

HIS MAJESTY BEGINS EGYPT VISIT TODAY

- PUSH FOR
ECONOMIC AND
INVESTMENT
RELATIONS
- TO BOOST
THE VOLUME
OF TRADE
EXCHANGE
- TO REVIEW
INVESTMENT
POTENTIALS
IN OMAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt today, according to a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court.

The statement says, “In continuation of the historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Egypt with effect from Sunday, May 21, in response to an invitation from President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of Egypt.

“The visit reflects the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships to enhance joint ties. The visit will explore areas of the existing cooperation between the two countries in various spheres that serve the joint interests.

“The two leaderships will hold a session of consultation and coordination on matters that serve the joint Arab action, in addition to discussing the latest developments at the regional and international arenas.

“During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied

by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

“May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and guard him as a treasured source of pride and inspiration to his nation.” — **ONA**

SEE ALSO P2, 3 AND 4



Visit opens a new chapter in bilateral relations

CAIRO: Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, said that the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt and his meeting with his brother President Abdel Fattah el Sisi would open a new chapter and a new phase of cooperation relations to the joint benefit of both countries.

Speaking at a press conference held in Cairo on Saturday on the occasion of His

Majesty’s visit to Egypt, Al Rahbi said that His Majesty will be accompanied during his visit to Egypt by a high-ranking official delegation comprising economic officials as the two brotherly countries seek to push forward the economic, commercial and investment cooperation and boost the volume of trade exchange.

The ambassador said that during the visit the Omani-Egyptian Business Forum will convene to review the investment potentials available in the Sultanate of Oman and the investor-

friendly atmosphere such as legislations, regulations and infrastructure all of which are designed to attract investment in many sectors including renewable energy and green hydrogen.

The ambassador said that the two brotherly countries will sign a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding in the economic fields to be added to the existing MoUs, agreements, executive programmes and letters of cooperation signed during the visit of the Egyptian President to the

Sultanate of Oman in June 2022.

During the press conference, Al Rahbi called on journalists to highlight the facilitations provided by the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt to the private sector, the support provided to businesspeople and the opportunities and fields of investment in both countries. The ambassador pointed to the common principles contained in the foreign policy of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt and their keenness to support everything that would serve Arab causes. — **ONA**

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The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt and his meeting with his brother President Abdel Fattah el Sisi would open a new chapter and a new phase of cooperation

ABDULLAH BIN NASSER AL RAHBI

S P O R T S



AL NAHDA CLINCH OMANTELE LEAGUE TITLE

P10

OMAN FLAYS STORMING OF QATAR EMBASSY IN SUDAN

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman condemned the storming and vandalising of the embassy of the sisterly State of Qatar in the Sudanese capital Khartoum by a paramilitary group.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry confirmed the Sultanate of Oman’s firm stance rejecting any act that targets diplomatic missions and the importance of protecting the premises of the diplomatic missions in accordance with the international charters that govern and regulate the diplomatic work.



Meanwhile, air strikes and artillery exchanges shook the Sudanese capital on Saturday and armed men ransacked the Qatari embassy as the country’s warring generals kept up their struggle for control. Khartoum residents said that heavy fighting raged despite repeated international calls for a humanitarian truce.

The area around the state television building in Khartoum’s sister city Omdurman was one of the sites bombarded, witnesses said.

The power struggle between

regular army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his former deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), erupted into fighting on April 15.

The conflict has killed hundreds of people, most of them civilians, and displaced more than one million. The United Nations has warned of a fast-deteriorating humanitarian situation in Africa’s third-largest country, where one in three people already relied on aid before the war. **SEE ALSO P6**



‘HM’s historic visit to Egypt to explore newer avenues of cooperation’



KABEER YOUSUF
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Khaled Mohamed Radi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman, was in high hopes that the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt would further deepen the existing strong relations that are deep-rooted in history, and move to broader horizons and further avenues of development between the two brotherly countries in various fields.

“The two sides will discuss ways to strengthen and develop relations, whether at the political, economic, commercial, cultural or social levels, in addition to Egyptian-Omani coordination on various regional and international issues, as the region needs more coordination and cooperation to secure peace in the region, so that its

people can enjoy more security and stability,” the ambassador said.

He pointed out that the visit of Abdel Fattah el Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, to the Sultanate of Oman earlier was a turning point in the path of relations between the two countries and witnessed the signing of a large number of agreements, which included many areas, including those related to maritime, navigation, investment, trade and industry, besides MoUs in combating monopoly and providing means for free competition, and industrial development and investment promotion. “The signing of these agreements established the solid base that enabled the Omani and Egyptian sides to build a large edifice of cooperation last year,”



he said. The volume of intra-trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt increased by nearly 52

per cent compared to the year 2021, as the volume of trade exchange reached nearly one billion and nine million Egyptian pounds, and Egyptian exports to the Sultanate of Oman amounted to about \$433 million. The major imports of Egypt from the Sultanate of Oman are metal ores, fish, aluminium and its manufactures and organic chemical products, while the Sultanate of Oman imports some agricultural products, furniture, electrical appliances, dairy products among others from Egypt.

“What makes Oman a suitable country for

investments is that the country is witnessing stability and a positive climate that encourages investment, the legislation and systems which provide to the foreign investor through the single port encourages the investor to come to the Sultanate of Oman, where we find the Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating in progress and rising, which is a clear indication of efforts and hard work under Royal directives and Oman is an oasis of security and stability and a destination for foreign investors, including investors from Egypt,” Radi said.

The number of Egyptian companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman are on a continuous rise, and they reached nearly 1,900 firms across the country, all of which reflect the depth and strong ties of cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

THE VOLUME OF INTRA-TRADE BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT INCREASED BY NEARLY 52 PER CENT

THE MAJOR IMPORTS OF EGYPT FROM OMAN ARE METAL ORES, FISH, ALUMINUM AND ITS MANUFACTURES, AND ORGANIC CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

OMAN IMPORTS SOME AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS, FURNITURE, ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES, DAIRY PRODUCTS FROM EGYPT

DIRECTIVE FROM THE TWO LEADERSHIPS FOR OFFICIALS IN THE TWO COUNTRIES TO WORK TOGETHER

CULTURAL RELATIONS AND TIES BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT ‘VERY LARGE, DIVERSE’ IN MANY FIELDS

MARCHING AHEAD

OMANI-EGYPTIAN BUSINESS COUNCIL SCALING HIGH

MUSCAT: “It is a golden day to be etched in the history of bilateral relations of the two friendly countries as the Omani-Egyptian Business Council is marching ahead with efforts to explore more ways of cooperation,” said Ahmed Reda, Vice-President of the Omani-Egyptian Business Council (OEBEC).



According to Reda, the wise politicians of the two countries will be able to draw conclusions and suggest solutions in light of the challenges that face the world politically and economically and meet the aspirations of the peoples of the Arab region especially to face the challenges arising from it as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and passing through the war of Russia and Ukraine as well as the military unrest in the brotherly Republic of Sudan.

“The bilateral meetings will be related to the economic aspect, with the participation of the Omani-Egyptian Business Council, which plays an effective role in raising the rates of investment and trade exchange in various investment sectors, and coordination between businessmen, the two governments and diplomatic missions of both countries. A joint investment fund worth \$100 million, with the participation of the two governments and businessmen from the two countries, has been already formed,” he said.

“When we talk about the package of investment facilities and incentives granted by the two countries to attract investment, it makes the investment environment attractive to a large extent. We also refer to the statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, which indicated that the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt witnessed an increase in the year 2022,” he said.

“The value of Omani exports to Egypt increased from RO 157,515,000 in 2021 to RO 298,77,000 in 2022, while the value of Omani imports to Egypt amounted to RO 95,551,000 in 2022,” he said.

“The available statistics show that the balance of trade between the two brotherly countries in 2022 was in favour of the Sultanate of Oman,” he added. According to Reda, the Omani-Egyptian meetings are a guarantee of security and stability in the region that is witnessing many transformations. The growth of trade exchange and joint investments reflects the depth and distinction of relations, and contributes to the maximum benefits from the distinguished geographic location of the Sultanate of Oman on the Indian Ocean, and the promising investment potentials and opportunities in several sectors.

Egyptian teachers shaped educational landscape in Oman

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MAY 20

The role of Egyptian teachers in the development of education in the Sultanate of Oman is part of an integrated system of educational, cultural and pedagogical relationships.

The system consists of interconnected and multi-directional frameworks, with diverse opportunities and dimensions rooted in the historical ties between Egypt and Oman that extend back thousands of years. The intellectual, cognitive, educational and cultural aspects are integral parts of this relationship.

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

to Egypt represents an extension of Oman’s appreciation for what Egypt has contributed to the joint Arab work, and the respect and admiration that Omanis hold for Egypt. Teachers, school administrators, and representatives from both public and private universities and institutions of higher education have been included in delegations from Egypt to Oman. The largest contribution of Egyptian teachers to the education renaissance in the Sultanate of Oman was seen in the 1970s. The first spark that ignited the modern Omani renaissance, launched by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, “We will teach our children even under the shade of a tree,” outlined



the building and development requirements for Oman. The spread of education throughout every region of Oman marked the start of the blessed Renaissance journey.

Opening schools for the Omanis was necessary for them to realise their dream, but before any educational facilities could be built, teachers were first needed. These facilities were mobile and temporarily under the

shade of palm trees. The vision of the enlightened leadership turned to many Arab countries to hire teachers and Egypt was present along this route, and its position was highly valued.

This positive optimistic spirit had a positive impact on the course of work, despite the challenges facing schools, their beginnings, the difficulty of transportation, the rough road, and other circumstances

related to education and its means in the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the lack of material resources, schools and educational institutes became attractive learning environments that included many activities, events, programmes, laboratories and workshops, which made schools productive environments.

Duaa, an Egyptian teacher who has been in Oman for a long time, expressed that progress is ongoing and Egyptian teachers are still reaping the results of their initial efforts.

According to Duaa, she reminisces about her initial days in Oman and emphasises that she never experienced feelings of isolation. Upon

arriving in Oman, she immediately felt a sense of belonging, as the people were friendly, helpful and welcoming. The country itself was secure, which further motivated her to continue her work there.

Asma Jad, who has been residing in Oman for 18 years, considers the country her second home. She attributes her ability to persevere throughout these years to the inherent kindness and generosity of the Omani people. Besides her professional responsibilities, Asma has had the opportunity to visit numerous locations within Oman and has been captivated by the country’s charming natural beauty.



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HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN
OMAN AND EGYPT GO BACK TO 3,500 YEARS

HM’s visit to Egypt illustrates trustful relations

HM AND PRESIDENT SISI WILL STRENGTHEN THE EXEMPLARY RELATIONS TO A BROADER HORIZON

OMAN AND EGYPT WILL SEEK TO START A NEW CHAPTER IN HISTORICALLY CLOSE RELATIONS

OMAN HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED EGYPT ON SEVERAL ISSUES

THE TWO SIDES ARE MAKING CONTINUOUS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

THE VOLUME OF TRADE BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT HAS WITNESSED A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt on Sunday will not only further boost ties in political and economic spheres but is also significantly important for people-to-people contact. The historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt go back 3,500 years.

With both Oman and Egypt supporting stability and peace in the Middle East and the wider world, Egypt has played a fundamental role, especially in the Palestinian issue and other Arab causes and the meeting between the leaders of the brotherly nations is expected to strengthen relations manifold.

Egypt has been the platform that brings the Arab nation together. Its role is recognised and the unique relationship between Oman and Egypt has been nurtured since the 1970s when education was a top priority.

In the early 70s, as the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said set the vision for the renaissance march, Egyptians played a big role.

Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League, said the two countries share common principles, including non-interference in the affairs of others, paying attention for the regional security and stability and playing an important role in this aspect.

“Oman and Egypt celebrated last November, the 50th anniversary of the



establishment of diplomatic relations between them whose period witnessed events that underlined the depth and strength of this relation. The two countries share common principles, including non-interference in the affairs of others, paying attention for the regional security and stability and playing an important role in this aspect,” he said.

According to businessman Yousuf al Shidhany, many Omanis learnt from Egyptian teachers. “They played a big role in different fields, but more so in education. Egyptian teachers played a big role at all levels of education. This is in addition to their expertise in different areas as they worked alongside Omanis in both the government and private sector,” he said.



“Now is the time to explore more areas that will benefit both countries and their peoples. It is time to look at opportunities for Omanis to invest in Egypt due to population and Africa areas connection. The visit of His Majesty the Sultan will pave the way for that,” he added.

In January 2020 when Sultan Qaboos passed away, President Sisi declared three days of mourning. Egypt’s House of Representatives also declared an official mourning period with flags at half-mast for three days in honour of the deceased sultan.

Under the late Sultan Qaboos, relations between the two countries continued to evolve, both seeking further cooperation and development. His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik is currently pursuing the same policy to consolidate relations.

Independent business consultant Khalfan al Tauqi is grateful for all that he learnt from his Egyptian teachers. “The Egyptians came in groups – the first one comprising teachers, followed by medical professionals. They went to all parts of the Sultanate of Oman; not only cities but villages and remote places, too, to help people and to be by their side.” Tauqi described the Egyptians as highly qualified in many professions including medicine, engineering and law. “We love their expertise. We Omanis also prefer to go to Egypt for our higher studies,” he added. “Egypt is like a reference point for many Omanis in many fields and professions. Many Omanis who finished elementary and primary education in Egypt continue to have very good relations with the country,” he said. Salalah-based entrepreneur Ahmed Barham said, “Egyptians have had a positive impact on Omanis, particularly in the education sector, from way back in the 1970s to 1990s because during this period, there were no Omani teachers. Many of the teachers were from Egypt as in the case with other professions.” “Egypt is the pillar of Arab world and it was good move for Oman to resort to Egypt for its manpower needs when Oman was in the early years of the renaissance,” he added.

Barham said there are a lot of opportunities there that can increase income for Oman and create more cooperation between the two countries.

Promising potential for enhanced ties in green energy sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 20

A new phase in economic and trade relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt is set to commence in the wake of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Cairo starting on Sunday.

It is anticipated that the upturn in economic and investment ties will be driven by stronger cooperation in, among other areas, the renewable and green energy sector, given the abundance of natural resources — sun and wind mainly — that both countries enjoy.

Accordingly, both Oman and Egypt have embarked on a major drive to harness these sustainable resources for electricity generation initially,

and later to power the growth of a green hydrogen sector to supplant their current dependence on hydrocarbons for economic development. These commonalities in their respective national visions for growth promise to open the way for mutually beneficial cooperation centring around the future green energy sector.

It is in this context that the Omani government, represented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), signed a MoU last November with Saudi-based energy giant ACWA Power to explore the feasibility of investing around 10% in the development, construction, and operation of Egypt’s 1.1GW Suez Wind Energy project — a mega-scale venture estimated to cost \$1.5 billion.



The MoU was signed on the sidelines of the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. It was in line with Oman’s efforts to enhance joint investments with Arab nations like Saudi Arabia and Egypt

in renewable energy projects, particularly wind power.

The Suez Wind Farm project, which is expected to start operations in 2026, is located close to Ras Ghareb City in the Gulf of Suez region near Jabal Al Zait in Egypt. Power will be generated using turbines of up to 220 metres

in addition to several latest advanced technologies. The plant is expected to operate at the highest level of efficiency and will generate enough power for approximately 1,080,000 residential units and reduce about 2.4 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

Cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector has also accounted for a key share of the bilateral relationship between the two countries over the past decades.

This was affirmed during the signing of an MoU between the two countries in September 2019 to foster cooperation in the field of petroleum and natural gas.

Under the MoU, both sides also committed to exchanging expertise and technologies in addition to cooperation and

investment in the production storage and marketing of petroleum and natural gas.

Beyond the energy industry, Egyptian civil contracting, architectural design and other engineering firms have made a key contribution to Oman’s civil and infrastructure development over the past decades by extending their expertise across a number of design and engineering disciplines. Egyptian contractors have fared exceptionally in Oman’s water and wastewater sectors, as well as in the implementation oil and gas pipeline projects. Notable is the example of Petrojet, leading Egyptian civil contractor, which is credited with laying a number of key pipeline projects to support the development of Oman’s gas transportation infrastructure.



Did you know Egyptian artifacts were found in Oman?

VINOD NAIR
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For the first time in 2019, ancient Egyptian artifacts dating back to 1300 and 100 BC were found at the archaeological site in the Wilayat of Dibba in Musandam during excavations, conducted by archaeologists from the University of Rome.

Researchers managed to unearth an oval-shaped tomb, which was part of a large funerary complex and built in the period from 100 BC to 300 BC.

It is reported that the remains of 12 people were found in the tomb, as well as many funerary objects, including ceramic, stone and bronze vessels, swords and iron arrows, as well as silver and gold jewellery imported from other countries.

Many artifacts turned out to be much older than the tomb. Among them stands a powerful ancient Egyptian amulet, found on the territory of the Sultanate of Oman for the first time.

The Egyptian Eye of Horus amulet was also discovered at an archaeological site, which is a symbol of royal power and good health. The first features a stone inscribed with the cuneiform name of De Jolla, a Mesopotamian god of healing, and is thought to have been imported

from what is now Iraq.

An amulet is an object believed to have certain positive properties that, as the amulet's main function, can magically be bestowed upon its owner.

In ancient Egypt, this magical power was often derived from a combination of several aspects, such as the amulet's shape, decoration, inscription, colour, material, and words spoken over the piece or acts performed with it.

Amulets were usually worn or placed on the body to transfer their powers directly to the owner. Often amulets were pierced or featured a loop, which allowed their use as pendants on a necklace, for example. Among many other possibilities, they could be incorporated into rings or enfolded in a piece of fabric that was then attached to a string. This means that amulets could be worn without having any means of suspension themselves.

When used for the dead, they were placed on the mummy or in between the mummy's bandages. While amulets are often small, on average ranging from two to six centimetres (about 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches), funerary pieces such as winged scarabs can be as large as twenty-five centimetres (nearly ten inches) wide.

Ancient Egyptian amulets represented animals, deities, symbols, or objects in miniature. In addition,



Bibliotheca Alexandrina

certain things found in nature, such as a claw or shell, were thought to be imbued with magical power and therefore could function as an amulet as well. So-called textual amulets also occur; these usually consist of a short magical

spell written on a piece of linen or papyrus that was then folded and put on a string. Theoretically, anything could be made into an amulet through a magical act. Today, we often identify an ancient Egyptian object as an amulet based

on its shape and size, and — in some cases — its use as a pendant. However, outside of their original context, many amulets, especially those created in nature, can no longer easily be recognised as such.

Amulets often carried more than one meaning, and thus more than one possible function. Headrest amulets (04.2.80) depict a piece of furniture that supported the neck of a sleeping person and was often decorated with protective images. From early times on, full-size headrests were placed in tombs to protect the dead. Additionally, their function of raising the head was associated with the deceased rising and being revived, and further significance resulted from the formal resemblance between the round head on the curved headrest and the sun rising between two hills, which evoked a powerful symbol of resurrection and rebirth.

OMANI PRESENCE AT BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA

Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) is a significant library and cultural centre on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in Alexandria, Egypt. The new library complex was inaugurated on October 16, 2002.

In May 2022, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina received a set of gifts from the Sultanate of Oman, which were delivered by Ambassa-

dor Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to Egypt and the Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States.

Dr Moustafa Elfeki, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, said these donations are an added value to the library's researchers and specialists and give an insight into the Sultanate of Oman.

During that occasion, two books on the history of Oman were launched - 'The Omani Empire' by Dr Saleh Mahrous, and 'Ziad ibn Al Muhallab' by researcher Mohamed Ibrahim Abdel Majid.

The other book donated to the BA included 'Oman My Beautiful Country' by Mohamed bin al Zubair. The Omani Cultural Attaché has also offered books on various topics and fields, such as history, literature, media, intellect and poetry. It also includes a collection of scientific books translated into Arabic as well as several publications in English.

'The History of Islam and the Death of Celebrities and Luminaries' by historian Al Dhahabi is one of the most important books in the donated collection.

The book tackles a period in Islamic history, from the beginning of the Hijrah to 700 AH, and it includes the deaths of celebrities and luminaries during the period from 501 AH to 520 AH.

Announcement of Terms of BankDhofar's Non-Binding Merger Proposal with Ahli Bank

BankDhofar SAOG announced the details of its revised non-binding merger proposal with Ahli Bank SAOG made on 26 April 2023.

The Offer implies a price of 200 baisa for each share of Ahli Bank SAOG irrespective of the shareholding percentage. The offer includes option of opting for up to 25% of consideration in cash at 200 baisa per ABO share; and remaining in the form of newly issued BankDhofar shares, which translates into an effective price of 227 baisa per ABO share using BankDhofar's latest share price.

The offer implies significant premium to Ahli Bank's as well as Omani banking sector's valuation, translating into compelling proposition for Ahli Bank's shareholders.

The offer also entails 100% cash payout for Shariah compliant juristic shareholders and their subsidiaries as of date of revised offer.

Subsequent to submission of revised non-binding merger proposal to the Board of Ahli Bank SAOG on 26 April 2023; BankDhofar SAOG announces further details of its revised non-binding offer of its merger proposal with Ahli Bank SAOG. The offer proposes issuance of 1.2910 shares of BankDhofar ordinary shares for each share of Ahli Bank. The proposed share swap ratio implies an attractive valuation of 200 baisa per share for Ahli Bank based on BankDhofar's unaffected share price of 155 baisa prior to the initial offer of merger proposal as at 9th April 2023. The offer also entails an option for shareholders to opt for cash consideration for up to 25% of their holding in Ahli Bank at the offer price (200 baisa per share).

The revised offer is a highly value accretive proposition for all Ahli Bank shareholders. The offer price implies a 15% premium to Ahli Bank's unaffected share price, prior to submission and announcement of initial merger proposal to Ahli Bank Board. The offer price values the Ahli Bank shares at 1.30x book value. Moreover, based on latest share price of BankDhofar, the proposed offer and share swap ratio implies further increase in the effective value for each Ahli Bank share to 227 baisa per share, 1.48x book value and 30.6% premium to Ahli Bank's unaffected share price (applicable to the 75% share component as per the offered share swap ratio). Notably, the offer price reflects

a substantial premium to the valuation multiples of the Omani banking sector.

For entities which are Shariah compliant, (Shariah compliant juristic shareholders and their subsidiaries), the proposed merger offer include 100% cash payout at offer price of 200 baisa per share, taking into account inability to hold shares in a conventional bank.

BankDhofar intends to fund the cash component of the offer from its existing liquidity and capital resources as well as contribution from BankDhofar's existing shareholders.

The terms of the revised offer for merger with Ahli Bank clearly demonstrate strong commitment by BankDhofar SAOG, its board members and shareholders towards further strengthening of Omani banking sector offering improved value proposition to all the stakeholders. The proposed merger offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalized bank on day 1.

The transaction is subject to obtaining necessary approvals from relevant regulators as well as Boards and shareholders of BankDhofar and Ahli Bank.





Employers must ensure working conditions are safe for employees: MoL

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) stated that employers must ensure that the prevailing conditions in workplace meet the safety and health requirements of employees. In a notice issued online, MoL specified the responsibilities of employers in providing a safe work environment.

It stated that the employer is obligated to ensure that the working conditions are adequate for the safety and well-being of the employed workers. ‘Prevent the presence of contaminated air, and establish a natural or industrial ventilation system that ensures consistent air renewal in the workplace. Additionally, use a localised ventilation system in areas where pollution sources are present to efficiently extract polluted air.’ MoL stated.

‘To ensure maximum ventilation and easy



maintenance, windows should be of sufficient number and appropriate width. For warehouses, it is recommended to install ventilation vents on the roofs as well as lower vents positioned above the ground barrier level,’ it added.

MoL said that there is a need to ensure that the workplace maintains an oxygen level of at least 21 per cent of the proportion available in outdoor air and not less than 19.5 per

cent in underground work. ‘The velocity of air inside the workplace must not exceed 15 metres per minute in winter and 50 metres per minute in summer. If it exceeds these limits, work will be suspended or relocated to another site,’ it stated. ‘Ensure that the relative humidity in the workplace does not exceed 80% and if the limit is exceeded, cease work or relocate to a different area,’ it added.

Enhance the fluid power to lead a healthy life

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 20

Of all the body’s physiological requirements for good health, water is by far the most vital one as it is responsible for and involved in almost every bodily function and process. Water is our life support system and is the ultimate substance that helps us to lead a healthy life.

Dr Monika Seth, (pictured) freelance nutrition consultant in Oman, said people should make sure to drink enough water as per body/health status/ medical condition and climatic requirements. “It is of extreme importance to ensure that you are drinking it the right way at the right time,” she said.

Dr Monika gave hydration tips including drinking water in a sitting position. “Never while standing. Drinking water while standing may disrupt your body’s fluid balance leading to the accumulation of fluids in your joints,” she said.

“Water will forcefully enter the stomach, mixing with the digestive juices leading to bloating, heaviness, colic pain, acid reflux, etc. Water gushes down quickly without benefiting other body parts. It gets accumulated in the bladder



without getting purified and is harmful to the kidneys,” she added.

Dr Monika said people should avoid drinking too many caffeinated drinks as these drinks cause dehydration. “Make your heart beat faster, act as a diuretic, and make your stomach produce more acid. Your best bet would be to add an extra glass of water for every cup of tea/ coffee you drink in a day,” she said.

“Do not drink water just before eating your meals, along with your meals, and immediately after your meals; there has to be a gap of a minimum of 30 minutes between drinking water and meals.

It is debilitating to drink water with meals as it dilutes the digestive juices, preventing the meal from being properly digested. This also greatly

hinders both the appropriation and the assimilation cycles, which in turn negatively affect the all-important elimination cycle while wasting a great deal of energy,” she added.

There is also a need to focus on a light diet. “light diet is essential with plenty of high-water content foods like watermelon, strawberries, cantaloupe, oranges, cucumber, tomatoes, apples, celery, lettuce, peaches, zucchini, light soups, and broth,” she said.

“Drink a glass of water first thing in the morning; use alarms or notifications to your advantage along with some positive and encouraging verbal messages to remind you to drink water every 1-2 hours. Focus on your body’s signals; sometimes we overeat because we mistake thirst for hunger,” she added.

Dr Monika suggested trying fruit or vegetable infusions in water (mint, lemon, ginger, cucumber, orange, etc.) in your water to make it more appealing and get some variety in taste and flavour. “It is very easy to forget that we are living in a hot climate and drinking water is essential to your well-being. Make conscious efforts to stay hydrated throughout the day,” she said.



وزارة المالية
Ministry of Finance

Tender Announcement

Tender Number: T-14-2023

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name	Supply of Tools and Equipment for MWASALAT Workshop.		
Project Summary	Mwasalat is seeking an experienced and capable supplier to supply and deliver Tools and Equipment for the Mwasalat Workshop. This must be executed in compliance with the terms and conditions outlined in the tender documents.		
Tender Fee	NIL	Grade & Specialty	Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution	Last date for tender document distribution	Last date for submission
Sunday, 21st May 2023	Monday, 29th May 2023	Sunday, 11th June 2023

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

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C "MWASALAT" at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 1551
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om



وزارة المالية
Ministry of Finance

21 May 2023

Request for Proposal

Provision of Advisory Services for Public Private Partnership Projects under Information & Communication Technology Framework Agreement

As part of Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects and in order to encourage private sector to invest in infrastructure projects and public services, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) seeks to give effect to the PPP projects in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector through signing framework agreements with various consultants so as to provide relevant advisory services whenever needed for the upcoming PPP projects

Interested local and international companies may obtain the qualification document by sending an email outlining company name, competent staff name, contact number, and email ID to: ppp.frameworkagreement@mof.gov.om .

The interested bidders shall meet the following requirements:

- At least five years' experience in providing advisory services on PPP projects.
- Previous experience in providing advisory services on projects related to ICT sector with a cumulative value of RO 20 million.

Scope of Work

The advisory services shall cover IT, legal and financial aspects pertaining to ICT sector.

RFP Number	Term of Framework Agreement	RFP Release Date	Last Date of Raise Clarifications	Deadline to Submit RFP
MOF-PPP-TA-RFP-009	Two Years (extendable)	05 June 2023 (12:00 pm)	17 July 2023 (12:00 pm)	31 July 2023 (12:00 pm)



For more information, please contact us via an email ppp.frameworkagreement@mof.gov.om or phone number: +96824746606 (Sunday to Thursday from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm).

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سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
In AL Khuwair invites for the Following Project:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTCTIT/HQ 162/2022 Re-call (1)	DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF U TURIN AT AS SUNAYNAH ON IBRI-HAFEET ROAD	21-5-2023	04-6-2023	04-7-2023	EXPERIENCED SME COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(35/-) THIRTY FIVE OMANI RIAL NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Secretariat General of Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted online on given website.

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE



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Turkish voters living in the Netherlands queue for early voting in the second round at a polling station in Amsterdam. – AFP

Turks abroad begin voting in presidential election runoff

ISTANBUL: Turkish citizens based abroad began voting on Saturday in Türkiye’s presidential runoff election between the incumbent Tayyip Erdogan and his challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who aims to bring an end to the president’s two-decade rule.

The runoff election will be held in Türkiye on May 28 after Erdogan fell just short of the 50 per cent threshold needed to win the presidential vote outright last Sunday in what had been expected to be his greatest ever political challenge.

Some 3.4 million Turks are eligible to vote abroad, out of a total electorate of more than 64 million, and will cast their ballots from May 20-24.

State-owned Anadolu news agency said voting had started in countries across Asia and Europe. Germany is home to the world’s largest Turkish diaspora, where there are some 1.5 million Turkish citizens eligible to vote.

In last Sunday’s vote, Erdogan’s ruling AK Party and its nationalist allies won a comfortable parliamentary majority.

Kilicdaroglu, candidate of a six-party opposition alliance, won 44.88 per cent support in the presidential election, trailing Erdogan on 49.52 per cent and confounding expectations in opinion polls that the challenger would come out ahead.

Attention is now focused on nationalist Sinan Ogan, the candidate who came third with 5.17 per cent support. Any decision by him to support one of the two candidates in the runoff could potentially have a decisive role. Kilicdaroglu’s rhetoric has taken a nationalist turn after he trailed Erdogan in the first round of voting, saying that the government had allowed 10 million refugees into the country and that he would repatriate them all if he were elected.

He provided no evidence regarding the number of migrants. Türkiye hosts the world’s largest refugee population of around 4 million, according to official figures. Ogan had campaigned on sending back migrants, including some 3.6 million Syrians displaced by war to the south. — **Reuters**

Air strikes hit Khartoum’s outskirts as Sudan’s war enters sixth week



Smoke rises above buildings in southern Khartoum as violence between two rival Sudanese generals continues. – AFP

CAIRO/DUBAI: Air strikes hit outer areas of the Sudanese capital Khartoum overnight and on Saturday morning, as fighting that has trapped civilians in a humanitarian crisis and displaced more than a million entered its sixth week.

The fighting between Sudan’s army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has led to a collapse in law and order with looting that both sides blame the other for. Stocks of food, cash, and essentials are rapidly dwindling.

Air strikes were reported by eyewitnesses in southern Omdurman and northern Bahri, the two cities that lie across the Nile from Khartoum, forming

Sudan’s “triple capital”. Some of the strikes took place near the state broadcaster in Omdurman, the eyewitnesses said.

“We faced heavy artillery fire early this morning, the whole house was shaking,” Sanaa Hassan said, a 33-year-old living in the al-Salha neighbourhood of Omdurman.

“It was terrifying, everyone was lying under their beds. What’s happening is a nightmare,” she added. The RSF is embedded in residential districts, drawing almost continual air strikes by the regular armed forces.

The conflict, which began on April 15, has displaced almost 1.1 million people internally and into neighbouring countries. Some 705

people have been killed and at least 5,287 injured, according to the World Health Organization.

Saudi- and US-sponsored talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah have not been fruitful, and the two warring sides have accused each other of violating multiple ceasefire agreements.

In recent days ground fighting has flared once again in the Darfur region, in the cities of Nyala and Zalenjei.

Both sides blamed each other in statements late on Friday for sparking the fighting in Nyala, one of the country’s largest cities, which had for weeks been relatively calm due to a locally-brokered truce.

The war broke out in Khartoum

after disputes over plans for the RSF to be integrated into the army and over the future chain of command under an internationally backed deal to shift Sudan towards democracy following decades of conflict-ridden autocracy.

Army leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan removed RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo as his deputy on the ruling council they lead. He replaced him with former rebel leader Malik Agar.

In a statement on Saturday, Agar said he had accepted the position in order to help secure peace and support for the upcoming agricultural season, whose failure would spell widespread hunger.

— **Reuters**

India will do ‘whatever we can’ on Ukraine crisis: Modi

HIROSHIMA: India will do “whatever we can” to resolve the Ukraine crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged on Saturday as he met President Volodymyr Zelensky for the first time since Russia’s attacks.

“I understand your pain and the pain of Ukrainian citizens very well,” Modi said, as the pair met on the sidelines of the Group of 7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan.

“I can assure you that to resolve this India and, me personally, will do whatever we can do,” Modi said.

It was the pair’s first in-person meeting since Russia’s attack began

15 months ago, which New Delhi has pointedly resisted criticising.

A post on Zelensky’s Telegram account said he had “thanked India for supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country, in particular at the sites of international organisations”.

Zelensky also thanked Modi for providing humanitarian aid to the war-torn country, and invited India to join the implementation of the “peace formula” initiative devised by Ukraine.

Zelensky arrived in Hiroshima on Saturday afternoon for a surprise in-person appearance



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Indian PM Narendra Modi shake hands during the G7 leaders’ summit in Hiroshima, Japan. – **Reuters**

after winning US approval for Ukraine to obtain advanced fighter jets.

He quickly embarked on a whirlwind of diplomatic pitstops with leaders from the major developed democracies in the G7, as well as invited developing nations, including India.

Modi also thanked Zelensky for the help provided to Indian students after Russia’s attack, the Telegram post added.

The leaders met in Hiroshima, on the sidelines of the G7 summit, where Zelensky arrived for a surprise in-person appearance

after winning US approval for Ukraine to obtain advanced fighter jets. He quickly embarked on a whirlwind of diplomatic pitstops with leaders from the seven major developed democracies that make up the G7, as well as invited developing nations, including India.

The Ukrainian leader earlier held talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Britain’s Rishi Sunak, who he also met days ago on a tour of European allies to drum up support for a planned spring offensive.

— **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

ATHENS

Greece recovers hundreds of antiquities

Greece said it has recovered hundreds of looted Neolithic to Byzantine artefacts including a second century bronze statue of Alexander the Great from a notorious British antiquities dealer after a 17-year legal battle.

The fight to repatriate the trove of 351 objects began in 2006 with authorities investigating the eponymous company of Robin Symes in the country and abroad, Greece’s Culture Minister Lina Medoni said in a statement.

The recovery came years after



Italian and Swiss police in 2016 recovered a haul of archaeological artefacts stolen from Italy and stored by Symes. The Italian booty was found in a storage unit at the Geneva Freeport. — **AFP**

KINSHASA

Security forces clash with anti-govt protesters

Democratic Republic of Congo security forces fired tear gas and fought running battles in the streets of the capital Kinshasa with anti-government protesters demonstrating on Saturday over alleged irregularities in voter registration.

The protesters are also angry over the rising cost of living and the prolonged insecurity in the east of the country, where armed militias and rebel groups have been carrying out attacks that have killed hundreds and



displaced over a million.

Protesters were detained by security forces just after the start of the demonstration, which was called for by opposition leaders.

— **Reuters**

ISLAMABAD

3 Soldiers killed in attack on security post

At least three soldiers were killed on Saturday in south-western Pakistan as the threat of terrorism and violence flared in the country amid political turmoil.

The soldiers were killed in an attack on a recently established security post in the Zarghoon Marget area, in the volatile province of Balochistan.

The military’s media wing said that a group of terrorists attacked the post that was set up “to help check extortion efforts targeting coal mines in the area.”



During the heavy exchange of fire, one terrorist was also killed, the statement said. The incident comes a day after a suicide attack targeted a rally of the country’s largest political party in the province. — **dpa**

A loud GOP minority pledges to make trouble on Ukraine military aid



Robert Draper

The writer is a sourced reporter covering politics in books and as a magazine journalist.

Ukraine funding has gone unmentioned in the \$4.5 trillion in spending cuts House Republicans are demanding in exchange for raising the debt ceiling

A congressional delegation of five Republicans and two Democrats met with representatives of Ukraine’s parliament this month in Poland, where the Ukrainians thanked the delegation for US aid and asked for F-16 fighter jets to help in the war against Russia. Three members of the delegation described the meeting as cordial and informative.

“I just got back from meeting with the Ukrainian Parliament in Poland, where they demanded F-35s and thought it was an obligation for every American to pay \$10 a month to fund their war,” first-term conservative Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., wrote in a heated email to this reporter three days later. Ukrainians are not asking for the more advanced and expensive F-35s, but regardless, Luna said the US’ role in the conflict could “potentially start WWII.”

Ukraine ranked low on her constituents’ concerns, she added, vowing to brief her colleagues about the encounter.

Luna is among the boisterous proponents in Congress of former President Donald Trump’s “America first” world view that regards financial commitments overseas with extreme scepticism. Like Trump, they maintain that every dollar spent on Ukraine — and there has been \$113 billion for the war so far — is a dubious investment of taxpayer money that could have been better used on domestic priorities, like fighting the spread of fentanyl. Senior Republicans who support the war and maintain the hawkish traditions of the establishment GOP fear the movement will gain momentum as the conflict grinds on and Trump’s candidacy consumes the 2024 spotlight.

For the moment, America’s commitment to Ukraine seems resilient. President Joe Biden announced an additional \$1.2 billion in military aid last week. Ukraine funding has gone unmentioned in the \$4.5 trillion in spending cuts House Republicans are demanding in exchange for raising the debt ceiling. A House resolution introduced in February by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., aimed at halting further aid to Ukraine attracted only Luna and nine other signatories among the chamber’s 222 Republicans.

An amendment by Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., to establish a special inspector general to oversee Ukraine-related expenditures drew 26 supporters among 49 Republican senators. And one week before Luna met with the Ukrainians, Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who previously



Discarded equipment and rifles from wounded and dead Ukrainian soldiers are piled at a medical evacuation compound on the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, in eastern Ukraine.

declared that Ukraine would not receive a “blank check” from the United States, emphatically told a Russian reporter that “we will continue to support” Ukraine in the war effort.

But there is evidence to suggest that the anti-Ukraine flank of the Republican Party is playing not to the fringe but to the heart of the party’s base. A survey last month of registered voters by Kristen Soltis Anderson’s Echelon Insights found that 52 per cent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents do not think US interests are at stake in Ukraine. Similarly, a survey in March conducted by Axios/Ipsos found that 57 per cent of Republicans opposed providing weapons and financial support to Ukraine.

“It’s insane that so few Republican members are willing to say what I’m willing to say,” Sen. J.D. Vance, R-Ohio and a vocal opponent of aid to Ukraine, said in a recent interview. “Clearly, something is broken down about the democratic opinion-making process.”

He added, “I’d love to hear McCarthy be more sceptical of aiding Ukraine, because I think that’s where most of his voters are.”

Vance said his opposition to aiding Ukraine came from enlisting at 18 as a Marine in the Iraq War. “I feel this

deep sense of shame and regret for having gotten caught up in all of the social pressure to support the war and to think that it would have led to a good outcome,” he said.

When Trump denounced the war as a presidential candidate in 2015, Vance recalled that “I wanted to stand up and cry, because I was so happy that somebody finally said it.”

Gaetz, whose conservative district includes an Air Force base and a naval air station, said the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had devastated his community. “I saw the impact up close,” he said, “and I came to the view that this just isn’t worth it.”

Gaetz said that his party’s dominant foreign policy ideology for the past three decades, neoconservatism, “has done our country harm.”

Hawley echoed Gaetz and said that the legacy of neoconservatism, an interventionist foreign policy, continued to pervade Republicans’ policymaking approach. “My party took a serious wrong turn in the 1990s,” Hawley said. “And in D.C., you still see strong remnants of that thinking when it comes to Ukraine. But that’s not where the voters are.”

But some well-known Democratic anti-war voices reject the parallel

between attacking Afghanistan and Iraq and lending military assistance to Ukraine. Among them is Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., whom Gaetz now describes as a “folk hero” for casting the lone vote against authorising President George W. Bush to use military force after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Lee, who received death threats after that vote, said that in Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, “we see a dictatorship attacking a democracy. And we need to be on the side of democracy. Whenever you see innocent people being killed by a war criminal, you want to do what you can to support them.”

Lee declined to ascribe a motive for the dovishness in the GOP, but other Democrats did not.

“If you look at where the political energy is within the Republican Party right now, I’d say it’s with what I call the Tucker Carlson/Viktor Orban/Donald Trump wing of the party,” said Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md. and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, referring to the bombastic former Fox News host and the autocratic prime minister of Hungary. “And among that group, there are some very influential voices, starting with Trump, who believe that the idea of ‘America first’ translates into America retreating from the rest of the world.”

A ‘Canadian Armageddon’ sets parts of Western Canada on fire



Dan Bilefsky

The Writer is an international correspondent for The New York Times, based in Montreal.

Armageddon, like a bad horror film,” said Clarke, a 37-year-old hair stylist, standing outside her truck, a large hamper of dirty laundry piled in the back.

As acrid smoke filled the air, turning the sky around her sleepy hometown, Fox Creek, Alberta, a garish blood orange, Nicole Clarke said she felt a sense of terror.

With no time to collect family photographs, she grabbed her two young children, hopped into her pickup truck, and sped away, praying she wouldn’t drive into the blaze’s menacing path.

“This feels like a Canadian

In a country revered for placid landscapes and predictability, weeks of out-of-control wildfires raging across western Canada have ushered in a potent sense of fear, threatening a region that is the epicentre of the country’s oil and gas sector.

Climate research suggests that heat and drought associated with global warming are major reasons for the increase in bigger and stronger fires.

Amid frequent fire updates dominating national television news broadcasts, the blazes have also helped unite a vast and sometimes polarised nation, with volunteers, firefighters and army reservists from other provinces rushing in to lend a hand.

Roughly 29,000 people in Alberta have been forced from their homes by the recent bout of wildfires, though that number has been cut in half in recent days as fires subsided.

Clarke said her family had been staying in cheap motels since they were ordered about a week ago to evacuate. But she and her boyfriend were unemployed and money was quickly running out.



Two burned trucks sit on the edge of a charred forest in Drayton Valley, Alberta, Canada.

Roughly 29,000 people in Alberta have been forced from their homes by the recent bout of wildfires, though that number has been cut in half in recent days as fires subsided

“I don’t know if I’ll have a home to return to,” she added, sobbing. The fires have produced such thick smoke that during recess, children in some towns have remained in their classrooms rather than risk smoke inhalation outside. Dozens of residents left in such a frantic panic that they left pets behind.

On Highway 43, a long stretch of Alberta highway peppered by small, evacuated towns, the thick layer of smoke blanketing the road conjured the feeling of a dystopia.

With helicopters hovering and dropping water, police cars with flashing lights blocked parts of the highway as fires approached the road. Residents trying to return to homes they hoped were still intact commiserated as they were forced to turn back.

Fires have broken out throughout western Canada, including British Columbia, but hardest hit has been neighboring Alberta, a proud oil and gas producing province sometimes referred to as “the Texas of the North,” which has declared a state of emergency. More than 94 active wildfires were burning.

How to make the best of your holiday



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

Every summer millions of people around the globe take holidays either locally or abroad. Some do it to escape the hot weather, while others enjoy a break from work or travel to see their families.

Travelling can boost your mental well-being since it gives you time off work and daily stress, it is also a chance to get closer to nature, meet new people and widen your perspective in life.

This year I decided to take an early summer break to avoid the overpriced airline tickets and hotel prices and to enjoy nature without the crowds of other holidaymakers. However, this came with new challenges.

I was travelling to Bosnia and since the holiday season has not started there were no direct flights

and the shortest connection was over six hours of transit at Istanbul airport, which meant losing a full day just for the journey and arriving exhausted at our hotel in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital.

Since it was early May the weather was cooler and it rained most days so we needed to wear jackets and take umbrellas.

Some of the attractions had severe flooding and the roads to the parks and waterfalls were closed which meant we had to spend most of the time at the city parks and take refuge at shopping malls when it rained.

Overall we managed to remain positive and look at the brighter side of things. We had a wonderful tour guide who spoke good Arabic and told us about the history of

‘TRAVELLING CAN BOOST YOUR MENTAL WELL-BEING SINCE IT GIVES YOU TIME OFF FROM WORK AND DAILY STRESS. IT IS ALSO A CHANCE TO GET CLOSER TO NATURE, MEET NEW PEOPLE AND WIDEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE IN LIFE’

his country, about the war and the tunnel of life and took us to beautiful towns and villages up in the mountains where we experienced nature at its best. Reflecting on my experience I thought of sharing a few tips with you so you can all make the best of your holiday.

First, plan well and plan early to get the best airline and hotel prices. If you are taking different flight connections make sure you read the details as sometimes you will be required to collect your luggage during transit and check in again to your connection flight.

This would take time and you may be asked to pay for a visa simply to collect your luggage to join the following flight.

Find out if your booking includes a weight for luggage or if you have to pay for that separately. Read reviews about your hotel and the services available. Take cash with you and a debit or credit card so you can have access to more money if needed.

In my opinion, having a flexible and friendly tour guide is essential

for a relaxed holiday as you will be spending a significant amount of time together and it's important to trust him and feel comfortable about the service.

Most countries offer halal food but it's important to ask if you are not sure. Beware of safety issues and avoid getting into conflicts or arguments with the locals.

Respect the costume of the country and the heritage especially when it comes to discussing historical events that can bring painful memories. Make sure to enjoy traditional food and try to relax and breathe fresh air.

Be thankful to god that he granted you health and wealth so you could explore new places and learn about new cultures and have a good time.

US debt ceiling crisis dogs Biden at G7

SEBASTIAN SMITH

The sight of a tired-looking top White House domestic policy adviser in a Hiroshima hotel said it all: President Joe Biden may be on the other side of the world but his political fight back home over the debt ceiling has followed him.

Bruce Reed, spotted in a tracksuit having a late breakfast at the luxury hotel where Biden was staying during the G7 summit, is the White House deputy chief of staff with a focus on issues inside the United States.

Instead, for the last two days he has trailed the 80-year-old Democratic president around this southern Japanese city, “updating POTUS on the status of the talks”, as a senior official put it.

Those “talks” -- the White House demanding that the annual extension of the government’s borrowing authority proceed in order to avoid a US default and Republicans demanding Democrats first agree to slash spending -- were something everyone at the G7 wanted updates on.

“It is definitely a subject of interest here at the G7,” National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters on Saturday, exuding his customary intense calm.

Sullivan insisted that the debt talks had not been “generating alarm or a kind of vibration in the room” at the summit. And Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre insisted that it’s not a “hair-on-fire type of situation”.

Yet those reassurances belie the White House’s own apocalyptic warnings.

“Republicans are taking the economy hostage and pushing us to the brink of default, which could cost millions of jobs and tip the country into recession after two years of steady job and wage growth,” Biden communications director Ben LaBolt said on Saturday.

Biden has spent the entire summit trying to walk that same fine line. On the one hand, he wants the world to know that everything will be OK. On the other, he’s signalling that he’s extremely worried.

The crisis prompted Biden to cancel half of his planned Asia trip, thereby allowing him to get on Air Force One and start the return trip to Washington on Sunday.

This meant scrapping what would have been a historic first trip by a sitting US president to the remote island nation of Papua New Guinea, as well as a heavyweight diplomatic stop for a regional Quad group meeting in Australia.

Biden also skipped much of the G7 dinner on an idyllic island near Hiroshima on Friday.

The White House said Biden was going back to his hotel to check with negotiators in Washington, where it was morning. He’d already touched base by secure video link as the team was finishing up the previous evening and he was on the phone with them again on Saturday. — AFP

As world’s poor face ‘compounding crises’, what could curb risks?



Laurie Goering

The writer is Climate Change Editor for the Thomson Reuters Foundation based in London

In nations from Somalia to Pakistan, the world’s poorest and most fragile communities are facing the harshest impacts of climate change - a reality that is driving worsening poverty, potential for conflict and resentment against major polluters.

But finding innovative ways to get finance directly to those communities, to build resilience that is based on local knowledge and desires, could save cash and lives, and protect a global humanitarian system increasingly overwhelmed by surging need.

Right now, “there’s a real sense of compounding crisis”, with poorer nations battling a combination of climate shocks, heavy debt and economic woes, said David Miliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, a global humanitarian aid and development organisation.

“Countries are really feeling they’re on the precipice,” Miliband, a former British foreign secretary, said at a British Academy panel this month on the humanitarian impacts of climate change.

But rethinking the mission of global development banks, ensuring development, climate resilience and humanitarian efforts work in a joined-up way, and letting local people have a real voice in what needs changing - and the cash to change it - can help, experts said.

“There are solutions and innovations to be found that can be quite low-cost and can build up from what people are doing already,” said Melissa Leach, director of the Institute of Development Studies at Britain’s University of Sussex.

“If we actually look to communities, households, people - including those living in fragile and conflict-affected states - they’ve actually been living with uncertainties for a very, very long time,” she said.

That gives them “a depth of knowledge about living in a resilient way, responding and adapting to uncertainty”.

The number of people in need of humanitarian aid globally has tripled in the last half-decade, to 340 million, Miliband said. About 90 per cent of those live in just 20 countries, often



Right now there’s a real sense of compounding crisis.

those facing significant climate shocks or embroiled in some of the 54 civil conflicts around the world, he said.

But soaring demand for help is overwhelming humanitarian aid systems, with organisations such as the UN World Food Programme (WFP) increasingly struggling to raise the growing amounts of money needed, leaving more people hungry.

The combined weight of climate shocks, heavy debt, rising poverty and hunger, and other pressures, such as the economic impacts of Russia’s attack of Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic, mean once short-term humanitarian demands are turning into longer ones, experts said.

“This is creating huge challenges for the global humanitarian system,” which is set up to provide short-term help, Leach said.

Filling the growing gaps will require a rethink of how help is provided, with a new climate change “loss and damage” fund established at COP27 one part of the picture, analysts said.

But finding ways to ensure need doesn’t continue to skyrocket - such as investing now in things like social protection systems, which help buffer a range of shocks - is also key, they said.

“How can we reconcile the immediate need to act on the humanitarian crisis and at the same time shift now towards a more sustainable and resilient system that will see us through the next 200 years

or more?,” asked Edward Davey, co-director of the World Resources Institute in Britain.

He pointed to efforts within the WFP to trial “anticipatory action” programmes, which give those in the path of a predicted climate shock cash in advance to try to protect their assets, avoiding later heavy spending on aid.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that every dollar it has spent on anticipatory action has produced \$7 in benefits, and avoided losses for families.

But cash for such trials is drying up as more immediate aid demands soar, draining coffers.

“The prevention agenda, the resilience agenda, is going to be left behind. There’s no budget space to experiment,” Gernot Laganda, WFP’s climate and disaster risk reduction chief, warned at COP27 last year.

Among the keys to countering rising fragility is revamping the spending of big multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank, in an effort to drive more money toward cutting climate change and building resilience to its impacts, especially in poorer countries.

The so-called “Bridgetown Agenda” to reform the banks, championed by Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley and French President Emmanuel Macron, also aims to ease the crippling debt burden on many poorer nations, freeing fiscal space for climate action.

Listen to a child, to make an adult...

WHO would be a ‘fly on the wall?’ I sometimes feel that to be the best you can be, whether as a family or an individual, a ‘no consequences’ family discussion may be cathartic and empowering at the same time. What do you think?

You see, I’m not certain that within the family unit, we all know or appreciate each other’s strengths, know, or understand each other’s weaknesses, or even, in some cases, are certain of each other’s roles within the family dynamic. In fact, especially as our lives are evolving so quickly during our years, when we go from being nursed by mama, to being nurtured as a pupil to studentship, to higher education and becoming an adult.

We go from dislike to like, because there is, as a child, a very fine line between the two, to admiration, from a look to a love, from the joy of that love to togetherness, to parenthood. We go from “do this and do that,” to “please do this and please do that,” through the frustrations of “I asked you to do this and that,” to the sweet surrender of a rare, “Oh, you shouldn’t have...”

All the time we are changing, and we are changing not only ourselves but how much we know of each other. It’s no wonder that especially among parents the often-heard sentiment, accompanied by a long sigh... of “I just don’t know them anymore.”

Of course, if we think about time passing, growing up, and the entire conundrum of life’s constant changes, the realities and consistencies are few and far between. Our faith doesn’t change, our lineage can never change, our culture and traditions evolve, but very slowly embracing each generation, and there is the stumbling block to our parental potential to having all the answers, generation. We will always rarely be any less than a generation, twenty or so years, behind our offspring, and in today’s world, that twenty years sometimes seems like a dozen lifetimes away, a universe, a galaxy away from who and what we were, and still are.

This gap, this yawning abyss between



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

our world and that of our children, is what makes parenting so difficult, because our experiences have so little relevance to our conceptions of what their experiences will be. Suffice it to say however, that though mankind and technology are shooting for the stars, our kid’s journeys may be less fraught with danger than ours, but with so many more obstacles.

Childcare and education expert Maria Montessori said, “Never help a child with a task where they feel they can succeed.” So, it’s incumbent upon us therefore, as parents to be truly aware of the directions these young people’s lives are taking, and that awareness allows us while we are preparing them for life ahead, to be there, at the right time, and in the right place, to catch them when they fall... as they almost certainly will. Not to say “I told you so,” but to be whatever they need at that moment.

Oh, I know, some of you are thinking, “I took some stick when I was young, and it did me no harm.” Or the old adages that the ‘school of hard knocks,’ and the ‘university of life, will teach them.’ Well, maybe, maybe not. But do you really want to see your kids with a succession of bloody noses, split lips, scraped elbows and skinned knees? Of course not. Yet you would see life teach them its harshest lessons when you have the power to make a difference? No, I thought not.

So how can we help them navigate this Amazonian new age? Be aware, ask questions, maintain an interest, but above all be a practical and pragmatic listener. Young people may dislike being questioned, but they hate being told! So be good listeners, and having listened, and knowing what you want to say... wait until you are asked for your thoughts, and if you are clear, concise, and precise, all will be well.

Some fairy tales, some dreams, do come true... Princesses do happen, as do astronauts, and heroes, but most of our kids have slightly less lofty aims, that we are perfectly placed to support by enabling them, and sharing their journeys. Not leading them but inspiring them. Listening... to save them.

WE GO FROM
DISLIKE TO LIKE,
BECAUSE THERE
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BETWEEN THE
TWO

RETRIEVING THE DAMAGED



Residents transport an electric appliance from a flooded house in the village of Ghibullo, near Ravenna, after floodwaters hit the Emilia-Romagna region. The toll from floods that have devastated Italy’s Emilia-Romagna region rose to 14 on May 19, amid calls for the government to revive an abandoned project to mitigate the impact of natural disasters. – AFP

Half a century of animal liberation is not enough

Fifty years ago, my first article arguing that it is wrong to treat animals as we do appeared in The New York Review of Books. Two years later my book Animal Liberation was published, subsequently to be credited with triggering the modern animal-rights movement.

Animal Liberation contains both ethical arguments and factual descriptions of what we do to animals. The ethical arguments have stood up well to nearly 50 years of discussion. Similar perspectives are now supported by many philosophers, including those who hold views that are very different from my own utilitarian position: Christine Korsgaard, a Kantian; feminist philosophers like Carol Adams, Alice Crary, and Lori Gruen; Mark Rowlands, who takes a social contract view of animal rights; and Martha Nussbaum, who is closer to Aristotle.

On the other hand, the factual descriptions in Animal Liberation of what we do to animals have long ceased to capture current conditions accurately. So, 18 months ago, I started a complete update and revision of the book, which will be published this month under the title Animal Liberation Now.

In writing what is, in effect, a new



PETER SINGER

The writer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the nonprofit organisation The Life You Can Save

book on our treatment of animals, I could not avoid the question: have we made progress in our attitudes towards animals, and our treatment of them, since 1975?

Many people are concerned about cruelty to animals, but focus on how we treat our companion animals, especially cats and dogs, who number about 840 million worldwide. That number is dwarfed by the approximately 200 billion vertebrate animals raised for food in appalling conditions in factory farms. In any objective assessment of the lives, and deaths, of animals under human control, the welfare of intensively farmed animals far outweighs the significance of how we treat our companion animals.

Of these vertebrate animals raised for food in close confinement, about 124 billion are fish. There is now strong evidence that fish can feel pain, and there is no justification for ignoring that pain.

Moreover, difficult as it may be to conceive of 124 billion individual fish, the total number of fish who suffer because of intensive fish farming is even greater. An estimated 460 billion-1.1 trillion fish are hauled

out of the ocean every year, ground up into fishmeal, and fed to carnivorous fish. A typical farmed salmon has eaten 147 fish before it is itself killed.

After fish, chickens are the most consumed vertebrate: about 70 billion are raised and killed each year, typically in large sheds containing about 20,000 birds each. Today’s chickens are bred to grow so fast that their immature leg bones cannot easily support their weight, causing them chronic pain for the last fifth of their lives.

For that reason, John Webster, an emeritus professor at the University of Bristol who is

also a veterinarian and a widely respected expert on the welfare of farmed animals, has described modern intensive chicken production as “the single most severe, systematic example of man’s inhumanity to another sentient animal.” (For my part, I find it hard to say whether intensive fish farming or intensive chicken farming is worse.)

Because of the growth and further intensification of animal production, humans inflict more suffering on animals today than they did in 1975. Nevertheless, the trend since 1975 is not all negative. The idea that animals should have rights has gone

from being ridiculed to being widely held. In many countries, safeguarding animal welfare is seen as an important government responsibility.

In Europe, reforms have reduced the suffering of hundreds of millions of animals raised for food or used in research.

It is now illegal in the 27 countries of the European Union and in the United Kingdom to keep egg-laying hens in the standard bare wire cages that, in 1975, prevented nearly all hens from spreading their wings fully or laying their eggs in the nest that hens instinctively seek if given the opportunity.

The same countries also prohibit keeping breeding sows and veal calves in individual crates that prevent them from turning around or moving more than a single step. Regrettably, most other parts of the world lag behind Europe in this respect.

That includes the United States, where, in the absence of any federal legislation to regulate how farmed animals can be raised, billions of them still live in conditions that have not improved over the past 50 years.

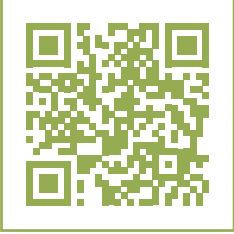
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Animal Liberation contains both ethical arguments and factual descriptions of what we do to animals.

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CHAMPIONS THUMP MUSANNAH 3-0 TO COMPLETE SEASON DOUBLE

Al Nahda clinch Omantel League title

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 20

Al Nahda team secured a remarkable victory in the Omantel League, claiming the premier Oman football league title for the fourth time in its history. In a thrilling match held at Al Buraimi Stadium, Al Nahda defeated Al Musannah with an impressive scoreline of 3-0 in the 25th round on Friday night.

Al Nahda ensured the 2022-23 season's OL crown by reaching 55 points with one more match to go. Second-placed Al Suwaiq, who were held by Bahla 4-4 on Friday, remained six points behind on 49 points with no chance of overtaking Al Nahda.

Al Nahda showcased their exceptional skills as they dominated the game, with Ahmed al Kaabi scoring a goal in the 15th minute, followed by Ali al Rashidi in the 51st minute and Al Mundhir al Alawi in the 88th minute.

This achievement marks a double triumph for Al Nahda, as they were also crowned champions of the His Majesty's

Cup earlier this year, after a remarkable victory against Al Seeb in the final match.

In another eventful match, Al Suwaiq faced Bahla in the 25th round, resulting in a thrilling 4-4 draw at Bahla Stadium. Despite their strong performance, Al Suwaiq continued to drop points in the tournament's final matches.

Bahla's goals came from Ahiro Carter, who scored from a penalty kick in the 18th minute, Walid al Mesli with two goals in the 21st and 29th minutes and Abdul Hameed al Mandhari in the added time of first half (45th + 3 minutes). Al Suwaiq responded with goals from Mamadou in the 44th minute and Essam al Subhi in the 60th minute. Mamadou then secured two additional goals in the 63rd and 88th minutes.

SEEB FIGHT FOR SECOND SPOT

The runners-up position was still up for grabs as Al Seeb, finishing in third place, defeated Al Nasr with a convincing 3-0 scoreline in another match at Al Seeb Stadium.

Mohammad al Habsi, Abdulaziz al



Muqbali, and Mohsen al Ghassani scored the goals for Al Seeb, narrowing the points gap with Al Suwaiq to just one point.

With Al Seeb now at 48 points, just one point behind Al Suwaiq's 49 points, the final round of the league will determine the runners-up position.

The Oman Football Association recognises the significance of the runners-up position, as it determines the second participant in the Super Cup match. Since

Al Nahda, the league champions, are also the Sultan's Cup winners this season, the OL runners-up team will earn the opportunity to compete in the Super Cup.

AL RUSTAQ, DHOFAR WIN

Al Rustaq defeated Al Bashayer 2-0 in the match that was played at Nazwa Complex. Al Rustaq scored two goals through Musab al Maamari and Ibrahim Awad bringing their tally to 43 points in fourth place.

In another thrilling encounter, Dhofar blanked Al Oruba 2-0.

Hussein al Shahri and Lubaga were the goal scorers for Dhofar, bringing their tally to 42 points, placing them in fifth position, just one point behind Al Rustaq in fourth place.

The upcoming 26th round will prove crucial in determining the fourth-place team as Dhofar face Al Ittihad, who have already been officially relegated to the First Division League after the 24th round. Al Rusatq will face Sur.

Sohar team tied with its counterpart Oman Club 1-1 at Sohar Stadium.

The result deprived Sohar (37 points - sixth) and Oman Club (36 points - eighth) any chance to catch up to top five in the final round.

Walid al Matroushi scored the goal for Sohar, while Daoud al Jabri netted for Oman Club.

Additionally, Sur secured a 3-1 victory against Al Ittihad at Al Ittihad Stadium in Salalah.

Mohammad Rabie, Mohammad al Najashi, and Sultan al Ramadi scored the goals for Sur in the match, while Al Ittihad managed to score one goal through Kay Wade.

With this result, Sur's points tally rose to 27, solidifying their position in 11th place, which ensures their survival in the league. The victory provided Sur with renewed motivation to compete for the 10th place, especially after Al Nasr's defeat to Al Seeb, freezing their tally at 30 points.

To secure the 10th place, Sur need to win their final round match against OL champions Al Nahda, and rely on Al Nasr's defeat against Bahla, who currently occupy the seventh position.

Rune rallies past Ruud to reach Rome final



Denmark's Holger Rune celebrates after defeating Norway's Casper Ruud during their semifinal of the ATP Rome Open tournament at Foro Italico in Rome on Saturday. — AFP

ROME: Holger Rune fought from a set and a break down on Saturday to book a place in the Italian Open final with a 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-2 defeat of fourth seed Casper Ruud.

The 20-year-old Dane established Scandinavian superiority as he overhauled the Norwegian who played the Roland Garros final a year ago against Rafael Nadal and has two semifinals in Rome.

Rune will bid for the title on Sunday against the winner from Daniil Medvedev and Stefanos Tsitsipas, who play their semifinal later.

Ruud lost for the first time in five meetings with his rival, with all of their matches being played on clay.

Rune, who knocked out top seed Novak Djokovic in the quarterfinals, said that he relaxed when he thought all was lost on court.

"When I was down, I told my-

self I had nothing to lose, he would probably win," he said.

"I told myself to play freely, play aggressive as it would likely be my last set.

"That was the key to the comeback - I'm super-happy."

Rune said his game has lifted at the best moments this week in the capital.

"I've played some of my best tennis in the last two matches. It's so difficult to play the top guys, I had to find my best tennis.

"I only found it at the end, that's how I was able to turn it around."

MEDICAL TIMEOUT

Ruud needed 69 minutes to win a grinding first set with the Norwegian dominating the tiebreaker to take the early lead after failing to convert on three break points in the sixth game.

Rune, occasionally something

of a loose cannon for his outbursts of temper, began to unravel a bit in the second set with Ruud holding his nerve as the deadlock continued.

The youngster lost serve to trail 2-3 and suddenly called for the physio, who rubbed his right shoulder for the three-minute medical timeout.

But that pause may have turned the match around, with Rune suddenly coming to life as he levelled at a set apiece and ran away with the third to advance in a light drizzle.

Rune closed out victory in just under two and three-quarter hours as he broke Ruud for a fourth time.

The Dane will be playing his eighth ATP final (4-3) and his third this season. He won in Paris Bercy last November and was runner-up to Andrey Rublev in Monte Carlo in April. — AFP

Hetmyer, Jaiswal dump Curran's Punjab out

DHARAMSALA, India: Shimron Hetmyer and Yashasvi Jaiswal starred as Rajasthan Royals dumped Punjab Kings out of the IPL on Friday, capping a poor season for the league's most expensive ever player Sam Curran.

The nail-biting four-wicket win in Dharamsala gave Rajasthan, last season's runners-up, hope of qualifying for the knockout phase although their fate depends on other matches this weekend.

Curran, who cost Punjab a hefty \$2.23 million, fell one run short of what would have been only his second 50 of the tournament as Punjab put on 187-5 with Navdeep Saini taking 3-40 for Rajasthan.

This was after Punjab were in trouble at 50-4 after 6.3 overs when Saini sent Liam Livingstone's off stump flying, the English big-hitter managing just nine and captain Shikhar Dhawan 17.

Curran's valiant 49 came off 31 balls with four fours and two sixes included vital partnerships with Jitesh Sharma (44) and Shahrukh Khan (41) that rescued Punjab's innings.

In reply for the Royals, Curran's England team-mate Jos Buttler fell for his latest duck of his lacklustre season, trapped leg-before to a vicious inswinger by Kagiso Rabada.

But Jaiswal, the IPL's second-highest run scorer this year

behind Faf du Plessis, and who last week hit a 13-ball 50, continued in his stellar form with yet another half-century, off 36 balls.

TENSE FINALE

Rajasthan captain Sanju Samson departed for just two to Rahul Chahar but rock-solid Devdutt Padikkal made 51 off 30 before falling to a stunning catch on the circle by Harpreet Brar off Arshdeep Singh.

Hetmyer almost saw the Royals home in a tense final phase that saw the West Indian exchange sharp words with Curran when he was given out caught behind, only to be reprieved on review.

"It is nice to have someone saying something, giving me a little bit more confidence and a little bit more energy to execute," Hetmyer said afterwards, adding that what Curran said to him "is not anything I can disclose".

Curran, who leaked 46 runs in the match, finally got his man and his only wicket in the 19th over, with Hetmyer finally departing for 46 off 28 after a brilliant catch by Dhawan at cover.

But Hetmyer and Riyan Parag (20) had done enough, with impact player Dhruv Jurel (10) finishing the job by clubbing a six back over Chahar's head with two balls remaining.

The win in their final group-stage game by Rajasthan puts them in fifth position with 14 points. — AFP



Chennai Super Kings' Devon Conway (R) and Ruturaj Gaikwad run between the wickets during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match between Delhi Capitals and Chennai Super Kings at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

Conway, Gaikwad power Chennai Super Kings into IPL play-offs

NEW DELHI: New Zealand's Devon Conway and Ruturaj Gaikwad smashed half-centuries to fire Chennai Super Kings into the IPL play-offs with a thumping 77-run win over Delhi Capitals on Saturday.

The left-handed Conway (87) and Gaikwad (79) put on a blazing opening stand of 141 to steer Chennai to a mammoth 223-3 after electing to bat first in Delhi.

Skipper David Warner hit a valiant 86 but Chennai kept down Delhi, who are coached by Ricky Ponting, to 146-9 and book their spot in the top four.

They join holders and table-toppers Gujarat Titans, who are assured of a top-two finish.

Four-time winners Chennai have finished the group stage with eight wins and can stay as the second-ranked team in the table, depending on the day's second result between Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants.

The season remains special for Chennai skipper MS Dhoni, who is believed to be playing his last season and has attracted huge crowds wearing the teams' yellow as a tribute to the legendary cricketer.

Dhoni, 41, though has kept the fans guessing and still not clarified on his swansong.

Delhi, who were the first team to get eliminated from the play-off race, bowed out with nine losses and five wins.

Batters set up victory for Chennai after Gaikwad and Conway, in his 52-ball blitz, got cracking on the opposition bowlers with fours and sixes.

Chetan Sakariya sent back Gaikwad, who hit seven sixes in his 50-ball knock, but Conway kept up the charge in another attacking partnership of 54 with

Shivam Dube, who hit 22.

Dube's wicket raised the noise as Dhoni walked in with thunderous applause and stood unbeaten with Ravindra Jadeja, who hit a seven-ball 20.

Delhi were never in the chase as Warner played a lone hand in his attempt to drive the teams' reply in his 58-ball knock but got little support from the other end.

Pace spearhead Deepak Chahar took three wickets while Sri Lankan duo of Matheesha Pathirana (fast bowler) and Maheesh Theekshana (off-spinner) took two each. —AFP



Rajasthan Royals' Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match between Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals. — AFP

Super Sunday brings double excitement



MI VS SRH AT MUMBAI

TEAM INFO - This is an opportunity for both these teams to forget about everything that has happened through the season and finish on a high. Mumbai have an opportunity to qualify, which depends on others' performance, hence thinking a lot about it is of no use and its best if the game is enjoyed and, in the process, if things work your way, then why not?

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA - SRH are eliminated and this win would mean that they would not finish on the last spot. MI are in a complicated situation. The only way that they can qualify is if, MI win this game and RCB lose the last game. If Mumbai lose this game, they are out of the contention with their poor NRR.

PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER - Both these teams clashed in the 25th match of this year's IPL at Hyderabad. Put into bat first, Mumbai piled up 192/5 on back of Cameron Green's 64 not out and Tilak Varma's 37. On a batting paradise, Mayank Agarwal played a slow 48 as wickets fell around him. Although a blistering knock of 36 from Heinrich Klassen did bring SRH back into the game for a while, but after his wicket,

the teams couldn't stand to the scoreboard pressure and collapsed to 178 all out, falling short by 14 runs.

Head-to-Head - Played - 20; Won by MI - 11; Won by SRH - 9

MI possible 12 - R Sharma, I Kishan, C Green, S Yadav, N Wadhwa, T David, H Shokeen, C Jordan, P Chawla, J Behrendorff, A Madhwal, V Vinod.

SRH possible 12 - A Sharma, R Tripathi, A Markram, H Klassen, H Brooks, G Philips, A Samad, K Tyagi, M Dagar, B Kumar, U Malik, T Natarajan, M Markande.

Pitch & Weather Report - The pitch at Wankhede Stadium is a wonderful track to bat on. The batters can hit through the line right from the start of their innings. Short boundaries on either side help the batters and fans can expect a high-scoring affair on Sunday. Cloudy afternoon will control the temperature in Mumbai and is expected to hover between 28 to 33 degrees Celsius. Last 10 overs would be under lights and dew could play a role in them.

Match Prediction - Mumbai have finally found their momentum in the later half of the tournament and have caught up with other teams. Although, bowling has been the concern of Mumbai Indians and that's what has worried them for most of the time.

It is the Mumbai wicket that should generally suit the SRH team's free flowing and stress-free game play. SRH would come in to express themselves and that could be costly for



Mumbai in a must-win situation.

RCB VS GT AT BENGALURU

TEAM INFO - GT have redefined the way T20 cricket should be played and the combination that they have set since yesterday has been incredible. The role of a jolly coach (Ashish Nehra) and the importance of the captain (Hardik Pandya), to give space to the support staff to plan has been wonderfully portrayed. RCB have been one of the most unpredictable teams and they have stood up to their expectations this year as well. Faf and Kohli

have been an incredible opening pair, but the middle order and lower middle order have raised a lot of concern. For a change, their bowling line-up has stood up to the expectations and has done an incredible job.

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA - GT have already finished the league stage on the first position and that's going to stay undisturbed, irrespective of the results of this game.

RCB on the other hand will have all the statistics before they get into this match, since it's the last game of the league. On most

occasions, if RCB win their last game, they should be going through, unless and until Mumbai Indians have a big win in the afternoon game. If RCB and MI lose then it could go on to NRR between RCB and RR.

If LSG hadn't won yesterday then both MI and RCB could have qualified with a win.

Head-to-Head - Played - 2; Won by RCB - 1; Won by GT - 1

RCB possible 12 - V Kohli, F Du Plessis, G Maxwell, M Lomror, A Rawat, S Ahmed, M Bracewell, W Parnell, H Patel, K Sharma, M Siraj, D Karthik

GT possible 12 - S Gill, W Saha, S Sudarshan, H Pandya, D Miller, D Shanaka, R Tewatia, M Sharma, R Khan, M Shami, N Ahmed, Y Dayal

Pitch & Weather Report - The Bengaluru ground is known to be one of the favourite venues for the batters. The true wicket allows the batters to play through the line and the short boundaries give value for miss hit shots as well. Even 220 is not considered to be a safe score. Although there is a 55-per cent chance of rain between 3 pm and 9 pm, which could very well mean that RCB would watch the afternoon game desperately and hope for SRH to win it.

Match Prediction - Gujarat are expected to be the best team in the tournament with their balance and team build-up. Although, since GT have already qualified, it's most likely that many senior players would be rested and almost a B-team of GT would be given a chance, which would make RCB as favourites to begin with.

Driveshaft breakage and punctures push
Al Attiyah into second place

Co-driver Ata al Hmoud is first Jordanian
to win home event since 2004

Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri beats Jordan's
Shaker Jweihan to Merc2 win

A B D U L L A H A L R A W A H I

First Omani to win Jordan Rally



DEAD SEA, Jordan: Abdullah al Rawahi became the first Omani ever to win the Jordan Rally after a dramatic fightback by Nasser bin Saleh al Attiyah was thwarted by punctures on the closing stages of a pulsating Jordan Rally on Saturday.

Al Rawahi and local driver Ata al Hmoud had taken a lead of 2min 33.5sec into the final six special stages in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas in their Skoda Fabia Evo. But Al Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel launched a full-scale fightback during the morning and reduced the deficit to 1min 20sec at the midday service point.

The pendulum appeared to have swung in the Qatari's favour when the Oman Rally Team crew clocked out of service three minutes late and incurred a 30-second time penalty, reducing the deficit to 50 seconds. But Al Attiyah was forced to change a punctured tyre on the first test after the restart and then punctured again with Al Rawahi reaching the finish 7min 04.2sec clear of the struggling defending champion.

With the pressure off on the final stage, it enabled Al Rawahi to secure his third career Merc win and Al Hmoud became the first Jordanian to win his home rally since Amjad Farrah and Khalid Zakaria

prevailed on a dramatic final stage way back in 2004. Al Rawahi's third success drew him level with the late Bjorn Waldegard, Jean-Pierre Nasrallah and Abdullah Bakhshab in the regional Hall of Fame.

AMAZING FEELING

Al Rawahi said: "It's been a very tough weekend for us. The stages were really nice and we enjoyed them. We managed to win this rally. The second day was difficult, actually starting first on the road. Nasser was trying to keep the pressure but we held on. Well done to my team. They have worked really hard this weekend. It's an amazing feeling."

"When I started rallying my first rally was here in Jordan, so it's a big thing for me. I have been gaining so much experience against the champion. Every rally we learn a lot, especially from the pressure we were in this weekend. We won the first rally and now this one. We will keep pushing and see what happens."

Al Attiyah added: "This is my favourite race but, this year, it was not easy. Day one and day two, we were struggling a little bit with the problems. Today we had two flat tyres in the same stage and we tried to manage three stages with punctures and

we had only one spare. We made it happen. It was important to finish and we finished second. Well done to Abdullah, he did an amazing race. Still, we are leading the championship and we look ahead to Lebanon. I am disappointed at one point but, on the other, I am happy to finish."

Meshari al Thefiri teamed up with Qatar's Nasser al Kuwari and were the class of the Merc2 field for the third successive event this season. The Kuwaiti rounded off the podium places and finished 6min 49.2sec clear of fourth-placed Jordanian Shaker Jweihan and his Omani co-driver Taha al Zadjali.

Al Thefiri said: "Very happy to win in Merc2. It was a tough day because I keep pole position and it was difficult to drive. Finally, we finished without any issues and we look forward to the next round."

After Shaikh Bader al Fayeze and Emad Juma left the road on the second stage of the morning, that opened the door for Shadi Shaban and Samer Issa to finish fifth. The Lebanese pairing of Ahmad Khaled and Joseph Kmeid rounded off the top six and finished fourth in Merc2. Up-and-coming Jordanian talent Mustafa al Atari was seventh overall.

Support for this year's event comes from Zain Jordan, Hala and Bliss FM.



ACTION IN THE 2023 FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP RESUMES IN LEBANON ON SEPTEMBER 15-17.

2023 JORDAN RALLY - POSITIONS AFTER SS13:

- 1. Abdullah al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al Hmoud (JOR) Skoda Fabia Evo - 2hr 24min 18.3sec
- 2. Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 - 2hr 31min 22.5sec
- 3. Meshari al Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X - 2hr 32min 55.5sec
- 4. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Taha al Zadjali (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X - 2hr 39min 44.7sec
- 5. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 2hr 41min 46.1sec
- 6. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Joseph Kmeid (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 2hr 48min 18.6sec
- 7. Mustafa al Atari (JOR)/Zeid Abu Zaid (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X - 2hr 52min 10.0sec
- 8. Ihab al Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 02min 36.6sec
- 9. Salem al Dhafreiri (KWT)/Fares al Thefiri (KWT) Subaru Impreza - 3hr 18min 30.7sec
- 10. Fadi Dahshan (JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 26min 28.8sec
- 11. Sami Fleifel (JOR)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 34min 04.0sec

2023 JORDAN NATIONAL RALLY - POSITIONS AFTER SS13:

- 1. Abdullah al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al Hmoud (JOR) Skoda Fabia Evo - 2hr 24min 18.3sec
- 2. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Taha al Zadjali (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X - 2hr 39min 44.7sec
- 3. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 2hr 41min 46.1sec
- 4. Mustafa al Atari (JOR)/Zeid Abu Zaid (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X - 2hr 52min 10.0sec
- 5. Nancy al Majali (JOR)/Nadia Shnoudeh (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VI - 2hr 58min 41.7sec
- 6. Ihab al Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 02min 36.6sec
- 7. Ghaith Qubti (JOR)/Tarek al Assad (JOR) Range Rover Classic - 3hr 11min 13.1sec
- 8. Asem Aref (JOR)/Ahmad Jankhout (JOR) Subaru Impreza - 3hr 25min 57.5sec
- 9. Fadi Dahshan (JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 26min 28.8sec
- 10. Sami Fleifel (JOR)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX - 3hr 34min 04.0sec
- 11. Hashem Kalbouneh (JOR)/Mustafa al Bitar (JOR) Black Iris - 3hr 46min 58.0sec
- 12. Ziad Miqdad (JOR)/Amer Mousa (JOR) Renault Clio - 4hr 02min 20.6sec

Oman volleyball team shifts gears as Arab Games nears

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 20

Oman volleyball team is gearing up to take part in the volleyball competitions at the Arab Games which will be held in Algeria during July 5 to 15 and Arab Volleyball Championship in Iraq in September besides the Asian Games in China which will begin on September 23. The national volleyball team, coached by Jamal al Mamari, concluded recently their first part of the preparatory programme for the abroad participations at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The domestic camp was held in presence of all the announced squad members including 19 players under direct supervision of national experienced coach Jamal al Mamari and his assistant coach Khalid al Shizawi. The training sessions featured fitness, physical and tactical training sessions that ensured the proper harmony among the

national team which comprised mixture of experienced and youth faces.

"The internal camp in Muscat was very vital part in team's preparation for the next Arabian assignment in Algeria. The next gathering will take place after the completion of the military volleyball league in May end with some friendly games ahead of the event in Algeria. The doors of the national team are open for any players who prove their technical capability and ability to join the team. During the training camp, we worked very hard to evaluate each player's position in the field and how to create a proper harmony among the experienced and the new players who have been selected to the squad," national head coach Jamal al Mamari said.

"A special thanks for Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) board directors for their continuous support to the national team. Their close follow-up to the national volleyball team ease the possibility of having many players in the camp and to relieve some military players

of attending the training sessions," he added.

The chairman of OVA, Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali, appreciated the cooperation of the military and governmental entities to allow the team players attendance in the recently concluded training camp in Muscat. "High appreciation to out strategic partners and stakeholders towards registering the success of the domestic preparation camp. Thanks goes to the technical, administrative staff and the players for their top efforts during the camp and we are looking forward to see top performance in the upcoming events including Arab Sports Games in Algeria," he ended.

OMAN SQUAD: Yousef al Shukaili, Younis al Amri, Abdullah al Muqbali, Ahmed al Toubi, Adam al Jalbobi, Khamis al Jabri, Mohammed al Muqbali, Mahmood al Saadi, Saleh al Jalbobi, Said al Rujaibi, Hilal al Muqbali, Majid al Shibli, Ismail al Hedi, Khalid al Muqbali, Abdullah al Shibli, Osama al Mamari, Saud al Mamari, Falah al Jaradi and Al Mundher al Mazini.



business



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Moody’s upgrades ratings of seven Omani GRIs

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 20

Moody’s Investors Service, a leading global credit rating agency, has upgraded the corporate family ratings of seven government-related issuers (GRIs) domiciled in the Sultanate of Oman to Ba2 from Ba3 and maintained the positive outlooks.

The companies are Dhofar Integrated Services Company (DISC), Majan Electric Company (MEC), Mazoon Electric Company (MZEC), Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP), and Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel).

Moody’s said the rating action is a direct consequence of the recent rating action on the Government of Oman where the government bond rating was upgraded to Ba2 from Ba3, while the outlook remains positive.

The upgrade in ratings is



a significant development for these government related Omani companies. It will help them access funding at lower costs and enhance their creditworthiness. This will also boost investor confidence and

attract foreign investments into Oman’s economy.

Moody’s has upgraded the ratings of DISC, MJEC, MZEC, MEDC, OETC and Nama PWP due to their significant exposure

to the Omani government in the form of subsidies, which closely interlink them with the sovereign rating.

However, their ratings are also supported by a stable and

THE UPGRADE IN RATINGS IS A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT FOR THESE GOVERNMENT RELATED OMANI COMPANIES. IT WILL HELP THEM ACCESS FUNDING AT LOWER COSTS AND ENHANCE THEIR CREDITWORTHINESS. THIS WILL ALSO BOOST INVESTOR CONFIDENCE AND ATTRACT FOREIGN INVESTMENTS INTO OMAN’S ECONOMY

transparent regulatory framework, cost-recovery mechanisms, low business risk profiles, and respective monopoly positions.

The positive outlook for these companies is also in line with the positive outlook for the government rating.

Moody’s considers them GRIs that benefit from strong credit interlinkages with the Government of Oman.

Meanwhile, Moody’s has upgraded Omantel’s credit rating from Ba3 to Ba2 and affirmed the company’s baseline credit assessment (BCA) at Ba3.

This reflects the upgrade of

the sovereign rating and the company’s status as a government-related issuer. Moody’s expects that Omantel’s credit metrics will improve over the next 12-18 months which could lead to improvement in the BCA.

Omantel’s credit quality is supported by its strong market position in Oman; resilient demand due to the necessity-like consumer spending on telecommunications services; exposure to other Middle Eastern and African markets through ownership in Mobile Telecommunications K.S.C.P. (Zain); and efforts to reduce leverage, particularly by using proceeds from the recent sale and leaseback of assets to reduce debt.

However, the rating also takes into account the company’s high concentration in Oman; increased competition following the entrance of a third mobile operator which has been negatively impacting Omantel’s financial performance and market positioning; and the company’s increased leverage following the acquisition of a stake in Zain in 2017.

CMA approves merger of Omani Qatari Insurance and Vision Insurance

MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a decision cancelling the licence of Vision Insurance Services SAOG for carrying out general and life insurance and savings in the Sultanate of Oman.

CMA’s decision was based on the approval the resolution of the extraordinary general meeting of Vision Insurance to dissolve the company and merge with Omani Qatari Insurance Company SAOG.

CMA emphasises that merger of insurance company is a healthy phenomenon that

contributes to enhancing the robust financial position of the merging companies in a single economic entity.

This reflects positively on the quality of the insurance service and maintains appropriate insurance prices as well as being one of the available solutions for overcoming market fluctuation and ensures sustainability of the insurance sector to be able to meet the obligations towards policyholders and enhance competition in the local and global markets, it said.

Following the merger, the authorised capital of Oman Qatari Insurance Company will rise from RO 20 million to RO 30 million and the issued capital will be increased to RO 22 million.

“CMA continuously monitor the financial positions of the regulated companies and encourage solutions that assist the companies to grow and prosper to achieve financial stability of such companies and contribute to the economic development process in the Sultanate of Oman,” the Authority added.

Commercial banks grant credits worth RO 19.9 billion to private sectors in Oman



MUSCAT: An analysis of the activities of traditional commercial banks indicated the continued growth of credit in the Sultanate of Oman. The total balance of credit granted by commercial banks increased by 5.6 per cent, while credit extended to the private sector increased by 4.8 per cent to reach RO 19.9 billion by the end of March 2023.

The report issued by the Central Bank of Oman indicated that the total investment of traditional commercial banks in securities decreased by 14.6 per cent to reach about RO 4.5 billion by the end of March 2023, while investment in government development bonds increased by 2.7 per cent to reach RO 2.2 billion.

As for the investments of

conventional banks in foreign securities, it increased by 23.7 per cent to reach RO 900 million by the end of March.

On the other side of the budget (liabilities), total deposits with conventional commercial banks increased by 3.4 per cent to reach RO 22.2 billion, while government deposits with commercial banks increased by 9.4 per cent to about RO 5.3 billion, and deposits of public sector institutions increased by 24.8 per cent, to record about RO 1.8 billion at the end of March.

Meanwhile, private sector deposits decreased by 0.2 per cent to reach RO 14.6 billion by the end of March 2023, constituting 65.9 per cent of total deposits with conventional commercial banks. — ONA

Al Dakhiliyah chosen to commemorate IP Day celebrations in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 20

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has been chosen as the distinguished icon for the celebration of World Intellectual Property Day in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Dakhiliyah’s selection serves as a testament to the governorate’s exceptional cultural and civilisational heritage, as well as its commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

The commemoration aims to cultivate a competitive spirit and nurture a culture of innovation among the youth of the region. Central to this recognition is the governorate’s remarkable ability to leverage its rich heritage as a driving force for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth.

The celebration endeavours to create



a sustainable environment that promotes the dissemination of technical knowledge, fostering social and economic development not only within Al Dakhiliyah Governorate but also across other regions.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, highlighted the

importance of intellectual property (IP) rights for economic development.

He reiterated the governorate’s commitment to creating an enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, recognising the crucial role played by IP rights in achieving this objective.

Shaikh Hilal also extended his gratitude to the institutions that have actively supported the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

He also expressed his appreciation for the young individuals in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, recognising their creativity and innovation as the foundation for a prosperous future. With a flourishing environment for creativity and a commitment to education, the governorate serves as a role model for others in Oman and the wider region, he added.

CCED joins Tejarah Talks discussion on net-zero greenhouse gas emissions



MUSCAT: Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development (CCED), the value-driven company delivering long-term growth to Oman's hydrocarbon sector, recently took part in a panel discussion entitled 'Oman's Journey towards Net Zero: An Environment for Enterprise.'

The event was part of the Tejarah Talks platform, a series of discussions organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Oman Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Tejarah Talks brings together experts and thought leaders from across different industries in Oman, and enables them to share ideas in areas related to Oman's economy. The session focused on the transition of Oman to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050 and its implications

for corporations, including small and medium enterprises.

The panel discussion was moderated by HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said who is the Co-Founder of The Firm for Business and Economic Consulting in Oman. Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CC Energy Development said, "Our industry is committed to contributing to Oman's journey towards a low carbon future and its transition to a net-zero economy by 2050.

Through our gas-to-power project, CC Energy Development will be making a major step towards reaching zero emissions from gas flaring by 2027."

He added, "We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, using modern technologies and optimising operations to achieve this important objective for Oman."

Explore the features and benefits of Mazda CX-9 and CX-30

MUSCAT: Mazda is a well-known brand for its reliable, stylish, and affordable cars. In recent years, they have expanded their lineup to include some of the most popular SUVs on the market. The Mazda CX-9 and Mazda CX-30 are two of the brand's best offerings in the SUV category.

They are both stylish, efficient, and offer plenty of features to make your drive a comfortable and enjoyable experience. Let's have a closer look at both the CX-9 and CX-30, including their features, performance, safety, and pricing. Whether you are looking for a family car or just a reliable SUV for your daily commute, the Mazda CX-9 and CX-30 are definitely worth considering.

Mazda CX-9 and Mazda CX-30

The Mazda CX-9 is a full-size SUV that provides ample space for families and groups of friends. It has a sleek and sophisticated design that is both modern and timeless.

The CX-9 is powered by a turbocharged 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine that delivers a smooth and responsive performance. It also comes with a host of advanced safety features to ensure that you and your passengers are protected on the road.



The Mazda CX-30, on the other hand, is a compact SUV that offers a perfect blend of style and practicality. It has a sporty and dynamic look that is sure to turn heads.

The CX-30 is powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine that delivers a spirited and efficient performance. It also comes with an array of advanced features, including a 360-degree camera, blind-spot monitoring, and rear cross-traffic alert, to help you stay safe on the road.

Both are excellent choices for anyone looking for a quality SUV. They offer a perfect blend of style, performance, and safety, making them ideal for families, professionals, and anyone who values comfort and convenience.

Mazda is a brand that prides itself on building vehicles that are stylish, fun to drive, and packed with cutting-edge technology. When it comes to SUVs, Mazda takes this approach to the next level. Both are built to offer drivers a truly unique driving experience that is unmatched by other SUVs on the market.

When it comes to performance, Mazda SUVs are designed to be both powerful and agile. The available Skyactiv-G engine delivers plenty of power, while the Skyactiv-Drive transmission provides smooth, responsive shifting. Mazda's i-Activ AWD system is also available on both models, providing excellent traction and stability on a variety of road surfaces.

Mazda SUVs are known for their safety features. Both the CX-9 and CX-30 come with a suite of advanced safety technologies designed to keep you and your passengers safe on the road. Features like Blind Spot Monitoring, Lane Departure Warning, Lane Keep Assist, and Rear Cross Traffic Alert are all available on these vehicles.

Overall, Mazda SUVs are a great choice for anyone looking for a stylish, fun-to-drive vehicle that is also packed with cutting-edge technology and advanced safety features.

Whether you choose the CX-9 or the CX-30, you can be sure that you are getting a top-quality SUV that will provide you with many years of driving pleasure.

All-new Toyota Urban Cruiser SUV launched in Oman

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Wali of Bausher, the all-new Toyota Urban Cruiser SUV was unveiled at an exclusive event. Gracing the occasion was HE Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to Oman.

The guest of honour was Masaru Shimada, General Manager, Middle East and Central Asia Division, Toyota Motor Corporation. He was accompanied by other officials from Toyota Motor Corporation.

In the opening remarks, Abdullah bin Mohammed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, said, "For decades, Toyota has been winning hearts in Oman with its high quality products that have not only found a special place in the lives of customers, but have also been inspirations in the automotive world. In Oman, Toyota commands a major market share and that is all due to the trust and confidence that customers have in the brand."

Expressing his gratitude to Toyota Motor Corporation he said, "We would like to thank Toyota Motor Corporation, for their constant support and encouragement extended to us at all times. We also take this opportunity to thank our valued customers for their continued patronage."

Later in the evening sharing his thoughts on Toyota's presence in Oman, Masaru Shimada said, "Toyota Motor Corporation has a very long relationship with Saud Bahwan Group, for almost 50 years. They are one of the most important partners among all the distributors in the world.

That's why, the late Honorary Chairman of Toyota Motor



Corporation, Dr Shoichiro Toyoda, and his son and current Chairman Akio Toyoda have visited Oman and deepened their personal relationship.

Toyota's mission is to produce 'Happiness for All' and therefore here in Oman, we will work very closely with our respectful partner, Saud Bahwan Automotive, to make sure all our customers are happy in Oman."

Sharing his thoughts on Toyota's future plans and the all-new Urban Cruiser, he said, "Toyota's approach is "Multi-pathway", by offering wide variety of choices, meaning not only Battery EV but also Hybrid, Plug-in Hybrid, Fuel Cell EV, Hydrogen engine and so on."

The 2023 Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor.

Combined with a compact Lithium-Ion battery, the powertrain delivers 102 hp and 135 Nm of torque, with an average fuel consumption of 19.8 km/l and is paired with six-

speed automatic transmission. The new Urban Cruiser's spacious cabin is designed for greater comfort and convenience. The vehicle's head-up display, 4.2-inch colour Thin Film Transistor (TFT) multi-information display.

Other impressive features include a dual-sliding panoramic roof, 17" wheels, a 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia screen with seamless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto integration, and a wireless smartphone charging system.

Additionally, the interior offers three USB ports, a six-speaker sound system, a powerful automatic air conditioning system with rear AC vents, and 60/40 split reclining rear seats. As with any Toyota model, the new Urban Cruiser comes complete with a comprehensive array of safety features.

A choice of seven exciting exterior hues adds to the new Urban Cruiser's striking visual appeal. The vehicle's interior features an equally stylish colour scheme, with options.

The all-new Urban Cruiser is now on display at all Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms.

AOU to hold strategy practitioners' conference

MUSCAT: The Faculty of Business Studies (FBS) of Arab Open University (AOU) Oman under the auspices of Professor Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi, Rector, Arab Open University, Oman organises AOU-FBS 2nd Strategy Practitioners' Conference to be held on May 23, 2023 (Tuesday) in their new purpose-built campus at Al Seeb.

Following the success of the AOU-FBS 1st Strategy Practitioners' Conference (Powered by Omantel, Oman and

Khimji group, Oman), AOU-FBS is organising the 2nd Strategy Practitioners' Conference with the aim of Shaping Strategy Practice, powered by Al Ansari Group, Oman.

Inaugural address will be delivered by Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO, Oman Data Park; Sanjeev Madavi, Group Chief Digital Transformation Officer, Khimji Ramdas LLC; and Abbas Irshad al Lawati will deliver keynote addresses. Warith al Kharusi, Chairman

of Oman Centre for Skills development (MAHARAT); Jawhara al Hashemi, ASAAS Oman; Amina Butt, Nama Group, Amjid Ali, Al Ansari LLC, Dr Aju Samuel, The Performance Factory will be participating in the panel discussion.

This will be an excellent platform for Strategy Practitioners to explore and Shape Strategy Practice. AOU-FBS Team is making elaborate arrangements. To attend and participate, please mail us at fbs@aou.edu.om.

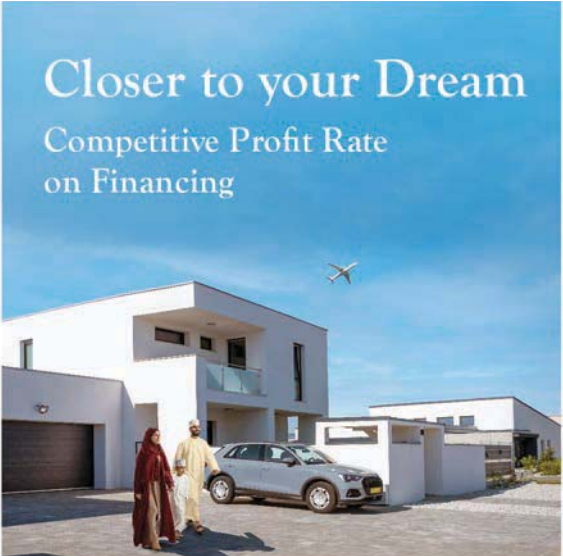
Financing products from Meethaq continue to gain popularity among customers

MUSCAT: The exclusive financing offer launched by Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has gained tremendous popularity among customers. Customers can take advantage of the offer and enjoy the competitive profit rate on Home Finance, Auto Finance, Personal Goods Finance, Education Finance, Marriage Finance and Travel Finance. The competitive profit rate also applies to the transfer of existing financing facilities to Meethaq with the option of consolidating various financing facilities into one financing facility.

All customers irrespective of their salary or whether they are employed in the private or government sector can avail special rates on different financing products.

This makes Meethaq's offer unique, transparent as well as cater to the needs of customers across all segments of the society. To take advantage of this highly advantageous offer, customers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, as the special profit rates will only be available until July 31, 2023.

Both new and existing customers can apply for any of Meethaq's financing solutions and benefit from swift processing as well as minimal documentation.



Financing options are available based on each customer's unique needs, with up to 80 per cent financing available for Home or Auto financing. 100% financing is available for Travel, Marriage, Education, and Personal Goods Finance. Customers can submit their applications at any of Meethaq's 26 state-of-the-art branches across Oman.



Oman LNG adds Croatia to its export markets

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 20

State-owned terminal operator LNG Croatia has announced that it has received its first shipment of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Oman LNG, whose market footprint now covers around 25 countries globally.

LNG Croatia, which operates a 140,000-cubic-metre (cbm) Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FRSU) at Krk in the North Adriatic Sea, said the LNG cargo was delivered by the 170,000 cbm capacity BW ENN Snow Lotus LNG carrier last week.

It is expected to be one of the last shipments of Omani LNG into Europe before a new European Union (EU) Energy Platform – a newly established pan-Europe portal for the import of natural gas, LNG and green hydrogen in the future – comes online next month.



Work on the EU Energy Platform was initiated last year in response to a European Council mandate requiring EU member states to diversify gas imports away from Russia following the

Ukraine conflict.

The platform allows the EU to coordinate negotiations with global energy suppliers, thereby securing competitive prices for its energy imports without the

need for member states to outbid each other.

Besides supporting the EU's security of supply and access to affordable energy, the platform also enables international

IT IS EXPECTED TO BE ONE OF THE LAST SHIPMENTS OF OMANI LNG INTO EUROPE BEFORE A NEW EUROPEAN UNION (EU) ENERGY PLATFORM – A NEWLY ESTABLISHED PAN-EUROPE PORTAL FOR THE IMPORT OF NATURAL GAS, LNG AND GREEN HYDROGEN IN THE FUTURE – COMES ONLINE NEXT MONTH.

outreach, demand aggregation and efficient use of EU gas infrastructures.

Last week, the EU announced its first tender for proposals for gas supplies via this new platform. Significantly, the maiden shipment to LNG Croatia was based on a spot sale – a type of contract that Oman LNG has increasingly capitalised to secure buyers for surplus volumes not committed under long-term or short-term supply arrangements.

According to Oman LNG, between 10-15 per cent of all cargoes from the company are marketed and delivered through the spot market.

The year 2022 was a bumper year for Oman LNG with the company delivering a record 176 cargoes of LNG, up from 163 shipments sold a year earlier.

Eleven per cent of the shipments delivered last year were spot cargoes. Total LNG production from the three-train plant at Qalhat climbed to 11.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) in 2022, up from 10.6 mtpa in 2021.

The uptick in output was the result of a major multi-year debottlenecking programme carried out at the Qalhat complex.

The surplus production yielded 10 new LNG cargoes last year – a figure that is anticipated to rise to 12 cargoes in 2023, according to Oman LNG.

2nd phase of Manjam Lab to focus on streamlining government services

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 20

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit have jointly announced the commencement of the second phase of Manjam Lab – an initiative to streamline the procedures of 120 government services to make them more accessible and user-friendly.

The second phase of Manjam Lab is being conducted at the Oman Oil and Gas Institute and involves the participation of ten government institutions. These institutions have been divided into five laboratories, each led by a service streamlining supervisor, a trainer and a documenter.

The documenter's role is to

document the current procedures for each service and propose improvements for the future.

The targeted institutions in this phase include the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Public Authority for Social Insurance, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Public Prosecution Office, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Environment Agency, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Supreme Judicial Council.

The first phase of Manjam Lab successfully simplified the procedures of 145 services, achieving a 100-per cent simplification rate for the targeted services.

This included services

such as connecting utilities, applying for job opportunities, obtaining building permits and requesting various certificates. The process of simplifying procedures is conducted in four stages.

The first stage involves studying the current situation, identifying areas of weakness and challenges and addressing them accordingly. The second stage focuses on envisioning the future state of the services.

The third stage includes quality control, where stakeholders review the re-engineering document, and a quality control team ensures its accuracy. The fourth and final stage consists of approval, where the document is amended based on feedback, re-reviewed with stakeholders and ultimately approved by the general managers.

SalamAir to inaugurate three new destinations in June and July

MUSCAT: SalamAir has announced the launch of three new destinations in June and July 2023. These new destinations include Almaty in Kazakhstan, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and the Turkish city of Rize.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, expressed his excitement about the expansion plans. "We are thrilled to introduce these new destinations to our growing network. Almaty, one of Kazakhstan's prominent cities, offers great tourism potential. We aim to establish year-round connections to cater to the demand and not limit it to seasonal periods," he said.

He added that in addition to these developments, SalamAir is currently conducting an economic study of 20 new tourist destinations in Europe and Eastern Europe. The objective is



to attract tourists to the Sultanate of Oman and invigorate the tourism industry.

This initiative, he affirmed, aims to enhance the movement of tourists through Muscat and Salalah international airports. Regarding seasonal destinations during the upcoming summer, Captain Mohamed Ahmed mentioned that the following routes would be reopened: Muscat-Sarajevo, Muscat-Baku, Muscat-Bursa, Suvar-Trabzon, and Muscat-Beirut. He highlighted that the Muscat-Trabzon route has become a year-round direct connection due to

its popularity.

SalamAir currently operates flights to 38 domestic and international destinations, including Suvar, Salalah, Duqm, Masirah, the GCC countries, and several Arab, Asian and European destinations.

The airline is also excited to announce the addition of new aircraft to its fleet. Within the next two months, SalamAir will receive three new Airbus A321neo and by the end of the year, three more aircraft will join the fleet, bringing the total number of SalamAir's aircraft to 17.

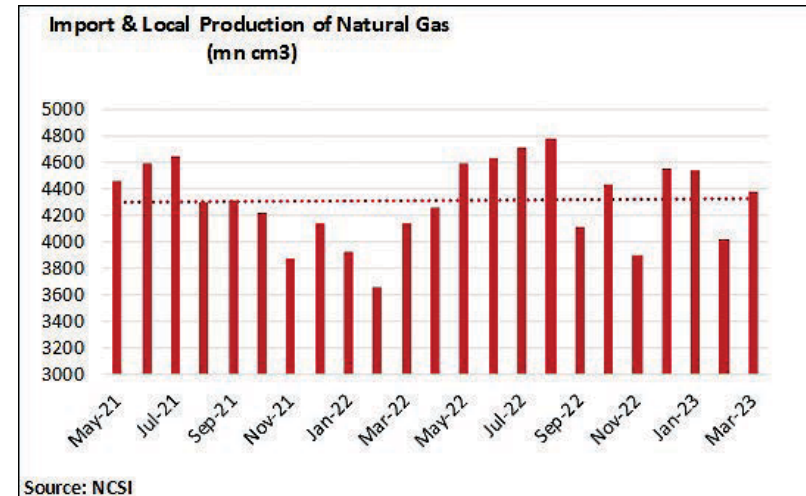
SalamAir places significant emphasis on Omanisation and is dedicated to providing employment opportunities. The company's Omanisation percentage currently stands at 65 per cent. — ONA

MSX closes week down at 4666.72 points

MUSCAT: MSM30 Index ended the week down by 1.22 per cent. All sectors ended down, the financial index ended lower by 1 per cent, the services index and industrial index ended down by 1.76 per cent and 3.24 per cent respectively, and the MSX Shariah Index closed down by 1.23 per cent.

Zain Group and Omantel concluded a shareholder agreement to incorporate a joint venture (JV) to be called Zain Omantel International (ZOI). Zain Group will be holding 74 per cent of the JV share capital whereas Omantel's share will be 26 per cent. Among the purposes of ZOI is to act for Zain Group and Omantel in managing their international wholesale requirements across eight markets, serving over 55 million customers which will create better economy of scale value to the JV partners.

At its FMB held on May 11, 2023, AMAN REIF recommended to unitholders a semi-annual dividend payment of at least 3.58 baisas per unit. The dividend payment is subject to approval of



unitholders at the AGM.

The Board of Directors of Ominvest in its meeting resolved to announce the intention for Ominvest to lead a consortium, which will make an offer for the entire issued share capital of Ahli Bank.

The offer will be made by certain entities separately controlled by Ominvest and Arab Bank plc. Certain other investors have also expressed their desire to join the Consortium.

Bank Dhofar resolved to submit

a revised non-binding offer to the board of directors of Ahli Bank (ABO). Bank Dhofar said it believes that a combination of Bank Dhofar and ABO is a compelling opportunity for ABO shareholders to: create a leading domestically-focused Omani bank with a robust competitive position, well placed to serve the entirety of the market with leading market positions across a number of customer segments, combine the banks' highly complementary activities and expertise across retail,

corporate and Islamic banking for the benefit of the combined group and its customers, provide career development opportunities for both banks' employees; provide opportunities to create value for both sets of shareholders, notably through an improvement in the combined group's cost of funds; and provide enhanced liquidity for both sets of shareholders.

NCSI latest data revealed that the number of private sector expatriates rose by 16.3 per cent YoY in March 2023, while family expatriates went up by 25.47 per cent YoY.

Government expatriates also rose by 24.21 per cent YoY. Where the total number of expatriates stood at 1.75 million at end-March 2023.

The data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the domestic production of natural gas, including imports, increased by 5.74 per cent to reach 4.374 billion cubic metres compared to 4.137 billion cubic metres during

the period in 2022.

Trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia surged 123 per cent, RO 2.7 billion in value at the end of 2022 compared to the previous year's figure.

Bandar bin Ibrahim al Khorayef, Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, said remarkable growth in bilateral trade underscored growing integration between the two countries, as well as opportunities for joint investment in logistics and mining.

Al Khorayef said the two countries seek to develop the industrial sector by adopting the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to provide products of high value and quality.

Commenting on the integrated economic zone currently under development in Al Dhahirah Governorate, he said the facility would accelerate trade exchanges and stimulate investment inflow in both countries.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Moody's upgrades ratings of seven Omani GRIs

FROM PAGE 13

Moody's said the positive outlook of Omantel is in line with that of the government.

The outlook also incorporates Moody's expectation that the company will demonstrate resilient financial performance, reduce leverage and improve liquidity over the next 12-18 months.

The upgrades in ratings are expected to have a positive impact on the companies, as they will likely lead to lower borrowing costs and improved investor confidence.

The ratings upgrades also reflect the improving economic and financial conditions in Oman, which are expected to continue to improve as the government's efforts to diversify the economy.

Oman’s decarbonisation: An energy transition



FADI AL SHIHABI

The author is the ESG Services Leader at KPMG Lower Gulf

As the world is moving towards net zero carbon, Oman is also taking steps towards the same goal. Oman has set an ambitious target of achieving net-zero carbon by 2050. This target is in line with the Paris Agreement and reflects the country’s commitment

towards sustainable development. The energy transition trends towards net-zero in Oman are visible in the various initiatives taken by the government and the private sector. For example, the government has initiated a number of renewable energy projects such as the 1 GW solar power plant in Manah and the 500 MW solar project in Ibri. These projects are aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix of the country. Oman has started exploring the potential of hydrogen as a clean energy source. The private sector is also taking steps towards decarbonisation, with companies such as Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) setting their own targets of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Additionally, local small and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can play a significant role in achieving the net-zero goal, as they contribute significantly to Oman’s economy and can adopt best practices to move towards the goal of decarbonisation. In this regard, they can start by conducting an energy audit to identify areas where energy can be saved, and then build on that. They can invest in energy-efficient technologies such as LED lighting, solar water heaters and energy-efficient air conditioning systems. SMEs can switch to renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power. Adopting circular economy principles such as these, can help Omani SMEs reduce waste and emissions. The Government of Oman has taken practical steps towards regulating the transition towards

net-zero. For example, the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) launched a programme to reduce carbon emissions from landfills. The initiative aims to capture methane emissions from landfills and using it to generate electricity. Furthermore, the government has introduced regulations to promote energy efficiency in buildings — requiring all new buildings to meet energy efficiency standards. Oman is already investing heavily in research and development of renewable energy and green hydrogen, with a key example being Sultan Qaboos University’s Renewable Energy Research Centre which is working on developing new technologies for solar and wind power, and energy storage.

As a result, Oman launched a programme to promote the use of green hydrogen as a clean energy source, involving the establishment of a hydrogen refuelling station and the development of a green energy powered bus. Beyond government initiatives, research and development in new technologies can equally be driven by the private sector. PDO for example, has set up an Energy Innovation Centre to develop new technologies in areas such as carbon capture and storage, green hydrogen production and renewable energy. Oman’s commitment towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 is commendable and is evident in a multitude of ways. We see clear energy transition trends towards net zero in Oman through a variety of initiatives taken by the

government and the private sector alike. The government is ramping up efforts towards net-zero through regulations and incentives and it is clearly producing highly positive results. Research and development in new technologies is one of the ways Oman can contribute to net-zero carbon emissions, an essential step towards achieving the 2050 net-zero goal. With heavy investments into areas such as renewable energy and green hydrogen, it is clear the private sector can be a driving force behind new technologies in the field. Therefore, achieving the net-zero goal in Oman will require a collaborative effort between government, the private sector and society as a whole.

Understanding crypto ownership: Not your keys, not your coins



STEFANO VIRGILI

The author is member of International Press Association

In today’s digital landscape, choosing the right wallet for managing cryptocurrencies is crucial. When we store our cryptocurrencies in a crypto exchange, it’s important to understand the technical implications of this arrangement. In the crypto world, the phrase “Not your keys, not your coins” carries significant meaning. It highlights the fact that when our digital assets are held in an exchange, we technically do not have direct ownership or control over them. In a cryptocurrency exchange, users create accounts and deposit their digital assets into wallets provided by the exchange. These wallets are custodial in nature, meaning that the exchange holds the private keys associated with the wallets and is responsible for the security and management of the assets. While this setup offers convenience and ease of use, it also introduces a level of risk. By entrusting our assets to the exchange, we are essentially relying on the exchange’s security measures and operational practices to safeguard our funds. If the exchange experiences a security breach, insolvency, or any other issues, there is a possibility of losing access to or control over our assets. On the other hand, when we use a non-custodial wallet or a self-hosted wallet, we retain complete ownership and control over our private keys. Non-custodial wallets, such as software wallets or hardware wallets, allow us to generate and manage our private keys locally. This means that we have the sole responsibility for safeguarding our keys and securing our funds. Non-custodial wallets provide a secure and convenient way

to store and manage digital assets. However, existing non-custodial wallets come with their own set of challenges, including inaccessibility to average users, complex onboarding processes, the risk of losing seed phrases, and fragmented chains. Current solutions on the market can be inaccessible to the average user, making it difficult for widespread adoption. The complexities of blockchain technology and the technical jargon associated with crypto wallets create barriers for non-tech-savvy individuals who want to explore the world of cryptocurrencies. The onboarding process for crypto wallets can be complex and intimidating. It involves multiple steps, such as creating an account, setting up security measures, and managing seed phrases. This complexity often discourages new users from entering the crypto space, limiting the growth and accessibility of digital assets. Another challenge with existing wallets is the risk of losing or having seed phrases stolen. Seed phrases are crucial for accessing and recovering wallets. If a seed phrase is lost or falls into the wrong hands, it can result in the permanent loss of all assets stored in the wallet. Additionally, the existence of multiple wallets for different blockchain networks adds complexity. Users must manage their assets across various chains, each requiring a separate wallet. This fragmentation makes it challenging to have a seamless and unified experience in managing and transferring assets across different blockchain networks. By having exclusive control over our private keys, we eliminate the reliance on third-party intermediaries and reduce the risk of potential loss or compromise of our assets. It grants us the freedom to manage our cryptocurrencies independently, without being subject to the operational risks and potential vulnerabilities of centralised exchanges. In a nutshell, with non-custodial wallets, users can enjoy greater control and security over their crypto assets while navigating the challenges posed by existing wallet solutions.



GENE FRIEDA

The author, a global strategist at PIMCO, is a senior visiting fellow at the London School of Economics.

As the most aggressive wave of monetary tightening in four decades slows the world’s largest economies, a growing number of analysts are questioning whether central banks should raise their inflation targets beyond the current 2%. After all, is it worth sacrificing growth just to gain an extra inch in the fight against inflation? But as Brazil’s recent economic difficulties demonstrate, the tradeoff between supporting GDP growth and fighting inflation cannot be wished away. Ultimately, accepting slightly higher price levels by raising central-bank targets will most likely result in both higher inflation and a weaker economy. Amid pressing security and climate-related challenges, policymakers may be tempted to move the goalposts when it comes to price stability. For most of the past 15 years, developed economies struggled to generate inflation, with the US Federal Reserve and other central banks often falling short of their 2% target rates. But the Covid-19 pandemic, the escalating tensions between the United States and China, and Russia’s attack of Ukraine have led to persistent supply-chain constraints, fundamentally altering the inflation landscape. Similarly, the evolving nature of globalisation and the clean-energy transition are prompting companies to rethink how they manage the supply of goods and labour. This shift, together with the unanticipated shocks that could accompany it, is likely to have inflationary effects. But in light of the threat posed by



A woman works at a fruit market in Sao Paulo, Brazil. – Reuters

climate change and heightened geopolitical tensions, one could argue that tolerating modestly higher inflation is the cost of achieving a just green transition. The growing recognition that the current confluence of shocks requires significant changes in how our economies function represents a healthy development. The ongoing debate about inflation and growth, however, often fails to appreciate the fickleness of business and consumer confidence. Brazil underscores the dangers of trying to adjust the anchors of price stability, even by a small margin. Shortly after President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva publicly suggested that Brazil’s inflation target was too low and that elevated interest rates were stifling the economy, the central bank’s inflation expectations rose to 5.8% for 2023 and 3.6% for 2024. The central bank, which gained formal operational independence only in 2021, has gradually lowered its target rate from 4.5% in 2018 to 3.25% for this year and 3% for 2024. In response to the updated inflation expectations, markets promptly adjusted their own earlier expectations of a rapid, aggressive rate-cutting cycle and priced in a slower, more gradual downward trajectory. At the longer end of the government debt yield curve, the risk premium that investors demanded to hold long-term Brazilian debt also sharply increased. Real interest rates surpassed the 6% level that prevailed prior to October’s presidential

election – and which were already perceived as exorbitant and unsustainable. Given Brazil’s well-known history of hyperinflation and extreme inequality, achieving price stability is particularly urgent. But the ever-present threat that the country’s distorted fiscal regime of high taxes and spending poses to debt sustainability is often overlooked. In the wake of the pandemic, government debt levels reached a 20-year high, leading to a significant increase in the cost of funding Brazil’s deficits even as growth rebounded. While developed economies are not Brazil, rich-country policymakers must not assume that it would be any easier for them to persuade their citizens that higher inflation targets could be achieved at little additional cost. Brazil’s experience offers three valuable lessons for determining whether central banks in developed countries should set higher inflation targets. First, inflation targeting is essentially a confidence trick. If governments are perceived to be raising inflation targets to support higher levels of spending – regardless of whether this spending is needed or not – borrowing costs will inevitably increase for everyone. In this scenario, re-anchoring inflation expectations at a higher level will almost certainly lead to a recession, which may be necessary to reduce inflation below the new target and keep it at that level long enough for expectations to stabilise.

Second, changing inflation targets without implementing fiscal consolidation would be imprudent. If the reason for resetting the target is to accommodate fiscal spending, it is unlikely that the public would believe that the reset is permanent. Concern about fiscal sustainability has always been at the core of Brazil’s inflation problems. Moreover, adopting a Brazil-style regime of tight money and loose fiscal policy would limit private-sector investment opportunities and hamper job growth. It could also lead to a significant increase in interest-rate volatility. Third, the limitations of inflation targeting are particularly evident in times of greater supply-side uncertainty, as monetary policymakers have no advantage in determining whether a given supply shock is transitory or persistent. In a low-inflation environment, policymakers could afford to wait to see whether a supply shock (of which there were few in recent decades) would naturally dissipate. But in a world where inflation is already exceeding targets, and the risk of compounding shocks is high, policymakers do not have the luxury of time. Thanks to their prior experience in dealing with persistent supply shocks, Brazilian policymakers had a better sense of the threat posed by today’s supply-chain disruptions than most central banks in developed economies. © Project Syndicate, 2023



CULTURE

An indigenous woman offers a bunch of flowers as she takes part in the ‘Prayer for Rain’ ceremony on the shore of Chicabal Lagoon, formed in the crater of an extinct volcano and considered by Mayan people as a sacred place, in San Martin Sacatepequez, Guatemala. — AFP

DINING

Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is shown how to make traditional Japanese Okonomiyaki pancakes at a restaurant in Hiroshima, on the sidelines of the G7 Summit Leaders’ Meeting. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood director Sudipto Sen (L) and actress Adah Sharma attend a press conference of their film ‘The Kerala Story’ in Kolkata after Supreme Court lifted the ban on screening of the film imposed by the government of India’s West Bengal state. — AFP



FILM

Spanish fashion influencer Marta Sierra arrives for the screening of the film “Kaibutsu” (Monster) during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Women wear traditional Hanbok clothing as they attend a culture festival in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP



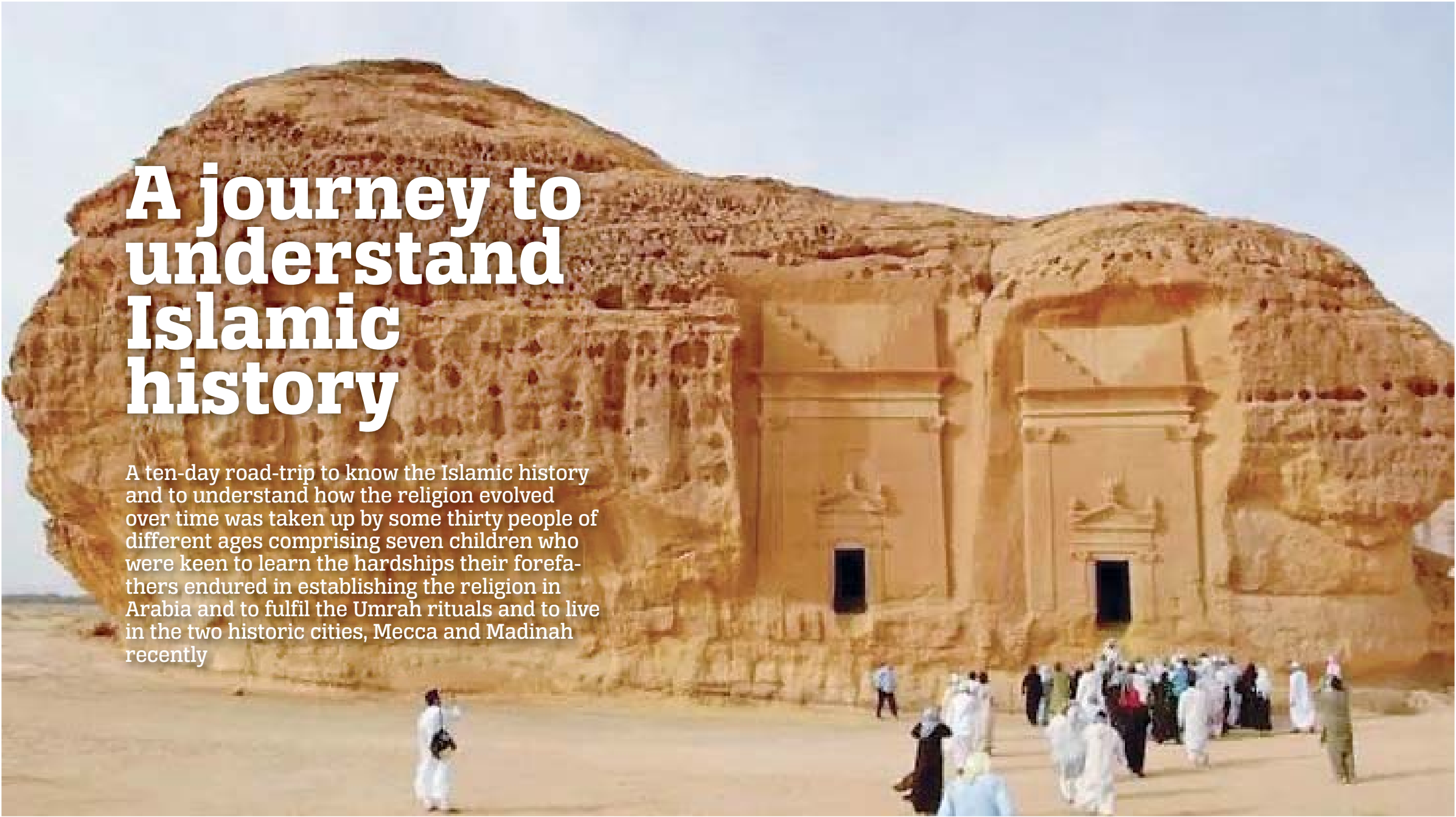
art & life

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OMAN OBSERVER f t i y u w www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

A journey to understand Islamic history

A ten-day road-trip to know the Islamic history and to understand how the religion evolved over time was taken up by some thirty people of different ages comprising seven children who were keen to learn the hardships their forefathers endured in establishing the religion in Arabia and to fulfil the Umrah rituals and to live in the two historic cities, Mecca and Madinah recently



ENTERTAINMENT

Kitano returns to Cannes, ‘indifferent’ to success

TAKESHI KITANO MAKES his comeback at Cannes next week with a new samurai epic, but the cult Japanese film-maker told AFP that he strives to remain “indifferent” to success.

Kitano, who rose to fame as a comedian before winning acclaim as an arthouse director, said in an exclusive interview that he does things his own way.

“If I receive recognition abroad, I’m happy, but I want to be as indifferent to that as possible,” he said in Tokyo before departing for the French film festival.

“I’d be very happy if something I’d shot... received good reviews. But that doesn’t mean I will try to please.”

“Kubi” is the first feature-length release in six years from the

76-year-old, whose eclectic career has included spells as an actor, author, painter and host of the gameshow “Takeshi’s Castle”.

Although his latest period piece has a bigger budget than the gritty gangster flicks he became known for, originality remains crucial for Kitano.

Despite being a huge fan of Japanese cinematic master Akira Kurosawa, when making “Kubi”, he avoided watching the combat scenes in the director’s 20th-century classics like “Seven Samurai” or “Ran”.

“I hate being influenced,” Kitano said. “I tried not to watch the battle scenes in Kurosawa’s films, so I wouldn’t be influenced by them.”

“If they are similar, we probably had the same ideas,” he added.



‘TRYING TO QUIT’

“Kubi” tells the tale of the 1582 death of Japan’s most powerful feudal lord in a deadly trap at a temple in Kyoto, in what became known as the Honno-ji Incident.

The film is not in competition at Cannes, but will premiere at the fes-

tival on Tuesday.

It is Kitano’s first Cannes appearance since 2010, when the yakuza movie “Outrage” went before the Palme d’Or jury.

But lounging on a sofa in his dressing room at Japanese network TV Asahi, having just recorded the political show he has presented for

decades, the director played down his return to the big screen.

“I’ve been trying to quit TV and movies for a long time,” he said, adding he was trying to take it easy, playing golf at his holiday home.

But even without the pressure to produce more work, Kitano found himself back on set.

“I thought I would make this film my last one,” he said.

“But then, after we finished filming, the actors and crew said it was a good movie,” he said, describing their appreciation as “the most important thing”.

‘BEAT TAKESHI’

Having studied engineering and “space-related subjects” at university, entertainment was Kitano’s second choice of career — something that allows him to feel “relaxed” even now.

For decades he was one of Japan’s most popular TV presenters, known as “Beat Takeshi”, performing sketches dressed as anything from a sumo wrestler to a giant milk carton.

In contrast, his movies are full of tortured characters and dark humour, such as the underworld thrillers “Sonatine”, “Brother” and “Hanabi”, which took top prize at the 1997 Venice Film Festival.

Kitano’s biggest commercial success, 2003’s “Zatoichi”, was also a

samurai film, and “Kubi” is his most expensive film yet, having cost 1.5 billion yen (\$11 million) to make.

“Most Japanese films are small-scale productions with small budgets... I thought I’d try to do something on a larger scale,” Kitano said.

In fact, he had wanted a budget and crew “three times bigger”, he said, and computer graphics were used to upscale the battle scenes.

Kitano first wrote a synopsis for “Kubi” three decades ago, but the project only took off after he wrote a novel in 2019 about the key moment in Japan’s history.

It contains the themes of loyalty, betrayal and Japanese codes of honour often seen in Kitano films, and also includes close same-sex bonds.

“Japanese historical drama rarely depicts male homosexuality,” although “it was common in that era”, Kitano said.

So “I wanted to make a film that would never be done on TV” or in mainstream Japanese cinema.

The final product is more sombre, intimate — and violent — than the usual sugar-coated primetime samurai dramas.

And even with two future film projects potentially on the cards, Kitano says what people think will remain a low priority.

“I’m just doing what I like and what I think is good.” — AFP



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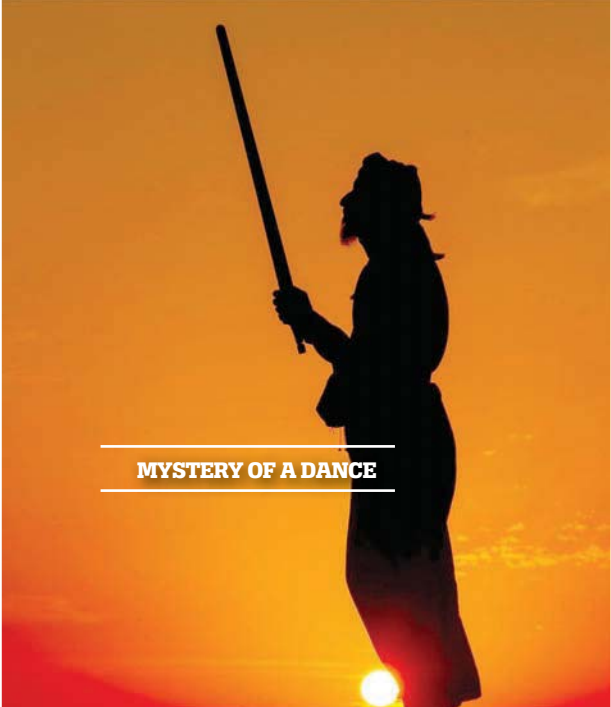
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HISTORIC CITY



MYSTERY OF A DANCE



AMONG THE WATERFALLS

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

0

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

By Kabeer Yousuf
@kabeeryousef

The most fruitful way to understand the history is to visit the places where it happened albeit the changes brought in by the developments, and to fall in love with the plot and characters who lived a life of accomplishment.

A ten-day road-trip to know the Islamic history and to understand how the religion evolved over time was taken up by some thirty people of different ages comprising 7 children who were keen to learn the hardships their forefathers endured in establishing the religion in Arabia and to fulfil the Umrah rituals and to live in the two historic cities, Makkah and Madinah recently.

After a long trail of nearly 30 hours which would have otherwise been a tedious and monotonous one if not for the inspiring insights in to the Islamic history by Shaikh Abdurahiman, a scholar and Islamic trainer in Muscat, the group reached the city of Makkah after a short break in Riyadh.

Makkah is one of the holiest cities in western Saudi Arabia as it's Prophet Muhammed's birthplace while Madinah is the place where the prophet migrated to and passed away later.

Every year, devotees from all over the world visit these spiritually rich and famous places in Saudi Arabia, and seek blessings from their almighty. The city of Makkah is home to grand mosques and lives on Islamic beliefs.

DAY 1

After two days and a night, by around 6 pm the bus reached some tens of kilometres from the city of Makkah where the pilgrims were expected to do the 'Ithram' which means, enter a sacred state in which a Muslim must be in order to perform the major pilgrimage Hajj, or the minor pilgrimage, Umrah. A pilgrim is expected to enter this state before crossing the pilgrimage boundary, known as Miqat, by performing the cleansing rituals and wearing the prescribed attire. Following, the 30-member team entered the holy Ka'aba for the prescribed rounds of Tawaf (going around the holy shape seven times).

This was followed by the journey between the mountains of Safa and Marwa where Bibi Hajar's (AS) went in between in search of some water for her hungry child Prophet Ismail (AS). This action demonstrates her commitment to her son and walking between the Mount Safa and Marwa is an integral part of the religious acts of Hajj and Umrah and to commemorate Bibi Hajar's (AS) experience in such harsh circumstances and her unwavering devotion to the command of Allah SWT.

DAY 2

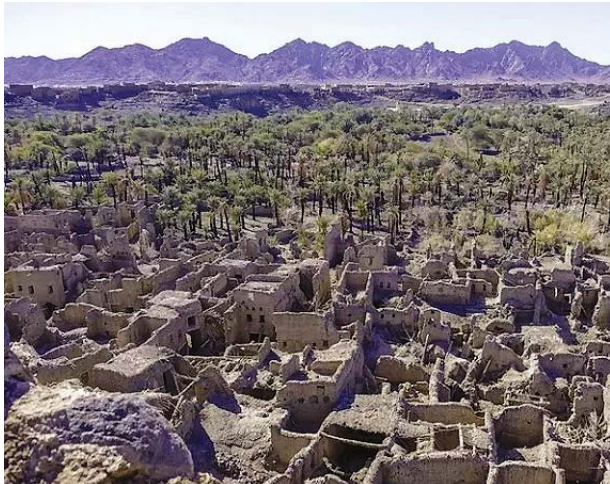
After a long, hectic journey and a mid-night Umrah, the team headed to visit the



Islamic historic places that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is home to and their visits varied from the battles that were fought some 1,400 years ago to the present day preservation of the Islamic rituals in the holy land.

Great Mosque of Makkah
Masjid Al Haram, also known as the Grand Mosque or the Great Mosque of Makkah, is one of the oldest mosques built in the history of Islam and is a mosque enclosing the vicinity of the Kaaba in Makkah, in the Makkah Province of Saudi Arabia. It is the mosque that is so precious to the Muslims across the world and can accommodate up to four million people in both its outdoor and indoor praying areas.

Kaaba
The Ka'aba, also known as Al Ka'ba al Musharrafah, is a stone building at the centre of Islam's most important mosque and holiest site, the Masjid Al Haram in Makkah. As far as Muslims are concerned, it is Islam's most sacred site because it represents the metaphorical house of God and the oneness of God in Islam.



DAY 3

The visit to the holy sites continued on the day 3 as well.

Built in the lifetime of the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the 7th century, the Quba Mosque is a mosque located in Madinah's Hejazi region of and is the first mosque in the world. This mosque was built on the first day of Muhammad's emigration to Madinah whose first stone was laid by the prophet, and the structure completed by his companions (sahabas). The Masjid Al Qiblatayn, is a mosque in Madinah believed by Muslims to be the place where the beloved Islamic prophet, Muhammad, received the command to change the Qibla from Jerusalem to Makkah. Bait al Muqddis, also known as Masjid Al Aqsa, has a very special place in the hearts of the Muslim believers as it was the first ever Qibla in Islam from the period of Prophet Adam (AS) to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

DAY 4

The day began with a visit to the Masjid Taneem: Located about 5 miles away from the Ka'aba. We then stopped over Al Rahma Mosque built in 1985, then at the Al Rajhi

Grand Mosque, one of the most famous and largest mosques in the city of Riyadh.

We then proceeded to the Tomb of Hawa (AS), also known as Eve, the first woman created and the wife of Adam (AS) and this cemetery in Jeddah is believed to house the grave of Hawa (AS).

For the rest of the day, we checked out:

Mada'in Saleh
Mada'in Saleh (city of Saleh) is a pre-Islamic archaeological site located in the Al-Ula sector approximately 400 km north-west of Madinah. The tribe of Thamud was supposed to have lived here and is famed for their ability to carve out homes in the mountains. The prophet Saleh was sent by Allah to guide them but they rejected his teachings and were destroyed by an earthquake.

Masjid Al Ji'rnanah
Masjid Al Ji'rnanah is situated approximately 24 km north-east of Masjid Al Haram and is one of the Miqat places where pilgrims enter into the state of Ithram for the performance of Umrah. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was said to have camped in this loca-

tion for a few days after the Battle of Hunayn, and entered into the state of Ithram and then proceeded to Makkah for Umrah.

DAY 5

On Day 5, we visited the Grave of Maymoonah, one of the wives of the Prophet Mohammed located on Hijrah Road, 20 km from Makkah, in an area called Sarif. Incidentally, this is the same place where they were married in.

It was followed by a visit to Masjid Abdullah bin Abbas in Taif, the House of Haleemah, a wetnurse who fostered the Prophet here in the early years of his life, the Masjid Al Hudaibiah — a place of Miqat for pilgrims to enter into the state of Ithram.

DAY 6

On Day 6, the visits begin in Al Masjid Al Nabawi, the second mosque built by the prophet Muhammad in Madinah, then followed by a visit to Jannatul Baaqi located to the southeast of the Prophet's Mosque and is the oldest and the first Islamic cemetery of Madinah in the Hejazi region, then to Khaybar that used to be inhabited by a tribe of Jews who incited hostilities towards the Muslims. The Prophet, along with 1,400 companions mounted an expedition and conquered their territory in Muharram 7 AH and Muslims across the world still praise the achievements at Khayber.

DAY 7

On Day 7, we visited the Site of the Battle of Badr where the most important and the first major battle the Muslims fought was won with Allah's blessings. It was followed by a stopover at the memorial for the martyrs of Battle of Badr:

Saudi Arabia's two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah are visited by millions of people every year and is transforming on a daily basis. Growth and development to this cities, along with the country is a continuous process. As home to the world's most important Islamic sites which includes the Masjid Al Haram, which houses the Kaaba the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah are at the centre of religious life for the world's Muslim population.

ENTERTAINMENT

New Indiana Jones director gave 'my best version' of Spielberg

IT IS NO EASY feat taking over an iconic saga like Indiana Jones, but new director James Mangold says he wanted to deliver the best version of his childhood hero Steven Spielberg.

Mangold took the helm of the franchise for its fifth and final crack of the whip in "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on Thursday, starring Harrison Ford, 80.

The legendary director Spielberg "has been a hero of mine all my life. I saw the first Indiana Jones movie when I was 17. It's a big chair to sit in ... but it was also a huge personal opportunity," Mangold said in an interview.



The director of "Girl, Interrupted," "Walk the Line," and "Logan," Mangold said the final cut was "my best version of Steven, me kind of emulating my mentor and trying to tell a story. Of course, it's still me, and not him."

In a Hollywood seemingly saturated by superhero movies, Mangold said old-school action movies still had their place.

"I think maybe it's not in fashion, but I think it's refreshing to people," in a time when "everything has to be so fast that it doesn't even allow characters or the story to breathe," said Mangold, warning that there are dangers of new visual effects being "overused."

However, "The Dial of Destiny" does not shun digital special effects, and one of the most impressive sequences was filmed in a studio.

The film opens with an extended flashback sequence in which Ford is de-aged.

"You have to have a lot of money to do it," he said of the increasingly coveted technique.

"I'm not sure it has relevance in most films, you can do so much with make-up and lighting in other ways if those are your challenges," he said, warning of the danger of new visual effects being "over-used."

But, even though Ford is still "pretty fit" at 80, how do you deal with an Indiana Jones who should be long-retired?

"You have to be honest with the audience and part of this honesty is dealing with age," and the point was to come up with a story that was "honest, and addressed time, aging and regret, and choice. What's it like to be a hero in a time when you are not celebrated anymore." — AFP

ART

Gerhard Richter painting sold for \$21.8 million at Sotheby's

A PAINTING BY renowned German painter Gerhard Richter sold for \$21.8 million at one of the annual New York spring auctions at Sotheby's on Friday.

The work "4,096 Colours" was the last painting in the coveted 1974 series of colour panels and was also an inspiration for the artist's magnificent window in Cologne Cathedral, a spokeswoman for the auction house said.

Richter was inspired by the idea of the colour panels when he saw colour sample cards in a paint shop in the German city of Dusseldorf. It then dawned on him that they were perfect pictures.

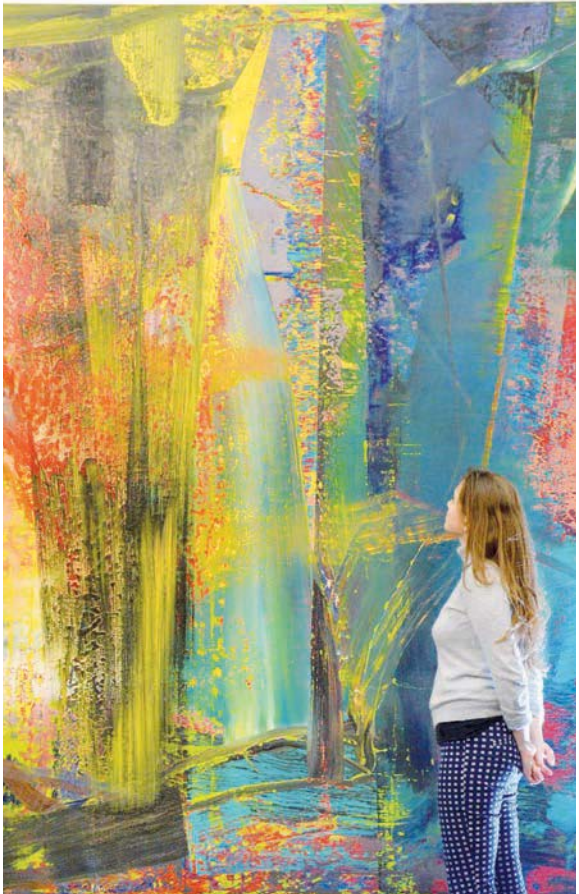
He copied the colour charts, but composed the colour fields differently. Between 1966 and 1974, he painted three different series of panels, each increasing in complexity.

In October 2022, Richter's painting "192 Colours" fetched around £18.1 million (\$22.59 million) at Sotheby's in London.

The "4,096 Colours" artwork was exhibited in Chicago, San Francisco, London's Tate Modern and Berlin's national museums.

The 91-year-old artist is one of the world's most influential living artists.

Sotheby's - as well as other rival auction houses like Christie's - is auctioning off hundreds of works by great artists in May. — dpa



CULTURE / FASHION

London show explores sari's 21st century reinvention

THE SARI IS BEING reinvented for the modern age in an Indian "fashion revolution," with around 60 trailblazing examples due to go on display at a new exhibition in London.

Over the past decade, according to curator Priya Khanchandani, the sari has seen the most rapid transformation in its 5,000-year history.

From sari styles worn by young women on their way to work in Delhi and Mumbai to the spectacular creation that was the first sari to grace New York's famous Met Gala, the London showcase spotlights the garment's 21st century revival.

Khanchandani says she first became aware of a renaissance in 2015 when she met some of the designers in Delhi who were transforming the sari, traditionally a single long piece of unstitched fabric draped over the body.

"I saw the sari being revived as an everyday garment in a way that was very fashionable. They were being worn by younger women than I knew before," she told AFP ahead of the show, The Offbeat Sari, which opens at the Design Museum on Friday.

"They were often quite intellectual women, writers and artists... wearing them in ways that I didn't expect," she said.

Having previously viewed saris as a garment to be worn for special events or weddings, she suddenly noticed them being reinvented as everyday clothing, even teamed with T-shirts and sneakers.

The birth of mass consumerism and social media in India combined with the growth of the country's urban middle class has accelerated the sari's revamp, Khanchandani said.

"The influence of digital media which has a really significant reach in India, particularly among young people, allowed trends to spread and I think allowed the way that saris were being worn to become a grassroots movement," she added.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Popular hashtags that have seen a vast array of images shared



online include #sarilove, #sarifashion, #designsarees and #sareeindia.

Despite the sari's long history, it was not until last year that a sari was seen at the celebrated annual Met Gala event in New York.

Worn by Indian businesswoman and socialite Natasha Poonawalla, the showstopping ensemble featured a flowing gold sari by Sabyasachi with a gold Schiaparelli bustier.

In addition to extravagant couture saris, designers in India have also pushed boundaries by experimenting in a range of ways.

The Raj Kilt, by the Little Shilpa brand, is described as "half kilt, half sari" and reflects the cross-cultural experiences of Indian designer

Shilpa Chavan who studied in Britain.

Some of the most eye-catching and innovative exhibits include a sari adorned with sequins cut from old X-ray images from hospital waste and another in distressed denim.

But while the sari's potential for extravagance and creativity is on full display in the exhibition's selections, there are also examples of how it is being pressed into use to express ideas of identity and resistance.

Hundreds of thousands of members of the so-called Gulabi Gang, a group set up to fight domestic violence, including sexual abuse and child marriage in rural India, have adopted bright pink saris along



with bamboo sticks as the symbol of their movement.

Also included in the show is a purple silk sari embroidered with sequins and crystals by the brand Papa Don't Preach.

After the label posted a photograph of the sari being worn by the author and comedian ALOK, who founded the #DeGenderFashion movement, it decided to remove the "womenswear" wording from their messaging. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Coronation tiara crowns Geneva jewels auction



A TIARA WORN at two British coronations and the Star of Egypt diamond that purportedly once belonged to King Farouk sold at auction on Wednesday, crowning a week of dazzling jewellery sales in Geneva.

The historic pieces went under the hammer at Christie's, the day after Sotheby's auction house sold a Bulgari blue diamond for more than \$25 million.

Less than a fortnight after the coronation of Britain's King Charles III, bidders fought it out for the Bessborough Diamond Tiara, which was worn at the coronations of King Charles's grandfather King George VI in 1937 and mother Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Vere Ponsonby, the ninth earl of Bessborough, commissioned the Parisian jeweller Chaumet to craft a tiara for his wife to mark his appointment as Canada's governor-general in 1931. She wore it to the coronations.

The platinum Art Deco headpiece sold for 945,000 Swiss francs (\$1.06 million).

"This is as iconic as it gets in terms of the style. The workmanship is unbelievable," said Max Fawcett, the head of jewellery at Christie's in Geneva, who sold the tiara.

"It's a piece of art and a piece of history," he told AFP.

The entire Christie's Magnificent Jewels sale totalled nearly 41.2 million Swiss francs (\$45.8 million), with 11 of the lots going for more than \$1 million each.



BULGARI DIAMOND NETS \$25.2M

On Tuesday, Sotheby's held its own Magnificent Jewels auction in Geneva, achieving total sales topping 76.7 million Swiss francs (\$85.4 million).

The auction was led by the Bulgari Laguna Blu, an 11.16-carat fancy-vivid blue diamond, which fetched 22,625,100 Swiss francs (\$25.2 million).

Created in 1970, it was worn in a necklace by the Indian actress Priyanka Chopra to the Met Gala fashion event in New York earlier this month.

It sold after a four-minute battle between one bidder in the room and three by telephone, one of whom ultimately grabbed the gem.

Nearly a quarter of all the lots sold featured coloured gemstones selling far above their high estimates.

"There is no doubt that high-quality high jewellery can still command sky-high prices," said Olivier Wagner, head of jewellery at Sotheby's Geneva.

STAR OF EGYPT

The Christie's sale featured the Star of Egypt, the origins of which are shrouded in mystery.

The spectacular unmounted 105.52-carat diamond was reportedly bought in 1850 by the viceroy of Egypt, who sold it in 1880.

It first appeared on the London market in 1939.

It was seemingly later bought by King Farouk, who ruled Egypt from 1936 to 1952. The Star of Egypt was bought alongside jewels known to be in his possession.

It had been in the same family since the 1970s and had never been auctioned before.

It fetched 2,707,000 Swiss francs (\$3.02 million) in under three minutes of bidding.

Of the 102 Christie's lots, the one with the highest estimate was a Cartier Belle Epoque natural pearl and diamond devant-de-corsage formerly owned by Australian opera singer Nellie Melba.

Made in around 1902, it was estimated to be worth 2.5 to 3.5 million Swiss francs, but went unsold, failing to attract the minimum sale price.

The highest sale price was achieved by a Chaumet ring featuring an oval-shaped ruby of 13.07 carats and pear-shaped diamonds.

It fetched 4,703,500 Swiss francs (\$5.25 million) — blowing past its estimate of 550,000 to 750,000 francs.

The Christie's sale also featured the largest private collection of Paris-based creator Joel Arthur Rosenthal's JAR jewellery ever to come to auction.

The 28 JAR lots made just over six million Swiss francs (\$6.68 million), led by the eye-catching 2011 sapphire, spinel and diamond "eye" bangle, which sold for 856,800 francs (\$957,000). — AFP