

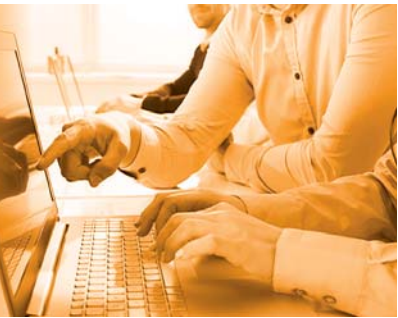
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VISITING WADI NAKHEEL



MUSCAT

TENDERS FOR 3 MORE HOSPITALS

The Secretariat-General of the Tender Board floated tenders for the construction of Al Falah Hospital in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Al Nama Hospital in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and Samayil Hospital in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The construction of these hospitals is based on the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and was included into the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan. Al Nama Hospital, to be constructed in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, will serve some 115,000 people, while Samayil Hospital will serve 38,000 people. Al Falah Hospital will serve the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Kamil W'al Wafi and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

DETAILS ON P2

CRUDE PRICE AT \$84.67 A BARREL

Oman oil price for June delivery on Tuesday reached \$84.67, comprising a drop by \$1.34 from the price of Monday, which was \$86.01. The average price of Oman oil for April delivery has stabilised at \$82.23 per barrel, thus \$1.31 per barrel higher than March delivery. Meanwhile, US crude dipped 0.3 per cent to \$80.42 a barrel. Brent crude lost 0.3 per cent to \$84.5. Spot gold rose 0.45 per cent to \$2,004 per ounce.

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INSIDE



ISRAELI FORCES SHOOT 7 IN WEST BANK RAID

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ARE 'SPONGE CITIES' ENOUGH TO CURB FLOODS?

P8



STAGE SET FOR MUSANDAM CARNIVAL

In line with the efforts to boost the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman, the much-anticipated Musandam Carnival is set to be held from April 26 to 28 in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Musandam Governor's Office, Omran Group, and several public and private sector entities. The 3-day event aims to enrich visitors' experiences with multiple entertainment activities catering to different demographics while promoting Musandam as a captivating local tourism destination. **DETAILS ON P2**

Moon sighting committee meets on Thursday



MUSCAT: The main moon sighting committee for the month of Shawwal 1444 AH will meet at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Thursday.

The meeting will be held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Ma'amari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Members of the committee include His Eminence

Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Dr Wael bin Saif al Harrasi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Shaikh Mohammed bin Salim al Akhzami, Judge at the Supreme Court, Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulsattar

al Kamali, Judge at the Supreme Court, and Shaikh Mohammed bin Salim al Nahdi, Judge at the Supreme Committee.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs requested Omani citizens and residents to look out for the new moon by cooperating with field teams in the wilayat or reporting any sighting to the subcommittees. — ONA

IoT services for remote reading of electricity meters

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Tuesday issued a permit to provide Internet of Things (IoT) services to the Electricity Holding Company (EHC) to employ technology in related services such as the installation of smart electricity meters and remote consumption reading.

The decision enables the provision of smart and innovative services to beneficiaries and also boosts the economy by offering investment opportunities in smart city applications.

Through this permit, the company will be able to install and manage smart meters and provide the electricity distribution companies with the actual reading on a regular basis without the need to visit homes and buildings.

The TRA also issued a directive for international roaming SIMs used in IoT (Internet of Things) devices after consulting with relevant parties in the telecommunications sector.

The IoT devices include sensors, lights, alarms and cameras (all of which can be controlled from a smartphone) that are connected via IoT to provide 24x7 security.

It also includes activity trackers or sensor devices that can monitor and transmit key health indicators in real-time.

The most popular IoT devices



are Google Home, Amazon Echo, remote door cams and Footbot which can measure indoor pollution.

The TRA directive is aimed at licensees or service providers as part of the efforts to regulate international roaming for IoT devices, enhance the security level provided to beneficiaries, and protect their personal data.

The directive states that the provider or importer can provide IoT devices with international roaming services or through local networks, provided that international roaming works on a temporary basis according to a number of obligations, provided they work using the subscriber identification card (SIM/e-SIM) from the licensee.

The subscriber will be allowed to use the international roaming SIM cards for these devices for a period not exceeding 90 days in local networks.

Providers or importers of IoT devices operating in international roaming, in the event of a desire to extend it for more than 90 days, can apply to the authority to request an exception through the authority's website.

Book on Dhofar evokes good response at London Book Fair

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

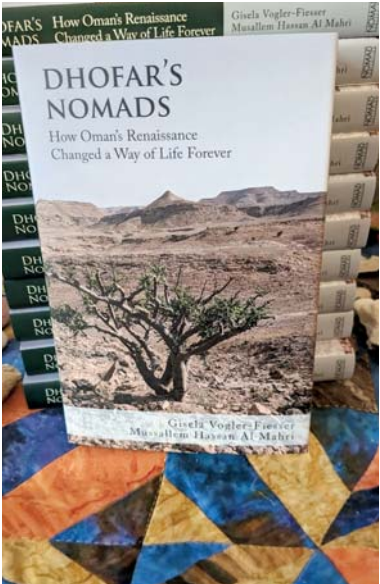
A chance visit to the Sultanate of Oman's Dhofar Governorate by a tourist and a writer from Scotland in 2013 was so impactful that she felt like writing a book. She completed her book 'Dhofar's Nomads: How Oman's Renaissance Changed Way of Life Forever' this month and now participating in the London Book Fair.

The writer Gisela Volger is happy with the response and wants the book to reach Oman as

early as possible.

"I am happy and elated to mention that the journey I started in 2013 proved fruitful and today I am participating with the book in the prestigious London Book Fair," she said in an electronic message soon after the opening of the three-day book fair on Tuesday.

Mentioning her first visit to Dhofar, Gisela said, "I came to Dhofar for the first time by chance in 2013. I had come to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia to visit my daughter who was studying there. From there I decided to visit Oman for a



short spell together."

"From the very beginning, I was intrigued by the stunning, multifaceted landscape arid in part and richly verdant in others, and its warm, welcoming people, willing to share their deep love for their homeland, and always eager to answer any questions about their culture. Little wonder, I came back again and again. Since then, Dhofar and Salalah became the hotspots of my visits and year by year, I meet new friends and finally decided to write a book."

Empty Quarter fascinates her

where "silence is audible and darkness becomes an explosion of dazzling starlight... it always provides a special experience."

Gisela loves to follow the coasts along the deep blue Arabian Sea. Spending time in the wilderness of Dhofar's many wadis brings one close to nature.

"There are some spectacular rock formations in the canyons, but the great variety of flora taking root even in barren soil always fascinated me. I tried to comprehend all my thoughts about Dhofar in my book," Gisela summarised.



Oman marks World Heritage Day

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, joined the world in marking the World Heritage Day, which falls on April 18 every year. This year's World Heritage Day is held under the theme 'Heritage Changes'.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism accords great attention to protecting and preserving Omani heritage, world heritage sites and monuments. It also carries out studies and research for archaeological excavations and surveys, in addition to issuing scientific publications in this regard.

Eng Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage said that



several programmes are being carried out in the heritage field in the Sultanate of Oman, including programmes for the restoration and maintenance of heritage sites, as well as coordinating with renowned universities and specialised centres to conduct excavations and surveys.

Al Kharousi added that the ministry recorded 3,423 heritage

sites, while the number of historic and heritage sites that were restored by the end of 2022 stood at 310.

As many as 5 Omani sites were included in the World Heritage List and seven other sites are on the Tentative List, Al Kharousi said.

He pointed out that the number of archaeological missions stood



Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage

at 26 within the programme of the 2022/2023 season.

In regards to the archaeological missions, Al Kharousi clarified that the 26 missions within the 2022/2023 season programme revealed more about the nature of life in Oman more than 10,000 years ago, that through the discovered monuments and antiquities that explore the

Omani contribution to the human civilisation since the dawn of history and what the historical eras included of the human settlement in many places in Oman and the ancient human interactions with the land in these places.

He said that the ministry is working on issuing, translating and publishing various books, studies and peer-reviewed scientific research, in Arabic and English - periodically and annually to highlight many aspects of the Omani cultural heritage.

He also pointed out that the ministry exerts efforts to document the existing or near-extinction craft industries to preserve them, including a number of projects such as innovation in the Omani Sarooj, the study of innovation in the leather industry, and innovation in cotton industries in the Sultanate of Oman.

Science Project Contest registration extended to April 20

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The last date to register for the fifth Edition of the Science Project Contest - SPC-2023 has been extended to April 20, the organisers informed.

Part of the Muscat Science Fest (MSF), the SPC is organised by the Science and Technology Sub wing of the Indian Social Club's Kerala Wing. The event also includes a Science fair, exhibition, and competition of science projects for all students in the Sultanate of Oman.

The science exhibition will be conducted on May 5 and 6 at Al Amerat Park along with the prestigious Indian Community Festival (ICF) 2023, known as Keralotsavam earlier.

Children from all schools in the country under 18 can participate in the science project competition. The children who wish to participate in the competitions shall register with their team and a project description at the below link or scan the QR code in the poster to get the registration link.

Further details of MSF SPC-2023 are also available in the registration link - <https://forms.gle/FbxbMEgHNAaRY7U66>.

The organisers have announced attractive prizes for the best projects.

MSF has organised science exhibitions along with Keralotsavam and later as part of the Indian Community Festival (ICF) which had a strong footfall of about 50,000 plus over the last edition. During the pandemic, MSF also organised an online science exhibition through a virtual exhibition platform which attracted more than 10,000 visitors in 2 days from all over the world.

Three more new hospitals to come up in Oman



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Secretariat-General of the Tender Board floated tenders for the construction of Al Falah Hospital in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, Al Nama Hospital in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and Samayil Hospital in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The construction of these hospitals is based on the Royal Directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and was included into the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan.

Al Nama Hospital, to be constructed in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, will serve some 115,000 people while Samayil Hospital

will serve 38,000 people. Al Falah Hospital, will serve the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Kamil W'al Wafi and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

The new hospitals will comprise specialised departments, outpatient clinics, emergency departments, CT scan and x-ray departments, medical laboratories, intensive care units, dialysis units, among other facilities.

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Stage set for Musandam Carnival from April 26 to 28

MUSCAT: Preparations for the Musandam Carnival which is set to take place from April 26 to 28, from 4:00 pm to midnight at Bassa Beach in the Wilayat of Khasab are well underway. The carnival is organised in cooperation between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Office of the Governor of Musandam and the Omran Group, with the participation of a number of government and private agencies.

The carnival will be held on Bassa Beach in the Wilayat of Khasab, which is distinguished by its natural beauty and its proximity to the most prominent tourist sites in the governorate. A tourism project is currently being developed among its sides, and it includes a public park and various public facilities. To contribute to enriching the tourist experience for its visitors.

Nawfal bin Mohammed al Kamzari, Assistant Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Musandam Governorate, said: "We, in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, are constantly striving to diversify tourism products in the various destinations of the Sultanate of Oman, and We also aim to enhance the local tourism movement by employing the natural and cultural richness that these destinations enjoy." "The Governorate of Musandam has many natural, cultural and historical assets, which contribute to providing comprehensive and integrated tourism experiences for visitors," he added.

The carnival will play an active role in enriching the experience of all family members throughout



the three days through the various corners it includes, which are the food corner, which is delicious traditional and international food, the shopping corner, which allows visitors to serve learn about local products and products of home projects, and the corner of the Omani Women's Association in Khasab, which operates mainly to acquaint visitors with the local culture of Musandam Governorate by presenting various foods and local handicrafts, a children's activities corner dedicated to presenting various recreational fun games.

In youth activities corner a musical performances and a group of electronic and interactive games are presented, and a marine activities corner dedicated to presenting beach football and beach volleyball, in addition to a theatre corner to present various theatrical performances such as light shows and fire shows.

Noura bint Mohammed al Dhahouriyah, Planning and Investment Director at the Musandam Governor's Office

said, "This carnival demonstrates our unwavering commitment to exploring different tourism experiences in the region and promoting the diversity of our culture to visitors. It is also an extension of the tourism season-related activities periodically held in the governorate. Such carnivals play a pivotal role in developing the tourism sector by attracting visitors from Oman and the rest of the world. This, in turn, will create opportunities for local businesses, including SMEs, to thrive and grow."

Speaking on the significance and importance of the event, Badriya bint Abdulrahman al Siyabiyah, Manager of Social Investment at OMRAN Group, said, "Such events align with OMRAN Group's efforts to continue strengthening its stakeholder engagement to further enhance Oman's tourism sector. This specific carnival also plays an instrumental role in creating a platform for raising awareness on In-Country Value (ICV), thereby contributing to the country's overall socio-economic growth and prosperity."



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Iftar distribution gains pace as Ramadhan comes to an end

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Just as a few more days are left for the holy month of Ramadhan, the believers, and social workers are busy distributing iftar meals to the needy, passersby, and low-income groups daily and without losing the momentum that they built up since the beginning of the holy month.

The evening meal distribution has been a boon for those who cannot reach their residences before the call for maghrib prayers and a sight of unity and harmony where everyone felt the hunger

and experienced the first touch of water quenching their day-long hunger pangs every day.

By around five in the evening, those who need iftar meals would gather in front of the business houses that have daily plans of distribution and some of them would assign themselves as a volunteer to help smooth the distribution of the meals.

“It has been a wonderful journey since we embarked upon our annual iftar meal distribution campaign where we helped 50 people break their fast with a bundle of refreshments,” said the representatives of Mustafa Sultan



Exchange and Instant Cash Money Transfer who were engaged in the activity on a daily basis.

As most of the mosques haven't resumed daily social iftars this year in a row, such iftar meals proved to

be a respite as restaurants would open close to the fast-breaking time.

“Our iftar tent, the only tent in Ruwi, has been catering to nearly 700 people every day and the demand has been in ever-increasing mode, but since we have to adhere to safety precautions, we stuck to the capacity of the tent,” Najeeb, country manager of Malabar Gold and Diamonds which has been successfully operating the only iftar tent in Ruwi, said.

The blue-collar workers who have been engaged in manual labour or those who work in shifts digging and asphaltting the roads, tunnels, bridges and other construction works sometimes fail to get their iftar meal on time as they need to be prepared and transported to the various sites across the city. For them, the distribution channels operated by corporates have been a soothing experience as they look forward to those who bring them the dates and laban to break their fast.

“I rely upon the meals distributed by social workers or corporates as the case may be so that a delicious iftar is assured to break my day-long fast,” a worker from the Indian state of Madhyapradesh admitted.

From fabric to stitches - colours of Eid

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

“Do you know any tailor who can stitch fast? I need to stitch just three dresses for Eid.” These are the requests that are doing the rounds as Eid days come closer.

Noora Karim is a dress designer and owner of Khaleejiya Boutique.

“I like to create modern designs with traditional touch. This year everyone wanted simple designs. Popular colours have been blue, purple and orange. They wanted the fabric to be just one colour but the stones had to be of contrasting colours. For the Eid, ladies like to have flashy colours because it is a celebration,” Noora explained.

There are heartbreaks too at times the wrong fitting or not having the exact pattern one visualised.

“My tailor had postponed the date of completion and I just had to hunt for someone else,” said Shamsa al Harthiyah. She posted the question on family and friends groups and she got tens of contact numbers of tailors.

“I like pastel colours,” said Shamsa.

Observer took a walk through the inner lanes of Muttrah Souq. The mannequins are dressed up in dazzling traditional Omani dresses, and so are the windows and the walls. Mohammed Saleem is from Bangladesh and has been working in the same shop for the last 12 years at Muttrah Souq. He cannot afford to stop his sewing machine, but looking up from his work. “Almost all of the dresses have been picked up by the clients. These are just a few left,” he said. Mohammed is concentrating on the ‘shaila’, the headscarf, as it has to be equally elaborate in decoration to sync with the overall dress. For



some, it is the Khafthans and for many, it is the traditional Omani women's dishdasha below knee and Sarawal.

Muttrah Souq has always had the pride of having the best tailors specialising in a variety of costumes in Oman.

The foreman does the cutting, he said. Tailors also collaborate to handle the humongous orders that pile on during the festive seasons. For the last three to four months, the tailors have been busy for this Eid. According to Mohammed, they have been completing 50 to 60 dresses each week and in a month they have stitched about 200 to 300 dresses. Mohammed took his work and said the rest of the costume is with the foreman. This was a few shops away and Abdullah Awal took a look at it and gave a nod of approval.

Abdullah Awal, from Bangladesh, has been working in Muttrah since 1990.

“People from all over come here to stitch clothes for Eid. In the past people from Muttrah itself would keep us busy, but now a lot of families have moved out to Al Amerat and other places. However, they do come here for Eid stitching. After the season it is dry because, for other clothes throughout the year, they stitch



in their current residential area,” pointed out Abdullah while answering questions from his clients in the shop as well. The last-minute shoppers are now going for the readymade and this means altering it.

“We need to fix it now and go because we cannot come back all the way to pick it up tomorrow,” the ladies said.

Abdullah currently starts his work at the tailoring shop at 10 am and takes a break at 5 pm to return to work at 8 pm and continue stitching until 1 am.

Alauddin has been working for just one year but he specialises in embroidery which is an integral part of the dresses. The neck embroidery can make all the difference.

Right next to the tailoring shops is a fabric outlet and Wasi Mughal, from Pakistan, brings fabric from Karachi such as ‘brezen’, chiffon, ‘hareer Hindi’ (raw silk), and Kashmiri cotton. Also in demand are ‘hareer’, organza, cotton as well as ‘suri brezen’.

He said, “During the last days of Ramadhan, the ladies are busy purchasing the ‘shaila’ because once they get the dresses from the tailors it is time for choosing the perfect scarf.”

‘Dishdashas’ in high demand

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Tailors who make the traditional Omani male dresses called ‘dishdasha’ are in demand as Eid is almost here.

Tailors who were badly affected during the pandemic have all pulled their socks up to make sure every customer is truly taken care of, as said by Kashif Ahmed, a Kashmiri Musar (Omani turban) seller in Seeb Souq.

‘Kandura’, also known as thawb, thobe or ‘dishdasha’, is a long ankle-length dress worn by men of the Sultanate of Oman.

Most of the tailors in Seeb Souq, Muttrah Souq and OC Centre in Ruwi are working round-the-clock to meet their deadlines.

These tailors who work on full packages (cloth plus tailor charges) or just tailoring the clothes are facing a diverse set of demands and for them, learning is a constant process in tailoring.

“We are facing different youngsters in our shop daily having different choices and opinions. If one needs the colour to be unique, the other would need terracotta material than the extra light tropical wools suitable for warmer climates. Such are the likes and dislikes of our customers and we learn from them how to satisfy these demands,” says Shabbir Ahmed Mia, a tailor cum cloth trader at the OC Centre.

Shabbir Saab, as fondly called by other shoppers in this oldest shopping centre, says the tailors are getting even busier and the proportion has become two



dishdashas to be completed by one tailor in a day.

“This is against our routine practice of one ‘Kandura’ per day during other days and in this scenario, maintaining the quality is a big challenge. Once the quality is substandard, you're out of business forever,” he explained.

Strict rule on traditional costumes: Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has strict rules and regulations in place to encourage the making and usage of traditional ‘Kandura’ and no alterations without the ministry's permission are allowed and are offence if done otherwise.

Every year the ministry carries out a series of inspections in line with Ministerial Decree No 270/2015, which prohibits alterations to the design of traditional Omani clothing.

Cutting or sewing, printing slogans and trademarks of foreign companies or making drawings contrary to the public interest are not allowed. It will be considered an act of abuse of tradition, according to government standards.

The government has, in a bid to protect the Omani identity and prevent additions being introduced to the national dress, approved 5 designs of Kandura and no deviation from these designs is allowed.

Accordingly, the common dishdasha styles -- Buraimi, Abu Shaq, Suri and Bedouin -- are the five types approved by the ministry.

Acting on Article Three of Ministerial Decision 270/2015, which states that “it is not permitted to import or design traditional Omani attire or compromise or adjust it, which could harm the Omani identity”, the ministry imposed specific standards that dishdasha tailors must follow.

More expats prefer Arab garbs. Call it an exchange of culture or an urge to replicate, the demand among expats for Arab dresses, Omani dishdasha, Qatai and Kuwaiti ‘kandura’ is on the rise.

Tailors certify that the craze doesn't end with the adults alone but they prefer their children to be clad in these dresses of their hosts and mark their celebrations of Eid.

Rain softens Ramadhan mood in Khanadiq area

TEXT & PHOTOS BY:
YAHYA AL SALMANI

The sudden change in weather has softened the Ramadhan mood in the Sultanate of Oman, as most of the wilayats witnessed cloudy weather and rain that brought down the temperature and recharged the wadis (valleys).

Some governorates witnessed moderate rains even as thick clouds are hovering in the affected areas.

The wilayat of Al Rustaq had a large share of recent rains. It rained mostly in the mountainous

areas resulting in the overflow of the wadis and scenes of waterfalls in some areas.

Al Hawqayn and Al Khanadiq witnessed a large number of visitors after the rains.

This area has many popular tourist sites due to its geological nature. The water here is distinguished by its turquoise colour and this area provides the opportunity for its visitors to camp and practice swimming.

Many photography enthusiasts love to capture natural beauty when it rains in

this area.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre at the Public Authority for Civil Aviation has issued a report that suggests depression in the Sultanate of Oman's airspace.

Weather is likely to be partly cloudy to cloudy, with the possibility of rain of varying intensity, sometimes thundery, accompanied by active winds and hail until next Thursday.

In this atmosphere, joy appears on the faces of the residents of this beautiful village, as everyone



here is looking forward to a fertile agricultural harvest season.

“We are happy when the rain comes. In recent years, the wilayat has witnessed many rains that have contributed to soil fertility and an increase in agricultural activities. The agricultural season will begin in less than a month, and we expect that the local markets will witness a diverse range of agricultural products,” a local farmer said.

Rustaq's main agricultural products are dates, mangoes, lemons, onions and garlic.



Tradition Prevails

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

Ramadhan comes as a reminder of tradition and culture at a time when the whole world is on a fast track and people race against each other. It works as a reboot to the system in the traditional mode, the expression of which is pervasive among societies and cultures.

In the race for modernisation, many forget the taste of traditional food. Ramadhan revives the taste of traditional dishes, which are served in most households during iftar and other meals, the culmination of which is Eid when people get to eat all these delicacies. It is for the younger generation to understand 'the taste of Oman' which is hidden in conventional foods like Sakhana

(a thick sweet soup made of wheat, date, molasses and milk and Fatta (a meat and vegetable dish mixed with



Khubz rakhal — thin Omani bread made out of unleavened dough).

The holy month is the best time to experience typical Omani food. Harees, Mishkak and Shuwa are the best delicacies. Harees is prepared with wheat mixed with meat, Mishkak is skewered meat grilled on charcoal, and Shuwa is a typically Omani delicacy prepared only on special occasions. These three dishes are delicacies respectively for the first, second and third day of Eid.

Ramadhan is when everyone gets to eat homemade traditional food, and eating them with family, friends and community doubles the enjoyment. This is also a part of keeping the tradition when the world is fast switching from joint to unit families.

Who doesn't like Omani Halwa -- a sticky sweet gelatinous substance made from brown sugar,

eggs, honey and spices? However, getting it homemade in most houses is possible only during Ramadhan. Factory-made Halwas are tasty, but they cannot beat the taste of tradition stored in Omani houses. One of the popular desserts of the Sultanate of Oman, flavours are customised with ingredients such as nuts, rosewater or even chocolates.

Ramadhan comes as a great reminder of cultural and traditional values, as people love to return to their roots. They eat traditional food, wear traditional clothes and live traditionally as much as possible. Mainly they adopt minimalism and take a break from unwanted imposed modernism. This breaks their monotony, rejuvenates them and brings many other benefits that reflect their well-being.





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■ THE T-REX'S SKELETON



Bidders are seen next to a picture of 'Trinity' after the sale of the Tyrannosaurus-Rex (T-Rex) skeleton by Koller auction house in Zurich, on Tuesday. The T-Rex's skeleton, dating back 67 million years and made up of bones from three dinosaurs excavated between 2008 and 2013 from the Hell Creek and Lance Creek formations in Montana and Wyoming, was sold for 4,8 million Swiss francs (\$5,333333 million). — AFP

34 million Afghans in poverty under Taliban rule, says UN

KABUL: The number of Afghans in poverty nearly doubled to 34 million as the nation was racked by the collapse of the US-backed government and the Taliban takeover, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Vast foreign subsidies were halted and aid programmes dramatically cut back after the US-backed republic fell in 2021 as many countries refused to deal with the Taliban authorities in Kabul.

Those NGOs still providing vital help were dealt a further blow in December last year by a Taliban government order barring Afghan women from working for them.

The curb was extended this month to the UN's Afghan female employees and the organisation said it faces an "appalling choice" over whether to continue its aid schemes.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released on Tuesday a stark new assessment of 2022 data estimating 34 million Afghans were living below the poverty line.

The figure is a staggering increase of 15 million on 2020, the last full year of rule by the



The UNDP resident representative in Afghanistan Abdallah Al Dardari (C) addresses a press conference in Kabul on Tuesday. — AFP

Western-backed government that crumbled in a matter of weeks the following summer.

There is no contemporary census data for Afghanistan but the UN uses a population estimate of 40 million, meaning 85 per cent of the nation is projected to be in poverty.

"Some have been compelled to sell their homes, land, or assets that generate income," the UNDP report said.

"Others have resorted to the distressing practice of commodifying their own family members, turning children into labourers and young daughters into brides."

The UN airlifts vast sums of US dollars into Afghanistan to pay staff and operating costs — cash injections that have also been vital in shoring up the nation's faltering economy.

About \$1.8 billion was imported this way between December 2021 and January 2023, according to the UN's mission in Afghanistan.

It warned at the start of the year "if the volume of assistance that the UN is able to provide diminishes the amount of cash shipped will be reduced".

That means if the UN winnows down its work owing to the Taliban government curbs, it will have

the double effect of reducing aid and cutting a crucial economic lifeline for desperate Afghans.

The UN has also warned that restrictions may turn off the aid tap at the source, with donors wary of committing cash to projects that cannot be implemented.

The UN's 2023 Afghanistan appeal has thus far raised only five per cent of its \$4.6 billion goal.

"If foreign aid is reduced this year, Afghanistan may fall from the cliff edge into the abyss," the UNDP resident representative in Afghanistan, Abdallah Al Dardari, said in a statement.

Many organisations suspended their operations in protest against the December ban on NGOs employing Afghan women. An exemption was granted to those working in the health sector following days of wrangling, but the UNDP said 150 NGOs and aid agencies "have suspended all or part of their work".

Aid officials say they need women workers to help identify and support Afghan women beneficiaries across the country. — AFP

UN sees 'historic' chance to end Libya crisis

UNITED NATIONS: Libyans have a "historic opportunity" to tackle the political crisis that has haunted the country since 2011, the UN's special ambassador to Libya said on Tuesday, still hoping for elections later this year.

"An historic opportunity is open for overcoming the decade-long crisis," Abdoulaye Bathily, head of the United Nations Support

Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), told a Security Council meeting.

"There has been a new dynamic in Libya" in recent weeks, Bathily said.

"Intensive consultations have taken place amongst security actors. Institutional and political leaders have also taken action to move the political process forward."

Bathily pointed to several March and April

meetings between military representatives from various regions of the country. Representatives at the gatherings, which Bathily said represent a breakthrough, "committed to support all stages of elections, reject violence throughout Libya (and) take practical steps for the safe return of the internally displaced persons," he said.

These meetings served a

substantial symbolic purpose in the effort to reconcile and unify the country, he added.

But the "new national dynamic" must be sustained and amplified, Bathily said.

"UNSMIL will intensify its facilitation and mediation," he assured, "to support the realisation of all political, legal and security requirements so elections can be held this year."

— AFP

EU seeks 'cyber shield' to ward off online attacks

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday unveiled a 1.1-billion-euro (\$1.2 billion) plan to help stave off cross-border hacking attacks as threats grow.

Europe is looking to shore up its online defences as Moscow's war on Ukraine has raised fears that Russian hackers could target critical infrastructure.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said the "Cyber Shield" plan would look to link up capabilities at designated "Security Operations Centres" across member states.

It said the first centres could be operational by 2024 and would use artificial intelligence and advanced data analytics to track threats. The aim of plan — which still has to be negotiated with EU states — is to help deal with a large-scale attack targeting multiple countries.

But EU states have been sceptical about handing too much power to Brussels to tackle emerging threats in sensitive areas of their national infrastructure.

"Sometimes there was a reluctance between member states to share," said European competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager. "But the thing is, I think it has become increasingly clear that no one can solve this alone."

The initiative also foresees setting up a "cybersecurity reserve" of private providers that would be able to intervene to help a country targeted by a major attack. The threat from Russia was demonstrated at the start of its war on Ukraine when the West says Moscow carried out a cyberattack against a US satellite network.

Washington said the attack against satellite operator Viasat was designed to disrupt Ukrainian command and control just as the Kremlin was sending in its tanks. European providers said the incident also threw thousands of Internet users offline in France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Poland.

WEAKENS PRIVACY

WhatsApp, the instant messaging platform owned by US social media giant Meta, has again attacked the UK government over planned legislation it



Sometimes there was a reluctance between member states to share. But the thing is, I think it has become increasingly clear that no one can solve this alone

MARGRETHE VESTAGER

European competition commissioner

claims would "weaken the privacy" of users worldwide.

As Britain's upper House of Lords prepares to scrutinise the government's Online Safety Bill (OSB) on Wednesday, WhatsApp and other messaging services issued an open letter demanding an "urgent rethink" of the legislation.

UK-based signatory Element meanwhile warned it could leave the country if the law is passed.

"The UK government is currently considering new legislation that opens the door to trying to force technology companies to break end-to-end encryption on private messaging services," WhatsApp said in an open letter on its blog page dated April 17.

Signed by WhatsApp head Will Cathcart and bosses of other messaging services including Signal and Wire, the letter stated: "We don't think any company, government or person should have the power to read your personal messages and we'll continue to defend encryption technology." — Agencies



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its International Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2023	Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning a New Data Center Infrastructure in MOI Premises in Salalah	International Excellent Frst	1/5/2023	28/5/2023	25/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to the Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenderers which do not meet the required bond shall not accept. Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically
- The Ministry has the right to:
 - Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
 - Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone: 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



SAUDI FM MEETS SYRIA’S ASSAD ON FIRST TRIP TO DAMASCUS

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar al Assad met with Saudi Arabia’s top diplomat in Damascus on Tuesday, state media reported, ending more than a decade of diplomatic deep-freeze between the two countries.

“President Bashar al Assad meets Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan,” Syria’s official news agency SANA reported.

The Saudi prince arrived in Damascus on Tuesday afternoon on the first visit to Syria’s capital by a Saudi official since 2011.

The trip comes less than a week after Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad visited Saudi Arabia, also on the first such visit.

Last week, diplomats from nine Arab countries met in the Saudi city of Jeddah to discuss ending Syria’s long spell in the diplomatic wilderness and its possible return.

The diplomats stressed the “importance of having an Arab leadership role in efforts to end the crisis” in Syria, according to a statement by the Saudi foreign ministry.

A February 6 earthquake that wreaked devastation in Türkiye and Syria sparked Arab outreach to Assad’s government,

and the surprise rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran was announced the following month.

Assad himself has visited the United Arab Emirates since the quake.

Syria’s foreign minister visited this month Algeria and Tunisia on the heels of trips to Saudi Arabia and Egypt in a diplomatic push.

Syria is to reopen its diplomatic mission in Tunisia and appoint an ambassador there, following a similar move announced by Tunis.

Prince Faisal had said in February that a consensus was building in the Arab world that a new approach to Syria requiring negotiations with Damascus.

In March, Saudi state media had said that Riyadh and Damascus were in talks on resuming consular services.

Assad is hoping normalisation with Gulf states could bring economic relief and money for reconstruction, as broader international funding remains elusive without a United Nations-backed political settlement to the conflict. — **AFP**

Sudan’s warring generals agree to 24-hour ceasefire



KHARTOUM: Sudan’s rival commanders agreed a 24-hour ceasefire from Tuesday evening over deadly fighting that has engulfed the capital Khartoum.

The conflict between Sudan’s armed ruling factions broke out four days ago and has killed at least 185 people across the country, triggering what the United Nations has described as a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, including the near collapse of the health system.

The ceasefire will start at 6 pm and will not extend beyond the agreed 24 hours, Army General Shams El Din Kabbashi, a member of Sudan’s ruling military council, said on TV.

Early on Tuesday, gunfire echoed across Khartoum accompanied by the sound

of warplanes and explosions. Residents in the neighbouring cities of Omdurman and Bahri reported air strikes that shook buildings and anti-aircraft fire. Fighting also raged in the west of the country, the United Nations said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held separate calls with the rival commanders - the army chief and the head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - whose power struggle derailed an internationally-backed plan to shift to civilian rule after decades of autocracy and military control.

Blinken, speaking in Japan, said he had telephoned both RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as

Hemedti, and General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, appealing for the 24-hour ceasefire “to allow the Sudanese to be safely reunited with families” and to provide them with relief.

After the call, Hemedti said the RSF approved the ceasefire to ensure the safe passage of civilians and the evacuation of the wounded.

Hemedti said he had “discussed pressing issues” with Blinken and more talks were planned. The RSF also issued a statement saying it was waging a battle to restore “the rights of our people” in what it called a new revolution.

Hemedti’s whereabouts have not been disclosed since fighting began.

A previous shorter ceasefire

agreed for Sunday was not fully observed. Artillery volleys, strikes by combat aircraft and street fighting have made it almost impossible to travel in Khartoum, trapping residents and foreigners in their homes.

The main international airport has been under attack, halting commercial flights.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said it was nearly impossible to provide humanitarian services around the capital. It warned that Sudan’s health system was at risk of breakdown.

The outbreak of fighting followed rising tensions over a plan for the RSF’s integration into the regular military.

— **Reuters**

Israeli forces shoot 7 people in West Bank raid

NABLUS: Israeli forces shot and wounded seven people in a raid on Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said as the Israeli army confirmed an operation was under way.

The ministry reported “six minor injuries from live fire” reached Jenin governmental hospital, while another person shot had been admitted to a nearby hospital following the raid in the northern West Bank city.

A statement from the Israeli military said “security forces are currently operating in the Jenin (refugee) camp”, without giving



further details.

There was no immediate confirmation of the identity of those wounded in Jenin.

Frequent incursions by Israeli forces have led to clashes with local youth or militants, with at least 25 Palestinians killed in the city this year and no Israeli fatalities.

The latest raid comes amid a spike in violence in Israel and the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian gunman wounded two Israeli men near a Jewish site in annexed east Jerusalem, Israeli authorities said,

with security forces conducting a manhunt for the fighter.

The shooting comes amid a period of deadly attacks and military raids across the occupied West Bank, along with killings in Israel.

Israeli police announced a suspected “shooting attack” in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem targeting two motorists, who according to medics were rushed to hospital.

“Police officers are at the scene conducting searches for the suspect who fled,” the force said in a statement.

Israeli security forces closed off

streets in the neighbourhood with a drone and helicopter as well as police dogs aiding the search.

Officers enforcing the shutdown prevented cars and people from moving in the centre of the neighbourhood, as heavily armed forces combed the area. Police announced they had found the perpetrator’s gun near the scene of the attack, which took place near the tomb of Simeon the Just — Shimon Hatzadik in Hebrew — a site frequented by religious Jews.

The weapon was identified as a Carlo makeshift submachine gun, which Palestinians manufacture in the West Bank. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

KANO

Gunmen attack village, kill dozens

Gunmen suspected to be Fulani herders have killed 33 people in an attack on a farming village in northwest Nigeria’s Kaduna state, where inter-communal herder-farmer violence is common, a local official said. The assailants stormed Runji village in Zangon Kafat district opening fire on residents and torching homes as people tried to flee, Francis Sani, administrative chairman for the Zangon Kafat area, said.

“We buried 33 people killed in the attack on Sunday, including



women and children,” Sani said.

“The attackers, who are no doubt Fulani herdsman, also burnt more than 40 houses in the village before they were confronted by soldiers and vigilantes,” he said.

BEIRUT

Parliament delays local elections

Lebanon’s parliament on Tuesday postponed municipal elections scheduled for next month, official media said, with the cash-strapped country mired in an unprecedented economic meltdown.

It is the second time the polls have been postponed, after they were initially scheduled to take place last year. No new date was announced for the vote.

“Parliament has approved a law extending the mandate of municipal councils... until May 31, 2024 at the latest,” the National



News Agency said.

Deputy parliament speaker Elias Bou Saab warned last week that “holding municipal elections has become almost impossible”, citing a lack of funds.

BAGHDAD

Gambling dens raided, nearly 200 arrested

Iraqi police arrested overnight almost 200 people in raids on illegal casinos where alcohol was served in defiance of the fasting month of Ramadhan, the interior ministry said on Tuesday.

The raids targeted four locations in Baghdad where games of blackjack and roulette had been underway, ministry spokesman Saad Maan said.

A ministry official said 159 Iraqi citizens and 32 foreigners including women were arrested, while large amounts of cash were



seized.

Video footage released by the ministry showed several people rounded up and sitting on the ground before being taken away by the police.



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In brief

ROME



BEAR RESPONSIBLE FOR JOGGER DEATH CAPTURED

The bear, known as JJ4, that killed a jogger in northern Italy has been captured, according to information on Tuesday from the province of Trentino, where the attack occurred.

The animal was found during the night in the area around the forests of the territory, the regional government said.

A 26-year-old jogger was attacked and killed by the bear in early April in the Trentino municipality of Caldes in a valley popular with hikers and tourists. A DNA match to JJ4 confirmed the bear's identity.

The province had then ordered JJ4 to be shot in order to "preserve public safety."

PARIS



AI WORK SPARKS FIERCE DEBATE AFTER WINNING

A German artist has sparked an angry row after winning a prestigious photography prize with an entry that was generated by artificial intelligence.

Boris Eldagsen eventually rejected the gong from the Sony World Photography Awards after concluding that such competitions were not yet equipped to handle AI entries.

The awards organisers initially accused the artist of "misleading" behaviour, but removed the accusation from a later statement after a furious reply from Eldagsen on Tuesday.

Many photographers and artists fear their livelihoods are under threat from AI tools that allow anyone to create.

STOCKHOLM



SWEDEN'S PUBLIC BROADCASTER SR CEASES ACTIVITIES

Sweden's public radio Sveriges Radio (SR) announced on Tuesday that it was ceasing its activities on social media network Twitter, following similar decisions by US and Canadian public broadcasters.

"Sveriges Radio has for a long time de-prioritised its presence on Twitter and has now decided to stop being active on the platform altogether," it said in a blog post posted to its website.

SR noted that the social media network had "simply changed" and lost relevance for the broadcaster, adding that some of its accounts would also be removed from the platform, keeping only the main account.

Bitter fighting reported in Bakhmut: Commander



Ukrainian servicemen return from heavy fighting amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, close to Bakhmut. — Reuters

KYIV: The Kremlin said on Tuesday that President Vladimir Putin had visited two frontline regions in Ukraine, prompting Kyiv to brand it a tour of the scenes.

Moscow portrayed the trip as a marker of its control in occupied Ukraine.

Putin met Russian troops fighting in the regions of Kherson and Luhansk, according to a statement published in Moscow on Tuesday.

In Kherson in southern Ukraine, he was briefed by the commander of the airborne troops, Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky. In Luhansk in the east, the 70-year-old Kremlin leader met Colonel General Alexander Lapin and other high-ranking officers.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting continues over the now destroyed city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, as Russian troops attack from the air with heavy artillery, Ukrainian and British officials said on Tuesday.

"There is a realistic possibility that Russia has reduced troop

The commander of the Ukrainian land forces reported heavy fighting in Bakhmut as Russian troops attack from the air with heavy artillery. However he said that "the situation is under control at this point"

numbers and is decreasing offensive action around Donetsk city, most likely to divert resources towards the Bakhmut sector," the British Defence Ministry wrote in its daily Ukraine war update.

Oleksandr Syrskiy, the commander of the Ukrainian land forces reported heavy fighting in Bakhmut as Russian troops attack from the air with heavy artillery.

However he said that "the situation is under control at this point."

Strategically both sides have

to weigh a draw down of forces from Bakhmut, the tweet said. For the Ukrainian military it is about getting enough forces to launch the expected spring offensive, while Russian forces likely want to regenerate their reserves.

Syrskiy predicted Ukrainian forces would inflict heavy losses on the enemy and "noticeably slow down" the Russian attack.

The exact date of the troop visit was not disclosed. Putin was in Moscow over the weekend and took part in an Easter service by Patriarch Kirill.

International pressure on Russian from Western powers has not abated since the conflict started.

In Japan, foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) industrialised nations said they "remain committed to intensifying sanctions against Russia, coordinating and fully enforcing them... and the G7 again called on Russia to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Ukraine.

— Agencies

UK govt demands 'real leadership' from Northern Ireland unionists

BELFAST: The UK government on Tuesday issued its strongest appeal yet to unionists in Northern Ireland to restore the region's power-sharing government.

The Conservative government called on the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to embrace "real leadership" and emulate predecessors who forged Northern Ireland's 1998 peace accord, which ended three decades of violence against British rule.

The DUP has been boycotting the divided territory's government at Stormont over post-Brexit trading arrangements agreed with the European Union, despite itself supporting the UK's split from the EU.

The party has been under sustained pressure from London, Dublin, Brussels and Washington, peaking in a visit to the island last week by US President Joe Biden.

Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris delivered the UK government's sharpest rhetoric yet, in a speech to a conference marking the 25th anniversary of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday peace agreement.

Everyone in Northern Ireland wants better public services, economic prosperity

and a brighter future for their children, the minister told the audience at Queen's University in Belfast.

"The biggest threat to Northern Ireland's place in the (UK) union is failing to deliver on these priorities," he said.

At the conference, EU Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic said he had consulted widely with business leaders in Northern Ireland.

"What... I heard very clearly was, they need predictability," said Sefcovic, who led talks for the new deal with the UK, dubbed the "Windsor Framework".

"They need stability," he added, urging political leaders to learn from the "inclusivity" that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement.

Other Northern Irish leaders said the DUP and Conservatives only had themselves to blame for refusing to accept the inevitable consequences of Brexit.

Ireland's foreign minister Micheal Martin said London and Brussels had worked hard to clinch the Windsor Framework, in a bid to placate the DUP by diluting the border checks.

All leaders in Northern Ireland had the "responsibility to accept democratic outcomes", Martin said. — AFP



The three-day international conference is held at Queen's University Belfast to mark the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. — Reuters

EU Parliament backs overhaul of Europe's climate policy

STRASBOURG: The European Parliament on Tuesday approved sweeping reforms to make EU climate change policies more ambitious, including an upgrade of the bloc's carbon market that is set to hike the cost of polluting in Europe.

Europe's carbon market forces power plants and factories to buy CO2 permits when they pollute. It has slashed those sectors' emissions by 43 per cent since 2005, but is facing a revamp to hit more ambitious EU climate change targets.

Parliament voted to approve, with a large majority, a deal agreed last year by negotiators from EU countries and Parliament, to reform the carbon market to cut emissions by 62 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030.

Under the upgrade, factories will lose the free CO2 permits they currently receive by 2034, and shipping emissions will be added to the CO2 market from 2024.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. — AFP

Lawmakers also backed the EU's world-first plan to phase in a levy on imports of high-carbon goods from 2026, targeting imports of steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity

and hydrogen.

The carbon border levy aims to prevent EU industries being undercut by more-polluting foreign competitors, removing the temptation for EU firms

to relocate to regions with lax environmental rules.

The laws still need final approval from EU countries, who will assess them in the next few weeks. That approval is usually a

formality that waves through pre-agreed deals — but the process was upended last month when Germany lodged last-minute opposition to another policy to phase out fossil fuel-powered cars. CUTTING GOALS

Peter Liese, Parliament's lead negotiator on the emissions trading system (ETS) reform, said the success of the carbon market would make or break Europe's CO2-cutting goals.

"For the climate, the ETS alone is more important than all the other files together," he said.

The price of EU carbon permits has soared in recent years, boosted by anticipation of the reforms — hiking costs for polluters, but raising billions of euros that are returned to EU country governments to invest in climate measures.

Lawmakers also backed plans to launch a new EU carbon market covering emissions from fuels used in cars and buildings in 2027. — Reuters

A circular portrait of a man with a full dark beard and mustache, wearing a yellow turban with a patterned band. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light color.

The writer is a banker
by day and a storyteller
by night

When speaking to students of Al Amal School for the Deaf and some members of Al Amal Club for the Deaf, they all believe that everyone deserve a chance in working and contributing to the society and they should never be looked down or felt sorry for 'we are as capable as

There are now many services and facilities for people with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Development had launched “Services and Facilities for Person

There are now many facilities and services supporting a person with disability. But yet what is longed for is a chance of equal

We want to work so we can earn to build a house, drive a car and have a future. Many from the disabled and special needs community have stated that it took them long time to get jobs and that

Despite the great initiative, facilities and services to support the disability community. More is needed to support them to have more active involvement in the social arena, to be employed, and given opportunities to progress. What all they want to be equal partners in the development of the society.

Wealthy countries have still not met a promise to deliver \$100 billion per year, starting in 2020, to help poorer countries cut emissions and cope with climate change. That amount falls far short of their actual needs, but has become symbolic of wealthy countries' failure to deliver promised climate funds. — **Reuters**

The term “sponge cities” was coined in 2013 by Kongjian Yu — an architect and professor at Peking University —



Its digital mapping tool allows cities to gauge the best use of available space — from rainwater harvesting to ponds and inner-city gardens — to boost sponginess, and to determine the risks of not doing so.

Non-native plant species can end up absorbing more water than indigenous plants — but that can lead to low water availability during times of drought.

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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A festival that brings joy to all!

A much-anticipated event in the world, and with the dates confirmed, Muslims all over the world are preparing for their favourite festival of Eid al Fitr. It marks the end of Ramadhan, the holy month of dusk-to-dawn fasting observed by Muslims across the globe. Eid al Fitr is a time for Muslims to thank the Almighty for giving them the strength to fast and reflect on all the aspects of life they're grateful to have. It is customary for Muslims during this time to seek forgiveness from each other for any wrongdoings that may have occurred during the year.

During the period of the festival Muslims introspect and reflect on their inner character. Also it helps unravel their sense of self that include their strengths and weaknesses, which can then be worked upon during the rest of the year.

Eid al Fitr also heralds the noble messages of unity and brotherhood. It entails compassion, empathy and benevolence. It sends strong messages against violence and communal discord. It is a gentle reminder of love prevailing over hatred.

While across cultures, traditions may differ, there's a unanimous joy that is celebrated in the form of food, family and friends. Malls and shops offer special discounts, and restaurants and hotels prepare special Eid menus and events.

Having lived in Oman for over two decades, I have come to know a lot about the festival and traditions of my Muslim friends not in the Sultanate but also many other countries. Eid is not an exclusive festival of Muslims alone, but it is a celebration of all who values affection and friendship. Muslim or non-Muslim, the festival brings joy to all!

I found Ramadhan and Eid to be a time, except during the catastrophic coronavirus period, to celebrate with family and friends. The scrumptious food and the drooling aroma of the delicacies being prepared made it more special!

Indeed the calamitous Covid-19



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

HAVING LIVED IN OMAN FOR OVER TWO DECADES, I HAVE COME TO KNOW A LOT ABOUT THE FESTIVAL AND TRADITIONS OF MY MUSLIM FRIENDS

era has been both difficult and challenging. The past three years have brought changes in how we celebrate Eid. Those who lost their family members to the dreaded coronavirus have to celebrate it without their loved ones by their sides.

For many of those who recovered from the virus, many still find it extremely challenging to re-acclimate to "normal" life.

The economic upshot from the pandemic has had a disparate impact on certain sectors of the economy, particularly the service sector and certain population groups and could risk continued labour dislocations.

The human costs in terms of lives lost will permanently affect global economic growth in addition to the cost of elevated levels of poverty, lives upended, careers derailed and increased social unrest. In addition to this is the fallout from the war in Ukraine which has aggravated the woes. The conflict has sent global food prices soaring.

The pandemic, which is again showing signs of resurgence in some countries, is not completely gone. It is incumbent upon us all to continue to stay cautious while partaking of the blessings during this Eid.

We should not ignore the fact that we are still in the midst of unusual circumstances. Eid invites us to become exemplary embodiments of the truth which we profess and reminds us of the virtue of sacrificing some of our own comforts for the benefit of others.

After all, responsibility is a fundamental virtue of Islam! Along with all celebrations, I still believe that Eid is a festival that brings along the vibrancy of peace and love to cherish life. All of us should come together shoulder to shoulder to share and care.

Why not make this Eid a memorable one by celebrating it in a way where we can bid goodbye to hatred, jealousy and enmity, and bring in an era of love, sympathy and brotherhood?

May this Eid al Fitr bring all peace, happiness and prosperity! Happy Eid to all in advance!

A HOT SUMMER DAY!



A woman speaks on a mobile phone as she walks through a market on a hot summer day in New Delhi, India, on Tuesday. – Reuters

A distinctive identity firmly rooted in history

The Sultanate of Oman, a country on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, is renowned for its vibrant history and culture. Oman has a distinctive identity firmly rooted in its history and traditions, from its beautiful architecture to its traditional attire.

Despite the country's rapid modernisation and development, Oman has managed to preserve its history and keep a solid connection with the past. This has been made possible by several programmes designed to promote and safeguard Oman's cultural heritage, such as opening of museums, preserving historical sites and commemorating traditional holidays.

In this article, we will delve deeper into Oman's rich heritage, exploring its historical significance and the importance of preserving it for future generations. We will also examine the challenges faced in protecting Oman's heritage in the face of modernisation and development and how individuals, communities and the government can ensure its protection and promotion. Ultimately, this article aims to raise awareness about Oman's heritage's importance and encourage a deeper appreciation and understanding of this unique and fascinating culture.

Oman's history covers thousands of years and is a significant part of its heritage. The country played an essential role in the ancient maritime trade routes. In addition, its ports



Mohsin bin Khalil al Amri

DESPITE RAPID MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT, OMAN HAS MANAGED TO PRESERVE ITS HISTORY AND KEEP A SOLID CONNECTION WITH THE PAST

acted as vital crossroads in trade between Asia, Africa and Europe. Oman's architecture, art and traditions, influenced over time by numerous cultures and civilisations, reflect this rich history.

Oman's heritage is a testament to its rich history and the diverse cultural influences that have shaped it over the centuries. From the ancient forts and castles that dot the landscape to the intricate designs of its traditional clothing, Oman's heritage reflects its people's resilience and creativity. Oman's heritage reflects its people's tenacity and creativity, as seen in the intricate designs of its traditional clothing and the numerous historic forts and castles that dot the landscape. One of the most significant aspects of Oman's heritage is its architecture. The country is home to many historical sites, including the stunning Bahla Fort, which dates back to the 13th century and is a Unesco World Heritage Site. Other notable landmarks include the Al Jalali and Al Mirani forts in Muscat, and the ancient town of Nizwa, famous for its traditional souqs and historic buildings.

Oman's heritage reflects its people's tenacity and creativity, as seen in the intricate designs of its traditional clothing and the numerous historic forts and

castles that dot the landscape. Additionally, traditional festivals such as the National Day celebrations have become essential platforms for showcasing Oman's heritage and traditions. These events provide an opportunity for locals and visitors alike to learn about Oman's rich history and celebrate its unique culture.

Despite Oman's rapid modernisation and development, the country has made significant

efforts to protect its heritage and traditions. Establishing museums, cultural centres and heritage sites has helped promote and protect Oman's unique identity, allowing visitors to learn about the country's history and culture.

The Omani government has taken action to safeguard and preserve its cultural heritage to reverse this trend. For instance, historical sites have been restored, museums and cultural centres have been established and

traditional festivals and events have been promoted.

However, preserving Oman's heritage is more than the government's responsibility. Individuals and communities also have a crucial role in safeguarding their cultural legacy. This can involve everything from supporting local artisans and craftsmen to participating in cultural festivals and events.

The preservation of Oman's heritage is crucial for the country's identity and sense of history, as well as for the rest of the region and the entire world. Furthermore, Oman can motivate future generations and contribute to developing a greater understanding and appreciation of the variety of cultures that contribute to our world's richness and vibrancy by safeguarding and promoting its cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Oman's heritage is a valuable and unique cultural legacy that deserves protection and celebration. Its architecture, traditional clothing, festivals and customs represent the diverse influences shaping Oman's history and identity. Despite the challenges posed by modernisation and development, the Omani government, individuals and communities have taken steps to preserve this heritage for future generations.



Oman's heritage is a testament to its rich history.

sport

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Al Bashayer, Al Nasr post valuable wins in OL



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Al Bashayer surprised Al Ittihad as they snatched a valuable 1-0 win over hosts Al Ittihad in the 22nd week of Omantel League at Al Saada Stadium on Monday night. Diyob netted the winner in an early minutes of the first half as he found the net in the fifth minute of the match. Despite the triumph, Al Bashayer remained in the danger position at the bottom of the table with 12 points. The Al Dhakhiliyah-based team managed to reduce the gap with the 13th placed team Al Oruba to one point as the Sur representative team has 13 points in the 13th position. Al Ittihad missed the chance to go little away with the defeat as they remained on 16 points in the 12th place. Both teams entered the match with a target to get valuable points and move away from the danger zone. Al Bashayer, coached by Mohammed Fathi, will try to claim as many points in the remaining four rounds of the league despite the tough opponents. Al Ittihad, coached by national coach Khalid al Lahoori, need to be more

focused in the forthcoming fixtures and avoid missing any points to remain among the top-tier league clubs.

AL NASR EDGE SUR

Five-time champions Al Nasr secured an important victory against Sur 1-0 on Monday at Al Saada Stadium. The only goal in the match was scored in the first half by Mohammed Abdulkhakeem Bait Sabee in the 16th minute. The emphatic victory revived the Salalah-based team's chances to remain in the comfortable zone as Al Nasr raised their tally to 27 points in 10th place, while Sur SC stayed on 20 points in 11th place. On the other hand, Sur missed a golden opportunity to extend the gap with the closest rivals Al Ittihad to seven points as the latter suffered a defeat against Al Bashayer. Oman Club staged a remarkable rally as they overturned a one-goal deficit to rout Al Musannah 3-1 at the Seeb Stadium on Monday. The win took Oman Club to position among the top five teams temporally and raised the tally to 35 points in fifth place while Al Musannah remained in ninth place with 27 points.



Oman set to compete in West Asian U23 tourney

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The West Asian Football Federation has received final confirmation from eight teams for the fourth West Asian Under-23 Championship to be held in Iraq from June 12-20 during the Fifa international break. The confirmed participating teams include host country Iraq, Oman, the UAE, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain have apologised for various reasons and will not participate. The Saudi and Qatar teams will instead compete in the Maurice Revillo Championship (formerly known as Toulon) held from June 5-18 in southern France, while Bahrain will participate in the 'Panda Cup' in China alongside China, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, during the same period. The tournament will feature two groups of four teams, with each team qualifying for the golden square. Each team will



play at least three matches during the tournament. The West Asian Federation has held a series of coordination meetings with the Iraqi Federation to discuss the administrative, logistical, marketing, and media details of the tournament. The local organising committee of the

Iraqi Federation has been named for the championship. The West Asian Federation will conduct an inspection visit to the host cities after identifying them to ensure their readiness. The last edition of the West Asian Championship was held in Jeddah in November 2022, where Oman U23



national team played four matches, outperforming Lebanon and losing to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Syria. Hosts Saudi Arabia won the title. In the Qatar International Friendly Championship held last March, Oman played three matches in Doha, losing 3-0 to South Korea and 1-0 to Iraq and

defeating Kyrgyzstan 2-0. The list of players chosen by coach Akram Habrish includes Maytham al Ajmi, Asaad al Balushi, Al Faraj al Kiyumi, Ayman al Nabhani, Mutia al Saadi, Nasser al Rawahi, Abdullah al Flaiti, Salim al Abdulsalam, Abdulmajid al Balushi, Khalid al Ghatrifi,

brothers Abdulhafeez and Abdullah al Mukhaini, Omar al Salti, Yousef al Ghailani, Ahed al Mashaikhi, Mazin bin Saleh, Mulham al Sunaidy, Nibras al Maashri, Saeed al Salami, Mohammad al Hinai, Mohammad bin Abdulhakim al Hatmi and Mohammed bin Makhoulouf.



New Zealand players celebrate after dismissal of Pakistan's Shadab Khan (not pictured) during the third Twenty20 international match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore. — AFP

NEW ZEALAND SURVIVE IFTIKHAR ONSLAUGHT

LAHORE: All-rounder James Neesham held his nerve in the final over to give New Zealand a dramatic four-run win over Pakistan in the third T20 international in Lahore on Monday despite Iftikhar Ahmed's brilliant innings.

Ahmed brought Pakistan back into the contest from 88-7 with a whirlwind 24-ball 60 as they attempted to chase down New Zealand's 163-5.

Needing 15 to win from Neesham's final over, he hit a six and a four to reduce the target to five off the last three deliveries.

But Neesham had Ahmed caught at long-on by Daryl Mitchell and then after a dot ball dismissed last man Haris Rauf in the same manner.

"It was a great game and it's satisfying to get across the line and keep the series alive," said visiting captain Tom Latham.

"I think the whole squad will

take a lot of confidence from this match moving forward.

"The three early Pakistan wickets in the powerplay set us up and we pride ourselves on our fielding and keep the bar high every time we set foot into the middle."

Ahmed led the fightback with Faheem Ashraf as the pair added 61 for the eighth wicket, with Ashraf holing out after a 14-ball 27 studded with two sixes and as many fours.

Ahmed smashed six sixes and three fours.

The victory means New Zealand trail the five-match series 2-1 after Pakistan won the first two games, by 88 and 38 runs, also in Lahore.

The last two matches are in Rawalpindi on April 20 and 24.

Pakistan lost wickets at regular intervals with prolific opening pair Babar Azam (one) and Mohammad Rizwan (six) both

gone by the fourth over with the score on just 17.

Azam was caught at third man off pacer Adam Milne while Rizwan was found short of his crease after trying to take a sharp single.

Pakistan were further jolted by left-arm spinner Rachin Ravindra who dismissed Fakhar Zaman (17) and Imad Wasim for three while Saim Ayub fell to Neesham for 10.

Ish Sodhi dismissed Shaheen Shah Afridi for six and Milne accounted for Shadab Khan for 16, leaving Pakistan reeling.

The hosts battled back thanks to Ahmed, but were bowled out from the final ball on 159.

"We didn't bat well enough tonight," said Pakistan skipper Azam. "We kept losing wickets at crucial stages, because of which the pressure kept building throughout the run chase, but our bowling has been superb this

series," Azam added.

Earlier, New Zealand's innings was anchored by Latham's 64 after winning the toss.

Latham, who hit seven fours and two sixes, added 65 for the third wicket with Mitchell who scored a 26-ball 33.

Mark Chapman made 16 not out off nine balls as New Zealand managed to score 51 in the last five overs.

Shaheen — playing his 50th T20I — took 2-33 while his fellow pacer Rauf finished with 2-31.

— AFP

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 163-5 in 20 overs (T Latham 64, D Mitchell 33; Haris Rauf 2-31, Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-33) v Pakistan 159 all out in 20 overs (Iftikhar Ahmed 60, Faheem Ashraf 27; J Neesham 3-38, R Ravindra 2-28, A Milne 2-37)

Series: Pakistan lead series 2-1

Chennai edge RCB by 8 runs after Du Plessis- Maxwell storm



BENGALURU, India: Chennai Super Kings held on for an eight-run win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in a high-scoring IPL match on Monday, despite a blistering partnership from Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell.

A game billed as the clash between Indian superstars Virat Kohli and MS Dhoni saw a record-equalling 33 sixes hit in Bengaluru.

The IPL has witnessed that number of sixes in a game thrice, with Chennai involved each time.

Devon Conway and Shivam Dube blasted 83 and 52 respectively to help Chennai post a commanding 226-6 batting first.

"Dube is a clean hitter, is a tall guy with good reach," Dhoni said of the 29-year-old.

"He can hit spinners. He needs to believe that he can score runs in the middle overs more than us because he has the talent."

Four-time champions Chennai moved to third in the 10-team table with three wins in five matches.

But Bangalore skipper Du Plessis (62) and Maxwell (76) brought the home crowd alive in a blazing partnership of 126.

The pair tore into the opposition attack, striking 12 sixes between them after losing two early wickets including Kohli for six in the first over.

Dhoni played his part with two high catches to dismiss the dangerous pair, with Maxwell

and Du Plessis falling in the space of two overs.

Sri Lankan mystery spinner Maheesh Theekshana removed Maxwell after his 36-ball blitz, including eight hits over the boundary, and England spinner Moeen Ali sent back Du Plessis.

Dinesh Karthik attempted to keep up the attack with his 14-ball 28 but Chennai regained control with regular wickets as Bangalore failed to keep up with the asking rate.

With 19 runs needed to win from the final over, Matheesha Pathirana, a fast bowler with a slinging action, kept his calm to give away just 10 and Bangalore ended on 218-8.

"DK finishing the game, that's bread and butter for him, but that shows how good their bowling was," Du Plessis said. "At the toss, I said 200 was par, it was 10-15 too many."

New Zealand opener Conway set the tone for the match with his 45-ball knock, laced with six sixes, as he put on big partnerships with Ajinkya Rahane and then Dube.

Rahane smashed 37 before being bowled by Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga but Conway kept up the charge with Dube for company in a partnership of 80 off 37 balls.

Bangalore attempted to pull things back with the wickets of Conway, who was named man of the match, and Dube, who departed after a 27-ball innings.

But Moeen steered the team to the mammoth total with his unbeaten nine-ball 19. — AFP

Rajasthan look to continue domination at home



Two teams that have a different kind of intense history, even though they don't go way back in time. The super giants are led by KL Rahul, while the Royals are led by the famous 'Mallu-boy' Sanju Samson. Sanju's fans (A lot of Keralites and a few Rajasthanis as well) believe that KL Rahul, who has been in extremely poor form, is being given an unnecessary extended run of opportunities, because of his relations with Virat Kohli and instead of him it should be their boy — Sanju Samson, to be playing for the Indian team. As a contrary to this, it's strongly believed by many Indian fans that, Sanju Samson is an extremely talented cricketer, who has become an expert at wasting opportunities provided to him.

RAJASTHAN ROYALS (RR) VS LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS (LSG) AT JAIPUR

TEAM INFO — Rajasthan have truly dominated the IPL 2023. Out of the 5 games played, they have won 4 games. But, most importantly, that sole game that they lost was also a very close one. The credit surely going to the selectors and

management, for putting up an extremely competitive and balanced side, while the players have paid back by standing up to the expectations. On the other hand, its Lucknow, who stand just behind Rajasthan on the second spot. Lucknow have won three out of their five matches and even for Lucknow, both the matches that they lost were close encounters.

Head-to-Head — Played - 2; Won by RR - 2; Won by LSG - 0

LSG possible XI — KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Deepak Hooda, Marcus Stoinis, Krunal Pandya, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Ayush Badoni, Avesh Khan, Yuvvir Singh Charak, Mark Wood, and Ravi Bishnoi.

RR possible XI — Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson (c & wk), Riyan Parag, Shimron Hetmyer, Dhruv Jurel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Trent Boult, Adam Zampa, Sandeep Sharma, and Yuzvendra Chahal.

Pitch & Weather Report — The pitch at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium is a balanced track. The new-ball bowlers will get some movement up front and the batters will have to be patient early in their innings. Once they get set, plenty of runs will be on offer. The temperature in Jaipur is expected to hover between 24 and 38 degrees Celsius.

Match Prediction — It goes without saying that, both these sides have got an incredibly balanced side and its almost going to be anyone's game on

IPL 2023 POINTS TABLE						
	TEAM	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1	RR	5	4	1	1.354	8
2	LSG	5	3	2	0.761	6
3	GT	5	3	2	0.192	6
4	PBKS	5	3	2	-0.109	6
5	KKR	5	2	3	0.320	4
6	CSK	4	2	2	0.225	4
7	RCB	4	2	2	-0.316	4
8	MI	4	2	2	-0.389	4
9	SRH	4	2	2	-0.822	4
10	DC	5	0	5	-1.488	0

the day. Although, I feel that it's going to be a slight advantage to Rajasthan for having home conditions and also

for the extra confidence boost that they would have got by beating sides like Chennai and Gujarat in the last

It's going to be a slight advantage to Rajasthan for having home conditions and also for the extra confidence boost that they would have got by beating sides like Chennai and Gujarat in the last two games

two games. Another big factor is KL Rahul's form, who despite having a big knock against Punjab in their last game, was the biggest factor for their side's batting collapse. Hence, don't be too shocked to see Ryan Parag performing some 'ghoomar' dance for Rajasthan fans tomorrow with a win.

Fan Comments

"Rajasthan are in incredible form and they are surely looking like a title contender this year. We love cricket and to promote cricket in the Rajasthan community, we are going to be organising the Vapariyan Cup — a competition for the Rajasthan Business Community" — Idris Solanki, 48, Business Owner/Glamhome Properties, Indian.

"I feel that finally KL Rahul is back in form and that will be a big boost for the Lucknow team. If he plays a little aggressive in the powerplay, then LSG are a very dangerous side. Even

Quinton De Kock should play this important game. Lucknow will win!" — Manjul Ahmed Khan, 55, Country Manager/Cricket Captain, Indian.

"Being a junior national cricket team captain has helped me learn a lot from this wonderful game. I hope that in time to come, there is a road to senior national team for talented youngsters and upcoming Omani's. IPL does its job very well, by promoting the game in this region, but for growth there needs to be even more training and opportunities, combined with lots of patience." — Ahmed Mohd Mahmood al Balushi, 36, Employee of Eihab Travels, Omani.

"Diverting from the topic, but midst this wonderful IPL, Omani fans will have their eyes on the ACC Men's Premier Cup 2023, which starts today for Oman with their match against Qatar. Best of luck Team Oman, BLEED RED!!" — Jeet Vrajesh Shah, 15, Student/Oman U-16 Captain, Indian.

Send us your comment for the next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 92470544' and the best comments will be included. 30 words on the team that you support, full name, age, designation and nationality. You could post us your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our articles, Twitter - @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman or Instagram - @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use #OOIPL2023 for better reach.



LEEDS, United Kingdom: Liverpool crushed Leeds 6-1 as Cody Gakpo's controversial opener provided the spark for the Reds' first win in five Premier League games on Monday.

Jurgen Klopp's side took the lead at Elland Road when Gakpo's goal was allowed to stand despite the ball striking Trent Alexander-Arnold's arm in the build-up.

It was reported the VAR official did not check the incident because it happened too far back in the move, but Leeds were furious at the perceived injustice.

Mohamed Salah rubbed salt into Leeds' wounds when he increased Liverpool's lead four minutes later before Luis Sinisterra got one back for the struggling hosts.

Diogo Jota's double, another Salah strike and Darwin Nunez's late effort ensured Liverpool ended their five-game winless run in all competitions.

After coming within a whisker of winning a quadruple last season, Liverpool have been reduced to scrambling to reach next season's Europa League or Europa Conference League, with the Champions League seemingly out of reach.

With that target in mind, the eighth-placed Reds are now within two points of seventh-placed Brighton.

"It's the best game we've played this season from all different perspectives," Klopp said.

"My favourite part was in the 92nd minute when we chased the poor boy on the ball from Leeds. The counter-pressing was the best for, I want to say, decades!"

Klopp has compared fan criticism of Liverpool potentially not making big-money transfers in the coming close-season as like a five-year-old asking for a Ferrari for Christmas.

But on the evidence of this composed display and the recent fightback from two goals down to draw 2-2 with leaders Arsenal, Liverpool still have the foundations in place for a return to prominence next term.

"The second half against Arsenal was super important to us. We have to do what we did tonight again and again," Klopp said.

"I hope these one-and-a-half games gives us the right sign for the end of the season.

"I would like to see us with the same desire and passion. That's the job, to bring it consistently."

Leeds crumbled again eight days after their 5-1 home defeat against Crystal Palace and sit just two points above the relegation zone with seven games left.

Javi Gracia's team were booed off after becoming only the second club to concede five or more home goals in successive Premier League games.

RAMPANT REDS

After marking the 34th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster before kick-off, Liverpool quickly seized the momentum before their dubious opener in the 35th minute.

Alexander-Arnold blocked Junior Firpo's pass with his elbow before picking out Salah.

When Salah passed back to Alexander-Arnold, the right-back squared for Gakpo to slot home from close range.

Leeds were fuming, only for VAR to opt against checking the incident despite their protests.

Gakpo's fifth goal since signing from PSV Eindhoven in January was followed by the latest example of Salah tormenting Leeds.

Salah's eighth goal in six appearances against Leeds came in ruthless fashion. — AFP

Djokovic's elbow not in 'ideal shape' ahead of French Open

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Novak Djokovic says he is still dealing with an elbow issue heading into this week's Srpska Open as the Serb looks to get his French Open preparations back on track following his early exit at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Djokovic suffered a third-round defeat to Lorenzo Musetti in Monte Carlo last week, the 22-times Grand Slam champion's serve broken eight times by the Italian.

"My elbow is not in an ideal shape but good enough to be ready for the first match," Djokovic told reporters.

"One of the good things in tennis is that you get new opportunity to prove your worth every week and take a step forward. I've turned over a new leaf.

"Naturally, I wasn't satisfied with the result in Monte Carlo. But, ever since I landed, I've felt welcomed in Banja Luka, a lot of positive energy and



positive emotions."

Djokovic will face 18-year-old Luca Van Assche in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina on Wednesday after the Frenchman claimed a 1-6, 7-6(4), 6-4 victory over three-times Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka.

"I don't know much about the young French player," Djokovic said.

"I thought Wawrinka would win the match. I saw (Van Assche) play but not for long,

he is a real fighter, fast, it's difficult to get past him. No one should be underestimated."

Van Assche, ranked 87th in the world, said it was a privilege to play against Djokovic.

"Novak is a true champion. Not only in tennis but in sports in general," he added. "It will be an incredible match. I know I'll have to give my all to win."

The French Open, the second Grand Slam of the season, begins on May 28.

— Reuters



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Syria seeks to enhance investor relations



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Dr Idris Mia, the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, met with Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, head of the Oman Investment Authority in a bid to explore areas of cooperation that includes bilateral investment and enhancing trade and commercial relations.

During the meeting, they discussed the relations of cooperation between the two sides and ways of upgrading and strengthening them in all fields, in a way that serves the common

interests of the two brotherly peoples and countries.

“We are happy to have met with the head of Oman Investment Authority seeking more ways of enhancing bilateral investment relations and we sincerely hope that we will explore better ways,” said Dr Mia.

Recently, Syria has made attempts to invite Omani businessmen wishing to invest in the Syrian Arab Republic offering visas from the border posts upon their arrival at the borders, after submitting the necessary documents in those centres.

TURN TO PAGE 15

RO 24.6 million paid out in motor insurance claims last year: CMA

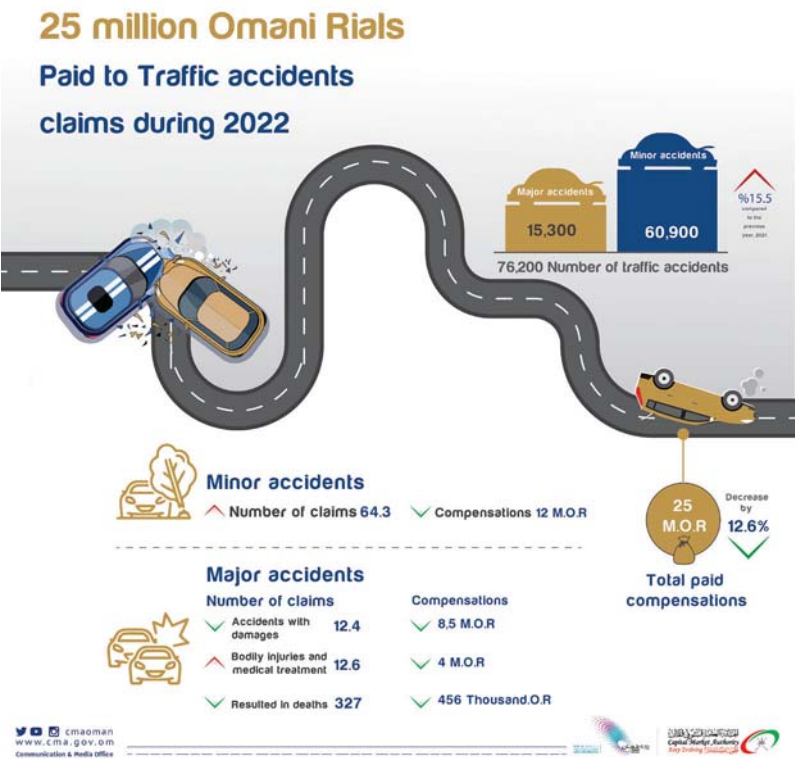
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The insurance indices of 2022, issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in the Sultanate of Oman, showed that the number of accidents reached nearly 76,200 accidents, 15,300 of which are major accidents and 60,900 are minor accidents.

It represents a 15.5 per cent increase over the previous year’s tally of 65,900 accidents. Contrary to expectations, there was a fall in the indices for total paid compensations, which exceeded RO 24.6 million, a decrease by 12.6 per cent.

Additionally, a decrease by 1.7 per cent was also seen in the total of compensations (both paid and not yet settled claims) that reached RO 84.7 million.

The indices for traffic accidents claims recorded by insurance accidents indicate that the number of claims for minor accidents with damages only rose relatively to 64,400; compared to last year where they were 62,000



THE INDICES FOR TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS CLAIMS RECORDED BY INSURANCE ACCIDENTS INDICATE THAT THE NUMBER OF CLAIMS FOR MINOR ACCIDENTS WITH DAMAGES ONLY ROSE RELATIVELY TO 64,400; COMPARED TO LAST YEAR WHERE THEY WERE 62,000 ACCIDENTS.

as the total of major accidents compensations with damages decreased from RO 9.2 million in 2021 and RO 8.5 million in 2022.

Paid compensations for major accidents that resulted in bodily injuries and medical treatment costs fell from RO 4.5 million last year to RO 4 million.

As for the number of major accidents claims that resulted in deaths, they also declined as they were 327 claims which caused a decline in paid compensations as well at only RO 45,000 compared to last year where the number of major accidents claims resulted in 444 claims with total compensations of RO 1.4 million.

Phase 1 of Oman’s first green ammonia project set for mid-2025 launch

LANDMARK VENTURE: Initial groundwork commences on 100,000 tonnes/day plant at Duqm Special Economic Zone

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 18



The first phase of Oman’s first maiden ammonia project – currently under development in Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZ) – is on track for launch by around mid-2025, according to a key executive representing the project promoters. Syed Hussain Naqvi, Chief Technology Officer of ACME, an Indian-based international renewable and green energy developer, said the Duqm project will rank among the world’s first green ammonia ventures when an initial phase comes online in the next couple of years.

Participating in a webinar conducted recently by Ammonia Energy Association, an industry grouping promoting the use of ammonia in a sustainable energy economy, Naqvi said an ACME-led special purpose vehicle named ‘Green Hydrogen & Chemicals SPC,’ is currently developing the facility at Duqm.

“Our first commercial-scale plant

AT THE UPSTREAM END OF THE PROJECT, SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAYS OFFERING AROUND 486 MEGAWATT-PEAK (MWp) OF CAPACITY WILL POWER A 320 MW ELECTROLYSER PLANT, HYDROGEN FROM WHICH WILL BE PASSED THROUGH THE HABER-BOSCH LOOP TO BE CONVERTED INTO AMMONIA.

is coming up in Duqm SEZ where we will have a facility capable of producing 1.2 million tonnes of green ammonia every year; so we have acquired around 92 sq kilometres of land (in Duqm) for this project,” the Chief Technology Officer said.

“We are already certified as a green ammonia production facility by TUV Rheinland, and we have the environmental clearance and construction permits as well. Further, we have placed orders for long lead items like the ammonia loop with (US-based engineering firm) KBR, the ammonia storage facility with

(German industrial engineering giant) ThyssenKrupp, and so on.”

Sharing details about the landmark venture, the official noted that an investment of around \$6 billion is envisaged in the development of the complete 1.2 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) capacity scheme over two phases.

Labour camps have already been set up at site, with the first phase capacity of 300 tonnes per day of green ammonia expected to be brought into operation between December 2024 and June 2025.

At the upstream end of the project, solar photovoltaic arrays offering around 486 megawatt-peak (MWp) of capacity will power a 320 MW electrolyser plant, hydrogen from which will be passed through the Haber-Bosch loop to be converted into ammonia.

Phase 1 output of green ammonia is projected at around 100,000 tonnes per annum. Other project components

include a roughly 7 million litres/day capacity desalination plant, a 60-tonne capacity hydrogen storage plant, and facilities for the storage of 30,000 tonnes of green ammonia.

To help with the delivery of this green energy project in Oman, ACME has lined up a number of reputable engineering firms, technology providers, and consultants, according to the official.

Besides KBR and TUV Rheinland, the list includes L&T Sargent & Lundy, Black & Veatch, Worley, Tata Consulting Engineers, SenseHawk, BMT Cowi, Allen & Overy, ACES and Nusail Surveys.

As for the offtake of green ammonia, a term-sheet has already been signed, with an agreement presently in the final stages.

Significantly, ACME’s Oman project is the first in an expanding portfolio of green hydrogen related investments planned by the group within India and elsewhere across the world, said Naqvi.

“Our vision is to reach about 10 million tonnes of green molecule production in terms of green ammonia or its equivalent in hydrogen by 2030 – 2032,” he stated.

In the pipeline are 1.1 mtpa capacity ammonia projects planned in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha, and a 2.1 mtpa plant in Egypt.

Specialised IT training for Omani job-seekers



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology is rolling out a specialised IT training programme for Omani job-seekers. Set to run from June 4 to November 23, 2023, the six-month programme aims to provide practical, cutting-edge knowledge and in-demand technological expertise to support the professional development of IT specialists.

The programme will focus on two areas — database management and cybersecurity — and is aimed at those looking to enhance their skills and stay competitive in the local and regional markets.

It has two primary objectives: firstly, to equip participants with the necessary practical skills to succeed in their chosen fields and secondly, to connect them with top technological companies operating in the industry to gain experience and further develop their careers.

By providing practical, in-demand skills to those pursuing careers in the IT sector, the programme is expected to offer significant benefits to participants and help them compete more effectively in the market.

Lulu distributes Iftar boxes to university students in hostels

MUSCAT: In an effort to strengthen its core principles of goodness and benevolence during Ramadhan, Lulu Oman rolled out an exemplary initiative to provide Iftar meals to university students in hostels across Muscat during the holy month.

This initiative follows the ‘Convoy of Goodness’ campaign launched earlier

to distribute special Ramadhan grocery kits to 1,000 deserving families across the Sultanate of Oman.

The latest in a series of initiatives is part of Lulu Group’s corporate social responsibility strategy and is a noble gesture towards the welfare of the society during Ramadhan.

As part of iftar meals distribution drive,



Lulu and N7N volunteers distributed Iftar boxes containing a selection of delicious eatables, drinks, dates and fruits to students of several colleges across Muscat.

Commenting on the initiative, Shabeer K A, Regional Director – Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, said, “We are glad to have launched this initiative to enhance the spirit of love and compassion within

the society during Ramadhan.

This initiative is an example of how we can come together during Ramadhan and make a real difference in our community.

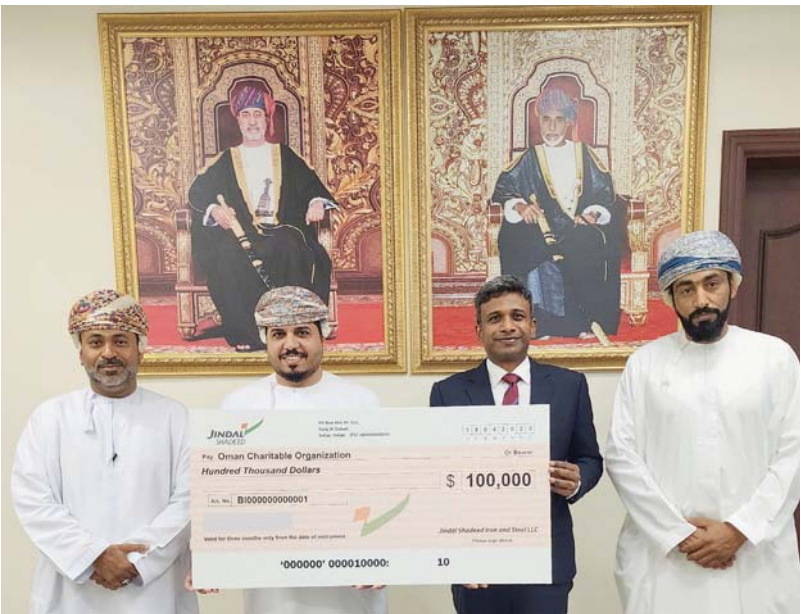
“There are so many students who remain far away from home, and through this campaign, we are happy to have brought joy and smiles to their faces and made them feel at home,” he added.

Oman Charitable Organisation and Jindal Shadeed raise \$100,000 for Syria and Turkey

MUSCAT: Continuing to lend a helping hand to Syria and Turkey, Oman Charitable Organisation raised \$100,000 through Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel. The funds are earmarked to help rebuild homes in the areas devastated by the earthquake that hit both countries earlier in the year.

“During this month of giving we are proud to be joining hands with one of Oman’s leading steel players to help make a bigger difference in supporting Syria and Turkey during Ramadhan and Eid, said Badr al Zaabi, CEO of Oman Charitable Organisation.

Harssha Shetty, Jindal Shadeed



CEO commented, “Our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in Syria and Turkey during the holy month of Ramadhan, when families come together.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who are still living in very harsh conditions, with limited space in shelters and sparse food and clean water. Working with Oman Charitable Organisation, we hope to bring attention back to Syria and Turkey during the holy month and help them in their noble cause.”

Over the past months since the earthquake, Oman Charitable Organisation has raised a

considerable amount which has gone towards providing necessities to those displaced from the disaster ranging from non-perishable food items to clothes and blankets.

Plans are now underway to support the rebuilding of homes and neighbourhoods.

Established in 2010, Jindal Shadeed is the largest privately-owned integrated steel producer in the region.

Made in Oman for Oman, its iron and steel is exported to over 30 countries around the world, reaffirming the Sultanate of Oman’s position on the global steel trade map.

Geely unveils all-new Azkarra in Oman



MUSCAT: Geely, a leading automobile manufacturer, is thrilled to announce its latest offering in Oman — Season to Explore — with a range of exciting benefits. This offer is the perfect opportunity for car enthusiasts in Oman to become proud owners of Geely’s newest car model — the all-new Azkarra.

This season, customers can unlock unbelievable prices with Geely’s latest ‘Season to Explore’ benefits that include a generous cash gift of RO 2701, free 3 years of AAA roadside assistance, and a manufacturer’s warranty for 5 years or 150,000 kilometers (whichever comes first).

(Please note that benefits may vary based on model variants, model year, and manufacturing year. Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details).

Geely has earned a reputation worldwide for producing outstanding vehicles. Now, even the people of Oman can indulge in the same extraordinary driving experience with the launch of the all-new Azkarra. Visit our showrooms to book a test drive for this amazing car.

Introducing the all-new Azkarra, the SUV that combines style and performance to provide the best of both worlds. With its versatile and modern design packed with advanced features, this vehicle is perfect for families and adventure seekers.

The all-new Azkarra has been designed as the flagship of the multi-use sports car category, aimed at satisfying the desires of young drivers who seek technology, communication, and superior design aesthetics.

Equipped with an advanced 1.5-liter turbo engine and direct fuel injection, the all-new Azkarra offers a powerful driving experience that is also eco-friendly, thanks to its 48V Electric Motor Synergy mild hybrid system.

Experience unparalleled driving pleasure by test-driving the all-new Azkarra today!

In Oman, Geely vehicles are brought to you by Towell Auto Centre LLC. To know more about the products or to book a test drive and get unbelievable offers, visit the nearest Geely showroom or www.geelyoman.com.

ahli cares initiates aid campaign during Ramadhan

MUSCAT: ahlibank initiated a community engagement programme under its ‘ahli cares’ CSR wing, in collaboration with the Seeb charity team, to assist families in need throughout the holy month of Ramadhan, in keeping with its values of sharing and caring.

The bank has given several households in the Wilayat of Al Seeb essential Ramadhan provisions. The ahli cares initiative serves as a mark of the bank’s commitment to supporting the community and aiding those who require assistance.

The programme emphasises



the significance of the bank’s CSR efforts and the significant contribution made by its employees toward the local community.

ahli cares team, consisting of employee volunteers, managed the distribution of boxes, which contained essential food items such as rice, sugar, oil, and other necessary commodities.

Toyota’s biggest excitement benefits on commercial vehicle range

MUSCAT: Customers in Oman looking to own a commercial vehicle from the Toyota range can now choose either the Land Cruiser pick-up or the Hilux.

The Ramadhan campaign benefits include service from 2 years/20,000 kms up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and insurance 1 year or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 125 to RO 300 and 8 Toyota Raize SUV raffles. The campaign is valid until May 10, 2023.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom



for exact details.)

The legendary Land Cruiser pick-up is one of the most dependable commercial vehicles with its impressive built quality, power and prowess. The Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up’s large wheels and stable footprint allow it to offer good control.

The Toyota Hilux Adventure is a perfect choice for those looking to maximise their objectives. Every Toyota Hilux Adventure comes with high-end features that start with the mighty 4.0 Litre V6 Engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds onboards Bollywood actress as new brand ambassador

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with 312 showrooms across 10 countries, has signed Indian actress Alia Bhatt as their new brand ambassador.

After making her debut in 2012, Alia Bhatt has quickly transformed into one of the most sought-after actresses in India, with a score of blockbusters movies under the belt.

She has garnered praise for her versatility as an actress, her humble persona and stunning looks, representative of a new era of super talented actors hailing from India. She is also set to make her Hollywood debut in the movie, Heart of Stone, which is slated to be released soon.

The announcements come in the wake of the 30th anniversary of Malabar group, which began their operations in 1993.

“I am delighted to be the face of a global brand such as Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Having witnessed first-hand their acceptance amongst Indians and Indian sub-continental audience, the immense success they have reaped abroad should be a source of great pride for us and I am humbled to be a part of the Malabar family.

As Malabar Gold & Diamonds gears up to execute their ambitious expansion plan, I earnestly look forward to working closely with them to further their reach amongst jewellery lovers world-over”, commented Alia Bhatt.



“We are very excited to welcome Alia Bhatt into the Malabar family. Over the years, our brand ambassadors have played an instrumental role in

elevating our brand’s status in the eyes of our customers and we are looking forward to taking Malabar Gold & Diamonds to new heights with Alia Bhatt as the face of the

brand.

Our goal is to be crowned as the World’s largest jewellery retailer by crafting, promoting and selling jewellery that is an intersection of Indian art, culture, tradition, heritage and Alia Bhatt, both as an actor and as a person, perfectly represents what we are striving to achieve. Her impressive career in the highly competitive film industry resonates with our brand’s journey and ambition as a brand.

As Malabar Gold & Diamonds celebrates its 30th anniversary, we are reaffirming our commitment to providing our loyal customers with the best jewellery shopping experience”, commented Malabar Group Chairman, M P Ahammed.



Swedish firm targets 200 mmbo of hydrocarbon prospects in Blocks 56 and 58

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Swedish upstream energy firm Tethys Oil says its exploration and appraisal activities during 2023 are targeted at unlocking more than 200 million barrels of potential crude oil (mmbo) deposits in Blocks 56 and 58 onshore Oman.

This follows the completion of prospect maturation studies carried out in the Fahd area of Block 58 in Q4 of last year which led to the identification of three prospects distributed across the Buah, Khufai and Ara formations. In Block 56, an extended well test targeting a promising oil discovery has been commissioned, it said.

Awarded in 2020 with a 100 per cent interest share, Block 58 is Tethys Oil's latest addition to its portfolio. The block has several high-potential leads spread over the South Lahan and Fahd areas. In 2022, significant exploration steps were taken, culminating in the identification of three drillable prospects with a total of 184 mmbo unrisks prospective resources in



Fahd.

The block showed potential as both previous wells had encountered hydrocarbon shows and multiple play concepts were believed to exist within the block boundaries, including plays familiar to Tethys Oil, with several leads identified. Based on further analysis of the legacy data, Tethys

Oil has focused its exploration activities on two areas of the block — Fahd and South Lahan.

On the other hand, Block 56 is a promising exploration and appraisal block for which Tethys Oil has been the operator since 2021 with a 65 per cent interest share.

In 2022, five wells were drilled in

Al Jumd ahead of a 2023 extended well test and in the 'Central Area' seismic studies continued in preparation for a 2023 exploration drilling targeting some 50 mmbo unrisks resources.

In total, eleven wells were drilled on Block 56 prior to Tethys Oil assuming operatorship in 2021, ten of which encountered oil

or oil shows.

Under Tethys Oil's operatorship the focus of the exploration and appraisal activities has been on two different areas of Block 56, Al Jumd and the Central Area.

Meanwhile, Tethys Oil's share of the production, before government take, from Blocks 3&4 onshore the Sultanate of Oman, in March 2023 amounted to 288,002 barrels of oil, corresponding to 9,290 barrels of oil per day.

The Official Selling Price (OSP) for Oman Export Blend Crude Oil for the month of March 2023 was \$80.92 per barrel.

The OSP, as published by Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, is the benchmark price for Tethys Oil's monthly oil sales excluding trading and quality adjustments.

Tethys Oil is an oil exploration and production company with focus on onshore areas with known oil discoveries. The company's core area is the Sultanate of Oman, where it holds interests in Blocks 3&4, Block 49, Block 56 and Block 58.

Syria seeks to enhance investor relations

FROM PAGE 13

Any investor from Oman can get a visit or multiple entry visa to Syria based on their document submission and purpose of visit and they are free to make any investments there. With this aim, the two countries have formed the Syrian-Omani Business Council last year.

"We are working with the Sultanate of Oman to develop bilateral economic relations, and in this regard, we have formed the Syrian-Omani Business council at the initiative of Mohammad Samer al Khalil, Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade," he further added.

The establishment of the council aims to enhance the role of the private sector and benefit from its capabilities in developing economic relations between Syria and the Sultanate of Oman in trade, investment, industry, agriculture and tourism.

Aloft Hotels debuts in Muscat

MUSCAT: Aloft Hotels, the design-driven hotel brand for music lovers and travellers, and part of Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of 30 extraordinary brands, arrives in Muscat today (Wednesday), marking the brand's debut in the Sultanate of Oman.

Anchored in design, culture, and music, the 193-guestroom hotel brings the brand's bold modern style to the capital and its vibrant social scene with buzzing open spaces to connect. Each of the urban inspired, loft-style guestrooms feature high ceilings, plush platform beds and 50-inch LED TVs. The modern bathrooms feature walk-in rainfall showers and custom Aloft bath amenities.

"Oman is a thriving leisure destination for travellers who seek original experiences and warm hospitality," said Sandra Schulze-Potgieter, Vice President – Premium and Select Brands, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Marriott International.



"Driven by bold design Aloft Muscat is a place for creative self-expressers to meet and mingle." "With this first venture into the hotel market, we were eager to apply the knowledge and expertise we have gained from 35 years in real-estate development to create an exciting, fresh new destination," said Aadil Thomas Alexander, Owner and Executive Director.

"Aloft Muscat represents a space where style is necessary, connectivity keeps up with you, social scenes are vibrant, and the only direction is forward. As well as being a hot spot in its own right,

the hotel will act as a wonderful base to explore the dynamic city of Muscat and the intriguing expanses of the rest of Oman."

The hotel's signature public spaces are designed as innovative, comfortable places to socialise and relax. At the sleek Re:mixSM lounge, guests can enjoy a game of pool, with day-to-night lighting and music to switch up the vibe.

Dining destinations include the brand's signature bar W XYZ, an outdoor space to enjoy a meal at Arcade, which offers global craft beverages and delicious international comfort food, or Refuel by AloftSM, which offers a self-serve grab-and-go option for snacks.

Guests can build their own burger from the bun all the way to the sauce at California Beach-inspired eatery Wave Burger, while The Backstage dining space serves up world-class international cuisine with a Mediterranean twist for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

OCCI delegation explores tourism cooperation with Russia

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Alexander Stuglev, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of the Roscongress Foundation, met with a delegation from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Moscow recently.

In his welcoming speech, Alexander Stuglev emphasised: "Establishing direct contact between Russian and Omani companies is of great importance for strengthening mutual trust, finding common ground and building strategic cooperation. As early as the end of April, under the umbrella of SPIEF, a delegation from the Roscongress Foundation will visit Oman.

I am confident that this platform will bring together industries, enabling both countries' business



communities to reach a new level of agreement."

During the meeting, the parties discussed possible formats of cooperation. In particular, they discussed the expansion of mutual tourism between Russia and Oman and the signing of an agreement between the Roscongress Foundation and the OCCI during SPIEF 2023.

Humanitarian cooperation was another topic of discussion. The cultures of Russia and Oman are rich and unique, and everything

should be done to preserve them for future generations.

"Cultural and humanitarian ties between our countries have been developing well lately. I would like to point out that Hans-Joachim Frey, the main founder of the Art Bridge Foundation and a partner of the Roscongress Foundation, held the first Dresden Opera Ball in the United Arab Emirates in Dubai last November. I suggest thinking about holding a similar event in Oman," said Alexander Stuglev.

European exchanges team up for overhaul to rival US



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

European exchange groups in the EU are joining up their data, as regulators in the bloc look to take on the dominance of United States markets.

As the European Commission

pushes to create a 'consolidated tape' – a single source of trading data that could improve price transparency and narrow spreads in the bloc – the exchanges have begun a joint venture on a potential solution.

Instead of several vendors providing data, a single, central source could become the de facto provider for the European Union, reducing costs and making its markets more attractive compared to US markets, which have had a consolidated tape for decades.

The new venture includes the three largest European exchanges – Euronext, Deutsche Borse and SIX – and was formed in response to a European Commission proposal to create a consolidated tape. A spokesperson for the joint venture said it is being set up ahead of a final decision by the commission

and European Parliament, which are still determining the tape's structure.

"Exchanges are standing for and are committed to stable and transparent markets. As such we do and did support a properly calibrated consolidated tape per asset class for EU markets," the spokesperson said.

Once the scope and breadth of the tape are decided, the joint venture will still have to go through the European Securities and Markets Authority's vendor selection process. If it is chosen, it would need to get a tape up and running within six months.

Also included in the joint venture are the Athens, Bucharest, Budapest, Bulgarian, Cyprus, Ljubljana, Luxembourg, Malta, Warsaw and Zagreb stock exchanges, as well as the Wiener

Borse.

Negotiations about what the tape could look like have been running for years. Work on establishing the joint venture itself has been ongoing since July 2022. Some progress has been made in recent months. A decision to make the tape close to real-time was taken in December.

However, other sticking points remain, such as whether to include both pre- and post-trade data and revenue sharing for trading venues. Natan Tiefenbrun, president of Cboe Europe, said Cboe was encouraged that exchanges had dropped their opposition to a real-time tape.

"We have been exploring the viability of operating a consolidated tape for UK and EU equities and would welcome the opportunity to work with other exchanges, multi-

lateral trading facilities and all other data contributors to deliver a viable tape that benefits all market participants," he added.

The Association for Financial Markets in Europe, which represents European and global banks, said having potential providers ready is a good sign that a tape could be built once legislation is passed.

But Pedro Pinto, AFME's director of advocacy and head of MiFID, reiterated its call for real-time pre-trade data to be included "to further integrate EU markets, attract international capital to the EU, and democratise access to market data in an affordable way."

The US consolidated tape, which was set up in the late 1970s, is considered the gold standard for what a tape can achieve. It collects both trade data and bid-ask quotes

in real time from all US trading venues.

On a separate issue – there has been welcoming news for Asset managers who have seen fees from some sustainable funds jump very substantially – a saving grace in what was otherwise a dire year for the profession.

The sector endured one of its worst years on record last year, with some of the biggest fund houses in Europe recording a drop in revenue and profit amid a mass investor exodus from mutual funds.

But ESG funds proved to be a bright spot, with management fee revenue generated by some sustainable products surging almost 400 per cent, according to Fitz Partners – research company providing independently calculated investment fund fees.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

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ramadhan



Up for a long drive this Eid? Consider visiting Wadi Nakheel

It is an area that has yet to experience an explosion of visiting tourists, and this slow development is a blessing not just to nature but also to the simple lives of the Omanis who live in Hasik.... **P20**



QUR'AN VERSE OF THE DAY

{Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.}

Surah al Baqarah, 112

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

'Amr ibn Shu'ayb reported from his grandfather that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Anyone who does not show mercy to our children nor acknowledge the right of our old people is not one of us."

Sahih (Al-Albani)

HEALTH TIPS

You can prepare lower calorie sweets at home by using low-fat dairy products such as low-fat milk and cream, using a moderate amount of oil and sugar, baking your sweets or having them raw when you can.



STORIES FROM THE QUR'AN

Prophet Nuh

GOD, SEND PROPHET NUH (NOAH) to guide the idolaters back to the truth. Allah blessed him with eloquent speech and immense patience so that he may carry out his duty with success. Therefore, Prophet Nuh began to preach to his people. Nuh then told them about the oneness of Allah—that the mysteries of the world were only proof of the existence of one true God and that is none other than Allah the Highest. He explained to them that Satan had misled them into worshipping idols and warned them of a terrible punishment from Allah if they continued their idol worship. The People of Prophet Nuh listened to him with great confusion and patience. The most miserable and desperate amongst Nuh's people began to find hope and solace in

the Prophet's words and gradually entered into Islam, whilst the affluent watched on with rage. They said to Nuh: "We see you but a man like ourselves". Prophet Nuh explained to them that he was certainly a human being and Allah had specifically chosen a human messenger. One day, the wealthy of the city approached Prophet Nuh and said: "If you want us to believe in you, and then dismiss your believers. They are meek and poor, while we are elite and rich; no faith can include us both." Nuh was well aware of the ignorance of the wealthy men. Prophet Nuh replied: I am not going to drive away those who have believed. The idolaters were furious. They had tolerated Nuh's incessant preaching and arguments for far too long.

They angrily challenged Nuh: "O Nuh! You have disputed with us and have prolonged the dispute with us, now bring upon us what you threaten us with if you are of the truthful." Despite the continuous mockery and rejection, Prophet Nuh was persistent in calling his people to Islam for nine hundred and fifty years before long, Allah soon revealed to Prophet Nuh that no other man from his people would enter Islam thereafter. Sad and frustrated, Prophet Nuh replied to God: "My Lord! Leave not one of the disbelievers on the earth. If you leave them, they will mislead your slaves and they will beget none but wicked disbelievers." Prophet Nuh's prayer was accepted. He instructed Prophet Nuh: "And construct the ark under Our Eyes and with Our Inspiration and address me not on behalf of those who did wrong." Prophet Nuh began to build the ark through day and night with the support and guidance of the Angels. The construction of the ark continued amidst the constant mockery of the people. They jeered at Prophet Nuh saying: "O Nuh! Does carpentry appeal to you more than prophethood? Why are you building an ark so far from the

sea? Are you going to drag it to the water or is the wind going to carry it for you?" Prophet Nuh answered: "You will come to know who will be put to shame and suffering." — [Surah Hud, 25-44]

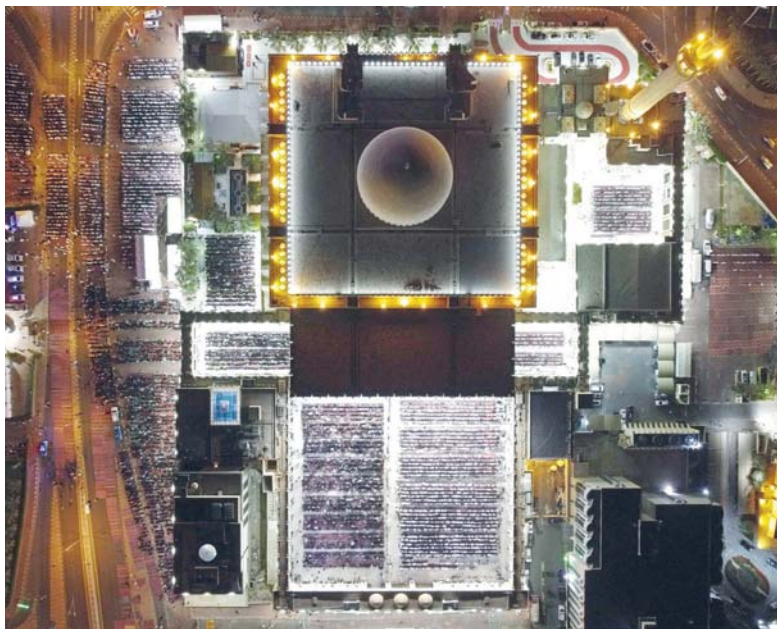
ALLAH THEN INSTRUCTED NUH that when the oven at his home begins to gush forth water, collect the believers, and board the ark for it was the first sign of the beginning of the floods that would destroy the disbelievers. Not long after, the terrible day dawned as water began gushing forth from the oven at Prophet Nuh's house. Nuh knew it was time to board the ark. Along with the believers, Nuh also took with him pairs of animals, birds, and insects. The people who witnessed Nuh's peculiar behaviour laughed at him again saying: "Nuh must have gone out of his head! What is he going to do with the animals?" Soon after, heavy rains began to pour down from the angry skies and water began to rise through every crack on Earth. The water levels gradually began to rise and the oceans conquered the land. The once dry land was now completely submerged in water for the first time. Prophet Nuh witnessed the terrible calamity

that had befallen his people. He knew the disbelievers had no escape from the wrath of Allah. Amongst the disbelievers was Prophet Nuh's wife and son who refused to board his ark. Nuh desperately called out to his son: "O my son! Embark with us and be not among the disbelievers." The ignorant son of Nuh replied, "I will get to the mountain; it will save me from the water." Nuh answered: "This day there is no savior from the Decree of Allah except him on whom He has mercy." Before long, Nuh's son was engulfed by angry waves never to be seen again. When every single disbeliever had perished, Allah ordered the skies and the earth: "O Earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold your rain." The skies immediately cleared and the sun shone brightly on the land. Meanwhile, Nuh's ark peacefully landed on Mount Judi. Allah instructed His Prophet: "O Nuh! Come down (from the ship) with peace from us and blessings on you and on the people who are with you." The believers were grateful to Allah for safeguarding them from the terrible ordeal and observed a day of fasting as an act of gratitude to Allah.

IN PHOTOS



Muslim women pray at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi on Laylat al-Qadr, one of the holiest nights during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Destiny) marks the night Muslims believe the first verses of the Koran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel in the seventh century. — AFP



An aerial view shows Muslims performing an evening prayer known as "Tarawih" in Kuwait's Grand Mosque. — AFP



A child opens the Koran during prayers at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi in the early hours of on Laylat al-Qadr, one of the holiest nights during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. — AFP



The Chinese flavours of Ramadhan

By Kabeer Yousuf
@kabeeryousef

As many as 20 million Muslims in China belonging to various ethnic groups, celebrate the holy month of Ramadhan in all its spiritual grace and customary ways as over the last 1,300 years since its arrival in China, Islamic culture has flourished and integrated with Chinese culture.

These believers live in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and other parts of China. Ramadhan is the most sacred, auspicious and happiest month for Muslims. Chinese Muslims, like their Muslim brothers and sisters around the world, purify their bodies and souls, observe fasts and prayers, perform good deeds, and uphold the traditions of solidarity, cooperation, friendship, and mutual assistance.

Located in the heart of ancient Silk Road, Xinjiang is where Eastern and Western civilisations meet, serving as the bridge for the arrival of Islam to China. Since ancient times, it has been a place where diverse ethnic groups lived together, where different cultures interact, and where various religions coexist. There are 24,400 mosques in Xinjiang, with an average of one mosque for every 530 Muslims. People of various ethnic groups singing and dancing at the square in front of Id Kah Mosque is the most vivid illustration of a harmonious Xinjiang.

The start and end dates of Ramadhan are primarily determined by the appearance of the new moon. On the first day of Ramadhan, after sunset, Chinese Muslims search for the crescent moon. If the moon



is sighted, they start fasting. If the crescent moon is seen on the evening of the 29th day of fasting, the next day is celebrated as Eid Al Fitr. Otherwise, fasting will continue for 30 days. In Xinjiang, Ningxia, and other ethnic minority areas, Eid al Fitr is a public holiday. After a month of fasting, as the auspicious crescent Moon glows, Muslims get together to celebrate Eid Al Fitr. Eid Al Fitr is also celebrated by various Muslim ethnic groups such as Uygur, Hui, Kazak, Uzbek, Tajik, Tatar,

Kirgiz, Sala, Dongxiang and Bonan, where friends and family gather to celebrate Eid.

On Eid day, the Fajr prayer is the largest of the year. Each family prepares traditional food with ethnic flavours and characteristics, such as fried Sanzi, fried Youxiang (both made of flour), and boiled jam. They also slaughter sheep and chickens, make Liangfen (a Chinese traditional food consisting of starch jelly) and vegetables stew. Every household is

stocked with abundant festive food, which they give to their relatives, friends, and neighbours. There is joy everywhere with music, singing, and dancing.

In China, fasting by Muslims is a normal religious activity, entirely based on individual wishes, protected by law, and widely respected in society. During Ramadhan, the Chinese government inspects food hygiene and reduces traffic congestion to ensure the smooth running of all activities during Ramadhan while promoting national unity and social harmony.

Both Chinese civilisation and Islamic civilisation advocate the spirit of moderation, peace and benevolence. As a confluence of these two major civilisations, Xinjiang's history, culture and local customs are worth exploring and discovering. There are more for visitors from Oman to see in Xinjiang to admire the beauty of its snowy mountain and desert scenery, taste the wonders of its unique delicacies, and feel the warmth of its friendly and harmonious people.

'Living gallery': fighting to save Hong Kong's fading neon signs

NEON SIGNS ONCE TRANSFORMED

Hong Kong's oldest neighbourhoods into a kaleidoscope of luminous colour after dark, but most have been removed with a few lucky ones now piled up in a ramshackle yard.

Citing safety concerns, city authorities have begun extinguishing the neon signs, which are widely seen as part of Hong Kong's heritage.

"It is very heartbreaking to hear the sound of the glass being smashed," conservationist Cardin Chan said.

Chan is part of a preservation campaign led by Tetra Neon Exchange (TNX), which has an open-air storage yard that maintains a treasure trove of historic signs taken down by the city.

She says she is on a mission to "save" the glowing billboards, which

once numbered in the thousands.

There are now around 500 signs left, based on a 2022 count carried out by TNX.

The group's latest acquisition is a pair of double-circle-shaped behemoths depicting a bat clawing a coin.

Once hoisted outside a pawn shop in the working-class Sham Shui Po district, news of their pending removal had quickly spread on social media, drawing dozens of enthusiasts eager to take pictures of their last light.

"I'll be very sad to see the signs come down. They're beautiful things, with very warm, welcoming colours," store owner Dan Ko said the day before they were removed.

"It's an integral part of the city's visual history."



AN ART PIECE

Neon once illuminated the diverse businesses that pock-marked Hong Kong's streets, announcing in hues of bright green, red, blue and yellow the availability of bridal wear, jewellery, hotel rooms, fishball noodles and much more.

"Our streets used to be a living gallery," Chan says.

But the signs pose a "persistent building safety problem", according to Hong Kong's buildings depart-

ment, and uninstalling them can be a delicate task.

The ones from Ko's pawn shop were three metres in length and two in width, with dozens of handcrafted neon tubes running through them.

A single worker spent hours meticulously removing the tubes while keeping the electronics intact, some of which have been untouched since they were first erected decades ago.

They depict a complex "double



happiness" Chinese character atop the pawn shop's name — unique to Ko's chain — which is what initially caught Chan's eye.

"It's an art piece. It is not like a piece of junk metal," she says.

She spent almost a month looking for Ko, before convincing him to preserve his signs.

Today, they are nestled against other faded plaques adorned with intricate designs — ranging from Chinese characters to palm trees —

in a rural part of Yuen Long district. Chan hopes to one day display them in a "museum-grade facility" safe from the elements, but TNX "can't afford it" at the moment.

"It was sad for me to see the signs removed. They could no longer be seen in their natural habitat," Chan says.

"But I think as a consolation, at least we could give them a home instead of witnessing them being trashed." — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Sotheby's to auction world's largest ruby in New York in June



THE LARGEST RUBY in the world to come to auction will be offered by Sotheby's in New York in June, the auction house said at a preview in Hong Kong on Monday, and is estimated to achieve more than \$30 million.

That would probably make the 55.22-carat gem, known as the Estrela de Fura, the most expensive ruby ever sold at auction, said Uni Kim, a specialist in Sotheby's jewellery department in the Asian financial capital.

"It is from Mozambique, which is also one of the new and more popular origins that we see for rubies, apart from the more traditional and the classic Burmese pieces," Kim added.

The current world record for a ruby sold at auction was set in May 2015 by "Sunrise Ruby," a 25.59-carat Burmese stone that fetched \$30.3 million at Sotheby's in Geneva.

The new stone, whose name means "Star of Fura" in Portuguese, was unearthed from mining company



Fura's ruby mine in Mozambique's northern region of Montepuez in July 2022.

Kim said the ruby, to be offered at Sotheby's Magnificent Jewels sale, was a 101-carat rough gemstone when first discovered, fuelling excitement among many in the gem industry.

The quality and size of the gemstone "is almost unheard of", Dev Shetty, the chief executive of Fura Gems, said in a statement.

"We estimate Estrela de Fura to be sold in excess of \$30 million," Kim added. "Hopefully we'll be able to see it just setting a new record for Mozambique rubies."

After being exhibited in Hong Kong, the gem will be displayed in Taipei, China, Singapore, Geneva and Dubai, before being auctioned in New York on June 8.

— Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Michelle Yeoh urges women to resist being 'put in a box'

Oscar winner Michelle Yeoh spoke up on Tuesday for diversity and women's empowerment in the entertainment industry, telling reporters in Kuala Lumpur "we should never allow somebody to put us in a box".

Speaking at her first news conference in her home country since her historic best actress win, the Malaysian star returned to themes that had been staples of her awards season interviews.

"I have been very blessed that I've continuously been able to work, and work (with) very interesting, very diverse and very forward-thinking filmmakers. That has enabled me to fight for what I truly believe in: representation, diversity, especially empowerment of women," she said.

"I don't believe just because we are women, we are a weaker sex... We should never allow somebody to put us in a box."

Winning the best actress Oscar -- as the first Asian woman ever to do so -- "represents so much to so many of us", she said, adding that she "heard the roar of joy, happiness all across the world to Los Angeles" following her victory.

- 'DIRECTORS HAVE NO LIFE' -

Yeoh, 60, won the award for her portrayal of Chinese-American laundromat owner Evelyn Wang, who deals with family turmoil while battling an interdimensional villain in the sci-fi action comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once".

The lack of Asian representation at Hollywood's highest levels had been a recurring topic in her interviews ahead of the awards.

Yeoh later met around 2,000 fans at a trendy shopping mall in the Malaysian capital, many of them screaming and taking photos and videos.

There were more cheers when she lifted her statuette to show it to the fans.

"She is a role model for me. Her tough and no-nonsense attitude empowers young women like me," Ng Xue Ying, a 21-year-old broadcast student, said.

Asked at the news conference for her advice to young people around the world, Yeoh said: "Don't become me, be you... I believe that you are going to be better."

The Hollywood veteran was born to Chinese-Malaysian parents in the northern city of Ipoh. She embraced dance as a child and specialised in ballet, which she studied in England.

Yeoh's film credits stretch back to the 1980s, but her Hollywood breakthrough came when she was cast as the first ethnic Chinese Bond girl in 1997's "Tomorrow Never Dies" opposite Pierce Brosnan.

She also starred in the Oscar-winning 2000 martial arts film "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon", the 2005 period drama "Memoirs of a Geisha" and the 2018 romantic comedy "Crazy Rich Asians".

Yeoh said she has no interest in becoming a film director.

"Directors have no life. I love my life so much," she said.

"You have no time for anything because being a director you have to know everything and be everywhere all at once." — AFP



CONSERVATION

Coastal shellfish 'colonise' ocean plastic: study



SCIENTISTS FOUND coastal species of shellfish and anemones living and breeding on floating islands of garbage in the Pacific thousands of miles from home, a study revealed on Monday.

Environmentalists have for years been eyeing what they call the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" -- masses of plastic rubbish combining bottles, fishing nets and much more.

US researchers who sampled rubbish from the northeastern Pacific between California and Hawaii said they found 37 kinds of invertebrates that originated from coastal areas, mostly from countries such as Japan on the other side of the ocean.

"The high seas are colonised by a diverse array of coastal species, which survive and reproduce in the open ocean," they wrote in the study, published in Nature Ecology and Evolution.

"Coastal species persist now in the open ocean as a substantial component of a neopelagic (new, sea-dwelling) community sustained by the vast and expanding sea of plastic debris," the study said.

More than two-thirds of the items examined had coastal species on them, including crustaceans, sea anemones and moss-like creatures called bryozoans.

Scientists had not often tracked creatures surviving dispersal across entire oceans. The researchers noted that in one rare event in 2012, debris from the previous year's tsunami in Japan washed ashore in North America bearing living species.

Creatures can spread quickly by feeding on the layers of slime formed on floating plastics by bacteria and algae, the study said. Scientists must now investigate how these coastal colonists will fit into the ocean food chain.

"We found that coastal species are commonly observed on the same plastics as the native pelagic species (dwelling far out at sea), suggesting that these two communities are interacting with one another," the study's lead author Linsey Haram said.

"These interactions could include competition for food and space as well as predation. More research is needed to understand whether the implications are positive or negative."

In a 2021 article, members of the same research team warned that the influx of invasive coastal species "might portend significant ecological shifts in the marine environment".

A study published in 2017 in the journal Science Advances calculated that if current production and waste-management trends continued, there would be 12 billion tonnes of plastic waste in landfills or the natural environment by 2050.

G7 energy and environment ministers declared at the end of talks in Japan on Sunday their "ambition to reduce additional plastic pollution to zero by 2040".

They said they hoped to draw up an "international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution" by the end of 2024. — AFP



ramadhaan

Local Scene

f t i s l p y @omanobserver

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 19 | 2023

By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

It's a two-hour drive from Salalah—a circuitous road of picturesque landscape and beautiful cliffs leading into a barren desert landscape and, ultimately, an Instagram-worthy oasis.

It is an area that has yet to experience an explosion of visiting tourists, and this slow development is a blessing not just to nature but also to the simple lives of the Omanis who live in Hasik.

Visiting Hasik in the summer might not be a good idea. From Muscat, it's almost an 8-hour drive and much longer if you take the coastal roads, but we embarked on this journey because of whispers of beautiful falaj, virgin beaches, and a charming oasis not a lot of people know about.

For this particular trip, we passed through the coastal area of Al Shuwamiyyah—an eye-opening discovery that made us realise that when it comes to beautiful beaches in Oman, we've never really mapped out and fully understood the beauty of the beaches in Oman's remote places.

To get to Al Shuwamiyyah, we have to pass through mountains cut out in the middle to make way for paved, beautiful roads. We made a stop at one of the villages, which only has a couple of small, homey restaurants, only one of which is operational.

The villagers had to travel to Mirbat or Salalah to buy their supplies, and it was an exhausting trip that required meticulous planning but looked fairly easy for the locals.

While the area doesn't have a fancy restaurant, they served the freshest of seafood, and a samak biryani was definitely a welcome treat with a beautifully grilled lobster on the side.

People have only become familiar with Al Shuwamiyyah because of the couple of Smurf Houses that have now been abandoned — an ambitious project that was supposed to provide a great option for accommodation in the area.

A necessary stop, we discovered that the houses are already giving in to nature—their white-painted exteriors were now covered in thick dust, and the windows and doors have already given up on their weight. It was rotting, and while its charm and beauty remain and it holds a lot of promise, it won't be long before it

is but a distant memory—a dream not realised and a total waste.

From the Smurf Houses, we drove another hour to finally reach our destination.

It is known to the locals as Khor Sanq, perhaps the end part of an even longer Wadi Nakheel in Hasik.

From the road, it was a beautiful sight to behold—a true oasis in the heart of the desert.

Entering the wadi, we were greeted by towering date palms that provided much-needed shade and relief from the scorching desert sun. There was no paved road; only a clear, white mark on the ground was an indication that cars had been passing through for, perhaps, years.

The vegetation is lushly growing, and in between these palms, it was easy to spot that this has been a great camping spot for many. There was burned wood left behind and some forgotten trash that does need cleaning.

Once inside the wadi, about a two-minute drive later, the vegetation gives way to a clearing that beautifully shows the extent of the khor.

If you're looking for the best spot in Oman for kayaking, without a doubt, Khor Sanq will give other areas a run for their money.

In summer, the water of the khor is peaceful and calm, and it leads directly into the sea. What makes it memorable is that it forms a horseshoe-shaped waterway that allows you a good 360-degree view of its beautiful landscapes.

By the side of the cliffs, there are a few shallow caves that serve as a shield from the sun. The vegetation remains lush here because of the ample supply of water it gets.

We'd been told that there are different unmapped hiking trails in the area. In fact, a colleague followed one of the aflaj, and they found a cistern pool that looked perfect for swimming.

There is so much to discover about Hasik and Wadi Nakheel. Our visit was short, but it led to an amazing discovery. Nearby, there is a beautiful cascading waterfall opposite, which offers a beautiful view of the sea.

For those who want to discover more about Oman, this is definitely a place worth checking out. It is a must-visit destination for anyone travelling to Dhofar. Its stunning natural beauty, tranquil atmosphere, potential for outdoor adventure, and the calmness of the oasis on its own are enough to leave a lasting impression.

