

Iran's foreign minister arrives

Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his accompanying delegation arrived on Tuesday on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The Iranian foreign minister was received by officials at the Foreign Ministry.



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BARCELONA CLOSE \$1.6 BILLION DEAL TO FINANCE STADIUM REVAMP



P13

GLOBAL REFINERY MARGINS SLUMP BY 50 PER CENT



P20

POWERFUL STORYTELLING AND PRISTINE CRAFTSMANSHIP



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO TANZANIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Samia Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Samia. His Majesty also wished the people of Tanzania further development and growth. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO CUBA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Miguel Díaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba on being elected for a new Presidential term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Miguel Díaz-Canel in leading the people of Cuba towards achieving further progress and prosperity. — ONA

CRUDE PRICE AT \$82.74 A BARREL

Oman oil price for June delivery on Tuesday reached \$82.74, comprising a rise by \$1.49 from the price of Monday, which was \$81.25. The average price of Oman oil for April delivery has stabilised at \$82.23 per barrel, thus \$1.31 per barrel higher than March delivery. World oil prices recovered from Monday's sell-off. Brent crude rose 0.2 per cent to \$82.88 a barrel, while US futures rose 0.15 per cent to \$78.89 a barrel.

INSIDE



TÜRKİYE, RUSSIA, IRAN AND SYRIA HOLD TALKS

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DECARBONISATION REQUIRES NEW FISCAL RULES

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MANY WILAYATS RECEIVE RAIN



Some wilayats in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, South and North Al Sharqiyah witnessed thunderstorms of varying intensity on Tuesday night. According to Oman Met Office, cloud activity is expected on Wednesday afternoon as well over large parts of Al Hajar Mountains, extending during the evening over the governorates of the South and North Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta. DETAILS ON P3

PHOTO BY KHALFAN AL RUZAIKI

OMAN'S EMBASSY IN SUDAN SAFE

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry affirmed that the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Sudanese capital Khartoum is safe and sound. Meanwhile, a US-brokered ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals was largely holding in much of the capital on Tuesday, but witnesses in some areas reported ongoing clashes between the army and paramilitary forces. Foreign nations stepped up efforts to evacuate their nationals from the chaos-torn nation, but security fears were compounded when the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a "huge biological risk" after fighters occupied a Khartoum laboratory. SEE ALSO P6

PRESIDENT BIDEN ANNOUNCES 2024 RE-ELECTION BID

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday his bid "to finish the job" with re-election in 2024, plunging at the record age of 80 into a ferocious campaign that could set up a rematch against Donald Trump. Launching his pitch in a video on the same date he first began his 2020 challenge against Trump, Biden said he was still fighting to save American democracy from Republican "extremists." "When I ran for president four years ago, I said we're in a battle for the soul of America. And we still are," Biden pronounces in the voiceover. "That's been the work of my first term: to

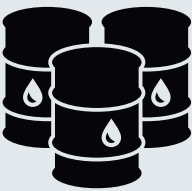


fight for our democracy," Biden says. "Let's finish this job — I know we can." After a series of big domestic legislative wins, a strong economic recovery from the Covid pandemic, and momentous foreign policy struggles, Biden has no real challenger from within the Democratic Party. But he will face constant and fierce scrutiny over his age. — AFP

GDP up by 30 per cent to touch RO 44.1 billion

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) issued the second edition of the "Quarterly National Accounts Indicators" report, which highlights the most important indicators at current and fixed prices, growth rates of economic activities and prominent indicators boosting the rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), until the end of December 2022. The Sultanate of Oman's GDP at fixed prices increased by 4.3 per cent by the end of December 2022 to stand at RO 36.1 billion compared to the corresponding period in 2021. Statistics indicated that this rise is attributed to the growth in oil activities by 10.2 per cent at fixed prices compared to the same pe-

PROMINENT INDICATORS



OIL ACTIVITIES GREW BY 10.2%



MINING AND QUARRIES UP BY 10.5%

riod in 2021. It is also attributed to the rise in activities of mining and utilising quarries by 10.5 per cent. The report indicated that the Sultanate of Oman's GDP at current prices recorded an increase by 30 per cent to stand at RO 44.1 billion till the end of December 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. This rise is contributed to the surge in oil activities by the end of 2022 at current prices by 61.6 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2021, being the highest among economic activities. It is also contributed to the growth of the activities of converting industries by 49.6 per cent during the same period. The per capita GDP for 2022 at current prices amounted to RO 8,936. — ONA

Activities lined up for Musandam Tourism Carnival

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Tourism constitutes one of the main pillars of economic development in the Governorate of Musandam, which is experiencing steady growth in the number of visitors and cruise ships. This stems from the fact that Oman's northern governorate boasts major natural assets that are enhanced by modern infrastructure of the tourism sector and development projects. In addition, the Ministry of



Heritage and Tourism undertakes great efforts to highlight the governorate's unique features that combine adventure tourism, leisure facilities, cultural tourism and heritage tourism. Musandam is a destination for a range of tourists including those who love adventure, recreation, culture, heritage and other forms of tourism. To highlight the tourism potential of the Governorate of Musandam, the ministry is organising a three-day 'Musandam Tourism Carnival' from Wednesday at Bussah Beach in the Wilayat of Khasab, with various activities and entertainment programmes that target all segments of society. The ministry has implemented many promotional campaigns highlighting the elements of the governorate and the experiences and activities it provides to visitors. The campaigns included 'Musandam al Jamal' in early 2021 and other promotional packages provided by Omran Group and Oman Air. TURN TO P2

المؤسسة العامة للمناطق الصناعية (مدائن)



تعلن مدينة البريمي الصناعية - المؤسسة العامة للمناطق الصناعية (مدائن) - عن طرح مُزايدة لمبايعة ومصانع قائمة لشوارع غير نشطة على النحو الآتي :

رقم المزايدة	آخر موعد لشراء المستندات	تاريخ زيارة الموقع	آخر موعد لتسليم العروض	قيمة مستند المزايدة (ر.ع)
٢٠٢٣/٢	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/١٠	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/١٥ في تمام الساعة التاسعة صباحاً بالمبنى الإداري للمدينة.	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/٣٠	٢٠

- يمكن للراغبين في شراء مستندات المزايدة استلام المستندات من دائرة الدعم بمدينة البريمي الصناعية أثناء ساعات الدوام الرسمي، (هاتف: ٢٥٥٧٧٦٥ / ٢٥٥٧٧٦٨) فطير المبلغ المحدد أعلاه والمبلغ المدفوع لا يُرد.
- تودع العروض في صندوق المناقصات بمدينة البريمي الصناعية بعد وضعها في مظاريض مختومة بالشمع الأحمر ومعنونة باسم رئيس لجنة الاستثمار- مدينة البريمي الصناعية ص.ب ٥٢٥ الرمز البريدي ٥١٢، على ألا يُكتب على المظروف اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه، وذلك خلال ساعات الدوام الرسمي فقط.
- يرفق مع كل عطاء التأمين المؤقت في صورة ضمان مصرفي أو شيك مصدق عليه من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد بنسبة ١ ٪ من قيمة العطاء وساري المفعول لمدة ٩٠ يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العروض ويُعْثَق باسم مدينة البريمي الصناعية.
- مدائن غير مقيدة بقبول العرض الأعلى سعراً أو أي عرض آخر.
- يجوز لمدائن إلغاء المزايدة ولا يحق للمتقدمين بمطاءاتهم المطالبة بأية تمويزات.



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Oman's aviation sector joins the recovery bandwagon

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As global air traffic returned to pre-pandemic levels despite a surge in oil prices, the number of passengers using the Muscat International Airport increased by 73.5 per cent to 954,905 in March 2023 from 550,539 during the same period in 2022.

The flight movement increased by 59.1 per cent to 7,789 in March 2023 from 4,953 in March 2022, while the cargo movement increased by 18.4 per cent.

The passenger traffic increased by 18 per cent to 93,673 from 79,380 at Salalah Airport while flight movement increased by 18.5 per cent to 956 from 807 during the same period. There had been a significant drop in passenger movement at Suhar Airport (-81.9), while the Duqm Airport showed an increase of 10 per cent. Boosting air connectivity between the Sultanate and the rest of the world will be one of the priorities of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in 2023.

Speaking to the Observer recently, Naif al Abri, CEO of CAA, said, "Currently, we have 122 bilateral agreements with countries. We are hoping to finish negotiations with the European Union (28 countries) and ten more pacts within this coming month and during this year." Al Abri said that bilateral talks are underway



with the Indian government to increase the capacity and that he is optimistic about a positive outcome. "The conclusion of the air bilateral agreement especially the EU will benefit the airlines of the Sultanate and also those respective countries, apart from offering direct air link from the Sultanate." The revenues of CAA increased by RO 26.4 million or 58 per cent in 2022 while there was a movement of 470,809 flights,

and the number of aircraft using the Omani airspace was 386. The southern runway and taxiways of Muscat International Airport will be rehabilitated at the cost of RO 21 million with the project stated to be completed by the end of this year.

"It is interesting to note that at the global scale, premium traffic has recovered faster than total passenger traffic. The data refers to the premium cabin class,

encompassing first and business class, but does not enlighten us as to the purpose of travel, and might thus include leisure travellers who choose to travel in greater comfort," according to IATA. In the Middle East, this category reached 92.3 per cent in February 2023, up from 59.6 per cent in February 2022, likely benefiting from the region's strategic location as a transit hub for long-haul flights.

Opportunities and threats of ChatGPT

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef



In less than a few months, November 30, 2022 to be precise, ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence chatbot, has been gaining rave reviews as a one-stop-solution for all sorts of content requirement.

The possibilities of ChatGPT do not end there, according to researchers, the potential of ChatGPT in various fields, from generating programming codes to scientific writing, has garnered significant attention.

However, questions are raised in the academia over the App's natural language processing to create human-like conversational dialogue.

ChatGPT, which is also a language model that can respond to questions and compose various written content, including articles, social media posts, essays, code and e-mails, is used to generate study materials and assignment solutions.

While some scholars use ChatGPT to summarise scholarly literature or create introductions for research titles, this new technological innovation has raised questions about the credibility and ethical aspects of scientific writing.

"As a result, academic journals have established policies prohibiting the use of AI or LLM in developing research papers, and universities are discussing revisions to ensure the credibility of the theses submitted by students," says Ubais Parayil Iqbal, a researcher with UTAS-Nizwa.

ChatGPT, an AI-driven Chatbot based on the Large Language Model (LLM) GPT-3, was developed by OpenAI in 2020. Recently, an updated version of the language processing AI model, GPT-4, was introduced, which is expected to produce more accurate results than its predecessor and deliver human-level performance in many practical scenarios.

"Researchers say that users have reported serious flaws in the quality of the output produced

by ChatGPT, including the generation of fake references, which has eroded trust in the system," says Ubais, adding that "nonetheless, OpenAI has since claimed that they have updated their system to prevent fake references in scientific writing."

This poses a dilemma in judging the credibility of assignments, dissertations and research papers. However, as AI becomes increasingly integrated into our lives, it cannot be avoided.

"One possible solution is to acknowledge that no AI can generate new ideas, making it illogical to claim that ChatGPT can create an entire research article. While it may be able to do so, it is unlikely to meet the quality standards required for publication in reputable scientific journals." Therefore, ChatGPT can only replace academics and researchers who focus on paid-predatory journals to increase their publication count.

Having said, for active researchers with a genuine thirst for scientific contributions, ChatGPT remains an additional tool for proofreading and literature searching.

He suggests some measures in the universities and other academic institutions to tackle the challenges posed by the ChatGPT.

"To ensure that assignments are placed at a higher order thinking level, universities should raise their standards and requirements, demanding theory generation rather than mere testing and review. In conclusion, while there are no shortcuts in scientific writing, ChatGPT is currently the smartest way to search for and read the literature."

Man nabbed for possessing psychotropic drugs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The police command of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, arrested a man for possessing more than 17 kg of hashish for trafficking, Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced on Tuesday.



"Legal action against the defendant is underway," ROP statement said. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard

vessels of the police command on Al Batinah South Governorate rounded up 89 people from different Asian nationalities for trying to enter the country illegally on smuggling boats.

In another incident, the police command of Dhofar Governorate arrested four nationals and three Asians on charges of stealing electric cables from different locations within the governorate.

Rains, wind continue in many parts of Sultanate of Oman



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Some of the wilayats of the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, South and North Al Sharqiyah witnessed thunderstorms of varying intensity on Tuesday night, and it is likely to continue until it begins to gradually weaken later.

According to Oman Met

Office, cloud activity is expected on Wednesday afternoon as well over large parts of the Hajar Mountains, extending during the evening over the governorates of South and North Sharqiya and Al Wusta.

The weather forecast for Wednesday stated high and medium clouds advection over most of the governorates with chance of isolated rain over

Musandam, Al Dhahira, Al Buraimi and Dhofar occasionally thundershowers associated with downdraft winds over governorates of South Al Sharqiya, North Al Sharqiya and over the mountains side of Muscat, al Dakhlyia, South AL-Batinah and North AL-Batinah governorates. There is also a chance for dust rising due to strong northwesterly winds over

desert and open areas.

There are also chances of low level clouds or fog patches at late night or early morning over parts of South Al Sharqiya, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates and parts of Oman Sea coast.

Areas around Al Hajar Mountains witnessed thunderclouds churning out thunderbolts and lightning. Lightening bolt had struck a

house in Nizwa damaging the top corner of the terrace. Heavy rains were reported in north of Ibra, Manah, while strong thunderstorms accompanied by hail was experienced in Sinaw and Al Mudhaibi. Al Amerat in the Muscat Governorate received strong rains which soon had the wadis flowing.

An interesting feature of the current weather in relation to wind

is that Al Hamra experienced a mild whirlwind and for the second time in a row a tornado was seen in Jalaan.

According to Oman Met Office, rainfall is expected to range between 20 mm to 60 millimeters. The speed of downdrafts is expected to be 15 to 50 Kt.

Precautions have to be taken not to cross flowing wadis and to stay away from low lying areas.

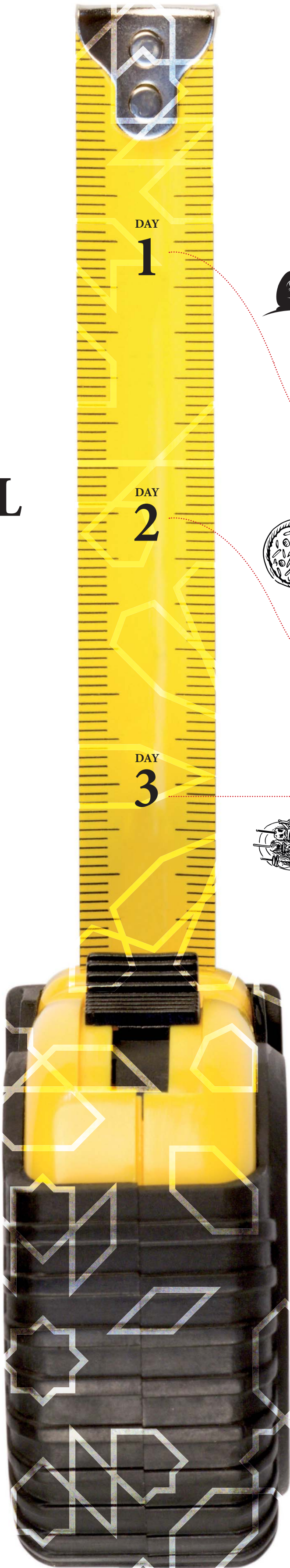
ROP evacuates 25 citizens due to heavy rains

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said that 25 citizens were airlifted from a mountainous area to the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen by police helicopter due to heavy rains in the Sultanate of Oman. 'Police aviation carried out an evacuation of 25 citizens from the Suqah area in Al Jabal Al Aswad to the Ismaia area in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, due to the interruption of traffic due to the descent of the wadis,' a statement from ROP said.





SHORT
YET
EXCEPTIONAL
EID
HOLIDAYS



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

Even though short, Eid Al Fitr holiday was an exceptional event for the people of the Sultanate of Oman. It was a moment of joy as all prayer areas and mosques opened their doors for performing prayers. On Eid day, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik offered the Eid prayers at Al Khor Mosque in Muscat. On the first day of Eid Al Fitr, citizens and residents in the various governorates performed various rituals including slaughtering of animals.

ON THE FIRST DAY OF EID, Omanis usually start with Aarsiya meal and some offer Al Migla'ai or Al Mihmas, a famous Omani dish prepared with liver, meat and flavoured spices. Omani Halwa is also served to guests in almost every house during the Eid days. During the first day of Eid Al Fitr, children are given Eidiya (money) which cements the concept of Sadaqa (alms giving) in their minds and hearts.

ON THE MORNING OF THE SECOND DAY OF EID, families gather together to prepare for a special meal of barbecue (mishkak), where the meat is kept in Tannour (oven) in a hole at a depth of three to four metres and taken out on the THIRD DAY OF EID. Then, the meal is shared with neighbours and relatives.

Khalfan al Khaldi, a retired government sector employee, was on top of the world as he came back from his home town Jarda. "I can't express how happy I am to be able to see my family, all at once, after such a long time. Compared to previous Eids, this one was exceptional as we celebrated the way we used to before the pandemic, including offering Eid prayers in big numbers," he said.

Echoing similar views, Abdulaziz al Numani, Muscat-based government employee, said, "The traditional ways of celebrating the big festivals in the country are coming back and this is evident when I saw how people celebrated this time. No one looked worried much about the health issues that have arisen as a result of Covid-19 but rather enjoyed to the fullest," Numani said.

Meanwhile, public parks continued to entertain visitors while recreational activities for children included horse electric games, electronic games, aerial and rubber games, watercraft, games of chance, and other games that meet the needs of children.



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India to pass China as most populous nation

NEW DELHI: India will overtake China as the world's most populous country in the coming week, hitting almost 1.43 billion people, the United Nations said.

“By the end of this month, India's population is expected to reach 1,425,775,850 people, matching and then surpassing the population of mainland China,” the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs said.

Last week the UN's annual State of World Population report had said the milestone would come by midyear 2023.

India is topping China due to both rapid growth in its own population and a decline in China's after hitting 1.426 billion last year.

Regarded as the world's most heavily populated country since the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th Century CE, China is expected to decline steadily to around one billion people by the end of this century, according to UN projections.

Meanwhile, India's population “is virtually certain” to continue to grow in the coming decades, according to the United Nations. The median UN projection sees India hitting 1.5 billion by mid-century — though officials stressed it could be much lower or higher.

China's fall is heavily tied to decades of maintaining a strict one-child policy for married couples, which ended in 2016.

In addition, its slower growth is attributed to the rising cost of living and the growing number of Chinese women going into the workforce and seeking higher education.

Last year, China's fertility rate fell to one of the lower levels in the world at 1.2 births per woman.

For India, which has taken much longer than China to get population growth under control, the fertility rate was 2.0 births per woman, just below the 2.1



School children visit the Taj Mahal in Agra on Tuesday. India will overtake China as the world's most populous country in the coming week. — AFP

replacement level.

Yet both countries had about the same level of fertility, just under six births per woman, in 1970, said John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division and the Economic and Social Affairs Department.

“It took three and a half decades for India to experience the same fertility reduction that occurred in China over just seven years during the 1970s,” he said. A key reason for the difference was Beijing's one-child policy; another was India's lower human capital investment and slower economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s, according to the UN.

Wilmoth said that the reason the population report last week said India would surpass China by midyear was that it was using a projection made based on data last year. The projection announced on Monday is based on more

recent data — though still a projection, Wilmoth stressed.

“The precise timing of when this crossover occurs is not known for sure and it will never be known,” he told reporters.

Both countries must confront rapidly ageing populations, China more so than India.

India faces huge challenges providing electricity, food and housing for its growing population, with many of its massive cities already struggling with water shortages, air and water pollution, and packed slums.

Surpassing China shines a spotlight on the challenge facing the Indian government to provide jobs for the millions of young people entering the job market every year.

Meanwhile China's economy is increasingly challenged to fill positions due to its ageing population. — AFP

Spain braces for scorching summer temperatures in spring

MADRID: Spain is bracing for a week of temperatures as high as 40C that are forecast to shatter records for April, as officials laid out plans to open public swimming pools early and adapt school schedules, while meteorologists warned of the risk of wildfires.

Coinciding with a long-running drought, the cause of the predicted temperatures is “the progressive entry of a very warm and dry air mass from Africa coupled with atmospheric stability (meaning unchangeable weather) and strong sunshine,” Spain's weather agency AEMET said on Tuesday.

These unseasonable temperatures would be “typical of summer”, AEMET added, with the mercury expected to creep up to 38-40 degrees Celsius in the southern Guadalquivir Valley that includes the city of Cordoba.

That would be the highest figure for April since Spanish meteorological official data-keeping began in 1961.

The heat means large parts of the country would be at high or extreme risk of wildfires, AEMET said.

Ricardo Torrijo, a senior meteorologist at the agency, said the weather was a thermal ridge — or wave of high temperatures — extending from Africa to the



Tourists use hats and a guide uses an umbrella to protect themselves from the strong sun as they look at the New Bridge during unusually high temperatures in Ronda, Spain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Iberian Peninsula.

He said it did not meet the official definition of a heatwave, which occurs when the maximum daily temperatures are unusually hot over an extended period.

The government of the central Madrid region on Monday announced an action plan, including allowing schools to adapt their timetables around peak temperatures and to ensure air conditioning at health centres.

Under the plan, Madrid's many outdoor swimming pools will open a month earlier than usual, in mid-May.

The capital's subway system is also set to increase air conditioning and make trains more frequent to avoid overcrowding. In the hottest region of Spain, the southwestern

city of Seville has boosted its emergency services budget and brought in extra healthcare worker numbers in case of heat exhaustion during the “Feria de Abril” (April, or spring, fair) that last year attracted an estimated 500,000 revellers.

Spain has seen 36 consecutive months of below-average rainfall.

Environment Minister Teresa Ribera said the coming months were likely to be “complicated”.

“Apart from extreme episodes such as the one we will experience this week in terms of temperature, we will probably see average rainfall in May, June and July; but given that in recent months rain has been well below average, this would lead to a scenario of concern,” she said. — Reuters



المتحدة للتقوى
United Finance

أنتجز المزيد
Achieve more

Board of Directors' Report for the period ended 31st March 2023 Report on material events covering the interim financials

OVERVIEW AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The first quarter of 2023 has been a challenging period for businesses worldwide, including the financial sector. However, we are pleased to report that we have navigated through these challenging times, delivering robust performance. Our total income for the quarter increased by 20.36% to RO 257,032 million respectively, and 1.12% in net profit at RO 257,032 compared to the same period last year. We maintained a healthy balance sheet and credit quality, with total assets standing at RO 99,848 million.

The future outlook for Oman's economy remains positive, and we are optimistic about the growth prospects for our finance company. The Omani government's initiatives to reduce the budget deficit and the surpluses from the oil prices being used to reduce the country's debt are expected to positively impact the overall economy and our company. In addition to its flourishing exports, The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) added that the expectations of an increase in the growth rate to more than 3% during the year 2023 will boost the growth. We anticipate that business activity will pick up as the effects of the pandemic wind down, and we plan to continue our investment in digital capabilities while exploring new opportunities in sustainable finance.

Overall, we are confident that United Finance Company is well-positioned to capitalize on the growth opportunities presented by the positive economic outlook for Oman. We remain committed to delivering sustainable value to our stakeholders while maintaining the highest standards of corporate governance and ethical practices.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

United Finance Company SAOG's net profit after tax increased by 1.12% to reach RO 257,032. Total income increased by 20.36% to RO 2.35 million. Moreover, the company costs rose by 23.24% in total expenses which is a reflection of the increase in finance costs due to tight market liquidity conditions and an increase in expected credit loss.

We have also seen a significant increase in the loan portfolio, which stood at RO 95.3 million as of 31st March 2023 compared to RO 79.5 million in March 2022, considering the company's prudent approach to lending. The capital adequacy ratio remained high, exceeding 47%.

PROVISIONING POSITION

The company has provided RO 443,247 as a provision during Q1 2023 taking the total provisions of the company to over RO 11.3 million, and we continue to maintain one of the highest provisions against non-performing loans amongst FLCs. In addition, the Company also maintains a special reserve of RO 2.37 million to guard against unforeseen delinquencies.

FUNDING

The company has adequate funds to meet its current business requirements. Banks have renewed/ replenished credit facilities to meet the company's business requirements. Management is confident of mobilizing the required funds at reasonable interest rates to meet the budgeted business levels of the current year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said, may God always protect him, his Government, the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority, and other regulatory authorities for their invaluable support and guidance during the quarter. Our sincere thanks also go out to our bankers, dealers, and customers for their unwavering trust, confidence, and support. Furthermore, we extend our appreciation to the dedicated management and staff of the company for their continued hard work and support.

Mohamed Abdulla Mohamed Al Khonji
Chairman

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	137,769	1,999,247
Deposit with the Central Bank of Oman	250,000	250,000
Other receivables and prepaid expenses	591,785	166,832
Instalment finance debtors - net	95,307,390	79,502,584
Investment securities	724,150	554,150
Deferred tax asset	16,923	16,923
Property and equipment	2,819,571	2,322,747
TOTAL ASSETS	99,847,588	84,812,483
EQUITY		
Share capital	35,612,730	34,914,441
Share premium reserve	-	528,402
Legal reserve	5,277,839	5,117,232
Special reserve	2,368,989	2,368,989
Impairment reserve	1,911,736	1,911,736
Investment revaluation reserve	170,000	-
Retained earnings	2,007,508	2,739,514
Total equity	47,348,803	47,580,314
Liabilities		
Creditors and other payables	5,409,228	4,386,787
Borrowings	43,358,891	28,436,111
Taxation	340,666	409,271
Corporate deposits	3,390,000	4,000,000
Total liabilities	52,498,785	37,232,169
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	99,847,588	84,812,483
NET ASSETS PER SHARE	0.133	0.136

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
Interest income on instalment finance income	2,043,279	1,876,742
Interest expense	(571,375)	(409,509)
Net instalment finance income	1,471,904	1,467,233
Fee commission and other income	310,580	78,909
Net operating income	1,782,484	1,546,142
Operating expenses	(1,012,371)	(1,017,685)
Depreciation	(24,476)	(22,470)
Allowance for expected credit losses	(443,247)	(204,587)
Profit before tax	302,390	301,400
Income tax expense	(45,358)	(47,210)
PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	257,032	254,190
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.003	0.003

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of such request addressed to:

Chief Executive Officer, United Finance Co. SAOG
P O Box 3652, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24577300 Fax 24561557
E-mail: ufc@ufcoman.com, Website: www.ufcoman.com

No flight cancellations during Nato air drill

LONDON: Nato's largest ever air deployment exercise, set to take place in June, is unlikely to lead to commercial flight cancellations, Europe's lead air traffic manager said, after Germany's aviation industry expressed worries that it could cause disruption.

“We do not anticipate that there will be any need for air operators to make cancellations in order to accommodate the needs of the exercise,” Eurocontrol said in a statement.

Air Defender 23 will be one of the largest air drills in Nato history, with 25 countries taking part in the joint exercise in German, Dutch and Czech airspace. It will use air corridors that have often been used for training purposes, according to the German air force. Since Russia's war on Ukraine last year, the commercial airspace over Ukraine has been closed. — Reuters



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors/consultant specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
004/2023	Civil Works - MAM	Excellent	04 May 2023	05 Jun 2023	815/-
013/2023	Supply and Install Diesel Generator - RAYSOOT	Grad (C) and Above - registered in (DCRP)	04 May 2023	05 Jun 2023	65/-

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.



Talks between Ethiopia and Oromo rebel group begin in Zanzibar

ADDIS ABABA: Talks between the Ethiopian government and rebels from the Oromiya region have started in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous region of Tanzania, a spokesman for regional Africa group IGAD said on Tuesday.

Rebel groups in Oromiya, which is the biggest of Ethiopia's 11 regions and surrounds the capital Addis Ababa, have battled the federal government for decades.

In recent years the violence has left hundreds dead and displaced tens of thousands, with Oromos accusing the government of marginalising and neglecting Oromos, the country's largest ethnic group.

"The talks are under way in Tanzania as we speak... we hope will lead to a political agreement," said Nuur Mohamud Sheekh, the spokesperson for the Executive Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development.

The unrest in Oromiya is one of several security challenges Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government is working to address after signing a peace deal in November to end a two-year civil war in the northern Tigray region that cost tens of thousands of lives.

The talks bring together representatives from the



Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed

Ethiopian government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). The OLA is an outlawed splinter group of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a formerly banned opposition party.

Both sides have confirmed the talks, but they have publicly provided few details.

Two sources with knowledge of the talks, who asked not to be named, said Abiy's national security adviser Redwan Hussien would lead the government's delegation. One of the sources confirmed the talks would take place on the island of Zanzibar.

A surge of violence in Oromiya in recent years, which included fighting between the government and rebels as well as ethnically motivated killings, resulted in hundreds of deaths.

The government and the rebels each blame the other for the violence. — Reuters

'Huge biological risk' after Sudan fighters occupy lab: WHO

GENEVA: Fighters have occupied a national public laboratory in Sudan holding samples of diseases including polio and measles, creating an "extremely, extremely dangerous" situation, the World Health Organization warned on Tuesday.

Fighters "kicked out all the technicians from the lab... which is completely under the control of one of the fighting parties as a military base," said Nima Saeed Abid, the WHO's representative in Sudan.

He did not say which of the fighting parties had taken over the laboratory.

Abid said he had received a call from the head of the national lab in Khartoum on Monday, a day before a US-brokered 72-hour ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals officially came into effect after 10 days of urban combat.

"There is a huge biological risk associated with the occupation of the central public health lab," said Abid.

He pointed out that the lab held so-called isolates, or samples, of a range of deadly diseases, including measles, polio and cholera.

The UN health agency also said it had confirmed 14 attacks on healthcare during the fighting, killing eight and injuring two.

And it warned that "depleting stocks of blood bags risk spoiling due to lack of power."

"In addition to chemical hazards, bio-risk hazards are also very high due to lack of functioning generators," Abid said.



Evacuees from Sudan sit inside a military plane as they wait to be processed by members of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF). — Reuters

The Sudanese health ministry has put the number of deaths so far at 459, with a further 4,072 wounded.

The UN refugee agency said thousands had already fled the violence and that it was bracing for up to 270,000 people to flee Sudan into neighbouring Chad and South Sudan.

UNHCR said it does not yet have estimates for the numbers

headed to other surrounding countries.

Laura Lo Castro, the agency's representative in Chad, said some 20,000 refugees had arrived there since the fighting began 10 days ago. Speaking to reporters, she said the UNHCR expected up to 100,000 "in the worst-case scenario."

Her colleague in South Sudan, Marie-Helene Verney, said that

around 4,000 of the more than 800,000 South Sudanese refugees living in Sudan had returned home since the fighting began.

Looking forward, she told reporters that "the most likely scenario is 125,000 returns of South Sudanese refugees into South Sudan."

Up to 45,000 Sudanese might also flee as refugees into South Sudan, she said. — Reuters

Türkiye, Russia, Iran and Syria hold 'constructive talks'

ANKARA: The defence ministers and intelligence chiefs of Iran, Russia, Syria and Türkiye held talks on Tuesday that Ankara and Moscow described as constructive, as part of efforts to rebuild Türkiye-Syria ties.

Moscow is Assad's main ally and Russia has encouraged a reconciliation with Ankara.

At the talks in Moscow, the ministers and intelligence service chiefs discussed strengthening security in Syria and the normalisation of ties between Ankara and Damascus, the Turkish and Russian defence ministries said in separate statements.

All four countries reaffirmed their desire to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and the need to intensify efforts for the speedy return of Syrian refugees to their



Negotiators and officials attend a meeting of defence ministers of Russia, Iran, Syria and Türkiye in Moscow, Russia. — Reuters

country, the statements said.

The Syrian and Turkish defence ministers previously held talks in Moscow in December, marking the highest-level encounter between the two countries since the war began.

EXACT DATE

Türkiye's foreign minister last week said that a meeting of foreign ministers of the four countries that would build on the December talks may take place in early May, but he later said it was postponed because the parties could not agree on an exact date.

"We are preparing for a meeting to be attended by defence ministers and intelligence chiefs" of Türkiye, Russia, Syria and Iran, Akar said.

"Our aim is to solve the problems through negotiations

and to bring peace to the region as soon as possible."

Ankara and Damascus have had few formal contacts.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has opened up to the idea of holding a peace-building summit with the Syrian leader.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has backed Erdogan's efforts.

But Assad has said he will only meet Erdogan if Türkiye withdraws troops from northern Syria.

Erdogan says he needs the military presence as a security precaution against attacks on Türkiye by Kurdish groups.

Earlier this month, diplomats from Iran, Russia, Türkiye and Syria met in Moscow to pave the way for a foreign ministers' meeting. — Agencies

SHORT TAKES

PRETORIA

Ruling party wants S Africa to quit ICC

President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Tuesday his ruling ANC party had resolved that South Africa should quit the International Criminal Court.

The ICC issued an arrest warrant against Putin in March meaning Pretoria, due to host the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa bloc summit this year, would have to detain him on arrival.

"Yes, the governing party... has taken that decision that it is prudent that South Africa should



pull out of the ICC," Ramaphosa said during a press conference co-hosted with the visiting President of Finland Sauli Niinisto.

Ramaphosa said the decision was reached "largely" because of what is perceived as the court's unfair treatment of certain countries. — AFP

KABAL

16 killed in Pakistan munition blasts

The death toll from a series of explosions caused by a fire in a munitions cache in a Pakistan police station rose to 16 on Tuesday, police said.

The explosions levelled the specialist counter-terrorism station in Kabal town of Swat Valley, in the northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which neighbours Afghanistan.

Swat police said a short-circuit in a basement storing "grenades and other explosives" was the



cause of the blasts.

The dead included policemen, five suspected terrorists being held for interrogation, and two brothers aged four and six who lived nearby, Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, the inspector general of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police said. — AFP

BEIJING

Mars rover likely idled by dust blocking

China's fully robotic rover on Mars likely met with excessive accumulation of sand and dust, its mission designer said, breaking months of silence about the status of the vehicle.

The motorised rover Zhurong, named after a mythical Chinese god of fire, was expected to have woken up in December after entering a planned sleep mode in May 2022 as falling solar radiation with the advent of winter cut its power generation.

"We have not had any



communication from the rover since it entered hibernation," said Zhang, chief designer of China's Mars exploration programme. "We are monitoring it every day and believe it has not woken up because the sunlight has not yet reached the minimum level for power generation." — Reuters



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In brief

■ NEW YORK



DONALD TRUMP GOES ON TRIAL, ACCUSED OF ABUSE

Donald Trump went on trial on Tuesday, where the writer E Jean Carroll is accusing the former US president in a civil lawsuit of abusing her in a department store dressing room in the mid-1990s.

Jury selection began in Manhattan federal court in the former Elle magazine advice columnist's case, where Carroll is also accusing Trump of defamation.

It is part of a slew of lawsuits and investigations facing Trump, the Republican front-runner in the 2024 presidential race, and could be politically damaging as witnesses discuss his alleged misconduct, all of which he denies. — Reuters

■ BERLIN



MINISTER JOINS ODER RIVER RESEARCH TRIP

German Environment Minister Steffi Lemke is joining scientists on a research trip on the Oder River on Tuesday as experts seek to clarify the mass fish deaths in the river last summer.

Lemke is travelling to the western Polish region between Kostrzyn and Odra on the Polish border and Hohensaaten to assess the ecological damage, the ministry said.

Accompanying Lemke are researchers from the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB).

Hundreds of tonnes of dead fish were discovered in the river, which runs south to north between Germany and Poland.

— dpa

■ LONDON



PRINCE WILLIAM 'SETTLED' PHONE-HACKING CLAIM

Prince William has "recently settled" a phone-hacking claim against a UK newspaper group, court documents filed by his brother Prince Harry claimed.

Harry, 38, is suing a number of UK newspapers over alleged unlawful information-gathering, including News Group Newspapers (NGN) which publishes The Sun and the now-defunct News of the World tabloids. NGN is part of Rupert Murdoch's global publishing empire and is asking the High Court in London to throw out the claims, filed by Harry alongside actor Hugh Grant, arguing they are out of time.

— Reuters

Ukraine says seeks for 'complete transformation' of war-hit towns

KYIV: Ukraine will seek the "complete transformation" of six towns that have been badly damaged in Russia's full-scale conflict under a reconstruction programme announced by Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal on Tuesday.

Kyiv's Western partners are preparing to pour billions of dollars into Ukraine to support reconstruction efforts after 14 months of war.

Shmyhal said the towns of Borodianka and Moshchun near the capital Kyiv, Yahidne in the north, Trostianets and Tsyrkuny in the east, and Posad-Pokrovske in the south would be rebuilt "comprehensively and according to new principles" under an experimental programme.

"This means that particular houses and buildings will not be rebuilt, but everything — with a system approach, new planning and a complete transformation of these settlements," he told a government meeting.

All six had suffered "terrible destruction", he said.

Shmyhal said the project was part of a broader plan to fast-track reconstruction even though the war is not over.

Ukrainian forces are expected to mount a counteroffensive in coming weeks to try to recapture other towns.

"For us it is important for Ukrainians to see this year already that reconstruction is a reality," he said.

Meanwhile, a Russian missile



Rescuers and volunteers work at the site of a building of local museum heavily damaged in the town of Kupiansk, Ukraine. — Reuters

struck a museum in the centre of the eastern Ukrainian city of Kupiansk, killing two women and wounding 10 other people, the state emergency service said.

Rescue workers dug through mounds of rubble to retrieve the bodies after the local history

museum was hit by what President Volodymyr Zelensky's chief of staff and the regional governor said was a Russian S-300 missile.

Anatolii Haivoronskyi, who used to work at the museum, said the museum director had been

trapped under the rubble.

Yulia, a resident who gave no surname, said she had been at the post office when she heard three explosions in the morning attack.

Zelensky posted a video of a devastated building that had spewed out rubble and debris

into the street. Its windows were smashed and a section of the wall and roof was destroyed.

Kupiansk, which had a pre-war population of 26,000, is an important rail hub which is covered by Ukrainian forces.

— Reuters

EU designates big online platforms for stricter rules

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday designated 19 online platforms, including Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, as having user numbers so big they will come under stricter regulatory rules for content.

The list — on which services from Amazon, Google, Meta, Instagram and Microsoft also feature — all have more than 45 million monthly active users.

That puts them in a category under a new EU law, known as the Digital Services Act (DSA), imposing measures from August such as annual audits and a duty to effectively counter disinformation and hate content.

In four months' time, "these platforms and search engines will not be able to act as if they were 'too big to care,'" Thierry Breton, the EU's internal market commissioner, said in a statement.

"This new supervision system will cast a wide and tight net and catch all points of failure in a platform's compliance," he added.

Breton told journalists on Tuesday his team will hold "stress tests" to check Twitter's compliance readiness "at the end of June".

He added that TikTok had also expressed an interest in cooperating to ensure compliance.

Tuesday's announcement



follows a deadline in February for online companies to publish user figures in Europe.

The DSA has a wide range of objectives, including forcing platforms to better protect children, strengthen transparency around digital services, prohibit the sale online of unsafe goods and allow users to have greater choice when online in the EU.

The rules allow the EU to impose fines of up to six per cent of the platforms' annual global sales for repeated infringements.

By August 25, 2023, the 19 platforms must have an independent compliance system in place and give their first annual risk assessment to the European Commission, including how they plan to handle content on mental health and gender-based violence.

There will then be an independent audit and oversight by the commission.

— AFP

Biden meets South Korean leader on eve of state visit

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol will pay homage on Tuesday at the Korean War Memorial in Washington ahead of a state visit cementing the countries' deep alliance.

Biden, Yoon and their wives were set to gather at the haunting monument, depicting life-sized steel statues of US soldiers marching during the 1950-53 war.

On Wednesday, Yoon and his wife Kim Keon Hee will arrive at the White House for only the second full-fledged state visit of the Biden era, following France's Emmanuel Macron.

This will feature lavish ceremonial events and a gala White House dinner.

But beyond the pomp and circumstance, Biden and Yoon will discuss their countries' deepening partnership in an increasingly volatile Asia-Pacific.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters that Biden and Yoon have had four "engagements" since Yoon took office less than a year ago and "have developed a rapport".

The alliance "has grown far beyond the Korean peninsula and is now a force for good in the Indo-Pacific and around the world," Sullivan said, noting that Yoon had been the first South Korean leader to attend a Nato summit.



President Joe Biden waves prior to signing an executive order at the White House in Washington, US. — Reuters file photo

On Tuesday, Yoon was set to visit Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Center just outside Washington, along with US Vice-President Kamala Harris.

Washington and Seoul are also highlighting the strong cultural links, something emphasised by Netflix's announcement of a \$2.5 billion investment in South Korean content. Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos met with Yoon in Washington on Monday.

A big task for Biden will be reassuring his guest over the US commitment to "extended deterrence" — the US military umbrella for South Korea.

"President Biden will reinforce

and enhance our extended deterrence commitments to South Korea with respect to the threat" from North Korea, Sullivan said.

Sullivan said to expect "major deliverables on extended deterrence, on cyber cooperation and climate mitigation, foreign assistance, on investment and on strengthening our people to people ties."

In Washington, Yoon is meanwhile likely to come under pressure to do more to help the US support Ukraine, as Washington looks to South Korea to help secure ammunition and weapons for Kyiv. — AFP

My Oman — a hidden jewel of the Middle East



Saif al Shaibany
SaifalShaibany@hotmail.com

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

Oman’s time has come as many international travel websites and guides such as the Lonely Planet had listed Oman among the top 10 global tourist destinations.

When travelling to the Middle East many travellers would recognise the region with the famous city of Dubai, which in return helped recognise other cities in the UAE.

The neighbouring countries and cities fall behind as many tourists want to visit Dubai which is like Las Vegas of the Middle East — a must visit destination.

Years has past Dubai has grown more popular and has become one of the top destination for travellers.

This has also brought the country just south of the border much needed attention.

That country is Sultanate of Oman what is known as the jewel of the Middle East blessed with natural beauty and a coastline stretching from Suhar to the greens of Dhofar.

An adventure’s dream from the sandy dunes, the cool wadis, and the rocky mountains to khareef Salalah can be realised in Oman.

Oman is not a one dimension country — it has a desert, mountains, the greenery, beaches, islands — and so much to offer for every type of tourist.

The vast culture of the old towns, historic landmarks of cities such as Nizwa, the beaches of Barr Al Hikman, turtle beaches of Ras Al Jinz, Ras Al Hadd, Masirah Island and the Al Daymaniyat Islands, the greens of Salalah and the

OMAN IS NOT A ONE
DIMENSION COUNTRY
AND HAS SO MUCH TO
OFFER FOR EVERY TYPE
OF TOURIST

mesmerising mountain peaks of Al Jabal al Akhdar and Jabal al Shams.

Oman has it all and the list of places to visit are endless and the beauty captivates both locals and tourists.

The Sultanate of Oman has a lot to offer — just go to YouTube and type Oman you will find guides on the best places to visit, travel diaries, stories of many travellers and recommendations to visit the country.

The New York Times in 2023 named Salalah among the top tourist destinations for its offerings especially during the khareef season from June to September.

Muscat the hub of the country is now also being recognised and ranked among 20th safest cities in the world. Many international travel guides list places to visit are the famous Muttrah Souq, Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Royal Opera House, Al Daymaniyat Islands.

The capital will see more visitors with its ever expending potential with new tourism projects.

As a whole Oman is booming with great potential as many projects will support the tourism in the region that can only grow as the county’s popularity will increase

year after year.

The options for visitors to visit the country are many as new attractions are coming up and have been completed like the new ‘Oman Across Ages’ a gorgeous museum located in the Wilayat of Manah.

Oman the hidden gem in the Middle East is no longer lesser than its neighbours, a shining diamond for everyone to see.

Oman is heading in the right direction of becoming a timeless masterpiece — an art painted on a portrait which draws a picture of its natural beauty, building still suck in time, beautiful beaches, desert sands mixed with greenery, a modern touch of past, present and future. My Oman the hidden jewel — it’s time has come.

Mobile printer for mRNA vaccine patches

DANIEL LAWLER

Scientists said they have developed the first mobile printer that can produce thumbnail-sized patches able to deliver mRNA Covid vaccines, hoping the tabletop device will help immunise people in remote regions.

While many hurdles remain and the 3D printer is likely years away from becoming available, experts hailed the “exciting” finding. The device prints two-centimetre-wide patches which each contain hundreds of tiny needles that administer a vaccine when pressed against the skin.

These “microneedle patches” offer a range of advantages over traditional jabs in the arm, including that they can be self-administered, are relatively painless, could be more palatable to the vaccine-hesitant and can be stored at room temperature for long periods of time.

The popular mRNA Covid-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna need to be refrigerated, which has caused distribution complications — particularly in developing countries that have condemned the unequal distribution of doses during the pandemic.

The new printer was tested with the Pfizer and Moderna jabs, according to a study in the journal Nature Biotechnology, but the goal of the international team of researchers behind it is for it to be adapted to whatever vaccines are needed.

Robert Langer, co-founder of Moderna and one of the study’s authors, said that he hoped the printer could be used for “the next Covid, or whatever crisis occurs”.

Ana Jaklenec, a study author also from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said the printer could be sent to areas such as refugee camps or remote villages to “quickly immunise the local population,” in the event of a fresh outbreak of a disease like Ebola.

Microneedle patch vaccines are already under development for Covid and a range of other diseases, including polio, measles and rubella. But the patches have long struggled to take off because producing them is an expensive, laborious process often involving large machines for centrifugation.

To shrink that process down, the researchers used a vacuum chamber to suck the printer “ink” into the bottom of their patch moulds, so it reaches the points of the tiny needles.

The vaccine ink is made up of lipid nanoparticles containing mRNA vaccine molecules, as well as a polymer similar to sugar water.

Once allowed to dry, the patches can be stored at room temperature for at least six months, the study found. The patches even survived a month at a balmy 37 degrees Celsius. —AFP



Cristina Donini

The writer is Vice President of Program Leadership and Strategy at Medicines for Malaria Venture



Doreen Akiyo Yomoah

The writer is Communications Officer at Medicines for Malaria Venture

A new weapon against malaria

Over the past three years, the Covid-19 pandemic has dominated headlines and spurred scientific research, with experts around the world focusing resources and any potentially useful technology on the problem. While the spotlight on Covid-19 has dimmed slightly, it remains a high global priority, sometimes to the detriment of infectious diseases linked to poverty and primarily affecting the Global South. For example, Malaria killed an estimated 619,000 people – most of them children in Sub-Saharan Africa – in 2021, when there were 247 million cases worldwide.

Malaria is an entirely preventable and treatable disease, and researchers have made great strides on both fronts. In March, for example, the World Health Organization recommended two new dual-ingredient insecticide-treated bed nets to protect against malaria-transmitting Anopheles mosquitoes, one with a more lethal cocktail of insecticides, and the other able to disrupt mosquito growth and reproduction.

Cost-effective antimalarial medicines are another important tool. In 2021, seasonal malaria chemoprevention was administered to around 45 million children aged three months to five years, who received monthly doses of therapeutic drugs at a cost of less than \$4 per person. The recent news of a groundbreaking vaccine, GSK’s Mosquirix (also known as RTS,S), offers some hope, although the cost is still relatively high, at around \$40 per child for the first year.

Despite these efforts, malaria continues to pose a threat to public health. Even after an investment of \$26 billion to tackle the disease in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of cases increased slightly between 2000 and 2019 (although the number of deaths decreased). New prevention measures – tailored to children, in particular – are clearly needed. Further innovation should take a page from the pandemic playbook: one benefit of the flood of Covid-19 research is that it demonstrated the enormous potential of monoclonal antibodies.

These drugs are laboratory-made copies of the proteins that a person’s immune system produces to attack specific foreign invaders. Historically, monoclonal antibodies have served



Malaria killed an estimated 619,000 people in 2021.

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as a powerful weapon against cancer and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. While not often used as a prophylactic, the deployment of monoclonal antibodies to prevent Covid-19 and respiratory syncytial virus has shown great promise. Moreover, their exquisite selectivity enables them to discern between closely related molecular targets, resulting in fewer off-target effects. This makes it a medication with an appropriate safety profile for children (as well as other at-risk populations).

A research group at the United States National Institutes of Health, led by Robert Seder, has identified two

antibodies against CSP-1, the protein that the malaria parasite uses to invade liver cells where it first establishes infection. Blocking CSP-1 should thus prevent infection. The more advanced of the two antibodies, L9LS, is currently being tested for its safety and efficacy in children in Mali and Kenya. The Mali study is assessing its success in a setting of seasonal malaria, whereas the Kenya study focuses on an area where year-round infection is possible.

Monoclonal antibodies could be a game-changer for preventing malaria and advance the long-sought goal of eradication. The current generation of antimalarial antibodies has been modified so that a single dose can protect a child for at least three months – possibly longer. The clinical trials will determine the extent and exact duration of protection, and provide useful guidance on how much improvement is needed to achieve a dosage that can be injected once per year.

Although antibodies have a reputation for being expensive, with those used to treat cancer priced at over \$20,000 per month in Europe and the US, increasing the potency of this cutting-edge treatment could significantly decrease costs. Some believe an injection as small as one milliliter of the antibody drug being trialed in Mali and Kenya could protect children at a cost of only \$5-10 per person.

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To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Let’s promote harmony with nature

Since my high school in the late 70s, I have seen Earth Days celebrated every year, mostly with solemn festivities to demonstrate support for the protection of our environment. On the day, which is also known as ‘International Mother Earth Day’, people plant trees, clean up their towns and roads, take out rallies, sign petitions and meet with the officials concerned. Regrettably, the day comes and goes without much tangible progress!

We all very well know the importance of the earth in our lives. It is the principal source of all essential nutrients for all living things on the planet.

It provides everything we need, including the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the home we live in! Unfortunately, the only home we have is at a breaking point. It is even messier. We have damaged two-thirds of the earth’s oceans and three-quarters of its land.

We see pictures of animals on land and in the ocean with trash in their bellies or around their body, and corporate factories and large companies around the world along with fossil-fuel-filled vehicles polluting our air and our living spaces.

These man-made changes to nature as well as crimes that disrupt biodiversity have gathered more pace leading to the destruction of the planet. The final result is that millions of people are affected by extreme heat, wildfires and floods.

In the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: “Biodiversity is collapsing as one million species teeter on the brink of extinction.

“We must end these relentless and senseless wars on nature. From the air we breathe to the water we drink to the soil that grows our food humanity’s health depends on the health of Mother Earth”.

The constant destruction of the



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

OMAN IS ONE OF THE FIRST COUNTRIES TO MAKE GREAT STRIDES IN ISSUES RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

planet’s biodiversity has accelerated climate change and made us even more vulnerable to it.

Adding fuel to fire is the damage our ecosystems threatening human health. By diminishing our sources of food, medicine, water, and even oxygen.

By encroaching into wild habitats and exploiting the creatures within them, we also risk new diseases jumping from animals to humans, as the devastating Covid-19 pandemic did. Yet we seem hell-bent on destruction.

The single most serious threat to our world now is climate change. To avoid catastrophic harm, we must reduce carbon emissions. And, with global energy demand forecast to rise 56 per cent over the next two decades, meeting those emissions objectives will be unattainable if we rely solely on traditional fossil fuels.

In the same way, junk and waste of all kinds have been dumped into the world’s water bodies, polluting them. Plastic has led to land and water contamination. Biological and electronic wastes contribute to water and land contamination as well.

Oman is one of the first countries to make great strides in issues related to the environment and climate. It supports international solidarity in addressing the problem of climate change and its negative effects.

The Sultanate has contributed effectively to reducing the risks of global warming and the adverse effects of climate change. Yet it is not considered safe from global climate change due to its geographical location near the sea and oceans which makes it vulnerable.

So saving the earth is not merely the need of the hour but much more. We need a healthier plant. We need nature more than it needs us.

Our world has been changing and will continue to change – with or without us. Saving biodiversity, ecosystem by ecosystem is the only way to save ourselves!

BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE



One of two peacocks that remain from a population of eighteen in Holland Park displays its plumage as part of an annual courtship ritual, in London, Britain, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Decarbonisation requires new fiscal rules

MAX KRAHÉ, PHILIPPA SIGL-GLÖCKNER AND JANEK STEITZ

Climate policy is at a critical juncture. The world’s leading scientists see a rapidly closing window to avoid the worst ravages of global warming. With the enactment of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) last year, the United States has finally taken meaningful domestic action to reduce emissions. Now Europe is scrambling to respond.

But the narrowly technical approach prevailing in the European Union — and particularly in Germany, its biggest member state — is steering Europe towards fiscal shoals and social turmoil. To chart a safer, more sustainable course, climate policy must be linked up with broader economic and especially fiscal policy. In other words, meaningful climate action requires an economy-wide strategy.

To date, European governments have coalesced around an engineering response to fighting climate change. The European Commission’s Fit for 55 plan, for example, breaks down the problem into small, manageable pieces, creating targets for individual sectors and determining how much carbon reduction various solutions, taken in isolation, can achieve.

The emerging response to the IRA turbocharges this paradigm, with faster planning procedures and more leeway for industrial subsidies, but does not change it.

This paradigm is not blind to social

WITH ITS NARROWLY TECHNICAL RESPONSE TO GLOBAL WARMING, THE EUROPEAN UNION IS STEERING THE BLOC TOWARDS FISCAL SHOALS AND SOCIAL TURMOIL



The world’s leading scientists see a rapidly closing window to avoid the worst ravages of global warming.

concerns. But here, too, a mindset favouring technical fixes prevails. To make carbon pricing palatable, introduce a carbon dividend. To address energy poverty, establish a means-tested monetary benefit. To assuage unemployment fears in the fossil-fuel industry, create a green-skills training programme. The list goes on.

While filling an important gap, these policies are an eerie echo of the so-called Third Way espoused in the 1990s and early 2000s. Back then, voters were told not to worry about losing their jobs to automation and globalisation. New and better opportunities were on the horizon.

Workers could sign up for retraining programs, and welfare benefits would sustain them until

they gained in-demand skills.

We know how that story ended. It turns out that well-paid jobs can disappear and be replaced by low-paid, insecure work. Entire regions can experience long-lasting decline, which is what happened in many advanced economies. Having lived through this, many workers voted accordingly.

Climate policy must not fall into the same trap. The rising tide of decarbonisation, like globalisation and automation before it, will not automatically lift all boats.

There is certainly no trade-off between prosperity and climate protection in the long term; we can only thrive on a healthy planet. But in the transition

period, moving away from fossil fuels will increase costs and economic instability, owing to higher energy prices, temporary bottlenecks, shifting trade patterns, or financial instability.

Only a fundamental change of mindset can head off Third Way 2.0. Decarbonisation must be accompanied by good jobs, high wages and economic security, and no region can be left behind.

An economy-wide problem requires linking climate policy with broader economic and fiscal policies. Focusing exclusively on emissions reduction misses the forest for the trees. While a climate dividend may benefit low-income households, investing in education will likely lead to better jobs and higher wages

across the board. Likewise, improving public-sector pay and employment conditions — which, compared to other EU countries, are relatively poor in Germany — will strengthen labour-market standards. And a resurgence of regional policy, building on EU programmes like the Social Climate Fund or the older Cohesion Fund, may be needed to ensure that prosperity is distributed evenly within and across countries.

An economy-wide approach may seem unnecessarily complex, but there is no shortcut. Stopping climate change will require drastic shifts in human behaviour and our economies. If these imperatives collide with widespread precarity, both people and governments can quickly be overwhelmed.

This became apparent during last year’s cost-of-living crisis. Even in Germany, 40 per cent of the population had no substantial savings to fall back on.

When higher energy and food prices struck and inflation reached 3-4 times its normal level, the German government, like others in Europe, had no choice but to provide massive fiscal support.

One need not be a fiscal hawk to recognise that launching support packages of this magnitude whenever the climate transition hits a rocky patch is unsustainable.

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Red Warriors to take part in 2023 Cafa Nations Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Oman national football team will take part in the first ever Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 which will be held during June 10-20.

Seven teams confirmed their participation in the Central Asian tournament including Asian heavyweights Iran, Oman, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and hosts Tajikistan. The official draw of the tournament will take place on Wednesday in Dushanbe city, Tajikistan.

The preparatory international tournament will be played during the Fifa days as part of the team's preparation for the forthcoming assignments including the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar and the AFC Asian qualifiers for World Cup in 2026 and AFC Asian Cup in 2027.

The teams in Cafa Nations Cup 2023 will be distributed into two groups as the first group will feature four teams and the second group will include three teams.

The toppers from each group will vie for the tournament title while the second-placed teams in both groups will compete in the third and fourth play-off.

It is expected that the forthcoming camp of the national team will be after the completion of the top-tier league on May 15 to gear up for the Central Asian tournament.

The 'Red Warriors' last appearance was in March during the domestic preparatory camp in Muscat and lasted for almost 10 days under the watchful eyes of Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic. The camp featured an international friendly game against Lebanon on March 27 which Oman won 2-0. Al Suwaiq striker Essam al Subhi had netted the winning goals in the 27th minute and 80th minutes of the game.

The national team was supposed to compete in the 10th edition of the West Asian Championship, which was postponed by host country United Arab Emirates on February 7. The new dates of the event have not been declared yet by the West Asian Federation.



Oman beach soccer team gears up for Arab Cup 2023



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The Oman national beach soccer team has begun its preparations for the upcoming Arab Cup 2023 in Jeddah. The tournament will run from May 11 to May 20, with the national team set to compete in Group B alongside Egypt, Palestine and Sudan.

The technical staff has developed a comprehensive programme to ensure the team is well-prepared for the tournament. The national team manager, Nabil al Balushi, has expressed the team's determination to qualify for the final and win the title, building on the strong performances the team showed in the Asian Cup.

The Oman team has already

begun contacting other teams to host them in Muscat for a friendly match before travelling to Jeddah at the beginning of next month. The team will begin its campaign in the tournament with a match against Palestine on May 12, followed by a match against Egypt on May 14 and will conclude the group stage by meeting Sudan on May 15.

The Arab Cup returns after a

nine-year absence, with the last tournament held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt in 2014. This year's tournament promises to be highly competitive, with the first and second of each group qualifying for the quarterfinals, along with the two best teams occupying third place in the three groups.

The Oman national beach soccer team has a proud history in

the competition, having qualified for the World Cup for the fifth time in its history after finishing third in the Asian Championship in Thailand last March.

ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

The Oman team is expected to rely on the same players who participated in the Asian Championship, which includes a

mix of experience and youth. The list of players includes Khaled al Araimi, Munther al Araimi, Mishaal al Araimi, Abdullah al Souti, Younes al Owaisi, Amjad al Hamdani, Sami al Balushi, Ahmed al Awaisi, Yahya al Muraiki, Sharif al Balushi, Salem al Araimi, Abdulrahman al Fazari, Hamad al Araimi and Al Yaqdhan al Hendasi.

Chapman's century helps New Zealand end Pakistan series 2-2



New Zealand's Mark Chapman (R) celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) during the fifth and final Twenty20 international cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi. – AFP

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Mark Chapman hit a maiden unbeaten hundred to anchor New Zealand's six-wicket win over Pakistan in the fifth and final Twenty20 in Rawalpindi on Monday, ending the five-match series level at 2-2.

The 28-year-old smashed a 57-ball 104 in a rearguard action to lift New Zealand from a precarious 73-4 to chase down a stiff target of 194 with four balls to spare.

"We are very happy with how we levelled the series tonight and finished the job," said Chapman. "It took a bit of adjusting in the first two games and it's great to see that it worked out well."

Mohammad Rizwan missed a century by two runs, but still guided Pakistan to a solid 193-5 in their 20 overs.

Chapman led the fightback with a match-turning unbroken fifth wicket stand of 121 off 58 balls with James Neesham, who scored a punishing 25-ball 45 not out as the duo toyed with Pakistan's much-vaunted bowling attack.

"I was pretty thankful that Jimmy came out all-guns-blazing and took some pressure off me as well," Chapman said.

Chapman, whose previous highest T20I score was 83 against Scotland at Edinburgh last year,

completed his century off 54 balls with a brace off Shaheen Shah Afridi, waving his bat to an applauding dressing room.

In all Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes while Neesham's knock was studded with two sixes and four fours as the pair combined to help give New Zealand their 100th T20I win in 192 matches.

Shaheen had given Pakistan a superb start with the wicket of Tim Latham off the first ball on the innings and Will Young (four) off the fifth.

Chad Bowes (19) and Daryl Mitchell (15) also fell cheaply before Chapman took charge, also benefitting from a dropped catch off Shaheen on 67 by Shadab Khan at long-on.

Pakistan won the first T20 by 88 runs and the second by 38 while New Zealand took the third by four, all in Lahore. The fourth match was abandoned due to a hailstorm in Rawalpindi.

The victory and a 2-2 result is welcoming for New Zealand who were missing their top eight players including regular skipper Kane Williamson due to the ongoing Indian Premier League.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was disappointed with the result.

— AFP

Oman trounce Malaysia by eight wickets

MUSCAT: Oman bounced back from the defeat against hosts Nepal in style as they hammered Malaysia by eight wickets in their Group A match of the ACC Men's Premier Cup at Mulpani Cricket Ground in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Oman rode on a sparkling unbeaten ton (101.n.o) from Jatinder Singh and his century opening-wicket partnership with Kashyap Prajapati (66), coupled with all-round performance by skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (52 n.o. and 4/35) to register a dominant victory and stay on path for a semifinal spot.

Following the victory, Oman are at second place in the group behind hosts with four points and will conclude their league engagement against Saudi Arabia on April 26, Wednesday. A top-two finish will assure Duleep Mendis' men a place in the semifinals. Nepal lead Group A with four points and better net run-rate (1.726) and have also played a game less than Oman (-0.011).

After suffering an 84-run loss at the hands of hosts Nepal on Friday, the determination to come back strongly was evident in the Oman side as they excelled in all departments of the game.

Having restricted Malaysia to 227/9 in 50 overs after sending them to bat, Oman openers, Jatinder and Kashyap sent the rival bowlers on a leather hunt as they smashed the attack to all parts of the park. Kashyap's 69-ball 66 were laced with nine boundaries and a six and their 123-run stand came off in 22.3 overs. Kashyap was the first to depart and though Shoaib Khan departed early to leave Oman at 128/2 in 25 overs, Oman never looked uncomfortable in their chase.

Maqsood joined Jatinder and then shared an unbroken 100-run third wicket stand to steer the team home in 42nd over.

Jatinder's reached his



milestone in style as he hit two consecutive fours to race from 92 to 100. His knock of 101 came off 111 balls and was studded with 12 boundaries and a six. Maqsood's 58-ball 52 had ten hits to the fence as Oman boosted their net run-rate too with the emphatic win.

Earlier, Malaysia's Virandeep Singh missed his century by six runs as he top-scored with 94 while Muhammad Syahadat's 55 was the only other notable contribution as the batters failed to tackle the Oman bowling attack.

Pacer Bilal Khan claimed two wickets while Ayaan Khan scalped two in one over but it was Maqsood who ran through the middle order and claimed the prize wicket of Virandeep as Malaysia was restricted to 227/9. Maqsood was ably supported by another spinner, Jay Odedra, who was not among wickets but his neat and tight spell of 2-22 in eight overs, including two maidens, put lot of pressure on the Malaysian batters.

Brief scores: Malaysia 227/9 (Virandeep Singh 94, Muhamad Syahadat 55, Muhammad Amir 20, Muhammad Wafiq 19 n.o.; Bilal Khan 2/48, Ayaan Khan 2/42, Zeeshan Maqsood 4/35) lost to Oman 228/2 in 41.4 overs (Kashyap Prajapati 66, Jatinder Singh 101 n.o., Zeeshan Maqsood 52 n.o.; Muhammad Amir 2/26).

Brilliant Butler fires Heat past Bucks, Lakers sink Grizzlies

MIAMI: Jimmy Butler conjured a dazzling 56-point performance as the Miami Heat came from behind to shove the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks to the brink of elimination from the NBA play-offs on Monday, while LeBron James led an overtime rally to give the Los Angeles Lakers a commanding series lead over the Memphis Grizzlies. In an electrifying battle at Miami's Kaseya Center, Butler all but single-handedly led Miami to a 119-114 win that leaves the Bucks 3-1 down in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round series.

In the Western Conference, the second-seeded Grizzlies are also staring down the barrel of an early play-off exit after the Lakers claimed a 117-111 victory to take a 3-1 series lead.

James finished with 22 points, 20 rebounds and seven assists and grabbed a game-tying driving layup with 0.8 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter to force overtime.

James then marshalled the Lakers superbly in overtime, scoring four points to put the Lakers in sight of the conference semifinals. — AFP



Miami Heat forward Jimmy Butler (22) dunks against the Milwaukee Bucks in the fourth quarter during game four of the 2023 NBA play-offs at Kaseya Center. – USA Today Sports

Kolkata eager to turn tables against RCB



Three years ago, Bengaluru-based sports enthusiast R Paul realised there weren't enough closed platforms to discuss the role of technology in the business of sports. Paul, a community manager for sports development and investment company Nimida Sports, set up Positive Sports Vibe Community (PSVC). The initiative brings together sports enthusiasts to talk shop and cheer for games and athletes that don't get enough attention.

Now I got an opportunity to connect with the members of this group, where I quickly realised that IPL and other such sporting platforms have created so much opportunity for professionals and now for many passions have become a profession.

It is on this platform that I got an opportunity to connect with Sarthak, who is a lecturer in Sports Economics in the University of Portsmouth. He has

written an extremely important article about 'competitive balance in men's international cricket'. Prior to this, despite my strong background, I had zero clue about the importance or involvement of anything called sports economics. Kudos to R Paul for this wonderful initiative, which will only help in taking competitive sports to the next level.

RCB VS KKR AT BENGALURU

TEAM INFO – RCB are with 4 wins from 7 games, while KKR have 2 wins for the same number of games. Both these teams are full of match winners and are extremely unpredictable in nature. They have the capacity of turning a difficult game into a win. We have seen them lose the easiest of games as well. One team has a solid top order and the other team has a brilliant lower order.

Head-to-Head — Played — 28; Won by RCB – 13; Won by KKR – 15

RCB possible XI – Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis (c), Mahipal Lomror, Glenn Maxwell, Shahbaz Ahmed, Dinesh Karthik (wk), David Willey, Wanindu Hasaranga, Harshal Patel,



Mohammed Siraj, Vijaykumar Vyshak

KKR possible XI – N Jagadeesan (wk), Jason Roy, Venkatesh Iyer, Nitish Rana (c), Rinku Singh, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Lockie Ferguson, Kulwant Khejroliya, Umesh Yadav, Varun Chakaravarthy

Pitch & Weather Report — The deck at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru has assistance for the batters. The smaller dimensions of the ground and the quick outfield aid the batters to score big runs. Any score beyond 190 will be a competitive total. Bowlers will need to be razor-sharp with

their line and length to restrict the batting team from scoring massive runs. It's going to be perfect for a high-scoring game with temperature to be around 29 degrees and no chance of rain.

Match Prediction – Though the momentum is in favour of RCB, the small ground of Bengaluru will be a bliss for the power hitters of KKR. It is going to be a match between RCB's bowling and KKR's batting, where if RCB can put KKR to a lot of pressure in the first 10 overs then they will stand a good chance. I believe that this is a game for KKR and everything supports their skill level, so it's going to be the Kolkata

Knight Riders.

Fan Comments

"It's a must win game for KKR, if they lose, they will be pretty much out of the competition. The bowlers need to step up against quality batters like Faf, Kohli and Maxwell." – Siddharth Dahiya, 21, Podcaster/The cricket show with Sid, Indian.

"KKR have a Royal Challenge on their hands at Bengaluru after losing 3 games on the trot. Their overseas knight Andre Russell has a terrific record against RCB. It remains to be seen if this knight helps the side ride through during this tough phase. We are in for a cracker of a contest." – Rohan Satelkar, 32, Customer Experience Partner/Maersk India Pvt Ltd, Indian.

"This season I am supporting CSK, because of their explosive batting, slightly better death bowling and smart captaincy. It might be the last of Dhoni's appearances that we may see. If not CSK, then it's RCB for today." – Tavish P Sharma, 22, Host to #AskTavish show, Indian.

"I am a big fan of Chennai and MSD's heroics/journey. I honestly hope this is not the last season for

him, but even if it is, I am going to be relishing every moment of cricket that he plays on those 22 yards and then relive them for the years to come. Wonder if India is going to even have a selfless captain like him again. – Suhaas Vedam, 26, International Commentator, Indian.

"The trio of Faf du Plessis, Virat Kohli and Glenn Maxwell has scored 82.5% of their team's runs barring the extras. Clearly, the other batters from the lower middle order need to step up for RCB." – Vibhakar TS, 24, Sub Editor/Bouncer Avenue, Indian.

Send us your comment for next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 78795978' and the best comments will be included in our article. '30 words on the team that you support', full name, designation, age, nationality.

You could post your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, Twitter — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR Instagram — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use the #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

Tottenham sack interim coach Stellini after Newcastle thrashing

LONDON: Tottenham sacked interim manager Cristian Stellini on Monday after chairman Daniel Levy branded Sunday's 6-1 defeat at Newcastle "wholly unacceptable".

Stellini, who was only put in charge last month after his former boss Antonio Conte left the club, will be replaced by Ryan Mason with immediate effect.

Conte's long-term assistant won only one of his four games in charge, dealing what appears a fatal blow to Spurs' chances of Champions League football next season.

Tottenham still sit fifth in the Premier League but are six points adrift of the top four and have played at least one game more than the sides directly above them.

A difficult season hit a new low at St James' Park as Spurs were 5-0 down after just 21 minutes.

"Sunday's performance against Newcastle was wholly unacceptable," said Levy in a club statement.

"Cristian will leave his current role along with his coaching staff. Cristian stepped in at a difficult point in our season and I want to thank him for the professional

manner in which he and his coaching staff have conducted themselves during such a challenging time."

However, the decision to replace Conte with a member of his backroom staff in the first place has opened Levy up to more criticism from fans.

"We can look at many reasons why it happened and whilst myself, the board, the coaches and players must all take collective responsibility, ultimately the responsibility is mine," Levy added.

"I met with the player committee today - the squad is determined to pull together to ensure the strongest possible finish to the season. We are all clear we need to deliver performances which earn your amazing support."

Mason, who also took charge towards the end of the 2020/21 season, will be in the dugout for Thursday's clash at home to Manchester United.

After finishing fourth under Conte last season, hopes were high that Tottenham could go even better this campaign as the former Chelsea boss was armed

with over £100 million (\$124 million) of new signings.

But after just one defeat in their opening 10 league games, Spurs have lost 10 of their last 22.

An astonishing rant by Conte, pointing the finger at his players' inability to perform under pressure, ended the Italian's time in charge. But things did not improve under Stellini as Spurs blew a goal and a man advantage at relegation-threatened Everton to draw 1-1 and lost 3-2 at home to Bournemouth before their collapse at Newcastle.

Tottenham's malaise has raised questions over the future of star striker Harry Kane.

The England captain has just one year left on his contract and is attracting interest from Bayern Munich and Manchester United.

The club's managing director of football Fabio Paratici also resigned last week after losing his appeal against a 30-month global ban from performing his role.

Paratici was handed the suspension by the Italian football federation (FIGC) in January after his former club Juventus were found guilty of false accounting. — AFP



Barcelona close \$1.6 billion deal to finance stadium revamp

MADRID: FC Barcelona have secured a financing deal worth 1.45 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) that will enable the club to renovate its iconic but outdated Camp Nou stadium and its surroundings after having renegotiated the initial terms, they said on Monday.

Barcelona added that they signed the agreement with 20 investors, including Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan.

The Spanish club are set to pay back investors in progressive tranches - after five, seven, nine, 20, and 24 years - with a flexible structure, including a grace period.

This means Barca will finish repaying the debt six years earlier than previously agreed, after renegotiating what was initially a 35-year deal approved in a referendum of club members in 2021.

"The club will start to repay the operation once work has been completed on the stadium, using income generated by the Spotify Camp Nou, which is forecast to be around 247 million euros," Barcelona said in a statement on their official website.

The club added that they would hold a news conference to give more details on the financing deal in coming days.

The announcement comes 24 days after the previous deadline to reach a deal, March 31, elapsed. The club said at the time that negotiations were still ongoing.

The preliminary debt structure has since been revised, the Kroll Bond Rating Agency (KBRA) said in reports published on its website.

KBRA said the revised structure included additional refinancing and interest rate risk. As a result, it had downgraded the financing



plan's rating from BBB+ to BBB, making it less attractive to investors.

Later, KBRA said it had converted its preliminary rating to unpublished from published at the club's request.

Camp Nou is the largest football stadium in Europe and the fourth-largest in the world by capacity, with 99,354 seats.

But Barcelona have said it no longer offers a full match-day experience for fans.

The club estimates that the revamped stadium will allow them to generate more than 200 million euros of additional revenue annually through sponsorship and naming rights, ticketing, catering, VIP boxes, hospitality, meetings and events.

Turkish construction company Limak has been tasked with the renovation, with works set to begin in June.

Club president Joan Laporta, who presided over one of Barca's most successful periods from 2003 to 2010, was re-elected two years ago after the previous board resigned due to the club's worsening finances and other

issues.

Laporta inherited a club deep in financial crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since taking over, he has tried to improve Barca's financial situation, turning the club's assets into cash and bringing in new sponsors.

In March 2022, the club signed a shirt and stadium sponsorship deal with audio streaming platform

Spotify in an agreement worth 280 million euros.

Barcelona have also agreed to sell a 25 per cent stake in their LaLiga TV rights for the next 25 years to US private equity group Sixth Street for 607.5 million euros and approved the sale of a minority share of their audio-visual division to Socios.com and Orpheus Media for 200 million. — Reuters



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Pact signed for RO 88.5 million ferroalloys project at Salalah FZ

MUSCAT: Besto Hengda Oman, a subsidiary of a Chinese silicon industry company, has signed an agreement with Salalah Free Zone, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, for the establishment of a ferrous alloys and high-quality recycled wrapping paper project.

Total investment in the project, which will come up on a 300,000-square metre site, is about RO 88.5 million (\$230 million).

In its first phase, plant capacity is projected to reach about 90,000 tonnes of ferrosilicon alloys annually. The output will be doubled in the second phase to 180,000 tonnes per annum.



The production capacity of recycled wrapping paper in the first phase is about 300,000 tonnes annually.

Represented by Asyad of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Salalah Free Zone provides competitive incentives that make it easier for investors and industrialists to establish projects and start operating, producing and exporting rapidly and efficiently.

Masirah Oil to step up exploration and appraisal of Block 50 offshore Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Singapore-headquartered Rex International, the majority shareholder in Masirah Oil Limited, said it is eyeing a significant production boost for its Oman asset — offshore Block 50 — based on its appraisal and exploration plans for this year.

In its recent annual report, Rex revealed that the Masirah Oil team would work this year on preparations for drilling and completing additional wells to capture the additional resource at the Block 50 asset.

Although the number of wells being targeted in not indicated, “a block-wide review of exploration potential will be performed” and that based on the results of an exploration review at Block 50, “planning of the acquisition of additional targeted seismic will be implemented”.

Rex International also aims to boost production from its other key international assets.

“The group’s long-term target to get to 20,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day remains, but this will be dependent on the availability of rigs and other equipment, particularly for Oman and Malaysia,” the company said.

While Rex is said to be eyeing a significant boost for the Oman asset, based on appraisal and exploration plans, it did not reveal the target.

Oil production in the Yumna field in offshore Block 50 Oman stood at 5, 076 stock tank barrels per day in March, according to the company. The operator added that it continues to “look for investment and development opportunities”, this year in its key assets.

Global refinery margins slump by 50 per cent

WASHINGTON: Global diesel margins have slumped by about half since February, dragging on refiners’ profits, as Russian exports continue despite sanctions, helping output from China and India reach all-time highs in March.

Western sanctions and price caps on Russian crude and oil products introduced in December and February had been expected to tighten oil supplies globally.

However, Russia continues to ship out low-cost oil, enabling its biggest clients — India and China — to boost their refining output and exports. Russian oil products, meanwhile, are being sent in high volumes to oil hubs to be stored and re-exported worldwide. In addition, several new refining complexes are coming online this year in the Middle East and China, churning out more oil products for export and further depressing refining margins.



A general view shows the oil refinery of the Lukoil company in Volgograd, Russia. — Reuters

India’s Reliance Industries, operator of the world’s largest refining complex, said in its earnings call on Friday gasoil margins dropped as Russian diesel supplies have remained firm, while an unusually mild winter in Europe led to a build-up in inventories.

Demand for gasoil to replace natural gas in power generation has also fallen after spot

liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices eased from all-time highs, the company said.

Benchmark European diesel barge refining margins drifted to their lowest since February 2022 last week to about \$13.70 a barrel, according to Reuters assessments, pressured by high import volumes and the restart of French refineries after labour-related strikes.

Similarly, Asian gasoil margins have fallen by 31 per cent in April to the lowest since January 2022 at about \$14 a barrel last week because of high inventories and as the arbitrage window to Europe has been shut for months. Profit on processing a barrel of Brent crude at a typical European refinery has plunged by about 71 per cent to the lowest since January last year to \$3.56 a barrel in April, while refining profit margins in Asia are down by around 57 per cent to \$2.54 a barrel in the month. — Reuters



TURN TO PAGE 14

Oman-backed flare mitigation start-up wins WEF endorsement

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Crusoe Energy Systems — a US-based tech start-up backed by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — has won praise from the World Economic Forum (WEF) for its pioneering use of waste natural gas to power mobile data centres — a technology that also helps reduce planet warming methane emissions.

A promo video aired recently by the Geneva-based WEF, an international organisation advocating for public-private cooperation, showcased Crusoe Energy’s proprietary Digital Flare Mitigation technology as an example of impactful innovation in combating climate change through methane reduction efforts.

Denver-based Crusoe Energy specialises in harnessing stranded

sources of natural gas (that would otherwise be flared) to power energy-intensive data, crypto and cloud centres, thereby contributing to methane emission reduction goals.

In the US alone, Crusoe Energy’s expanding fleet of methane-powered data centres are credited with achieving up to 99.89 per cent elimination of methane emissions, which translates to a reduction of 650,000 metric tonnes of CO2-equivalent per year.

Last June, seeking to capitalise on Crusoe’s expertise in driving flare reduction in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider Middle East, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) participated in a Series-C round of funding to support the start-up’s expansion globally.

In tandem with the investment, OIA also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Crusoe to further advance



Methane-powered mobile data centres © Crusoe Energy

sustainability opportunities for Oman by cooperating on new Digital Flare Mitigation technologies.

The pact enables OIA to leverage Crusoe’s patented technologies in reining in gas flaring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) — a region that accounted for over 38 per cent of global flaring in 2020.

Oman alone accounted for approximately 1.8 per cent or 2,517

million m3 of flared volumes that year. UAE state-owned holding company Mubadala too has signed agreements with Crusoe to participate in this effort.

With the World Economic Forum (WEF) endorsing Crusoe’s digital flare mitigation technologies through this latest video promo, the start-up expects to get a wider international audience for its methane

abatement solutions.

The video quoted Crusoe Energy Co-founder and CEO Chase Lochmiller as stating: “What Crusoe does is we build, operate and manage these mobile and modular data centres that we co-locate on location with these waste sources of energy and we use these waste methane streams to power these modular data centres. By doing that, we not only create

a massive emission reduction from this previously waste source of energy, but we can also produce ultra low-cost computing infrastructure by harnessing this otherwise stranded form of energy.”

Furthermore, with computing-intensive data centres projected to grow exponentially in the coming years, they are expected to pose a significant ecological challenge as the industry is projected to consume 8 per cent of all electricity by 2030 — up from 1.5 per cent presently.

Crusoe’s “win-win-win solution”, according to the start-up, not only saves oil companies the cost of operating flares, but also improves their environmental performance. Additionally, operators receive a dividend from Crusoe for gaining access to a cheap source of energy to power its low-cost data centres, it added.

Bank Muscat wins two awards from EMEA Finance

MUSCAT: Adding further to its successful record over the past four decades, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been once again recognised for its leading services.

The bank recently won two prestigious awards from EMEA Finance, for Best Asset Manager in Oman and Best Local Investment Bank in Oman.

Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the awards at the ceremony held in Dubai attended by senior bankers from the region. The awards commended Bank Muscat's excellent performance

and innovative solutions that helped the bank maintain its leadership in both local and regional markets.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi (pictured), Deputy General Manager - Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, expressed his happiness with the continuous success that the bank is achieving year after year, which confirms the success of its strategy in providing customer-centric financial and investment services for customers.

He said: "These awards reflect the consistency of the bank's performance and give us motivation to continue this hard



work and enhance the bank's pioneering role in the banking sector in Oman.

We aim to provide specialised solutions to accommodate the unique needs of our customers by focusing on innovation, agility and trust in all the new services

and facilities provided. We thank all customers for their continuous trust in the services that Bank Muscat is constantly developing."

Bank Muscat has long-standing experience in asset management and investment banking services and its performance has been commended by the global banking community in the past.

The bank offers a wide range of asset management options including investment funds in the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC region.

The bank also manages private equity funds and real estate funds in the Sultanate of Oman and in the wider GCC region. The bank's portfolio management service

enables the bank to meet the diverse needs of its large family of customers.

Bank Muscat has a successful track record of providing innovative and customised financing solutions to suit the unique requirements of its customers.

In 2022, the bank successfully advised on multiple transactions spanning across various sectors including telecom, financial services, utilities and supplier financing, which resulted in fundraising in excess of RO 800 million (\$2 billion).

Bank Muscat is the largest asset manager in Oman and a leading asset manager in the GCC region,

with approximately \$2.5 billion of Assets under Management (AUM) and has proven track record of successful operations for almost 29 years.

It offers tailored investment solutions across asset classes including equity, fixed income, real estate and private equity investments. Similarly, the Bank is also a market leader in corporate finance and advisory solutions encompassing corporate finance, project finance, debt capital markets, debt refinancing and restructurings, IPOs, structured financings, quasi-equity financings, private placements, as well as mergers and acquisitions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Masirah Oil to step up exploration and appraisal of Block 50 offshore Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Earlier this year, Masirah Oil announced that it has completed its Q4 2022 drilling campaign in Oman's Block 50 which comprised a workover of the Yumna-3 well and drilling of the Yumna-4 well offshore Oman.

"The workover of Yumna-3 consisted of replacing the electrical submersible pump in the well," it stated. The operator said it "continues to optimise the production facilities and well operations" at the offshore block.

"Integration of the data collected during the drilling of the Yumna-4 well into the subsurface field model has expanded the potential resource," it said.

Last year, the company carried out several initiatives with the goal of unlocking Block 50's hydrocarbon potential.

MG Motor Oman opens new after-sales facility

MUSCAT: MG Motor Oman has announced the opening of its 11th after-sales facility in Sur to meet the needs of its customers in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The new facility is fully equipped with modern facilities and is staffed by trained technicians who provide the best possible service to the customers.

The new centre features nine service bays and is capable of providing major and minor services, as well as complex repairs, in a timely manner.

This was soon followed with the opening of the 12th MG service centre in Ibri, offering high-quality maintenance services for MG vehicles to customers in the Dhahirah region. The new service centre in Ibri is equipped with state-of-the-art technology to ensure that customers receive the best possible care for their vehicles.

"We are very excited to expand our service network



in Oman and provide our customers in both regions hassle-free access to quality car servicing," said Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE.

"Our commitment to delivering exceptional service and support is reflected in the state-of-the-art facilities, ready-

availability of parts, efficient service and trained technicians at both centres.

We believe that the new facilities will enable us to serve more customers across Oman and continue to deliver on our promise of excellence."

With this new addition, MG Motor Oman now has

12 service centres across the country, offering customers the convenience and peace of mind that comes with knowing their vehicles are in good hands.

MG Motor Oman continues to grow its after-sales network to ensure that customers receive the best possible service across Oman.

NBO enables customers to earn cashback on purchases at Shell



MUSCAT: Aiming to continuously create loyalty initiatives that resonate with its customers, National Bank of Oman's (NBO), in cooperation with Shell Oman Marketing Company, has recently launched a nationwide cashback promotional campaign.

The campaign provides loyal customers with a valuable incentive for preferring their NBO Visa Credit Card to make fuel or non-fuel purchases at any Shell petrol station in Oman throughout April and May this year.

They will receive 10 per cent cashback as a reward for up to a maximum of two transactions per month, while the accumulated rewards will be credited to their account within 30 days after the campaign, which will run until the end of May 2023.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager - Head of Retail Products at National Bank of Oman, said, "Our loyalty initiatives aim to provide a seamless experience for our customers and offer a variety of rewards for their loyalty, as well as for using a Visa Credit Card. By cooperating with Shell Oman Marketing Company, we have been able to unlock more opportunities and deliver value to our loyal customers.

Sohar Aluminium appoints senior commercial advisor

MUSCAT: Sohar Aluminium (SA) has announced the appointment of Nenad Pavic (pictured) as the Senior Commercial Advisor to the CEO. In his capacity, he will guide strategic commercial development opportunities for Sohar Aluminium and mentor future commercial leaders.



Nenad holds a Bachelor of (Electrical) Engineering Degree from the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, and has been a member of the Institution of Engineers Australia since his graduation.

During his career, he held executive positions in global aluminium

value chain corporations, which included extensive international experience in the commercial domain. Some of his recent positions, include the Director of Sales and Marketing and prior to that the Director of Commercial for Alcoa across Australia and Singapore.

OOMCO expands operations in Oman

MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently signed an agreement with Alwafaq Trading and Al Shidhani International LLC to develop mega service stations along the Al Batinah Expressway.

At 30,000 square metres each, all three sites will be offering a one-stop shop designed around a wider variety of services that drivers need on the go.

The service hubs, of which one will be located in the Wilayat of Liwa and two others in the Wilayat of Barka, will include not just fuel stations but also coffee shops, car care centres, convenience stores, shopping complexes featuring global brands and ATMs.



Tarik bin Mohammed al Junaidi, Chief Executive Officer of OOMCO, said, "We are looking forward to developing what hopefully will become convenient service hubs in Liwa and Barka. Our stations have been diversifying and becoming

increasingly versatile over the past few years, offering not just premium fuel and other quality car-related services and products, but also branded food and other convenient items as the company continues to grow beyond the pump."



From investing in cutting-edge technologies to engaging in strategic partnerships with brands, and expanding into logistics, OOMCO continues to connect with its customers to meet and exceed their expectations.

As part of its regional expansion strategy, not just Oman but also Saudi Arabia and Tanzania are among key growth markets for the company with more service stations becoming available to customers in all these countries.

Meanwhile, at National Bank of Oman, we continue to use our vast experience and insights to proactively attune our state-of-the-art products and services, which have been tailored to the day-to-day banking needs of all of our customers."

Only NBO Visa Credit Card holders who made a Point of Sales (POS) transaction at a Shell Petrol Station will be eligible to earn the 10 per cent cashback per transaction.

The cashback will apply to the first two POS transactions made at a Shell Petrol Station in April 2023, as well as to the first two POS transactions made at a Shell Petrol Station in May 2023, and regardless of how many credit cards each NBO customer holds.

The maximum cashback amount has been capped at RO 2.5 per transaction. To find out more information about NBO's promotional cashback campaign, as well as its other services and products, please visit www.nbo.om, contact the NBO Call Centre, or download the free NBO Mobile App.

Opportunity Oman: Duqm a strategic destination



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
AL BALUSHI

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and CEO of Smart
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Duqm’s Special Economic Zone (SEZAD) in the Sultanate of Oman aims to position itself as a logistics hub, investment address, and business and tourism destination to support the nation’s economic diversification.

It has significant untapped potential to drive economic growth and diversification, as well as serve as a catalyst of socio-economic development in the central region of Oman.

Duqm’s strategic location and vast area have made it a vital link in international trade routes due to globalisation drivers related to production and global supply chain factors.

The logistics sector is a crucial strength of Duqm due to its strategic location overlooking expansive waterways close to the African, Indian and Asian markets.

This advantage positions Duqm as a prime location for Omani and Gulf products to access these markets with significant growth potential.

The Empty Quarter border crossing strategically creates a direct land corridor to transport the Gulf country’s oil and gas through Omani territory.

Expanding Duqm’s territory

can lower costs and transit times by bypassing dangerous waterways, boosting competitiveness.

Oman’s strategic location and history as a trade hub, underpinned by a free trade agreement with the United States, positions it as a vital regional and international commerce centre.

In addition, Oman’s fisheries sector — Al Wusta Governorate in particular — offers abundant stocks and access to the Indian Ocean. To fully capitalise on this renewable resource, the country requires a strategic partner capable of opening markets, including Saudi Arabia, and injecting financial investments to improve efficiency. Duqm also boasts high-quality stocks of various minerals and other sectors.

The Duqm Special Economic Zone is gaining attention locally and globally due to its strategic location on the Arabian Sea, proximity to international shipping lanes, and attractive

incentives and exemptions for investors. It offers a variety of investment opportunities, suitable land for projects, and exemption from customs and income taxes for up to 30 years.

To name a few of the current investments: hydrogen/ammonia projects, Karwa Motors, Oman Hong Tong Piping, Duqm Refinery, and the petrochemical joint venture SABIC, OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI). Investment opportunities in Duqm span the refinery, petrochemicals, storage and assorted heavy, medium and light industries.

Other sectors with investment potential include transport and logistics, tourism and hospitality, healthcare, education, real estate development, sports facilities, mining and fish industries. Commercial and residential complexes, markets and educational institutions are attractive investment options as well.

Duqm has a significant geographic advantage in Oman and the broader GCC region. Investors typically seek government and political stability, robust infrastructure and communication, access to natural resources, reliable transportation, skilled labour, attractive tourist attractions and residential benefits when considering investment opportunities.

Duqm offers critical conditions, making it an appealing destination for investors. It offers a balanced environment that meets the needs of both businesses and inhabitants.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) should develop a game plan that makes business and life in the area enjoyable, aspirational and productive.

The game plan should create a comfortable environment offering residents various lifestyle options while providing simple pleasures forgotten in overdeveloped

countries.

Oilfields in the hinterland of Duqm must also utilise Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) to attract investors, as Oman has become a leader in applying advanced oil extraction technologies.

Application of EOR has a 30 per cent to 60 per cent production return contributing to energy-led growth. The technique includes steam injection, chemical injection and gas injection. Duqm can be the hub for providing extraction technology to countries facing challenges like Oman.

As most oil fields are in Al Wusta, OPAZ should offer services and technology to these regions, thinking creatively to meet their needs.

Duqm strives to be a top global green hydrogen hub thanks to favourable factors such as ample land, high sun exposure, strong winds, vast coastlines and proximity to energy markets, all of which make Oman an ideal

location for green hydrogen.

Subsequently, selecting green hydrogen as a key sector for development and Duqm will play a critical role in realising the potential of the sector for Oman by becoming a location of choice for manufacturing/cluster development for wind and solar equipment and servicing, green hydrogen production clustering and associated industries and of course hydrogen storage and distribution.

Equally, the supply of hydrogen that will be delivered also allows Duqm to offer traditional industries a green and sustainable energy mix that will help attract value adding green steel downstream manufacturing activities.

Duqm has solid political support and is an independent regulator with good governance practices. It offers various opportunities for downstream activities, refinery and petrochemical investments, and tailored services for foreign investors. Traditional tools and roles must give way to a paradigm shift to overcome many challenges in the new normal.

Three aspects are essential to achieve the paradigm shift: Strategic analysis, creativity and operational excellence.

In conclusion, Duqm is a unique investor investment opportunity. A strategic approach tailored to the industry, leveraging regional advantages, prioritising customer satisfaction, talent acquisition, anchor projects, investment funds, heavy industries, petrochemicals and minerals, green energy, infrastructure, and stable regulations, is crucial for fully capitalising on this opportunity. With the suitable strategy, Duqm can become a top investment destination, driving economic growth, creating jobs and contributing to Oman’s development.

Asia’s richest banker will loom over his successor

SHRITAMA BOS

Uday Kotak is yet to reveal who will succeed him as chief executive of the \$46 billion Indian bank that bears his name, but the 64-year-old has won overwhelming shareholder support for a plan that will keep him on the board as a non-executive director when he steps down later this year.

It will also be messy and is at odds with the regulator’s own aim to improve governance across the industry. Bosses of the country’s private-sector banks are allowed to stay in their jobs for up to 15 years. When that rule was introduced in 2021, those who had already hit that limit were allowed to serve out their existing terms.

By the time he steps down in December, Kotak will have been in charge for 20 years, two years more than JPMorgan’s Jamie Dimon and six more than DBS Group’s Piyush Gupta.

It is little surprise that more than 99 per cent of investors voted for him to stay. The bank dodged the bad loan crisis that engulfed rivals over the past decade. Axis Bank and ICICI Bank ran into trouble and

replaced their CEOs.

Another, Yes Bank, had its founder kicked out before eventually requiring a rescue by other lenders. It’s partly why Kotak Mahindra commands a premium valuation at 4 times its forward book value, more than twice those peers.

Officials may want him to stay too. Kotak is the man who New Delhi dials when it needs a troubleshooter and he wrote India’s code for corporate governance.

Yet the RBI’s own rules explicitly mandate a three-year gap for outgoing bank heads to return to their past employers in any capacity, and the regulator, whom Kotak has sparred with over how to trim his large stake, will have the final say.

Ultimately, the regulator may struggle to look past one big problem.

If Kotak sits on the board, his successor will effectively continue to work with his or her long-time boss.

A similar arrangement was in place for nearly two decades at ICICI before the asset quality crisis hit the bank in 2015. If things go wrong at Kotak, regulators may end up wondering who to blame.

— Reuters

CFA exams undergo significant changes since 1960s



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign
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UK.

The CFA Institute, the global association overseeing one of the most sought-after qualifications for firms in the financial district of London (known as the ‘City’), is overhauling its programme to give investment professionals more of an edge – the most significant changes introduced in its 60-year history.

A CFA (Certified Financial Analyst) credential is the most respected and recognised investment management designation in the world.

The CFA programme is a master’s level qualification providing a strong foundation

of advanced investment analysis and real-world portfolio management skills. It is one of the finance sector’s most gruelling qualifications, with candidates required to undertake around 1,000 hours of study over four years to prepare for exams.

Changes to the CFA programme include new practical skills modules being introduced for Level 1 and Level 2 exams focused on data science, artificial intelligence and Python programming.

From 2025, candidates studying for a Level 3 qualification will be able to choose modules focused on portfolio management, private wealth and private markets.

Other changes include a reduction in the volume of study materials to ensure preparation remains at around 300 hours for each exam, as well as a new practice pack with 1,000 questions and mock exams.

The CFA Institute said it had found candidates were spending “significantly more than 300 hours to study for each level” of its programme. It said “best practices in instructional design” are being incorporated to ensure the content is “efficient, accessible

and relevant”.

The changes to the CFA programme come after a survey of more than 340 people revealed concerns that the benefits to their careers of the qualification were diminishing, with 29 per cent saying it did not equip them with the skills or knowledge for their work.

While 55 per cent of the 343 respondents polled said the qualification was useful to their job, more than 57 per cent said that hardly one in five of their colleagues had a CFA, while 57 per cent also said that they would always or usually hire someone without the qualification.

Just 14 per cent said that the lack of a CFA qualification would stop them taking on a potential candidate. While some respondents to the survey described the qualification as the “gold standard” that gave them “bragging rights” over their colleagues, others said that it needed to modernise, embrace the digital age and become more relevant in Western markets as well as sectors such as investment banking and financial technology.

Although highly sought-after, the CFA is not a prerequisite for

some firms.

Berenberg last year scrapped a mandatory requirement for its junior staff to undertake the CFA qualification, saying it would instead rely on its regular graduate training, senior staff and external experts. President and chief executive Margaret Franklin said the changes are the “most significant” since the CFA Institute was formed in 1963.

“We conducted extensive research to get feedback directly from employers, candidates, prospective candidates and the industry at large to inform how best to advance the knowledge and skills we provide to the investment professionals of the future,” said Franklin.

“We can say with certainty that candidates are exceptionally keen to get an edge in the market for employment and they are willing to work very hard for the advantage that the CFA programme provides.”

She added: “These changes will meet their needs by helping them to understand how to put investing concepts into practice on the job and be desk-ready on day one.”

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

NEW YORK: Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call, he commended the global coalition partners, Gassam said that the international community is grateful for the Sultanate's role in establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Gassam added that the Sultanate supports a unique model, not only in the Middle East but also in the world. He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advancing and supporting peace and stability.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

NEW RO SO BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

NEW YORK: A group of people at a railway station in New York City have been seen to ignore the health and safety measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The group of people, who were seen to ignore the health and safety measures, were seen to ignore the health and safety measures.



Powerful storytelling and pristine craftsmanship made Moe Khadra's 'Elsewhere' a fashion head-turner

Being Omani-Lebanese, Moe Khadra's duality in his upbringing has made him a well-rounded creative, and through the lens of the Elsewhere Collection, Moe tackled the notion of immigration, addressing the intangibility of the sense of belonging... **P20**

Shakespeare First Folio goes on display in London

A COPY OF THE FIRST collected edition of William Shakespeare's plays went on display in London on Monday, to mark the 400th anniversary of its publication.

The public was given the chance to see the First Folio held at London's Guildhall Library — for one day only.

The edition, published on November 8, 1623, seven years after the playwright's death on April 23, 1616, is one of the best preserved copies in the world. Others will go on display around the world to mark the anniversary of the publication between now and the end of the year.

The Guildhall Library stands where the folio's editors, Shakespeare's friends Henry Condell and John Heminges, once lived, and opposite the churchyard where they were buried.

The First Folio contains 36 plays, including 18 that had not been printed before, such as "Twelfth Night", "Measure for Measure", "Macbeth", "Julius Caesar" and "The Tempest".

Condell and Heminges divided the plays into comedies, histories and tragedies, shaping the way Shakespeare was performed and understood.



None of the dramatist's original manuscripts survive from the time they were written.

"Without the First Folio, we might have lost most of Shakespeare's heritage," Guildhall Library principal librarian Peter Ross said.

"The copy we have here is regarded as one of the finest in the world. It's absolutely complete. Nothing's been made up from another copy."

"Nothing's in facsimile. We have one tiny bit of the corner of a page missing which has been repaired, but apart from that it's a fantastic copy."

About 750 First Folios were printed, of which 233 survive, and queues formed at the library to catch a glimpse.

"Shakespeare is so much part of our culture, and when you see something like that, and you think it's amazing that it survives, but how wonderful that it has survived," said psychologist Robert Richards, 81.

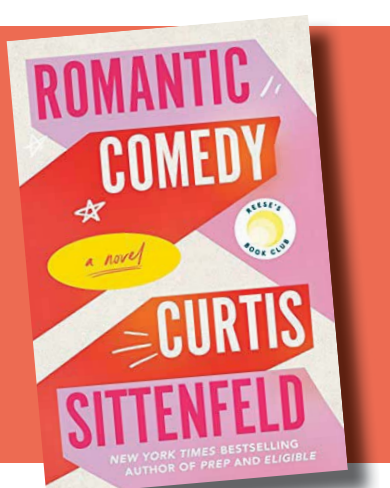
"And it's awe-inspiring really." One First Folio sold for nearly \$10 million at auction in New York in October 2020, setting a record for a work of literature. — AFP

READ

ROMANTIC COMEDY

BY CURTIS SITTENFELD

A late-night show's sketch writer may become involved with a pop music sensation who is a guest host.



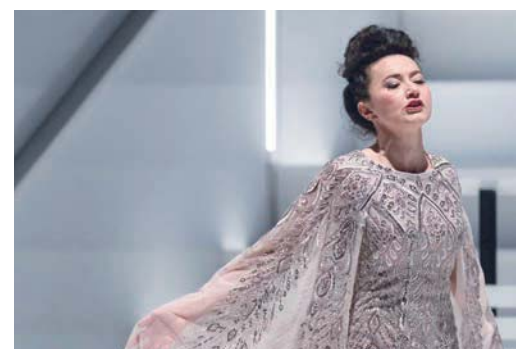
CULTURE

An indigenous woman from the Huni Kuin tribe taking part in the Terra Livre Indigenous camp, focused on bringing awareness for indigenous rights and land issues and promoting their culture, protests outside the Congress building in Brasilia. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

The mezzo-soprano singer Stephanie d'Oustrac performs during the rehearsal of Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera "Armide" at the Dijon auditorium, central France. — AFP





Peering Into Volcanoes at Tanzania’s Crater Highlands

LIKE RUMBLING THUNDERCLOUDS or far-off explosions, the muffled booms broke the silence as we reclined on a slope of pulverized lava beads in a small passage near the top of a volcano in East Africa, nearly 2 miles up into the night sky.

It was 5 am, and for six hours we had been scaling the colossal, pyramid-shaped Ol Doiyo Lengai — through waist-high tufts of grass in powdery ash, through loose rock and tight crevices and finally over hardened lava flows so steep I had to climb on all fours. Now we were exhausted, resting inside a fissure with chalky white walls. At sunrise, we would clamber the remaining 15 minutes onto the rim of the crater.

Our bed of gravelly black lapilli was warm, as if heated by an electric blanket. At my knee, a vent in the rock emitted swirls of steamy gas.

"You hear that noise?" My friend Kaixu Yuan asked.

"Yeah, it's a thunderstorm in the distance," I reckoned.

"That's the volcano underground," said Dennis Laiza, our Maasai guide.

I was starting to understand what it actually meant to be atop an active volcano.

We were nearing the spectacular climax of our gruelling and astonishing weeklong journey through the Crater Highlands of Tanzania. The region sprawls along the East African Rift, where, millions of years ago, separating tectonic plates allowed magma to rise, belching out over many millenniums a multitude of volcanoes, many of them now collapsed calderas or dormant peaks.

The most famous of the mountains is Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa (19,340 feet), 100 miles to the east. Kaixu had booked a flight from New York with no set plan and wanted company. I'm not a big fan of snow or thin air, so I searched for an alternative adventure.

I was intrigued by the highlands and selected a mix of experiences: a safari in the Ngorongoro Crater, the world's largest volcanic caldera, 14 miles wide and said to contain an astounding abundance of wildlife; the Empakaai Crater, nearly 4 miles across and one of the few in the region filled with a lake; and Ol Doiyo Lengai, the only volcano in the world to emit natrocarbonatite lava — dark gray, relatively cool (about 950 degrees Fahrenheit) and fast-flowing.

I used Instagram to send out requests for guides and chose a relatively new tour operator named Daudi Minde. We settled on a trip that would include two nights camping, a 10-hour trek and four nights in a hotel and lodge, for \$1,750 per person.

The tour was poles apart from luxury safaris with furnished tents and balloon rides over the Serengeti. Daudi cobbled together freelance guides, a borrowed, old Land Cruiser and no-frills accommodations for a trip that took us to places we surely would have missed without the aid of local specialists.

After landing in Kilimanjaro airport (I flew from Thailand, where I live), we spent the night in nearby Arusha at the Green Mountain Hotel, which, like most in the cities, was behind tall walls and a metal gate.

At 6:30 am, our guide, Aidano Kayala, and cook, Ramadan Singano, had the Land Cruiser crammed with camping gear. We drove west past the ramshackle shop fronts, women grilling corn on the dirt roadside and ranks of young men on chrome-fronted motorcycles waiting for fares.

We knew we were in the wild when, two hours outside the city, a bull elephant



lumbered across the road, spun around and blared his raised trunk, then rammed an acacia tree, showing off his strength or scratching his head.

At the entrance to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where, unlike in Tanzanian national parks, the Maasai are permitted to establish settlements and graze livestock, the steep dirt road was being rebuilt with crushed rocks. Two Land Cruisers were tipped and stuck at 45-degree angles, and Aidano roared past.

We stopped at the overlook to behold the vast circular chasm. In November, at the tail end of a five-month dry season, the landscape was parched. Cloud shadows darkened sections of the leafless rim and the tan crater floor. A silvery green lake spread out on the left, and a patch of emerald woodlands near a stream stretched out on the right. Wildebeest appeared as black dots in the buff.

The 45-minute bucking bronco of a ride down the rim ended at a marsh, where we ate a tasty boxed lunch of mustard-ginger chicken stew. We gazed at a submerged hippo, a few curly horned buffalo and a wandering warthog. As we jolted along a corrugated path past a line of pale pink flamingos in the shallow lake, a troop of baboons along the roadside and a herd of diminutive Thomson gazelle in the scrub, two things became apparent: The crater was mostly empty, and the wildlife was doing a lot of loitering.

We rumbled up out of the amphitheater just before sunset and pulled into a glade near a Maasai village. One of its warriors, Maletton Oleriro, tall and draped in a red blanket, would be our guide for the next two days. We talked as the fire of damp wood hissed and smoked.

Maletton told us how his late father had



six wives, how his own arranged marriage three years ago included a dowry of 20 cows, and how he trained to be a Maasai warrior with other boys by practicing spear-throwing while herding cows.

The next morning, we rattled over to the rim of Empakaai Crater, an enchanting circular caldera about 4 miles wide and 1,000 feet deep, largely covered by a lake. The wind, sun and clouds created an impressionistic canvas on the gleaming surface.

We traipsed down a steep, dusty path, through a thick forest and onto a shoreline of stubby grass and sand. We were alone but for several thousand flamingos rimming the edge of a quarter of the deep lake in a pink arc.

We hiked for four hours toward another Maasai village, joined by five women selling bracelets and carrying firewood. They sang a song of praise and fertility as we walked amid a primeval panorama of mountain ranges and a dazzling rainbow arcing toward our ultimate point, the Ol Doiyo Lengai volcano.

The next day, our tents and gear saddled

on two small donkeys, we embarked on an all-day hike — across a misty valley, through an ashy acacia forest and onto an escarpment that ran for miles down through the mountainscape. As a massive curtain of clouds lifted, we could see part of the Serengeti plains far beyond on the left, the sled-shaped Lake Natron way off in front and the remote volcano to our right, its top crowned with a cloud mass bigger than the mountain.

We stopped in a dry riverbed with stratified walls and shared our beef stew with five passing Maasai boys. They all wanted to be warriors like Maletton, and we took turns launching a walking pole down the ravine in a spear-throwing contest. Kaixu and I came in last. In the afternoon, we reached the bottom and waited on a hillock for Aidano to drive us to Lengai Safari Lodge.

A sandstorm was building, horizontal whirlwinds racing down the canyon and obscuring the lake in the distance. A Land Cruiser finally arrived, but it was driven by Dennis, the Maasai guide who would take us up the volcano. Aidano had gotten stuck in deep ash a few miles away. We rumbled over and spent 20 minutes pushing and towing Aidano's truck out of the depression.

That night we dined on a local dish called ugali, a polenta-like mash that you ball to sop up stew with your fingers, and washed it down with Kilimanjaro lager.

After spending the next morning swimming at a crystalline waterfall near the lodge, we rested and at 10:30 pm. Headed out to Ol Doiyo Lengai. Volcanologists estimate that the volcano started forming some 370,000 years ago. Explosive eruptions come every generation or so, with the last one occurring in 2007 and 2008.

We scrambled up to the rim just before the sun broke the horizon next to Kilimanjaro. In a whipping wind, we looked down about 20 stories into an entrancingly beautiful cauldron of rising steam and sputtering lava.

The crater was about 200 yards across, stratified brownish cliffs encircling a moonscape of rough formations and sculpted hornitos in multiple shades of gray and white. Columns of gas rose from vents around the circle. In the middle, surrounded by arabesque flats that looked like crusted lakes, loomed a profusion of large cones, with jagged holes at the tops. The largest one was smooth and gray, and when the wind died down we could hear lava churning and spitting like some seething creature from the netherworld. Every minute or so, bursts of black beads splashed out of the hornito, tumbling down the sides.

I jogged briefly around the rim, stopping to contemplate the molten energy that shaped these highlands, and hoping for a non-fatal, but sizable, eruption. But after about an hour, it was time for the teetering six-hour descent. The rising sun, heating the entombed lava slopes, was casting a pyramid shadow over the landscape far below.

TRAVEL TALES

Artists give new life to Ivory Coast's neglected 'Pyramid'



INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL artists paint giant, colourful murals on the exterior of a 15-storey building in Ivory Coast's commercial capital called "the Pyramid," an architectural gem that fell into disuse 20 years ago.

A symbol of Ivorian prosperity in the 1970s and one of the first towers built in the central business district of Plateau in Abidjan, this futuristic pyramid-shaped building was neglected for years. The project "Pyramid 2023, tomorrow is already born" aims to give it a second life.



Through this initiative, Ivorian artistic director Lemon Otto renovates external facades of older building such as Pyramid, which was completed in 1973 under the direction of the Italian architect Rinaldo Olivieri.

"This project allows us to have a look at Abidjan, which is not always well known, to highlight Ivorian creativity, to show that Ivory Coast is ... a land of inspiration and of entrepreneur-



ship in the cultural and creative industries," said Françoise Remarck, Ivorian minister of culture, who aims to make Abidjan West Africa's artistic and cultural hub.

The renovation must respect the original architecture of the building since the current structure is in good condition, added the minister of construction and urbanism, Bruno Nabagne Kone.

Many buildings in the business district are internationally known and could teach Ivorians about their own urban history, architects say.

"Ivorians should learn to look at the architectural heritage that surrounds them," said architect Issa Diabate. — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Archaeologists in Peru find adolescent mummy wrapped in bundle



PERUVIAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS unearthed a more than 1,000-year-old mummy on the outskirts of the modern capital on Monday, in the latest discovery dating back to pre-Inca times.

The mummy was probably an adolescent and found in an underground tomb wrapped in a funerary bundle, along with ceramics and rope and including bits of skin and hair.

The mummified adolescent was found in a "good state of conservation," said archaeologist Yomira Huaman, in charge of the Cajamarquilla research project affiliated with the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos.

While best known for the mountain-top Inca royal retreat of Machu Picchu, Peru was home to various pre-Hispanic cultures that thrived in the centuries before the Inca empire rose to power, mainly along the country's central coast and in the Andes.

The adolescent lived between 1,100 and 1,200 years ago, and might have belonged to the Lima or Ichma cultures. The mummy was discovered about 200 metres (220 yards) from where the first mummy of Cajamarquilla was found, explained Huaman, referring to another mummy found nearby last year.

The archaeological site is also where the remains of eight children and 12 adults, who were apparently sacrificed around 800-1,200 years ago, were found.

The sprawling Cajamarquilla complex features the ruins of four pyramids and other constructions such as walls laid out like a maze. The complex is the second largest mud-brick city in Peru after Chan Chan in the north of the Andean country.

Cajamarquilla was possibly occupied by people from the coast and the Andean highlands, said Huaman. Located in a dusty area about 20 km (12 miles) from Lima, the site was believed to be a thriving trading centre.

— Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Apple's 'Napoleon' wows movie theatre bosses at CinemaCon



RIDLEY SCOTT'S "NAPOLEON", a film originally created by Apple for its streaming platform, was the unlikely hero of the movie industry's CinemaCon gathering on its opening night on Monday.

The historical epic starring Joaquin Phoenix as Napoleon Bonaparte will first be shown exclusively in theatres this November, under Apple's recent and industry-shaking pivot towards world-wide big-screen releases for its films.

Sony Pictures, which is partnering with Apple to distribute the film to cinemas, dedicated the finale of its coveted CinemaCon opening night slot to the movie.

Footage of a brutal battle sequence, in which French forces led by Napoleon ambush an enemy army atop an icy lake, drew raucous cheers from the assembled audience of theatre owners.

"Old school, big screen," Sony Pictures chairman Tom Rothman said.

"Epic is the only proper description of that Apple Originals film," he said, in a show of praise for a streaming company that would have been almost unthinkable at CinemaCon previously.

The CinemaCon summit brings owners of theatres together with Hollywood studio bosses and A-list stars. Speakers typically make sure to praise the unique "magic" of the big screen — and to throw a few barbs at streaming services.

But a recent report that Apple plans to spend \$1 billion per year on movies that

will play in theatres before they move to its Apple TV+ streaming platform has been a major boon to cinemas still reeling from the pandemic.

Also this year, Apple's Martin Scorsese film "Killers of the Flower Moon" will be released in theatres by Paramount, while streaming rival Amazon recently put its Ben Affleck drama "Air" in theatres first.

"uniquely significant for Sony" and for movie theatres more generally, promising to give the film "a full throttle marketing campaign."

Tech giant Apple has previously only given very short theatrical releases to its films — typically just long enough to meet the minimum requirements for a film to be eligible to compete at the Oscars.



Analysts say both Apple and Amazon hope that such high-profile releases in theatres will ultimately boost awareness of their streaming platforms' offerings.

The trend also offers a potential financial windfall to Hollywood studios willing to distribute the films to theatres. Rothman said on Monday he was "honoured" Apple chose his studio "from among many suitors" to release "Napoleon."

He described the film as

The tactic earned Apple a best picture win last year with "CODA", the first for a streaming platform.

"Napoleon" reunites Scott and Phoenix more than two decades after their previous historical epic "Gladiator."

It chronicles Napoleon's origins and his rise to become a military leader and emperor of France, as well as his volatile relationship with his wife Josephine, played by Vanessa Kirby. CinemaCon runs until Thursday. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Trevor Noah wins Webby for 'Daily Show' segment supporting gun control



MONTHS AFTER HIS departure from "The Daily Show" in late 2022, comedian Trevor Noah won a Webby Award for comedy in the "America's Door Problem" segment of the late-night talk show, in which he pushes for gun control and criticises policymakers' response to mass shootings.

The 27th Annual Webby Awards — which will be handed out on May 15 in what is known as the Internet's biggest night — also honour work featuring singers Rihanna, Lizzo and Doja Cat, former president Barack Obama and the cast of Marvel's "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

The awards have a legacy of rewarding work that challenges cultural, social, and entertainment norms to make information more accessible.

In Noah's segment, he skewers the beliefs of some conservatives that books, critical race theory, video games and rap music lead to gun violence.

"Yeah, that's right, that's how evil critical race theory is — it's only been around for like a year and it's already caused three decades of school shootings," Noah said.

"I know you guys want to blame anything but guns, but it still has to make sense. Can we agree on that? You can't just blame stuff you're already mad at," he added.

The Webbys also honoured emoji creator Shigetaka Kurita with a lifetime achievement award, AI writing tool ChatGPT with the breakout of the year award and SZA for artist of the year.

The in-person award show will take place at Cipriani Wall Street in New York City with the correspondent for the "The Daily Show," Roy Wood Jr, hosting for the second time.

Some notable past winners include talk show host Stephen Colbert, comedian Sarah Silverman, television producer Lorne Michaels and French film-maker Michel Gondry. — Reuters



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WEDNESDAY | APRIL 26 | 2023

Powerful storytelling and pristine craftsmanship made Moe Khadra's 'Elsewhere' a fashion head-turner

By Yeru Ebuén
Instagram: @yru_here

This collection was a standout at the recent Dubai Fashion Week—a menswear collection that drew inspiration from the shapes and silhouettes associated with those who fled in search of new homes.

While Moe Khadra's MOK has been away from the runway for quite some time, his comeback didn't disappoint. This time, his message was even clearer, taking inspiration from his personal journey and identity as an Arab man.

Being Omani-Lebanese, it is this duality in his upbringing that has made him a well-rounded creative, and through the lens of the Elsewhere Collection, Moe tackled the notion of immigration, addressing the intangibility of the sense of belonging.

Moe's design is a familiar one to those living in the region. After all, they emulate the versatility of a man's thobe. What made them worthy of a second look is that Moe has become more confident about his textile fusion techniques; the garments, while oversized, pleated, and draped, remained serene, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship and the time and thought put into them.

While others take inspiration from the pain and suffering of those who lost their homes, Moe lived through these raw experiences, and it resulted in a collection that is not only inspiring but authentic and powerful; it couldn't have been pulled off just by any other designer.

Fresh from the success of his recent fashion show, Moe gave an exclusive email interview to share insight about the importance of this collection.

IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE YOU LAST LAUNCHED A COLLECTION. CAN YOU GIVE US AN UPDATE ON WHAT HAPPENED IN BETWEEN AND WHAT KEPT YOU BUSY?

MOE KHADRA: A looooong break from designing... YES indeed I needed to step aside for a while, but I never had a break from fashion, and for those who know me, I had been working in between as a stylist and fashion consultant, creative producer at GQ Middle East @gqmiddleeast, TV host on men's fashion at Al Jadeed TV @aljadeed. On the side, I

launched my Muscat home fine dining concept, Table 661.

CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH THE THOUGHT PROCESS FOR THIS COLLECTION? WHAT WERE YOU HOPING TO SHOWCASE, AND HOW DIFFERENT WAS THIS FROM THE PREVIOUS ONES?

I wanted to re-question the notion of immigration, and in reference to my own hometown nostalgia, I tackled the word "Elsewhere" and the intangibility of the sense of belonging we often feel. I can't explain the emotion when I think of the word "home" or Beirut. Today, I am still an immigrant, a refugee. I am an asylum seeker in a Silenced Revolution. Today, I am an immigrant not only in your land but even more of a stranger in my own.

I took motivation from my personal journey and identity search as an Arab man. Yet this journey is only a reflection of the lives and mental states of millions around me.

The collection drew inspiration from the shapes and silhouettes associated with those who fled in search of new homes. The ELSEWHERE line, for instance, boasts inside-

out coats, jute-top stitched pockets, and patchwork cubic jackets whose storytelling design is derived from the process of recollecting memories.

What added the cherry on top of my cake was being able to bring this story to life in Cairo. The intensity of this city has definitely contributed and helped me crystallise that emotion somehow.

HOW DOES THIS COLLECTION REFLECT YOUR PERSONAL STYLE AND DESIGN PHILOSOPHY?

Having said that above, I think this was by far one of the most challenging collections I have ever designed, especially since it is my first menswear line, yet it is also by far the most reflective of my identity. I think one does need to step back after all in order to reflect.

But I have always been an identity fighter and digger, and I have come to believe that showcasing a personal story always reaches the hearts of others. Because we want to relate.

FOCUSING ON THE COLLECTION PIECES, HOW MANY ARE THERE? HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO

MAKE THEM AND COMPLETE THE WHOLE COLLECTION?

There are 25 looks in total, and the whole process from concept to realisation took around three months.

CAN YOU TALK MORE ABOUT THE MATERIALS USED, THE SILHOUETTE, AND THE TYPE OF PERSON YOU ENVISION WEARING THIS COLLECTION?

ELSEWHERE emulates the versatile shapes of a man's thobe, presenting gradual, subtle curves that taper in at the neck and shoulder line. Some of my signature textile fusion and pleats appear in kimono wear sets, harem pants, and oversized draped veils coming out of single-sleeve glove-like pieces. The tenting/canvas fabric I used clearly highlights the collection's perception of escapism and bareness. The designs explore the contrast between belonging and void, thereby introducing a collective presence that is subtle yet strong.

The garments, of course, remained completely serene, intricate in craftsmanship, and accordining in whatever direction their wearer's expression demanded. Variations included pieces with draped hems that arced towards the chest, coats wearable waist-length or knee-length depending on how you tweaked them, and some warrior-like Samurai wear, as I like to call it. "Samurai comes to the Middle East" type of guy.

DO YOU STILL HAVE THOSE MOMENTS OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT A PARTICULAR PIECE? HOW DO YOU EDIT YOUR COLLECTION, AND ARE THERE PARTICULAR CRITERIA YOU GO BY FOR A PIECE TO BE INCLUDED?

Of course, all designers do, and sometimes it's important to throw into your show a few pieces you feel uncertain about to a certain extent. They always surprise you because they get liked by the audience, and that by itself is a learning process. As much as I insist on asking myself while designing a garment, "Moe, would you wear it?" I also assess it by asking myself whether it could be a reflection of the person I would aspire to be.

I edit by making sure the line tells a story, and that the story travels well through shape, texture, details, technique, and, of course, colour. There is an ongoing checklist I feel in every designer's head that is bespoke to his or her identity yet not alien to the fashion industry. A

design needs to sell!

YOU RECENTLY SHOWCASED THE COLLECTION AT DUBAI FASHION WEEK. WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING BACK ON THE FASHION CIRCUIT?

It was the best feeling ever: I really want to thank Jacob Abrian (@jacobabrian), Group CEO of @arabfashioncouncil & @dubai-fashion-week for challenging me to get back into this very addictive on-the-run fashion roller coaster. It's intimidating somehow, and it makes you feel quite naked and venerable every time you showcase a collection. But that's the magic spell, and somehow it keeps you going, wanting to unfold more.

WHAT WAS YOUR VISION FOR THE FASHION SHOW, AND HOW DID YOU BRING IT TO LIFE?

After the current horrifying images we saw following the Syria and Türkiye earthquakes and because I was starting to prep for the show, I all of a sudden felt that the concept of the collection has become even more current than ever. This idea of "Elsewhere" has never been more vivid, and this is why I wanted the show to deliver the emotion of recollecting memories. I kept that feeling of absurd travel in the show through the video edit, music, and styling; where models were seen carrying random home objects as they walked down the runway. But definitely, my concern was to end up with a show that gives you goosebumps. I don't do very well with change, the loss of someone, or the awkward moment of saying goodbye. I guess I was self-healing, too.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU AND YOUR BRAND, AND HOW DO YOU PLAN TO CONTINUE EVOLVING YOUR DESIGNS AND COLLECTIONS?

I am taking the collection into a new phase and developing it further by commercialising it more and retelling the story in a new city through a second edition show. I can't quite say more for now until things are confirmed, but definitely stay tuned.

I am trying to figure out gradually how the identity of the line is going to evolve, and I have to admit I am being approached by amazing retailers around the region, so I wish for the best.