS ON Thursday said Mosul's once-celebrated museum had entered the final stages of restorations ahead of a planned 2026 reopening after being closed to the public for 20 years.

The museum closed its doors in 2003, amid the chaos following the US-led invasion of Iraq, and was later ransacked by IS group militants after they seized the city in 2014.

"We are celebrating today, in the city of two springs, the launch of the Mosul Museum's rehabilitation project," the director of Iraq's antiquities authority, Laith Majid, said at

a press conference.

"This museum, an icon of museums in Iraq, was targeted by a blind barbarian assault," Majid said, referring to the destruction by IS.

The militants used sledgehammers and power tools to deface ancient statues and pre-Islamic treasures housed in the museum, releasing an infamous video showing the destruction in 2015.

A gaping hole remains in the floor of the museum's famed Assyrian gallery, caused by a bomb explosion.

"Part of this cavity will be preserved, as a witness throughout his-

tory to what has been perpetrated," said Khair al-Din Ahmed Nasser, head of antiquities in Nineveh province, of which Mosul is the capital.

A new display was inaugurated, showcasing the museum's history, collection and current restoration plans, as part of efforts supported

by France's Louvre Museum, the Smithsonian Institute and the World Monument Fund.

It comes within the "second and final phase" of the "total reconstruction and rehabilitation of the museum building" and should be completed within two or three years,



said Nasser.

Among the pieces defaced by IS and under restoration at the museum are treasures from the ancient Assyrian site of Nimrud, including a winged lion, two imposing "lamassu" — winged bulls with human heads — and the throne base of the ninth century BC King Ashurnasirpal II.

"Out of five works, there are three that are extremely advanced," said Barbara Couturaud from the Louvre.



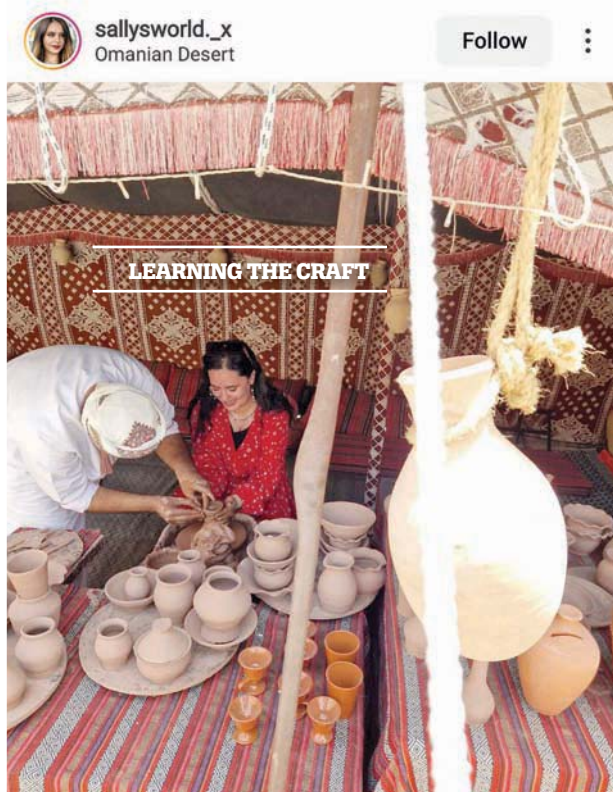
The artefacts are being revived with financing from the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH).

"The pieces have been identified... now they have to be assembled. These are sculptures that weigh several tonnes, requiring extremely complicated handling," she said, adding she hoped they would be ready for the planned full reopening in summer 2026. — AFP



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By Liju Cherian
@lijucherianoman

Malini Angelica, a popular travel documentary presenter and advocate of 'slow travel,' recently embarked on a mesmerising journey to Oman, where she delved into the country's stunning landscapes and vibrant culture.

Her experience serves as a testament to the rewards of taking the time to immerse oneself in the local culture, connect with the friendly locals, and seek out authentic encounters.

Over the course of her two-week visit, Malini explored numerous breathtaking locations in Oman, including the enchanting capital city of Muscat, the historical town of Nizwa, the pristine Daymaniyat Islands, the captivating Wadi Shab, the majestic Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and the vast expanse of the Rimal Al Sharqiya. The country's remarkable diversity, spanning from the sea to the desert and the majestic mountains, left her in awe.

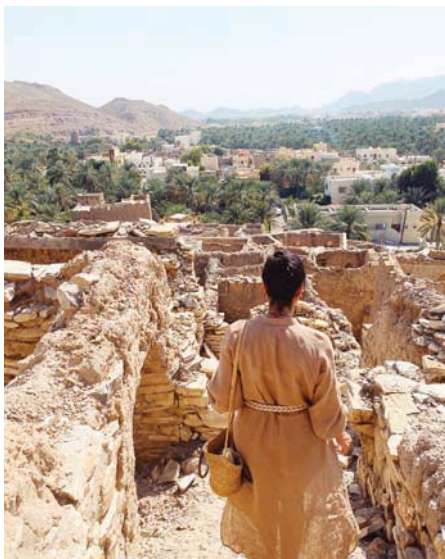
"Omani people are truly some of the friendliest in the world," she exclaimed, reflecting on the warmth and hospitality she encountered throughout her journey.

The locals eagerly embraced the opportunity to introduce visitors to Omani culture, and Malini had the privilege of meeting several individuals who graciously guided her through their homeland, enriching the authenticity of her experience.

What stood out to Malini the most was the preservation of cultural traditions that continue to thrive in Oman today. She marvelled at the resonating call to prayer that echoed throughout the day, the graceful attire worn by Omanis, and the enduring Bedouin culture in the desert. Oman, she believes, is a truly exceptional country, having achieved modernisation while safeguarding its rich heritage and traditions.

One of the most memorable aspects of Malini's trip was the delightful Omani cuisine. She savoured the experience of trying various traditional dishes, with a particular fondness for the marinated meat dish known as shuwa and the assortment of Omani bread.

A visit to the Nizwa date souk allowed her to indulge in the delectable array of dates, accompanied by a sweet Omani coffee. She couldn't resist the temptation of the Omani dessert halwa, which she indulged in multiple times throughout



her stay.

Malini's passion for film-making and travel has led her to explore numerous destinations, firmly advocating for the philosophy of 'slow travel.'

She believes that immersing oneself in the local culture, forging connections with the people, and embracing genuine experiences are the most rewarding aspects of travel. In 2022, Malini and her videographer partner launched their

own travel channel, aiming to create inspiring and informative videos centred around powerful storytelling.

Through her travel documentaries on Oman, Malini showcases the breathtaking seascapes, mountains, and deserts of the country, while highlighting the unique hospitality and eagerness of Omanis to share their culture.

Her videos, which emphasise powerful storytelling, have garnered a significant



following. Earlier this year, her YouTube travel channel (@Malini.Angelica) reached a remarkable milestone of over 100k subscribers.

Malini cherishes the memories of her boat trip to the Daymaniyat Islands off the coast of Muscat, which she considers a 'hidden gem' and a must-visit day trip from the city.

Similarly, her hike to Wadi Shab left her awestruck by the breathtaking land-

scape and the discovery of a secret cave with natural waterfalls at its culmination.

She also explored the picturesque coastal village of Sur, renowned for its traditional wooden dhow boat craftsmanship.

Inspired by her travels, Malini yearns to return to Oman again to further explore its breathtaking landscapes, indulge in its delectable cuisine, and meet more of its warm and hospitable people.

THE OPERA

ROHM closes season with Assi El Hallani, Marwa Nagy concert



LEBANESE SINGER AND composer Assi El Hallani, and Egyptian opera singer Marwa Nagy, will perform a collection of their most famous traditional Arabic songs at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

The Royal Opera House Muscat will conclude its current season (2022-2023) with a concert featuring the two renowned Arab singers. The concert will showcase a variety of their most famous traditional Arabic songs. Assi El Hallani, was born in Beirut in 1970, and is one of the most prominent names in the Arab and international music scene. He has released 23 albums and more than 50 videos since 1989 and is best known for his popular song Wana Marra, which became his breakthrough hit. He is also a

renowned composer and has written many successful songs. Hallani is an humanitarian ambassador and a well-known television personality.

Joining him in the concert is Marwa Nagy, an Egyptian opera singer and member of the Arabic music scene. Marwa is known for her strong and clear voice and her singing style that is inspired by an old, traditional school



of singing. Some of her most famous songs include Al Hob Ahayani and Habibe Mn Kalbi.

The concert will take place on Thursday and Friday, May 18th and 19th, at 7:30 pm at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. For information or to book tickets, visit the Royal Opera House Muscat website, app or box office.

GASTRONOMY

Sri Lankan baker 'cried' when he won best baguette in Paris

A PARIS BAKER of Sri Lankan origin said he "cried" when he heard he had won best baguette in the French capital this week and would be delivering the bread to the presidential palace.

"I cried because we are foreigners and we came here to learn how to make traditional French bread," Tharshan Selvarajah said on Thursday.

"I am very happy to have won the prize."

Fifteen baguette connoisseurs on Wednesday selected Selvarajah's version of the iconic French bread as the best among 175 anonymous contenders.

Members of the jury, including six ordinary Parisians, had to rate dozens of baguette on their taste, crust, crumb, air bubbles, and overall



aspect.

"Don't drink at the start or you won't be able to make it to the end of the tasting," Paris official Olivia Polski warned judges before they started.

A video she shared on Twitter shows her then ringing up the baker based in eastern Paris to tell him the good news.

"Noooo," he can be heard saying on the other end of the line.

Selvarajah said he always makes his long loaves "with love", while "smil-



ing, laughing and singing", and the result is well-cooked, delicious and crusty.

He has won 4,000 euros (more than \$4,300) and the opportunity to supply baguettes to the presidential palace.

"I'm so happy that the president will taste my bread. Just taking it to the palace is exciting," he said.

UN cultural body Unesco awarded the baguette world heritage status in November last year. — AFP



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TUESDAY | MAY 16 | 2023

Van Gogh's frenzied final days highlight of new show

VINCENT VAN GOGH'S feverish final months in a French village, when he churned out masterpieces even as he spiralled into despair, are the subject of a one-off exhibition opening this week in Amsterdam.

The show at the Van Gogh Museum in the Dutch capital, which opens on Friday, features 50 of the 74 works produced in his frenzied last days in Auvers-sur-Oise, just northwest of Paris, before his death at the age of 37.

More than 30 drawings are also featured among the works that have been loaned from museums and private collections all over the world and have never previously been shown together, curators said.

"It is fair to say that this is a once-in-a-lifetime exhibition about Van Gogh's very last period, his last 70 days," museum director Emilie Gordenker said at a press preview on Wednesday.

"During that period, he worked like a man possessed," producing some of his best works including the ominous "Wheatfield with Crows" and the melancholic portrait of his friend and physician Dr Paul Gachet.

The painting "Dr Paul Gachet", which the museum's researchers said was made on 6 and 7 June 1890, is one of eight works provided by the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, along with "The Church at Auvers".

What makes the exhibition unique is that all its paintings are arranged in chronological

order, from the first painting when Vincent arrived in the village until his very last work, "Tree Roots", painted two days before his death.

Van Gogh arrived in Auvers-sur-Oise near Paris on May 20, 1890, after spending time in Arles and Saint-Remy-de-Provence in southern France, where he already struggled with bouts of mental illness.

The painter arrived in Auvers full of hope and fresh enthusiasm, mainly because of the presence of Dr Gachet, a physician specialising in the treatment of "melancholia".

Once there, the painter entered one of his most productive periods.

"Vincent had a really tough time before he came to Auvers. He really suffered very much from his mental condition," Gordenker said.

"He comes to Auvers and he really has a new energy and he really gets to work," she said.

THE AUDACITY

"He must have worked very fast. But he knew exactly what he was doing," added Nienke Bakker, senior curator at the Van Gogh Museum.

"Working on this exhibition, we are not just amazed by the number of paintings that he did in Auvers in this short period, but also the great quality of it and the audacity, the expressiveness, the experimenting that was there until the very last day," Bakker said.

"It shows what an amazing artist he was," she said.

But as time went on, a feeling of unease again crept over Van Gogh, as seen in paintings like "Wheat field with Crows", which was followed by another ominous landscape, "Wheat field under Thunderclouds".

Indeed, Van Gogh, in one of his last letters to his brother Theo, says about his final painting, "Tree Roots", that "my life too is attacked at the very root, my step is also faltering".

Feelings of failure, loneliness and melancholy gradually gained the upper hand.

Van Gogh shot himself in the chest shortly after finishing "Tree Roots" and died two days later.

The exhibition "Van Gogh in Auvers. His Final Months" runs from May 12 to September 3 before moving to the Musee d'Orsay from October 3 until February 4, 2024.

— AFP

CHANGING WORLD

Taste of home offers comfort to nostalgic migrants



LIKE MANY MIGRANTS who leave their family and friends behind, Laura Linares finds that when she misses Venezuela, preparing traditional dishes from her childhood helps to ease her homesickness.

"I want to feel close to my family, to my grandmother, to important moments," the 29-year-old said

while cooking in her small apartment in the Mexican capital.

Linares moved to Mexico to study for a master's degree in linguistics after leaving her crisis-racked country five years ago.

She was one of the winners in March of the international culinary and cultural competition Sabores Migrantes Comunitarios (Community Migrant Flavors), organised by IberCultura Viva, a cooperation programme between the governments of the region, chaired by Mexico.

Linares, who hails from the Andean city of San Cristobal, won the competition with a typical potato stew from her region called turmada — made with milk, chives, cheese and hard-boiled eggs.

"It's a warm dish. You feel like you're at home. You feel like you're being hugged," she said.



Migrating — as seven million Venezuelans have done in recent years — has not been easy for Linares, even if it means she can enjoy food like apples, which have become something of a luxury in Venezuela.

The South American country is going through an unprecedented crisis, with the national economy contracting by 80 per cent between 2013 and 2021.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

To overcome the emotional highs and lows of leaving home, Linares immersed herself in preparing dishes from her country.

As well as turmada, she makes pastel de platan — banana cake — and bollitos alinados, a type



of corn dumpling made with fried onions and seasoned with paprika and sweet pepper.

Cooking is a way of "bringing my home" to Mexico, Linares said.

It has also helped her create a community around little-known dishes not usually found in Venezuelan restaurants in the Mexican capital.

Around 340,000 foreigners settled in Mexico in 2022, according to official figures.

When "we are in another country, we experiment with other foods, but we always come back to the origin of our food, the one that our mothers gave us, to feel this connection," said Edizon Muj Cumes, a Guatemalan researcher on the food systems of indigenous peoples.

It is part of an "identity process that is forged from the moment we are born," he said.

Jose Bustillos, a 45-year-old Venezuelan, said that he cried the first time he tasted an arepa — a kind of cornmeal patty — two and a half months after arriving in Mexico.

"My country, my city, my people came back to me," he said.

In front of a shelter for migrants in the Mexican capital, a group of Haitians gathered around a compatriot selling chicken.

For the price of one serving, the equivalent of \$5.50, they could buy up to eight Mexican tacos.

But the chicken is seasoned like on their island, so for them it is worth it for a taste of home. — AFP