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HAALAND HITS 45 AS MAN CITY MAKE MARK AGAINST BAYERN



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ASYAD LINE BOLSTERS SHIPPING FLEET WITH NEW ECO-FRIENDLY 2800 TEU VESSEL



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RO 2.29 BN TOURISM PROJECTS UNDER WAY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism revealed that the investment position of the projects that are under implementation, which were agreed upon, with various segments of investors in the public and private sectors, during the period of 2021 to 2025, stand at 363 across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with a total value of RO 2.290 billion.

The ministry targets to reach RO 3 billion worth investments in the tourism sector during the aforementioned period by attracting additional investments worth of RO 700 million by 2025.

The move comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to promote tourism investments in all sectors, and keep pace with the growing tourism movement in the country.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that the ministry's efforts in attracting investment come from the standpoint of the developmental role that relies on the tourism sector in accordance with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the comprehensive plan for developing the tourism sector in Oman.

He pointed out that these investments combine the



SALIM AL MAHROUQI
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

economic aspect represented by the fact that the sector is one of the potential ones to achieve economic diversification and channel investments to maximise the utilisation of the potentials enjoyed by the Oman, while highlighting and preserving the country's heritage.

HERITAGE ELEMENTS

The minister stressed that attracting investment in the tourism sector always takes into account maximising the benefit of the tourism and heritage elements in the short and long-terms while prioritising projects required by the tourism market. The step aims to diversify the tourism product and attract multiple categories of visitors.

He also clarified that investments in the tourism sector also seeks to empower its role in developing the economy

of the governorates, through projects that keep pace with the comparative advantages of each governorate, in addition to the benefit of these projects to local communities and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the governorates.

The minister pointed out that, the integrated tourism complexes represent the largest bulk in the volume of investment in the tourism sector. He said that 12 integrated tourism complexes with an investment value of RO 3.9 billion, are currently being implemented, including RO 1.07 billion as investment value during the period of 2021 to 2025.

These complexes include Al Mouj project, Barr Al Jissah Resort (the port district development), Mandarin Oriental project and Residence, Diyar Ras Al Hadd Resort, Hawana Salalah (Salalah Beach Resort), Yiti Sustainable City, phase two of Mirbat Tourism Project, phase one A, B of Jebel Sifah, Blue City Project, Al Sharq project and Palm Resort project.

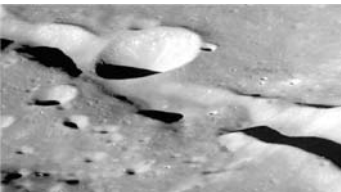
Preparations are on for another package of integrated tourism complexes to be located in the governorates of Muscat, Musandam and Al Sharqiyah South with an estimated total investment value of RO 2.5 billion, he added. — **ONA**

SEE ALSO P3

HM greetings conveyed to Canada



Moosa bin Hamdan al Ta'ei, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States of America (USA), presented his credentials to Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada, as plenipotentiary, non-resident ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Canada in Ottawa on Wednesday. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with best wishes of good health and happiness to the Governor General and permanent prosperity to the Canadian people. — **ONA**



Lunar orbiter captures moon's dark side

SEOUL: Danuri, Korea's first lunar orbiter, has succeeded in capturing photos of the dark side of the moon. The photos are part of scientific research to observe the moon from about 100 km above its surface, according to the science ministry on Wednesday, *The Korea Times* reported.

This is the first time that the Korean spacecraft photographed craters, valleys, basins and other traces of the moon's dark side, which is hard to observe from the Earth because it is tidally locked to our planet. Using the Lunar Terrain Imager (LUTI), developed by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI), Danuri captured high-resolution images of regions on the dark side or far side of the moon. — **Agencies**

Iran's embassy in Riyadh reopens

RIYADH: Iran's embassy in Saudi Arabia reopened its gates on Wednesday for the first time in seven years, a Reuters witness said, under a deal to re-establish relations.

The heavy gates of the Iranian embassy's compound were open in Riyadh with a team inspecting its premises, a Reuters reporter said. A white truck was seen arriving at the gate.

The diplomatic mission opened hours after the Iranian Foreign Ministry said a technical delegation arrived in the kingdom.

"The Iranian delegation will take the necessary measures in Riyadh and Jeddah to set up the embassy and consulate general," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanaani, said in a statement.

The mission had been closed since Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran in 2016.

Last month, the two countries agreed to end their diplomatic rift and reopen their diplomatic missions in a deal brokered by



People stand outside the Iranian embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

China. Both countries' foreign ministers met in Beijing earlier this month for the first formal gathering of their top diplomats.

Saudi officials also arrived in Iran to discuss procedures for reopening Riyadh's embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

SEE ALSO P6



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Team, family support vital for entrepreneurs to be successful



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) is continuing with the ‘Pioneering Evenings’ sessions during the holy month of Ramadhan. The third evening witnessed the participation of two distinguished guests and enriching dialogues about the challenges they faced and the opportunities that arose after those challenges.

The evening hosted Hilal al Hosani, the owner of the ‘Samat International Factory’ project. He presented his own entrepreneurial experiences and their impact on all aspects of his life and entrepreneurial career.

He said: “At first, I didn’t understand where to go. Where I went through great challenges

and many failures that paved the way for me to succeed. Life is like a bus. There are those who board the bus and there are those who get off at a certain station. The bus is the challenge that we live with. The big problem in our heads is a shadow of a small problem.” Al Hosani explained that one of the reasons for his success was the team he owns. A team of entrepreneurs, who are the shoulder that supported in overcoming many of the challenges he faced.

The ‘Pioneering Evenings’ aims to review the experiences, conditions and incentives to ignite the flame of competition and continuation. The participants share ideas with young people and inspire others, encouraging young people, entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to continue and sustain their

projects and initiatives and benefit from those experiences.

Musa bin Khamis al Balushi, Director of the Communication and Media Department at the SMEDA, said: “The pioneering evenings are an open dialogue platform adopted by the Authority in cooperation with our partners in the Youth Centre in an effort to keep the flame of enthusiasm ignited among young people by reviewing the journey of a number of personalities who faced challenges. And turned them into promising opportunities, and these challenges contributed to the discovery of new paths of success.”

Al Balushi added: “Through these evenings, we reflect on the inspiring and luminous side of the challenges faced by successful professionals. We relive with them the most difficult and beautiful

situations and then ask, “After all these challenges, what is the motive for continuing? What was the role of the family? And the influence of the environment, friends and partners. Among the questions we ask is what is the last book they read, or the last word that ignited their ambitions.”

Maryam al Kaabi, the second participant in the evening, talked about her passion for the field of technology. “I was always looking for what distinguishes me from others in the same field. Going through difficult experiences, entering into different activities, and joining multiple courses, made me a different personality.”

Maryam added, “Every experience carries sacrifices, as I felt at some point that I had lost the social aspect as a result of satisfying experiences, but the motivation that supported me was my belief that these difficult things will end one day.”

Commenting on who was behind her successes and her continued motivation, Maryam said, “My father supported me a lot in my experiences, which is one of the reasons of my success. With regard to my experience in archery, this is due to my grandfather, who made no distinctions between male and female children and I can say everyone in the family supported my love for archery.”

The sessions will continue until April 18 throughout the holy month of Ramadhan, targeting youth of all categories, owners of small and medium enterprises and start-ups.



Badr receives copy of credentials of Brunei envoy

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday a copy of credentials of Noralizan binti Abdula Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam appointed to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties. He also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth. — ONA

RNO engineer gets global patent for air conditioner



MUSCAT: Engineer Lieutenant Humaid bin Said al Hinaï from the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) obtained the international patent for his invention of an air conditioner that runs on the principle of vacuum engineering.

The patent was registered with the National Intellectual Property Office at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva and the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT).

The invention aims to dispose hazardous refrigerant gases that harm the environment and the ozone layer and get rid of external units that discharge heat. It can significantly cut manufacturing costs as it does not have an outdoor facility. The device is distinguished by its economic feasibility, low energy consumption, inexpensive maintenance and minimum leakage rate.

In addition, the non-existence of refrigerant gases makes it an environmentally-friendly alternative for the future. It is designed to be used as a home and office air-conditioner. The developer hopes that his device will be further developed in the future and its usage extended to include cars, factories and other settings.

The inventor is currently engaged in designing a testable prototype and it will enter the commercial phase soon after the completion of performance tests. — ONA

Oman, Sri Lanka review bilateral cooperation

MUSCAT: The foreign ministries of the Sultanate of Oman and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka today held the 3rd session of talks.

During the session, held via video-conferencing, the two sides reviewed bilateral cooperation in various fields and means of enhancing them to serve joint interests. They also exchanged views on matters of mutual interest.

The Omani side was headed



by Shaikh Hamad bin Saif al Rawahi, Head of International Cooperation Department at the Foreign Ministry, while the Sri Lankan side was headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Additional Secretary for Middle East and African Affairs and Consular Affairs.

The session was also attended by Ahmed Lebbe Sabarullah Khan, Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman and Mohammad bin Salim Jadad al Kathiri, Acting Head of the West Asia Department at the Foreign Ministry. It was also attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

‘Repentance requires understanding of oneself, controlling desires’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

While fasting requires discipline and willpower, seeking repentance not only requires an understanding of oneself, but also controlling the desires. But how do we know when should one repent?

“The importance of repentance can be seen as the root of this equivalent term, ‘Toba’, which can be found more than 10 times in the Holy Quran. We all know that the basic meaning of repentance is the act of showing one is sorry about something he/she has done. But the word ‘Toba’ in the Holy Quran has an additional meaning which is to return back to the track that is the straight path one is supposed to be on,” Shaikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, explained to host Hatim Abdulsalam on Radio Sultanate

of Oman. He pointed out that this is the Quranic meaning and not a mere act of just showing one is sorry for the wrong they have done.

He said it is also an indication that one is supposed to be on the straight path, but presumably, they did indulge in wrongdoing either due to ignorance or to have forgotten their purpose in life or any other reason.

“With the mercy of the Almighty, He has advised us to return back to Him - to the straight path - to show that we are sorry for what we have committed and now we are making a promise that we are returning back and we are aiming not to fall again into the same trap,” he noted.

“We are not making this promise within ourselves, we are at least having the intention not to fall into the same trap and we can make our intention sincere. So it is



an internal promise,” he explained.

He said that in the Quranic perspective, it means returning back to Allah, the Almighty, asking His forgiveness for whatever mistakes, mischief or wrongdoing we have committed and is now having the intention not to do it again.

To a question from Hatim Abdulsalam on the need for repentance, Shaikh Dr Kahlan

replied, by the nature of repentance, it is both objective and subjective.

To the question from Hatim, “Do people repent because we need to or is it because it is a

command from God?” Shaikh Dr Kahlan replied, “Because the more we commit wrongdoings, the more we are imprisoning ourselves and it may become very painful for a human being to tolerate these wrongdoings.

It can have a great negative effect on humans as it affects the soul spirit, morals, relationship with others and so on. They detach themselves from harmonious relations with others. They end up living a life full of contradictions between principles and behaviours. So the more they are committing mistakes, the more they are isolating themselves and the more they feel the need to return back. So repentance is objective. When we displease Him we feel the discomfort.” Shaikh Dr Kahlan pointed out that people feel a sense of a gap and that they can only get close when they repent.



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■ SHIHAB RECEIVES ITALIAN AMBASSADOR



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Pierluigi D'Elia, Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest. HH Sayyid Shihab wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. – **ONA**

Municipality launches drive against mosquito

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlbalushia

Muscat Municipality launched a campaign to combat Aedes Aegypti, the yellow fever mosquito responsible for spreading dengue fever. The campaign began on Wednesday and continues until April 22 in the targeted areas.

The targeted areas are the southern Mabela (industrial area and the surrounding residential area), the northern Ghubra area in the Wilayat of Bausher, Ruwi and Al Hamriya in the Wilayat of Muttrah; and Al Athaiba and Ghala in the Wilayat of Bausher.

The municipality has asked people to stay away from the sites where pesticide spray has been done for 10 to 15 minutes after the spray.

“Cover open food and utensils before spraying, wash utensils and cooking tools used after the spray, remove pets and keep children away from the site to be sprayed, and close windows and doors. Even don't allow anyone to enter the house during the spray period,” the municipality sources said.

The municipality campaign to combat Aedes Aegypti was launched last year by the General Directorate of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, in cooperation with the Muscat Municipality and the relevant authorities. This comes within the framework



of an effective partnership to raise environmental sanitation efforts and combat the spread of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito.

In the Governorate of Muscat, cases of dengue fever, which is transmitted by the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, have been recorded. It necessitated the campaign to combat and eradicate the mosquito and eliminate it and its breeding sites.

To avoid the breeding of Aedes Aegypti, residents and citizens should maintain cleanliness, and remove solid waste and all forms of water pools around residential areas. Water tanks should be tightly covered and used tires, empty cans, containers and utensils etc should be removed.

The community must interact with those in charge of the campaign, raise the awareness of community members, and cooperate for the success of the campaign and the elimination of its breeding grounds in the governorate.

Over 2,176 donate blood in 20 days of Ramadhan



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) received 2,176 donors in the first 20 days of Ramadhan.

A statement issued by DBBS said, “We received 2,176 blood donors and 133 platelet donors so far. The Blood Bank in Bausher will require more than 2,700 blood donors and 260 platelet donors during Ramadhan to meet the demand.”

It added that donors can go to DBBS Bausher between 7.30 pm and 11.30 pm to donate blood.

DBBS is also encouraging non-fasting blood donors to donate - during the day. “Those not fasting can come during the day between 8 am and 12.30 pm,” the statement said.

The Central Blood Bank organised two blood donation campaigns on Wednesday in Ali Al Shehani Mosque in Al Hail and Al Mamoura Mosque in Mabela from 8 pm to 11 pm.

124 hotels developed in 2021-2022: Minister

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

A number of 124 hotel establishments have been developed during the period of 2021 to 2022, with a total investment value of RO 139 million, according to Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

They include 4 hotel projects, including Avani Hotel project In the Wilayat of Al Seeb, the Doset D2 Hotel in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the Intercity Hotel Muscat, and Jumeirah Muscat Hotel in the Governorate of Muscat.

Al Mahrouqi said that there are a number of 120 hotel projects (with an investment cost of less than RO 5 million per project), which include hotel apartments, guesthouses, heritage inns, green inns, with a total investment value of RO 48.075 million.

He elaborated that a number of 127 new hotel establishment projects with a total investment value of RO 340 million are under implementation, including 14 hotel projects (of an investment cost higher than RO 5 million per project) with ratings ranging from 3 to 5 stars and hotel apartments, with a total investment value of

Preparations are also underway to invest RO 1.884 million in 34 historical landmarks

RO 238 million.

Additionally, the minister pointed out that as many as 113 hotel establishments (with an investment cost of less than RO 5 million per facility) are being implemented at an investment cost of RO 102 million, of which 15 projects are under implementation on government lands and 98 projects are under implementation on private lands.

Hotel establishments vary to include resorts and hotels with a rating of one to three stars, luxury camps, tourist camps, green lodges, hotel apartments, guesthouses and rest houses.

He said that a number of domestic tourism development projects, which are being implemented through the executive programme of the recovery plan and by the governorates have reached 24 projects, with a value of RO 16.6 million, while work is underway on 14 projects to develop and

invest heritage sites and historical monuments, with an investment value of RO 13.8 million.

The minister added that the number of projects to improve museums and private heritage houses reached 8 projects, with an investment value of RO 17,000. He also said that the number of projects for establishing museum exhibition halls in castles and forts reached to 6 projects, at an investment cost of RO 45,000.

There are a number of local tourism development projects being implemented directly by the governorates within the framework of their specialisations and through the governorate development programme.

Further requirements for service and tourism facilities to meet the requirements of domestic tourism in the various governorates are expected during the next stage.

Preparations are also underway to invest in 34 historical landmarks, with an investment value of RO 1.884 million, which includes a number of castles, forts, towers, walls, lanes and other monuments in various governorates across Oman. These sites are allocated as investment opportunities for SMEs.



Natural caves safe haven for mountain dwellers

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Small caves between Musandam and Al Sharqiyah governorates attract easy attention of travellers. The caves are located in the mountain range of the governorates and extend for more than 500km.

These caves were formerly a safe haven for the inhabitants. Omanis take it as a place to live, a shelter from the sun's heat and protection from the cold winter. These sites were also typical places for storing agricultural and marine crops that they harvested throughout the year.

“These natural caves can be found in various regions of the Sultanate of Oman. They are gaps with openings in the rocks of the mountains, unique in characteristics and rare formations, which took thousands



of years to form.

They are natural treasures and national heritage that require conservation and care as an important geological heritage of the country,” said a mountain dweller.

Omanis resort to these sites for many reasons, including but not limited to their location in high places, and thus becoming

a safe area that is not affected by floods during heavy rains. Some of these caves are located in high places along the paths of the water channels (Aflajs) where residents were guaranteed stability for longer periods due to the abundant availability of drinking water throughout the year.

Despite the civilisational development taking place in



various parts of the Sultanate of Oman, many mountain dwellers still use these caves to this day.

“We still use traditional irrigation methods in agriculture, we use traditional methods in harvesting our agricultural products, and we use traditional methods in preserving marine products. These geological sites created by nature are an important



resource in our daily life,” a farmer told Oman Daily Observer.

These natural caves attract people and show signs of life in the olden days. A geologist points out the source of agriculture and marine near the caves.

Also, many rock drawings are often found near these geological sites. In addition to that, there are cemeteries and tombs in various

geometric shapes.

No accurate studies are showing the real numbers of these sites, and there are no documented studies of their size, area, and times. Therefore, many specialists in geosciences hope to study these sites carefully, and they must be included in the priorities of plans and strategies that provide them with protection from tampering.



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SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
 @shadadm

As we have now entered the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadhan, devout Muslims worldwide have embarked on vigorous prayers and worship in all the remaining 10 days, one of which is the Lailatul Qadr, or the Night of Decree or the Night of Power.

During the last 10 days of Ramadhan, Muslims pray the whole night and trust that Allah will listen to their prayers and forgive them for all their mistakes. Muslims dedicate the last ten nights of Ramadhan to devotional reciting of the Quran, as they believe Night of Power could be any of the last ten days of the holy month.

While Ramadhan commemorates the month Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) the contents of the Quran, the Night of Power marks the exact night on which the revelation is thought to have happened.

The Night of Power is better than a thousand months and worshipping

The Night of Power

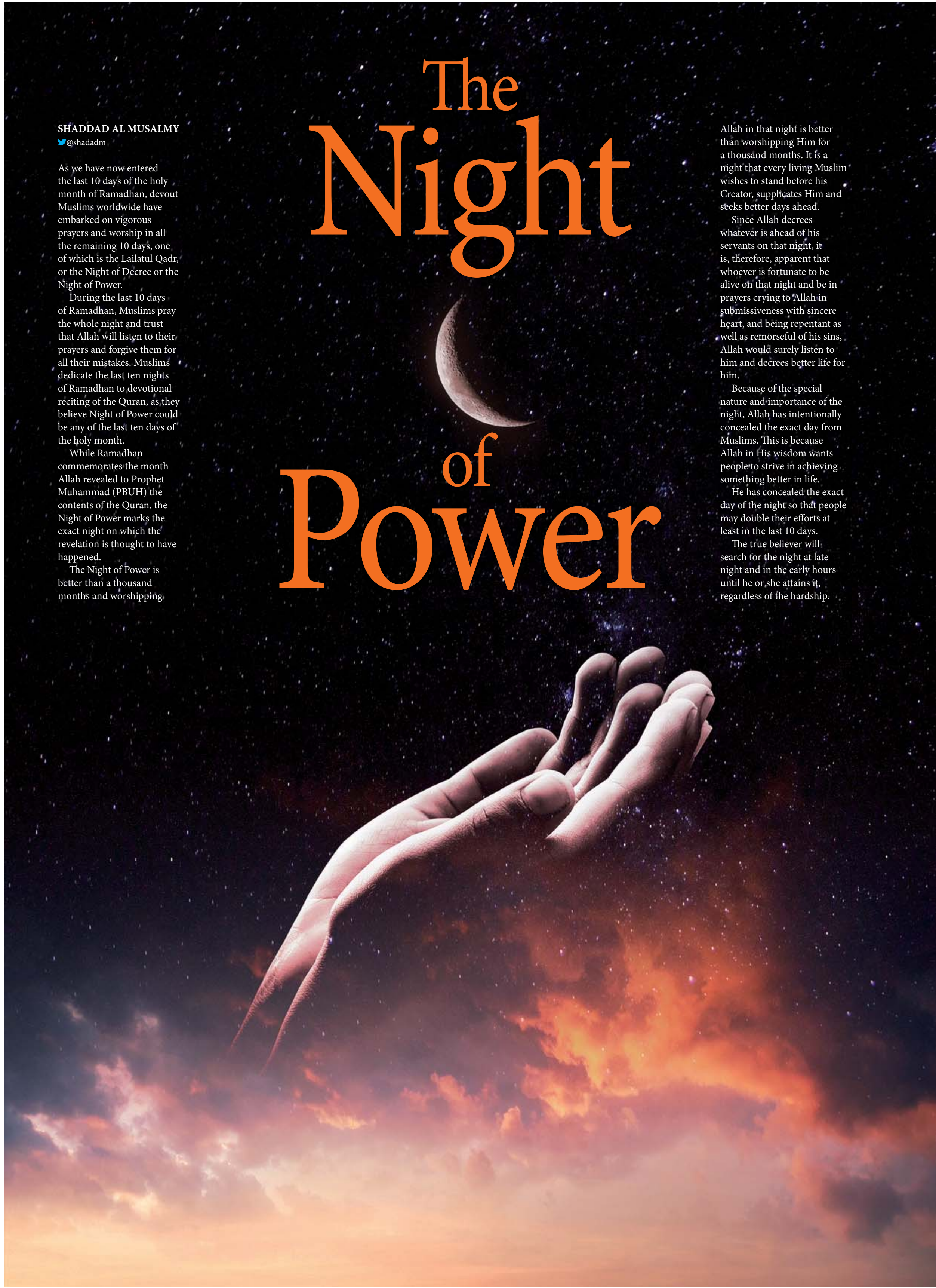
Allah in that night is better than worshipping Him for a thousand months. It is a night that every living Muslim wishes to stand before his Creator, supplicates Him and seeks better days ahead.

Since Allah decrees whatever is ahead of his servants on that night, it is, therefore, apparent that whoever is fortunate to be alive on that night and be in prayers crying to Allah in submissiveness with sincere heart, and being repentant as well as remorseful of his sins, Allah would surely listen to him and decrees better life for him.

Because of the special nature and importance of the night, Allah has intentionally concealed the exact day from Muslims. This is because Allah in His wisdom wants people to strive in achieving something better in life.

He has concealed the exact day of the night so that people may double their efforts at least in the last 10 days.

The true believer will search for the night at late night and in the early hours until he or she attains it, regardless of the hardship.





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MASCOT FOR PARIS OLYMPICS



Employees work on a production line manufacturing the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics Games official toy mascots, called the Phryges, at the Doudou et Compagnie factory in La Guerche-de-Bretagne near Rennes in Brittany, France, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Spain rejects Catalonia independence referendum

MADRID: Spain's central government has rejected a new proposal by the Catalonia region to hold a referendum on independence.

"With Prime Minister [Pedro] Sánchez there will be no referendum on self-determination in Catalonia," Finance Minister María Jesús Montero told journalists in Madrid on Wednesday.

Montero stressed that the

Catalan government of Prime Minister Pere Aragonès must abide by Spain's constitution.

Aragonès on Tuesday announced in Barcelona that a proposal "to solve the basic Catalan problem" would be drawn up in consultation with various sectors of society and be presented to Madrid by early 2024 at the latest.

The goal, Aragonès said, is to hold a referendum similar

to the 1995 vote in Canada's Québec province — where voters narrowly rejected independence.

"No one is satisfied with the deadlock in Catalonia," said Aragonès. The conflict continues. The announcement was criticised not just in Madrid, but also by some pro-independence activists in Catalonia, albeit for very different reasons.

— dpa

In world first, private Japanese moon lander on track for touchdown



TOKYO: The Japanese start-up ispace is on track to land the first private spacecraft on the moon later this month.

In what is still a rare feat after six decades of lunar exploration, the Hakuto-R lander is set to reach its destination as soon as April 25, the company said on Wednesday.

"The stage is set. I am looking forward to witnessing this historic day, marking the beginning of a new era of commercial lunar missions," Takeshi Hakamada, founder and chief executive of ispace, said in a statement.

A Falcon 9 rocket from Elon Musk's SpaceX had lifted off in December from Cape Canaveral in Florida, putting Hakuto-R on its way to the moon.

If all goes as planned, the lander will touch down gently in an area

In order to carry less fuel, the lander took a longer, more energy-efficient route to the moon, using the Earth and the sun's gravity for propulsion. Last month, Hakuto-R reached lunar orbit.

called Atlas Crater at around 1640 GMT on April 25.

Should conditions change, there are alternative landing sites and dates, including on April 26, May 1 and May 3.

In order to carry less fuel, the lander took a longer, more energy-efficient route to the moon, using

the Earth and the sun's gravity for propulsion. Last month, Hakuto-R reached lunar orbit.

The moon lander measures 2.3 metres in height and 2.6 metres in width once its legs have been folded out.

The lander can carry a load of some 30 kilogrammes. The load includes a small rover from the United Arab Emirates and an even smaller two-wheeled robot from the Japanese space agency Jaxa and Japanese toy maker Tomy. It is scheduled to deploy them in the Atlas Crater.

Two US competitors, the companies Astrobotic and Intuitive Machines, are also planning their own lunar missions. To date, only government programmes have succeeded in landing on the moon. — dpa

Fox shareholder sues Murdoch over 2020 election coverage

NEW YORK: A Fox Corp shareholder sued Chairman Rupert Murdoch (pictured) and four other board members on Tuesday, saying they failed to stop Fox News from reporting falsehoods about the 2020 US presidential election that damaged its credibility and prompted lawsuits.

Shareholder Robert Schwarz alleged in the lawsuit filed in Delaware Chancery Court that the directors breached their duties to ensure that Fox followed its own ethical standards and avoided reputational risk, and instead sought to keep supporters of former US president Donald Trump tuned in.

"FOX knew — from the Board on down — that Fox News was reporting false and dangerous misinformation about the 2020 Presidential election, but FOX was more concerned about short-term ratings and market share than the long-term damages of its failure to tell the truth," he said in the lawsuit, which did not say how many shares he owned.

A Fox representative did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The lawsuit seeks damages for the company from Rupert Murdoch, his son and Fox Chief Executive Lachlan Murdoch, and fellow directors Chase Carey, Roland Hernandez and Jacques Nasser. It also seeks unspecified corporate governance reforms.

Schwarz said the board's failure to act on "red flags" subjected the



network to defamation claims by two voting technology companies that Fox reported were involved in a conspiracy to steal the US presidential election from Trump.

Together, the two lawsuits by Dominion Voting Systems and Smartmatic USA seek damages totalling \$4 billion.

The trial in the Dominion case is scheduled to begin in Delaware Supreme Court with opening statements on Monday and is expected to last five weeks.

Dominion alleges that Fox destroyed its business by knowingly airing false claims that its ballot counting machines were used to flip the results of the 2020 election. Fox has argued that election-rigging claims by Trump and his lawyers were inherently newsworthy and protected by legal doctrines concerning press freedom. In March, a trove of exhibits in the lawsuit became public, including e-mails and statements in which Rupert Murdoch and other top Fox executives said the claims made about Dominion on-air were false.

— Reuters

'Fox News has credibility problem after Murdoch disclosure'

WILMINGTON: A judge said Fox News had a "credibility problem" just days before a \$1.6-billion defamation trial after the company disclosed for the first time in nearly two years of litigation that Rupert Murdoch was an officer of the company.

Superior Court Judge Eric Davis called the delayed disclosure "bizarre" and chided Fox attorneys for having previously made representations that Murdoch wasn't an officer of Fox News, only to reverse on the eve of a trial set to begin on Monday over the broadcaster's coverage of false claims the 2020 Presidential election was rigged.

"I'm not very happy right now," Judge Davis said during a hearing in Wilmington, Delaware. "You (Fox News) have a credibility problem."

— Reuters

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) announce to float Tender No. **TANWEER- 10/2023**

Supply Extension of HV Works to Feed Power Supply to Plot of Maysan Square at Duqm in AL Duqum Wilayat (SEZAD) - AL Wusta Governorate

The Conditions:

- 1- Collection of Tender:** Interested Companies with grade "C" and Above which registered with Tanweer, Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for Electrical Works may obtain the tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, Rural Areas Electricity Company at Al Seeb, till the date of **25 April 2023** against a non-refundable amount of RO (50/-) for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824
- 2- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- 3- Offers Submission:**
 - A- Original bid bond** along Cover letters shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Tender soft copy must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - B- Tender bids** shall be provided separately on a CD Roms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - C- Bidders** shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Addressed it to the **Chairman of Minor Tender Committee**, Rural Areas Electricity Company.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- 4- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the date of **18 May 2023**.
- 5- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- 6- Rural Areas Electricity Company** without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

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Syria to reopen Tunisia embassy



Bashar al-Assad



Kais Saied

DAMASCUS: Syria will reopen its diplomatic mission in Tunisia and appoint an ambassador there, Damascus and Tunis said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

Syria's decision followed a similar move by Tunis on April 3, when Tunisian President Kais Saied instructed his foreign minister to begin procedures to appoint an ambassador to Damascus.

"In response to the initiative of the President of the Tunisian Republic... the Syrian government... decided to reopen the Syrian embassy in Tunisia, and to appoint an ambassador soon," Syria's official news agency SANA said quoting the statement.

Tunisia's Saied had said last month he planned to restore diplomatic relations with Syria.

It was the latest example of Arab outreach to the government in Damascus that has gathered pace since Syria and Türkiye were hit by a devastating earthquake in February.

Since the quake, Syrian President Bashar al Assad has received calls and aid from Arab

leaders, momentum analysts say he could leverage to bolster regional support.

Assad has visited the United Arab Emirates, which restored ties in 2018, and last month Saudi Arabia said it has started talks with Damascus about resuming consular services.

In 2015, Tunisia took a step towards re-establishing relations when it designated a consular representative to Damascus to "follow" the situation of Tunisians in Syria.

Last month, sources said that Saudi Arabia and Syria had reached an agreement to reopen their embassies after the holy month of Ramadhan, which ends later in April.

The Saudi foreign ministry did not confirm an agreement was reached but said it was in talks with the Syrian foreign ministry to resume consular services.

Nine Arab countries are set to meet in Saudi Arabia later this week to discuss related issues.

The Arab League, which suspended Syria in 2011, is expected to hold a summit in Riyadh in May. — **Agencies**



Iranian Foreign Minister meets with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister in Beijing, China, April 6. — Reuters

Iran delegation arrives in Saudi strengthening regional powers

TEHRAN: An Iranian delegation arrived in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, Tehran said, to pave the way for reopening diplomatic missions as the two countries prepare to normalise relations, seven years after a split.

The announcement came just days after a Saudi delegation made a similar visit to Iran's capital, following a historic meeting in China between the two governments' foreign ministers who vowed to bring stability to the turbulent region.

"In accordance with the implementation of the agreement

between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the resumption of diplomatic activities... the Iranian technical delegation arrived in Riyadh at midday on Wednesday and was welcomed by Saudi officials," said Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani.

"The Iranian delegation will take the necessary steps to reopen the embassy in Riyadh and the consulate general in Jeddah as well as the activities of Iran's permanent representative in the (Jeddah-based) Organisation of Islamic Cooperation," he said in a statement.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has been invited to Saudi Arabia, according to Tehran. It would be the first trip by an Iranian president to Saudi Arabia since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2012 travelled to Mecca where he attended a regional meeting.

The flurry of diplomatic activity follows last month's landmark, Chinese-brokered announcement that Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Since the March 10 announcement, the two countries' foreign ministers have met in China and a Saudi technical delegation met Iran's chief of

protocol in Tehran last week, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The Saudi delegation, which arrived in Tehran on Saturday, is due to fly on to Iran's second city Mashhad on Thursday, Kanani said.

Analysts say Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, now wants to focus on domestic projects aimed at diversifying its energy-dependent economy.

Washington has cautiously welcomed the rapprochement between the Saudis and US adversary Iran. — **AFP**

Jerusalem church slams Israel's 'heavy-handed' Easter curbs

TEL AVIV: The Greek Orthodox Church on Wednesday slammed Israel's "heavy-handed restrictions" on its upcoming Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, urging Christians to attend in spite of police curbs.

In an escalating row over attendance numbers at the Holy Fire ceremony on Saturday in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre — where Christians believe Jesus's tomb lies — the church said negotiations with police had failed.

"After many attempts made in goodwill, we are not able to coordinate with the Israeli authorities as they are enforcing unreasonable restrictions," said Father Mattheos Siopis from the

Greek Orthodox Church.

"These heavy-handed restrictions will limit access to... the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to the Holy Light ceremony," he told journalists.

The annual Holy Fire ceremony, during which priests bring a flame from the tomb which they believe sparks miraculously each year, marks the most important event in the Orthodox calendar.

In the past some 10,000 worshippers clutching candles would fill the church, with many more crowding into the surrounding alleys of the Old City, before the flame was flown to Orthodox communities internationally.



Orthodox Christians gather with lit candles around the Edicule, during the Holy Fire ceremony at Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre church. — File Photo of AFP

"The ceremony has been faithfully taking place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for nearly 2,000 years," said Siopis.

The sacred site lies in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem and the country's police force has for the second consecutive year told church leaders that access must be considerably restricted.

Limiting church attendance to 1,800 people including clergy from the various Orthodox denominations is a necessary safety precaution, police said on Wednesday.

"I want to emphasise that our main concern is the safety of the pilgrimage that are coming to

the Old City. The numbers were provided by the safety engineer," who assessed the church, said Yoram Segal from the Jerusalem district police.

"We understand the feeling, the religious feelings of people that want to participate in this Holy Light ceremony. But unfortunately not everyone can enter the church because of the safety regulation," he added.

Last year there were scuffles between worshippers and police officers who imposed barriers throughout the city's Christian quarter.

Siopis said these measures "made impossible" the access of Christians to the church. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

MANILA

Philippines will pursue drug war

The Philippines will pursue its appeal questioning the International Criminal Court's (ICC) jurisdiction and authority to investigate killings during former President Rodrigo Duterte's 'war on drugs'.

The remarks come after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said last month he would cut off contact with the ICC after it rejected the government's request to suspend a probe into thousands of killings during the brutal anti-narcotics campaign.



"The appeal will not be withdrawn. We'll pursue it," Solicitor General Menardo Guevarra. Guevarra said the president's remarks meant the Philippines will "disengage with the ICC after exhausting our legal remedies within the framework of the Rome Statute". — **Reuters**

NEW DELHI

Four soldiers killed at military base

Four soldiers were killed in a shooting at a military base in the Indian border state of Punjab early on Wednesday, the army said, and a search for the shooter was in progress.

The number of perpetrators was not known initially but it is now suspected that only one shooter was involved, a defence source said declining to be named citing the sensitivity of the matter.

Four soldiers died from gunshot wounds sustained



during the firing incident, which took place in the early hours of Wednesday morning, an army statement said.

The statement did not mention the circumstances or other details about who was responsible for the incident. — **Reuters**

KATHMANDU

Three Nepali sherpa climbers go missing

Three Nepali sherpa guides are missing on Mount Everest after an avalanche swept down and buried them in a crevasse on Wednesday, a Tourism Department official said.

The avalanche hit the most popular Southeast Ridge route to the summit of the world's tallest mountain. Three guides who were ferrying climbing gear for their clients were caught at an unspecified site between the Base Camp and Camp I on its lower parts.



The Everest Base Camp, which turns into a tented city during the March-May climbing season, is located at an altitude of about 5,350 metres and Camp I is pitched across the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, the first major physical hurdle to the peak. — **Reuters**



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In brief

■ BRUSSELS



TOP EU DIPLOMAT POSTPONES CHINA VISIT

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has postponed a planned three-day visit to China after testing positive for Covid-19, he announced on Wednesday.

Borrell wrote on Twitter that he was feeling well with no symptoms. No new date for the trip was given.

Borrell's visit was coming on the heels of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron's closely-watched trip to Beijing.

Von der Leyen had called for a reassessment of the EU's economic relationship with China ahead of the visit. Macron meanwhile caused a furor over media comments surrounding Europe's stance.

■ TALLINN



ESTONIA PM KALLAS TO STAY IN OFFICE

Estonia's parliament voted on Wednesday in favour of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas staying in office following last month's election, giving a nod to her plans to raise taxes and defence spending in the face of perceived threats from neighbour Russia.

"The ongoing war in Ukraine and Russia's desire to destroy the existing European security principles will for the next few years put Estonia in the most difficult security situation since World War Two," Kallas' new three-party coalition said. The prime minister's liberal Reform party won the March general election and agreed on a coalition with another liberal party, Estonia 200, and the centre-left Social Democrat Party, commanding in total 60 of 101 votes in parliament.

■ SAN FRANCISCO

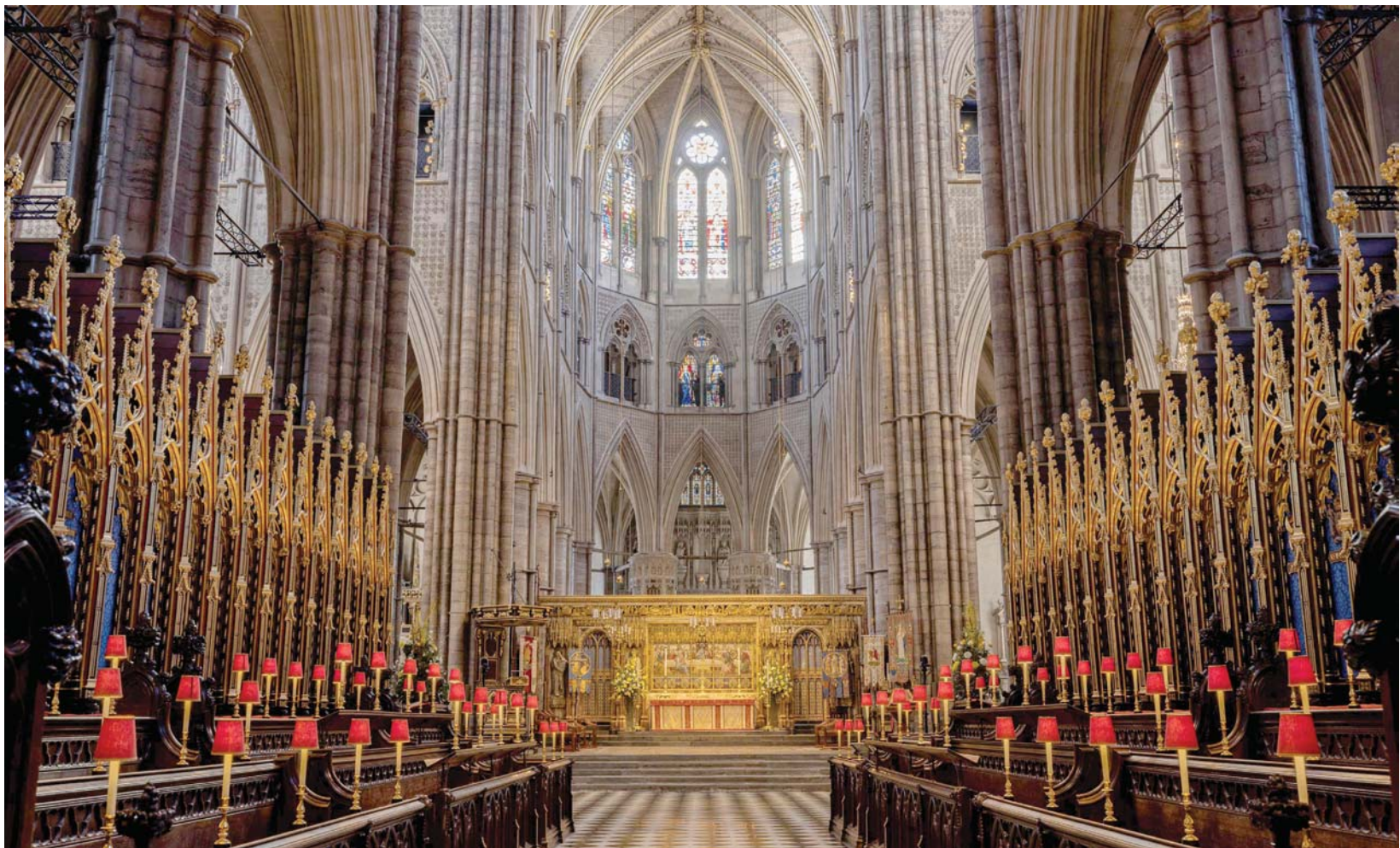


MISTAKES MADE SINCE TWITTER TAKEOVER

Twitter boss Elon Musk said running the social media network has been "quite a rollercoaster" and acknowledged "many mistakes" along the way, six months after he bought the company for \$44 billion.

In a live interview with the BBC after agreeing to a last-minute invitation for the "spontaneity" of it, Musk appeared to tacitly acknowledge that one of those errors was the decision to label the broadcaster's account "government-funded media". He said he would change the designation on the BBC's Twitter handle after the broadcaster objected.

■ GETTING READY FOR CORONATION



A general view inside Westminster Abbey in London on Wednesday during a preview ahead of the Coronation of King Charles III. Preparations for Charles' May 6 crowning at Westminster Abbey, set to be attended by dignitaries from around the world and watched by billions, continue to gather pace. — AFP

Biden urges N Ireland to seize 'incredible economic opportunity'

BELFAST: US President Joe Biden urged Northern Irish political leaders to restore their powersharing government with the promise that scores of major US corporations were ready to invest in the region as he marked the 25th anniversary of peace in Belfast.

Biden, who is fiercely proud of his Irish heritage, spent just over half a day in the UK region — where he met British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak — before travelling south to the Irish Republic for two-and-a-half days of speeches and meetings with officials and distant relatives.

The brief Belfast stop comes against the backdrop of the latest political stalemate in which the devolved powersharing government, a key part of the 1998 peace deal, has not met for more than a year due to a row about post-Brexit trade arrangements.

"It took long hard years of work to get to this place," Biden said in a speech at the new Ulster University campus in Belfast, remarking how the city had been transformed since he first travelled



US President Joe Biden takes a selfie with students on the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, at Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, on Wednesday. — Reuters

there as a young senator.

"Today's Belfast is the beating heart of Northern Ireland and is poised to drive unprecedented economic opportunity. There are scores of major American corporations wanting to come here wanting to invest."

Biden said powersharing remained critical to the future of Northern Ireland and that an effective devolved government

would "draw even greater opportunity in this region".

"So I hope the assembly and the executive will soon be restored. That's a judgment for you to make, not me, but I hope it happens," he told an audience that included the leaders of Northern Ireland's five main political parties.

Britain's departure from the European Union has at times strained ties between Britain and

Biden's White House as London and Brussels struggled to find a divorce deal that would not damage the principles of the peace agreement.

Sunak said he spoke to Biden on Wednesday about "incredible economic opportunities" for Northern Ireland, and described both countries as "very close partners". The pair met over tea at the Belfast hotel Biden stayed in overnight.

Biden said the recent Windsor Framework deal between the European Union and Britain to ease post-Brexit trade barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom offered the stability and predictability to encourage greater investment.

That deal has so far failed to convince the region's largest pro-British party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), to end a boycott of the local assembly. Powersharing has endured multiple breakdowns and suspensions since 1998, including the assembly not sitting between 2017 and 2020 over a different row.

— Reuters

Senator Tim Scott explores possible presidential run

WASHINGTON:

Republican US Senator Tim Scott launched a presidential exploratory committee on Wednesday, taking a step towards challenging former President Donald Trump for the party's nomination in 2024.

As the only Black Republican in the US Senate, Scott has frequently cited his own experience as the impoverished child of a single mother as proof of America's promise. He has sought to focus on his ability "to disrupt the narrative" of race, while criticising President Joe Biden and other Democrats on crime, inflation and other issues.

"This fight is personal. I want every American to have the same opportunities I had," Scott said in a Twitter post announcing his plan, adding in a video: "This is personal to me. I will never back down in defense of the conservative values that make America exceptional."

Scott, 57, often stresses the need for political unity and strikes an upbeat tone, in contrast with many other declared or prospective Republican candidates, who have portrayed the United States as a once-great nation in deep decline.

His announcement video was filmed at Fort Sumter off Charleston, South Carolina, where the state militia in 1861 attacked federal troops, starting the Civil War, in which South Carolina and other Southern states fought to defend slavery.

Scott called for the United States to once again overcome its deep political divisions. "America's soul was put to the test," he said. "And we prevailed."

An exploratory committee will allow Scott to raise his national profile and continue fundraising with fewer regulatory limitations than a formal campaign.

— Reuters

Russia says outlook for Black Sea grain deal is 'not so great'

MOSCOW: The Kremlin on Wednesday said the outlook for the landmark UN-brokered Black Sea grain deal was not great as promises to remove obstacles to Russian agricultural and fertiliser exports had not been fulfilled.

The grain deal is an attempt to ease a food crisis that predated the Russian war on Ukraine, but has been made worse by the most deadly war in Europe since World War Two.

The agreement was first signed by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations in July last year and has twice been extended. On paper, it allows for the export of food and fertiliser, including ammonia, from three Ukrainian Black Sea ports. But Moscow says that shipments are compromised by obstacles — such as insurance

and payment hindrances — that it says must be removed.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the current agreement was not working for Russia, despite some efforts by the United Nations to get the parts of the deal relating to Moscow's interests implemented.

"No deal can stand on one leg: it must stand on two legs," Peskov told reporters. "In this regard, of course, judging by the state of play today, the outlook (for its extension) is not so great."

Russia and Ukraine are two of the world's most important producers of agricultural commodities, and major players in the wheat, barley, maize, rapeseed, rapeseed oil, sunflower seed and sunflower oil markets. Russia is also dominant on the fertiliser



Vessels are seen as they await inspection under the Black Sea Grain Initiative in Istanbul, Turkey. — Reuters file photo

market.

The corridor has enabled the export of more than 27 million tonnes of grains and oil seeds from Ukraine and its closure was likely to cause a significant jump in prices at a critical time.

The United Nations World Food Programme warned earlier this month that food insecurity remains at unprecedented levels in 2023 as conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes and rising fertiliser prices continue to disrupt

food production globally.

Last month, Russia said it would extend the deal for another 60 days even though the United Nations, Ukraine and Turkey had pushed for a repeat 120-day roll over. Moscow says it is due to expire on May 18.

"Exactly half of this deal has not worked and is not working so far," Peskov said.

Ukrainian officials have repeatedly said they are fulfilling their side of the agreement and cannot comment on the implementation of the agreements between Russia and the UN.

However, Kyiv has also previously asked all parties to the agreement to prevent Russia from artificially blocking food supplies to world markets and using food as a weapon. — Reuters

The magical power of belonging



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Ten years ago, DEI, a new term, became the cool new kid on the block in every forward thinking work environment. As working environments around the world sought to adopt best practices for a productive organisational culture with positive vibes, and to adopt and internalise what this term really means; a new letter was added to the acronym making it now; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, or DEI&B. Soon enough, every forward thinking from the largest government agency or major corporation to our neighbourhood Dukan or grocery chain business either already has a DEI&B team or is expanding it. However, the question today is why do we still witness cases of non-productive organisational

culture with toxic vibes?

MEANINGFUL DEFINITIONS

I truly believe that clear definitions are the first step on the journey and roadmap for a productive working culture with positive vibes. This is because meaningful definitions clarify intentions and let people know if they are on the same page. For example, while diversity has been focused on skin colours and genders, it would be more meaningful if it could consider mindset and neurological diversity. Similarly, equity could be expanded to alleviate the root causes of disfranchising groups based on genders or socio-economic background. Inclusion,

WE ALL HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO SATISFY OUR HUMAN NEED TO BELONG, AND FACILITATE FOR OTHERS TO BELONG. TOXIC VIBES ARE ADDICTIVE AND CAN BE A HARD HABIT TO CHANGE.

one of our human needs that is in urgent need for improvement doesn't only mean tokenism such as nominating youth or women to roles, but also means considering their broad and diverse range of views in a way that contributes towards favourable outcomes to all.

Last but not least, you will only contribute and give your best when you feel you belong. When you assess your current work environment your first question is: Does it satisfy your need to belong? Leaders in that work environments are solely responsible to reasonably maintain organisational positive vibes and keep toxic vibes, if any, in check at all times.

HUMAN NATURE

Taming our individual ego is such a significant step and lifestyle that every spiritual guidance tell us that it's the true jihad, or righteous struggle. So, it's only human when organisational leaders give in to their egos and stop listening to voices that are not in line with their agenda, even when it contradicts

the goals of the organisation.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is our favourite hero that is making our lives easier, and our favourite villain because it's making us skilful in front of screens and keyboards and less skilful in the way we treat people and in sharing face to face positive vibes. We all have a responsibility to satisfy our human need to belong, and facilitate for others to belong. Toxic vibes are addictive and can be a hard habit to change. Unless we have this three-step roadmap that includes meaningful definitions, positive human nature and people skills we are not likely to foster more productive work environments with positive vibes.

Germany to switch off last remaining nuclear plants

SOPHIE MAKRIS

Germany will shut down its three remaining nuclear plants on Saturday, betting that it can fulfil its green ambitions without atomic power despite the energy crisis caused by the Ukraine war.

The cloud of white steam that has risen since 1989 over the river in Neckarwestheim, near Stuttgart, will soon be a distant memory, as will the Isar 2 complex in Bavaria and the Emsland plant in the north.

At a time when many Western countries are ramping up nuclear power in their transition to greener energy sources, Europe's biggest economy is resolutely sticking to its plans — though not everyone is in agreement.

Germany has been looking to phase out nuclear power since 2002, but the decision was accelerated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011 after the Fukushima disaster in Japan.

Fukushima showed that “even in a high-tech country like Japan, the risks of nuclear energy cannot be safely controlled”, Merkel said at the time.

The exit decision was popular in a country with a powerful anti-nuclear movement fuelled by fears of Cold War conflict and disasters such as Chernobyl.

But Russia's war of Ukraine in February 2022 threatened to upend the plans, putting an end to cheap Russian gas and throwing the country into an unprecedented energy crisis.

Just a few months before Germany's last three remaining plants were due to be turned off on December 31, 2022, the tide of public opinion began to turn.

“With high energy prices and the hot topic of climate change, there have of course been calls to extend the power plants,” said Jochen Winkler, the mayor of Neckarwestheim.

The government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, which includes the fiercely anti-nuclear Greens, agreed to extend the life of the plants to April 15.

“There might have been a new discussion if the winter had been more difficult, if there had been power cuts and gas shortages. But we had a winter without too many problems” thanks to accelerated liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, Winkler said.

Neckarwestheim has around 4,000 inhabitants, more than 150 of whom work at the plant — but Winkler is philosophical about the decision.

“The wheel has already been turned too far” and there is no point “going backwards” and reversing the process, he said.

Sixteen reactors have been closed in Germany since 2003. — **AFP**

On the meaning of the superyacht



Paul Krugman

Recently ProPublica, a nonprofit, independent newsroom that has partnered with *The New York Times* on occasion, released a remarkable report about the relationship between Justice Clarence Thomas of the Supreme Court and conservative billionaire Harlan Crow. It turns out that over the years Thomas, who has portrayed himself as a man of modest tastes who likes to hang out in Walmart parking lots, has taken many lavish — and previously undisclosed — vacations at Crow's expense. The ethical questions seem obvious.

Still, *The Wall Street Journal* lashed out at ProPublica, with an editorial headlined “The Smearing of Clarence Thomas.” The article accused ProPublica of using loaded language to create the appearance of a scandal. For example, the paper complained, ProPublica's report called Crow's 162-foot private boat, which has been featured in places like the website Superyacht Fan, a “superyacht.” Smear tactics! Actually, according to a 2022 article in *The New Yorker*, any yacht over 98 feet long is considered a superyacht within the yachting community.

Which got me thinking about big yachts and what they tell us about the state of society.

When rich people can afford to buy and operate big yachts, they do. Indeed, yachts are a highly visible indicator of inequality, the concentration of income and wealth in the hands of the few. The Gilded Age was marked by a proliferation of ever bigger, ever more elaborately furnished yachts; when J.P. Morgan built a large steam yacht, its 1898 launch was featured in *The New York Times*.

Conversely, the Great Compression of income disparities that took place during the 1940s and made America a relatively middle-class society for the next four decades put an end to the first golden era of superyachts. In 1955, Fortune published a remarkable essay, “How Top Executives Live,” which stressed how modest their standard of living had become compared with prewar norms. Among other things, large yachts had “foundered in the sea of progressive taxation. ... Today, 75 feet is considered a lot of yacht.” Now superyachts are back. Indeed, according to that *New Yorker* article, we're living through “the greatest boom in the yacht business that has ever existed.”

I've spent a lot of time over the years following debates over income and wealth inequality. Ever since inequality began rising in the 1980s, there's been a sort of intellectual industry devoted to what one might call inequality denial, questioning the data showing a drastic rise in incomes and wealth at the top. Indeed, measuring things at the top can be technically tricky — the very rich are such a small group that they can be missed by random surveys, and their ability to engage in tax avoidance makes it hard to track them with tax data, too.

But if you had any doubts about whether we're living in an era of extreme wealth concentration, comparable to or even surpassing the Gilded Age, the superyacht boom should quell those doubts.

The rise of superyachts also tells us some important things about the

IN ANY CASE, THE RISE OF SUPERYACHTS IS A HIGHLY VISIBLE INDICATOR OF THE EXTREME ECONOMIC POLARISATION THAT IS CERTAINLY A FACTOR IN THE EXTREME POLITICAL POLARISATION THAT IS TEARING OUR DEMOCRACY APART.

motivations and consequences of spending by the very rich.

First, why do the rich buy superyachts? Boating — being out on the open water, experiencing nature up close — can be a source of great joy to many people. (Not me — I'm so prone to seasickness that I've been known to return my breakfast to the ecosystem while snorkeling.) But really big yachts, which amount to floating mansions, would seem to defeat the purpose, insulating their passengers from much of the maritime experience.

Indeed, that 1955 Fortune article suggested that top executives were just as satisfied with the downsized vessels of their day as a previous generation had been with huge yachts. “The specifications of the boat that interests the great majority of seagoing

executives today are ‘forty feet, four people, \$40,000.’ In this tidy vessel the businessman of 1955 is quite happily sea-borne.” (For the record, \$40,000 in 1955 would be about \$450,000 in 2022)

Owning and operating a really big yacht is, however, as clear an example as you're likely to find of Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption — spending intended to demonstrate one's wealth and status, rather than for the direct satisfaction it yields. Indeed, the *New Yorker* article suggests that demand for superyachts really took off once owning your own plane stopped being an effective status symbol: “Once it seemed that every plutocrat had a plane, the thrill was gone.” Yachts, however, can always be made bigger, so there's no obvious limit to the game. The status competition isn't even purely implicit: Every year Boat International hands out the World Superyacht Awards, which supposedly honour “ingenuity and craftsmanship” — but obviously, size also matters.

In a way, it's quite sad: Rarely in the course of modern history has so much wealth been concentrated in the hands of so few, yet much of that wealth is being expended on zero-sum games of one-upsmanship.

The other point, emphasised in a guest essay this week in the *Times*, is that superyachts are immensely destructive to the environment. To be fair, it's not entirely obvious whether billionaires do more environmental damage with their superyachts than they would if they spent the same amount of money in other ways. But it's possible: Shipping and aviation — presumably including superyachts and private planes — are notoriously hard to decarbonise.

And in general, while I'm not a degrowther who believes that we must shrink the economy to save the planet, curbing extravagant and destructive spending by the very rich could be part of the solution to climate change.

In any case, the rise of superyachts — regardless of whether they carry Supreme Court justices — is a highly visible indicator of the extreme economic polarisation that is certainly a factor in the extreme political polarisation that is tearing our democracy apart. And if you're the kind of person who insists that calling superyachts by their name is somehow a vile smear, you're part of the problem.

— *The New York Times*

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Crime in the digital society:Let’s not normalise it

Have you read in the local media about a fake social media account targeting drivers to pay traffic fines? Perhaps. Social media has become a haven for criminals, mainly because of its allure of anonymity and virtual interaction. Experts predict that cybercrime will get worse and become more sophisticated. Criminals show themselves to be innovative, opportunistic, determined, and resourceful. Individuals motivated by ego, notoriety and money are exploiting opportunities created by digitalisation and people’s increased online activity.

Individuals and social institutions’ relationships nowadays are shaped by software and hardware devices in a hybrid interaction created between humans and technologies. It is in this line of thought that the researcher Debora Lupton addresses her work in digital sociology, titled Life is Digital.

Lupton sees that this fusion of actors is having a significant impact on the criminal world, as new social facts, new habits, new digital identities, new systems for information gathering, new crimes, and new ways to combat crime also emerge. Just as modern technology has expanded the ability of businesses to reach larger and more profitable markets, the same is true for other types of fraud that previously used traditional means of communication, such as mail and telephone calls.

The digital society moves fast. It is changing people’s behaviours and creating opportunities for organised online and offline crime. The hacking wargame is an eye-opener. Ultimately, criminologists will need to enter the realm of the digital sociology of crime. Digital sociology emerged as a response to the question of how the interaction of data, people and technologies transforms ways of knowing society. Data-mining is a gold mine!

Keeping in mind that social media is more than just a place for crime and virtual justice — shaming and acts of humiliation — everything from online abuse to misogyny to potential money making, identity theft, cyberstalking and social and psychological manipulation are all common offenses. Ghosting is considered passive-aggressive, and it



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DIGITAL
SOCIETY IS
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FOR ORGANISED
ONLINE AND
OFFLINE CRIME

may even constitute emotional abuse. Delinquent behaviour online is in danger of becoming normalised.

Would orbiting be considered an offense? Orbiting is when a person is no longer part of your life but still appears in your social media world — close enough to see each other but far enough to never talk. Why do people orbit each other? The literature points out that orbiting is something hard for people not to do! With people interacting so much on social media, orbiting becomes automatic. However, each situation is different; it can just be plain curiosity.

Again, anonymity and surveillance can lead to more serious offenses and crimes. According to the INTERPOL 2022 Global Crime Trend Report, illicit trafficking (drug trafficking and human trafficking), organised crime, financial crime and corruption, cybercrime, and terrorism are the five broad crime areas that dominate the global threat landscape.

The most basic crimes carried out over the Internet are stealing credit card information, hacking into government websites, theft of users’ private information on Internet accounts, taking advantage of existing software vulnerabilities, sending authentic-looking fraudulent e-mails to users in an organisation, and tricking them into performing actions such as downloading attachments or clicking on links.

Other common examples of cybercrime include the sale of illegal items, such as drugs, weapons, or counterfeit goods; illegal gambling; solicitation; and production, distribution, or possession of child pornography. Criminals have already been selling digital fingerprints. These offenses tend to be carried out on the dark web with the use of VPNs and encrypted communication services.

To better understand and respond to crimes in the digital society, criminology requires the interdisciplinary perspectives of science, technology, politics, cultural studies, as well as media and communications.

People with limited knowledge of criminal activities conducted over the Internet are considered more vulnerable; many are unaware they are victims. It is time to start the conversation.

PICKING ROSES!



A farmer picks roses during harvest season in Al Jabal A Akhdhar mountainous area in the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday. – AFP

Should we research geoengineering?

As our planet’s climate heats up, so, too, does the debate about the boldest response to it: geoengineering, or the deliberate modification of the atmosphere to combat global warming. In 2010, when Ken Caldeira and David Keith published “The Need for Climate Engineering Research,” geoengineering had virtually no support. That is no longer the case.

Early critics like Clive Hamilton dismissed geoengineering as “playing god” — an objection that misfires when addressed to those who do not believe that a divine being is safeguarding the fate of the planet. A more secular version of the objection might state that we should leave nature alone, but that battle was lost decades ago. We humans have already overwhelmed nature, to such an extent that many scientists suggest that we are now in a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene.

Now geoengineering is back on the agenda. In 2020, the US Congress directed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to develop a multi-year research initiative to investigate both natural and human activities that might alter the reflectivity of the stratosphere and how those activities could affect our planet. In 2020, NOAA began offering funding for such projects. Meanwhile, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine



Peter Singer

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

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recommended spending \$200 million on a research programme to see whether there is a safe way to cool the planet.

When Caldeira and Keith wrote about engineering the climate, several approaches were mooted, such as adding soluble iron to the ocean to increase the growth of phytoplankton, which would absorb and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Research failed to validate that approach, however, and current research is focused on solar radiation modification (SRM), also known as solar radiation management, which aims to reflect a small part of the solar radiation that warms the surface of the Earth.

The eruption of Mt Pinatubo in 1991 put 15 million tonnes of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere, where it mixed with water to form a layer of particles known as aerosols. This layer reduced the amount of solar radiation reaching the Earth’s surface, reducing average global temperatures by 0.60 Celsius for the next 15 months. That observation led some scientists to ask whether we could create a similar effect by deliberately releasing aerosols into the stratosphere — the tool most favoured by those who want to learn more about how we might

reduce solar radiation.

No responsible person would claim that we are ready to try something like that now, so the real debate is about whether to take the prior step: carry out research that might eventually make SRM feasible.

Two open letters give opposing answers. In January 2022, a group of scientists released a message directed at governments and the United Nations, calling for an International Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering. The letter, which has been signed by more than 400 academics from more than 60 countries, outlines three main concerns.

First, we are unable to understand fully the risks involved in geoengineering, given the complexities of both global

and regional weather patterns. Second, giving credibility to the idea that geoengineering may save us from catastrophic global warming will weaken our resolve to address the root cause of climate change by achieving net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions. And, third, we lack any system of global governance with the authority to control the deployment of geoengineering in a manner that would be fair, inclusive and effective.

In February, another open letter was published calling for “balanced research.” The signatories, again scientists and academics, recognise that we must address the root cause of global warming by cutting our emissions and removing CO2 from the atmosphere, and accept that SRM carries

its own environmental risks. Nevertheless, faced with a choice between a flat refusal to investigate SRM and “thorough and critical research,” they prefer the latter.

Ten years ago, I would not have signed a call for research into geoengineering, but I signed the second letter. I changed my view because today we are in a more desperate situation than we were a decade ago. Climate change is occurring more rapidly than previously predicted, with temperature records broken, more severe droughts and floods, and more intense storms. Despite these strong warning signs, few countries are on track to make the emissions cuts needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C or even 2°C.

It is true, as the letter opposing any use of geoengineering states, that we may never achieve certainty about the risks of SRM. But we are also very far from certainty about the eventual impact of the greenhouse gases we have already put into the atmosphere, and of those we will continue to emit. There are risks either way. We currently have no idea whether the risks of attempting SRM outweigh the risks of not attempting it. We would be wise to try to find out.

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Now geoengineering is back on the agenda.

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UTSC honours OHA chief Dr Marwan for AHF post



ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, who became the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Vice-Chairman was honoured by United Thalasserry Sports Club (UTSC) on Tuesday night.

In this connection, the UTSC held an ‘Iftar’ gathering at Hotel Haffa House in Ruwi, where the community came together to celebrate the holy month of Ramadhan. The event was attended by several OHA officials, prominent business people and members of the community.

The UTSC club, well known for organising the AHF-recognised Gulf Hockey Fiesta – a vibrant 5s hockey tournament participated from across the region and India – honoured the OHA chairman with a traditional Kerala gesture of ‘ponnada’.

Anoop Bijli, Second Secretary of the Embassy of India, and Lijihass Ussain of UTSC presented Dr Marwan with a plaque to commemorate his achievement.

Speaking at the event, Anoop Bijli said, “It is an honour to be here to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan and to recognise the achievements of Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma. His appointment as vice-chairman of the Asian Hockey Federation is a testament

to his dedication and hard work, and we congratulate him on this achievement.”

Lijihass Ussain on behalf of UTSC added, “Dr Marwan is a true inspiration to all of us, and we are proud to honour him for his accomplishments. We hope that his success will inspire others to strive for excellence in their own pursuits.”

Dr Marwan expressed his gratitude for the recognition, saying, “I am humbled and honoured to receive this recognition. This appointment is not just a personal achievement, but a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Oman Hockey Association. I look forward to working with the Asian Hockey Federation to promote Hockey and bring it to new heights.”

During the function, UTSC also honoured Manha Mariyam for her achievement in the CBSE National Athletics in India. Manha, a student of ISM hailing from Thalasserry in Kerala, won a gold medal in the 4x100m relay.

“Her achievements have brought great pride to the Thalasserry community and UTSC,” the UTSC organisers said.

United Thalasserry Sports Club (UTSC) is a club based out of Thalasserry, India. It has been the pivot and backbone of many sporting activities in India and now has a significant presence across the Middle East having spread its wings to Oman, UAE and Saudi Arabia.



Al Shabiba team clinches OJA football tourney title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Al Shabiba newspaper team snatched the title of the Oman Journalists Association’s (OJA) Ramadhan football tournament after they defeated Oman Daily newspaper 3-0 in the final clash late on Tuesday at the Al Hilal team greenfield turf in Azaiba.

Murtadha al Ajmi was the star of the match as he netted two goals for Al Shabiba while Ibrahim al Lizami scored the third goal.

Oman News Agency (ONA) finished in the third place as they thrashed Oman Radio team 6-2 in the third and fourth play-off.

The champions of the tournament won the majority of the individual player awards as Anas al Ghammari from Al Shabiba team was named as the best goalkeeper. His teammate Murtadha al Ajmi grabbed the top-scorer prize with eight goals while Hasan al Mhrzi from Oman Daily team became the most valuable player. The Galfar team won the best team award in the tournament.

At the end of the final match, chief guest Mohammed Said al Balushi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information, presented the trophies and medals to the top winners. The ONA team players collected the bronze medals and the third place trophy while Oman Daily players received the silver medals and the second-place trophy. Al Shabiba players claimed the gold medals and the champions’ trophy of the tournament.

In the final, the game started with balanced performance from both sides to avoid receiving an early goal. Later, the head coach of Al Shabiba, Al Muhannad al Busaidy instructed his players to focus on more attacks.

The top-scorer of the



tournament and Al Shabiba star Murtadha al Ajmi was the man who netted the opening goal and later he doubled his team’s lead by scoring the second goal. Ibrahim al Lizami confirmed his team’s victory by registering the third goal.

Oman Daily team tried to make a comeback through some movements of Hasan al Mhrzi and Osama al Shaqsi, but all their scoring attempts were stopped by Al Shabiba’s strong defending line besides good saves by goalkeeper Anas al Ghammari. The match ended with Al Shabiba winning 3-0.

Al Shabiba topped the group during the group stage as they managed to earn nine points from three games. They stunned Oman Daily newspaper 3-1 and then won against Galfar team 2-1 before edging Administration and Finance team of the Ministry of

Information 5-3 in the concluding round of group stage. In the semifinals, they beat Oman Radio team 3-2 as the regulation time ended in a 2-2 draw.

PLAN FOR MORE TEAMS

The chief guest congratulated Al Shabiba team for emerging as the champions.

“Congratulations to all the winners and we are very pleased to see the participation of the teams from the Ministry of Information and private media organisations. The tournament was a great opportunity for all the media people to meet in a sporting environment and to break the routine. Also, to discover the potential faces and the top technical performers in the tournament. I hope this kind of activity will continue during the whole year and not only during

the holy month of Ramadhan,” Mohammed bin Said al Balushi said.

Salim al Jahwari, Vice-Chairman of OJA and head of Sports Media committee, said that the second edition of the tournament was different from the previous edition as it featured top technical performance among the participating teams. “This year’s tournament will be reviewed during the forthcoming meeting of the committee. We will study increasing the number of the teams to 16 teams in the next edition by giving an early notice to all the teams ahead of the event with sufficient time to prepare and shape the players,” he concluded.

This edition of the tournament featured participation of eight teams distributed into two groups and each group comprised four teams. The Group A comprised Oman TV, Oman News Agency, Oman Journalists Association and Oman Radio. The Group B featured the Finance and Administrative team of the Ministry of Information, Galfar Company (media team), Oman Daily newspaper and Al Shabiba newspaper. The ten days tournament was run under the organisation of OJA represented by the Sports Media Committee.

Ministry’s Shield basketball final cancelled

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth’s 13th edition of the shield competition’s final match between Al Seeb Club and Al Bashayer Club ended in regrettable events. The match occurred at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex sub-hall in Bausher on Monday night.

During the match, Al Seeb player Mazin al Hadidi clashed with Al Bashayer player Aaron resulting in a tangle of hands. This incident escalated when

most of the reserve players from both teams entered the stadium, attempting to clash and create chaos.

The referee of the match announced his decision to end the match 7.50 minutes early. Al Bashayer were leading Al Seeb with a score of 57-38 when the match was called off.

Secretary of the Oman Basketball Association, Mohammad al Hassani, expressed his disappointment about the incident, saying that it was unfortunate and the first of its kind to happen in Omani sports.



He explained that the match was going well until the incident occurred, which resulted in chaos inside the stadium. International referee Ahmed Darwish cancelled the match due to the players’ behavior.

Al Hassani also stated that the association is waiting for reports from the referees and technical committee to make decisions about the fate of the first and second places in the competition. He added that a new date would be set for holding the final of the Ministry Shield.

Al Hassani called on the

players to exercise restraint during matches and to show sportsmanship, emphasising the association’s rejection of any behavior that harms the reputation of the two teams and efforts made to organise and prepare for the final.

The Oman Basketball Association is expected to issue decisions regarding the incident soon to ensure that such unfortunate events do not occur in Omani sports in the future.

Ahli Sidab won third place after their victory over Nizwa in a previous match.

Al Musannah secure crucial victory over Al Rustaq



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Al Musannah managed to clinch a significant win against Al Rustaq with a score of 2-1 in the 21st round of the Omantel League held at the Sports Complex in Rustaq on Tuesday. The game was full of excitement and nail-biting moments as both teams gave it their all to win the game. The first-half saw a balanced performance by both teams, with the host team, Al Rustaq, having a slight advantage. Despite several attempts to advance, Al Musannah's defence remained vigilant and successfully prevented any danger posed by Al Rustaq's attackers. However, in the 38th minute, Al Rustaq managed to take the lead through their professional Daniel Jesus. In the second-half, Al Rustaq attempted to double their score to

secure three points and maintain their position among the leading teams. However, Al Musannah surprised them with an equalising goal by Hammoud al Saadi in the 56th minute. After this, Al Musannah continued to push forward and launched several attacks, one of which resulted in a goal by Rodrigues from a header in the 70th minute. Despite Al Rustaq's efforts to achieve an equaliser, Al Musannah remained solid in defence and ultimately won the game with two goals to one. The victory gave Al Musannah Club three crucial points, bringing their total points to 27 and securing the ninth position in the league table. Meanwhile, Al Rustaq Club remain at 38 points, and they risk losing third place if Al Seeb win in the next match. The match was officiated by chief referee Haitham al Amiri,

assisted by Hamad al Ghafri, Ayman al Habsi and Nayef al Balushi as the fourth referee, with Rashid al Hosani as the match observer.

AL NASR BLANK AL BASHAYER

In another match, Al Nasr Club secured a victory over hosts Al Bashayer Club with two clean goals, scored by Abdullah Zaher in the 27th minute followed by professional Philip Aka's goal in the 81st minute. The match took place at the Nizwa Stadium. The match was filled with action and excitement, with the referee handing out numerous yellow cards. With this result, Al Nasr Club jumped to 24 points and remained in tenth place, while Al Bashayer Club continued to struggle, occupying the last position in the league table with nine points only.

Mumbai win first IPL game in tense chase after Rohit's 65

NEW DELHI: Skipper Rohit Sharma smashed 65 as Mumbai Indians edged out Delhi Capitals by six wickets in a last-ball IPL thriller to register their first win of the season on Tuesday.

Mumbai's chase of 173 moved to the final delivery when impact player Tim David and Cameron Green got the winning runs to hand hosts Delhi their fourth straight loss in as many matches.

Delhi, led by David Warner and coached by Ricky Ponting, have endured a horrendous run in the T20 tournament to be in danger of an early exit from the play-off race.

The franchise is yet to win the Indian Premier League and suffered an early blow when captain Rishabh Pant was involved in a car crash in December to be ruled out of the season.

Mumbai remain the most successful IPL outfit, owned by Nita Ambani, wife of India's richest man, Reliance Industries billionaire Mukesh Ambani.

The team, which is without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, out injured this season and missing England pace bowler Jofra Archer



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma watches the ball after playing a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi – **AFP**

for the second straight match, bounced back from their opening two defeats.

Rohit and the left-handed Ishan Kishan gave the former champions a flying start in their 71-run stand before a run out sent Kishan back to the pavilion.

Big partnership

Rohit, called "hitman" for his big hundreds and six-hitting,

looked in supreme touch as he pulled Nortje for a six over deep square leg and another hit over the fence off Kuldeep Yadav.

The Indian captain put on another big partnership of 68 with Tilak Varma, who made 41, but Mukesh Kumar raised hopes of a turnaround with successive strikes.

He sent back Varma and then T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav for a first ball duck to bring a live the home crowd that went crazy when Rohit departed five balls later off Mustafizur Rahman.

But David (13) and Green (17) kept their calm in a dramatic final over from Anrich Nortje, which witnessed a dropped catch, to steer the team home and the two batsmen stole a double after David pushed the ball to mid-off.

Earlier Delhi were bowled out for 172 in 19.4 overs despite Warner's 51 and an attacking 54 by fellow left-hander Axar Patel after the hosts were invited to bat first.

Piyush Chawla rattled the opposition batting to return figures of 3-22 and was later substituted by David. — **AFP**

OCT Ruwi bag All Omani T20 title

MUSCAT: OCT Ruwi claim the title for the All Omani T20 Tournament held at the Oman Cricket Academy from 25th March 2023 — 11th April 2023.

The tournament was played in a round-robin format between 8 All Omani teams competing for the coveted annual trophy during the hold month of Ramadhan.

OCT Ruwi led by Waseem al Balushi were champions of the tournament remaining unbeaten throughout the games while OCT Maabela led by Asif al Balushi claim runners up to the tournament winning 5 out of 6 games, losing only to the champions in the league stage.

Delighted on defending the championship, Waseem al Balushi, Captain of OCT Ruwi said, "We have always believed in ourselves and that I think is our team's strength. We have claimed Runners Up for the A Division and came with a lot of confidence behind our back. I



am proud of the way we played throughout the tournament. I laud all the teams for composing such teams that have kept the tournament competing as ever and challenging at all stages. We would also thank Oman Cricket and it's board for organising such a fantastic extravaganza for the development of youth and ethnicity into the sport of Cricket. We aspire to have more locals taking up Cricket and to represent Oman at the highest level in the sport."

Paul Sheridan , Vice-Chairman – Oman Cricket along with Younis Sakhi, Board Advisor – Oman

Cricket were present at the closing ceremony of the tournament and handed the individual accolades and the title positions to the teams.

Zubair bin Ali bin Akbar al Balushi bagged the Best Batsman scoring 243 runs at an SR of 143 and a staggering avg of 121.5. Haythim Bahar Ali claimed the Best Bowler picking 14 wickets at an Economy of 5.12 and a SR of 10.3.

Zubair bin Ali bin Akbar al Balushi also was adjudged the Player of the Tournament exhibiting his batting array scoring 243 runs and displaying superb bowling picking 12 wickets.

Punjab and Gujarat look to get back to winning ways



This year's auction has got most teams equally balanced and the result to this is the close encounters between a lot of teams. Another factor is that, many-a-players are fighting for either safe guarding their existing spot in the national team or to reclaim a lost spot, this has resulted in the competition being extremely high. Players realise that only special efforts will be noticed and hence they are willing to put everything on line for it. No team so far has been able to all-out dominate this season. With most teams differentiated on Net Run Rate at the moment, the bottom half teams have made it a mission to pull down teams from the top half, so that they can make their way. This makes the tournament even more interesting.

MATCH 16 of 74 – PUNJAB KINGS (PBKS) VS GUJARAT

TITANS (GT) AT MOHALI (PUNJAB)

- INTRODUCTION –** Gujarat Titans is coming on the back of a heart-breaking defeat, thanks to a swashbuckling innings of Rinku Singh (KKR). Although, the regular captain Hardik Pandya was rested in that game and Gujarat will be looking to forget it as a bad day at office. Punjab has looked to play high risk-high reward game so far and that approach did cost them against Hyderabad. Although vintage Shikhar Dhawan's 99* would be a huge confidence booster. Both teams have played 3 games, where they won the first two and lost the third one.
- Head-to-Head —** Played — 2; Won by PBKS – 1; Won by GT – 1
- PBKS possible XI –** Shikhar Dhawan, Prabssimran Singh, Liam Livingstone, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Shahrulkh Khan/ Kagiso Rabada, Sam Curran, Nathan Ellis, Mohit Rathee, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Arshdeep Singh



- GT possible XI –** Shubman Gill, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Sai Sudarshan/Joshua Little, Hardik Pandya, Vijay Shankar, David Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Mohd Shami, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal/ Shivam Mavi
- Pitch & Weather Report –** The pitch at the Punjab Cricket Association "IS Bindra Stadium" is a balanced track. The opening bowlers will get some assistance from the surface as the ball tends to do a lot early on. Run-scoring will become easier for the batters

once they are set.

- Our Match Prediction –** Punjab Kings is a very strong side at home and the return of the much-awaited Liam Livingstone will make them an even more daunting side. They are definitely going to face a tough challenge against an extremely balanced side of Gujarat Titans. Gujarat Titans have a lot of match winners and they expect any one of them to click on a given day and the game is theirs. They don't necessarily play with freedom, rather they opt to play conservative cricket, where

they look to take the game deep and take advantage of the pressure situations. I feel that, Shikhar Dhawan is well determined to put up a strong case for his return to Indian team and he is doing that by enjoying every day of his cricket now, this makes him lethal. So its Punjabi Bhanga all the way!

- Fan Comments –** "With both teams having exactly similar past records, I believe that Dhawan inspired Punjab Kings will take a lead in this game. That 99 from Dhawan was a pure delight for a cricket fan. Fighting against the odds and not giving up. Absolutely SPECIAL!!" – Navaneetha Krishnan, Key Account Manager (Taiba Pharma), 42 Years, Indian. "Its still early days for Gujarat Titans, but they have set a standard so high that its going to be very difficult to maintain it. Wonder if the Indian team will look to replicate this strategy for upcoming T20 World Cups." – Masroor Cheeda, Partner (Cheeda International), 43 Years, Pakistani. "Would be interesting to see what happens

to Yash Dayal. Would his career end here, or would he be backed like Stuart Broad and made into a Champion Bowler. That could have happened to anyone and I hope Gujarat backs him!" – Damodar Katti, Managing Director (Design Group), 48 Years, Indian. "IPL has played a big role in developing local talents, by providing them a platform with international players. Although, as a fan perspective, there should be a Champions League, between the winners of top T20 leagues around the world and that would be a pure delight for fans." — Dylan D Cruz, Managing Director, 39 years, Pakistani. "The premium top T20 leagues should consider holding their qualifiers/ eliminators/semi-finals in developing countries. This would not only help them build their increased fan base, but also help in promoting the growth of cricket in those upcoming regions as well. – Faiz Riaz, Managing Director (Mohammed Riaz & Partners) & National Golf Player for Oman, 33 years, Omani.



hits 45 as Man City make mark against Bayern

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Erling Haaland scored his 45th goal of the season as Manchester City took a commanding 3-0 lead over Bayern Munich from their Champions League quarter-final, first leg on Tuesday.

Rodri and Bernardo Silva were also on target for the English champions, who took a giant stride towards finally conquering Europe for the first time.

Victory was sweet for City boss Pep Guardiola as he came up against his former club for the first time since leaving Bayern for Manchester in 2016, but he warned that the job is not yet done.

“I’ve been three years there and I know in Europe this team is special. To knockout these type of teams you have to make two good games not just one,” said Guardiola.

“I know exactly what we have to do there, They are capable to score one, two, three goals. We have to do our game with huge personality.”

City also partially settled a Champions League score with Bayern boss Thomas Tuchel, who beat Guardiola’s men to lift the trophy as Chelsea manager in the 2021 final.



Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland shoots to score their third goal during the UEFA Champions League quarter final, first leg football match between Manchester City and Bayern Munich at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. – AFP

Tuchel was appointed less than three weeks ago by the German champions with one eye on this tie and he believed his side deserved more.

“I try to not allow my players to focus on the result because it is not the deserved result,” said Tuchel.

“I’ve seen so many good things that I refuse to just focus on the

result. You may say ‘that’s not Bayern’ but I was very proud on the sideline, we were courageous and showed the right character.”

City fought off interest from Bayern among other European giants to win the race to sign Haaland a year ago for nights like this and the Norwegian played his part in a clinical performance.

Haaland uncharacteristically fluffed his lines with the first big

chance of the game when his weak shot was straight at Yann Sommer.

At the other end, City were grateful to a brilliant block from Ruben Dias to prevent Jamal Musiala putting Bayern in front.

Rodri then showed the forwards how it is done as the Spaniard took aim from long range on his weaker left foot and curled a sumptuous shot into the top corner on 27 minutes.

CITY TURN THE SCREW

Bayern picked up Sommer in the January window as an emergency measure after Manuel Neuer’s season was ended by a skiing accident.

The Swiss international proved the value of that move with a number of vital saves to keep Bayern in the tie, starting with an outstretched leg to deny Ilkay Gundogan.

But Bayern were made to regret not making their bright start to the second period count.

Leroy Sane twice came close to haunting his former club with powerful efforts that were beaten away by Ederson before Matthijs de Ligt and Kingsley Coman had headers from close range blocked by desperate City defending.

Instead, City turned the screw in the final quarter to take a potentially decisive lead to Bavaria next week.

Haaland showed there is more to his game than goals with a perfectly weighted cross for Silva to head in City’s second 20 minutes from time.

Sommer then produced a fine stop low to his left to turn Julian Alvarez’s shot to safety.

But City were not to be denied their third and Haaland his goal as he stretched out a telescopic right leg to turn John Stones’ knockdown beyond Sommer.

Alvarez fired another effort inches wide and Sommer needed finger tips to turn over Rodri’s header as City went in search of a final flourish.

But Bayern will need one of the Champions League’s all-time great comebacks in eight days’ time if City are to be denied a third consecutive semi-final. — AFP

Djokovic needs time to adapt after ‘ugly’ start on clay

MONTÉ CARLO: Novak Djokovic returned to the ATP Tour with an “ugly” straight-sets win over Ivan Gakhov at Monte Carlo and while the world number one has had extended preparation on clay this year he said he needs more time to adapt to the surface.

Djokovic, who is not vaccinated against Covid-19, was unable to play at Indian Wells and Miami last month as he failed to obtain a waiver to enter the United States.

He spent the time training on clay ahead of the French Open, where he will target a 23rd Grand Slam, but the Serbian’s 7-6(5) 6-2 win over Russian qualifier Gakhov on Tuesday showed he needs more time to get into a rhythm.

“Throughout my career I needed one, two weeks of tournaments to really start to play the way I want to. It’s the case again this year, though I trained for three weeks and felt good playing practice points,” Djokovic



Serbia's Novak Djokovic in action during his second round match against Russia's Ivan Gakhov. – Reuters

told reporters.

“But it’s different when you play a match, especially today (Tuesday) was quite windy on the court, so not easy to find the rhythm, to have the ball right, the ball toss and playing a lefty, playing someone that has not much to lose.

“All these things play a factor in the way you feel on the court. I’m really glad I overcome the first step, because I hope things will be better and easier from this point.”

The Australian Open champion said the level of his tennis was “not very high” at the moment and he was not sure when it would pick up.

“The good feelings might come as soon as the next match or later,” added Djokovic, who plays Lorenzo Musetti or Luca Nardi in the third round.

“I don’t know. We’ll keep working on practice courts and see what happens.” — Reuters



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MSX Plus platform launched to drive efficiency of workers in securities sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) launched on Wednesday, April 12, the MSX Plus platform — an educational platform that aims to improve the skills and efficiency of workers in the securities sector, initially targeting companies operating in the sector before expanding to other categories according to a specified timeline.

The launch took place during the exchange’s annual iftar event, attended by Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of MSX, brokerage officials, stakeholders, and the media.

According to Wafa bint Taj Mohammed al Zadjalayah (pictured), Senior Director of the Membership and Inspection Department, the MSX Plus platform is an electronic educational and training platform that provides scientific materials related to the main requirements of various functional tasks in the securities sector.

It also enables the holding of remote training workshops connecting compliance officers of brokerage firms, and the membership and inspection team of the



exchange.

Al Zadjalayah pointed out that the platform launch is part of the exchange’s strategy, which prioritises enhancing the performance of companies operating in the securities sector by providing modern technologies in training programmes and professional exams for those working in those companies, contributing to improving their efficiency, which will undoubtedly be reflected in the performance of companies in particular and the exchange in general.

She added that the platform provide training programmes for employees in the sector, enhancing compliance, issuing licenses and certificates, and building a database of all workers in the sector.

Planned to be rolled out in multiple phase, the second phase will feature a mind map, interactive (smart) books, and direct conferences with Gulf and international brokerage firms and research houses.

Oman’s retail trade sector to grow to RO 10 billion in value by 2040

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) held its second annual Ramadhan event on Tuesday, April 11, on the theme, “Developing the Investment Environment in the Sultanate of Oman.” It was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, at the Invest in Oman hall located at the Civil Aviation Authority’s headquarters. Also in attendance were members of the business community and investors.

The event featured presentations on the Ministry’s efforts to enhance Oman’s national economy and Gross Domestic Product, mechanisms for addressing challenges faced by the private sector, improving the investment environment, and the results and plans of investment labs in the industrial sector.

During the event, Ahmed bin Salim al Rasbi, General Manager of Investment Services at the Ministry, shared that over 1000 visitors of different nationalities from around the world visited had visited the Invest in Oman lounge from February 27 to April 9 this year.

The lounge, showcasing 38 different investment opportunities, is also supported by the addition of 20 new services launched this year. Importantly, Al Rasbi also announced that the ‘Invest Easy’ online platform of the ministry will be renamed the



“Oman Business Portal” to provide a comprehensive gateway for all electronic services in country business environment. The new portal’s design and features prioritise ease of use, efficiency, and adherence to the latest global website standards, he said.

A presentation by Hussein bin Jumah al Eshaq, Chairman of OCCI’s Trade Committee, discussed the importance of the retail trade sector in the country.

According to Al Eshaq, the sector contributes around RO 3.5 billion to the GDP annually and provides employment to around 300,000 people, representing 15 per cent of the total workforce in Oman.

Al Eshaq also emphasised that the retail sector supports other sectors indirectly, including real estate, construction, building materials, transportation and logistics, tourism, and events.

Al Eshaq stated that the future goals of the retail sector in Oman include achieving a contribution of RO 10 billion to the national economy by 2040 and creating over one million job opportunities.

Additionally, it aims to stimulate and increase the revenues of other economic sectors and attract investments to Oman according to Oman Vision 2040.

In an effort to support the retail trade sector in Oman, the government has implemented several measures including increasing job incentives, simplifying lending methods, exempting new investors and local companies from localisation rates, and accelerating municipal and labour procedures.

Additionally, legislation will be enacted to protect investing companies that add value to the economy from the dominance of products from abroad through

e-commerce. Al Eshaq emphasised the importance of cooperation between regulators and companies to achieve the future goals of retail trade.

Khalid al Shuaibi, Head of the National Investment and Export Development Programme (Nazdehar), highlighted the programme’s role in developing investment trends and the procedural and legislative potential that aligns with Oman Vision 2040.

The programme aims to build a diversified investment portfolio for economic sectors, supervise the implementation of investment projects, and enhance the contribution of non-oil sectors in building a sustainable economy.

The programme is currently working on developing investment opportunities in various sectors, including education, culture, youth, sports and health.

Yellen to press for additional reforms at WB

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will call on Wednesday for the World Bank to undertake additional reforms this year to expand its ability to help developing countries meet global challenges such as climate change.

Yellen is hosting talks with global finance officials on Wednesday to discuss ways to continue evolving the World Bank and other multilateral development banks so they can better help developing countries deal with climate change and other global crises, even as they work to reduce extreme poverty.

In excerpts of her remarks obtained by Reuters, Yellen said changes already approved had sharpened the mission of the World Bank to ensure it was striving to end extreme poverty, boost shared prosperity and build resilience.

“This does not mean we are moving away from the Bank’s traditional work. Rather,

our incorporation of global challenges enhances the Bank’s work on poverty reduction and development. These goals are all interconnected,” she said.

Yellen said Zambian women she met during her visit in January understood how climate change reduced agricultural yields. “And we’ve all seen how threats to global health can disrupt entire societies and economies, and how fragility and conflict can lead to significant displacement and migrant flows,” she said. Yellen hailed balance sheet changes that could add up to \$50 billion in the bank’s financing capacity over 10 years, while protecting its AAA credit rating and long-term financial stability.

“These are very significant achievements. We should acknowledge and celebrate that,” she said in the prepared remarks. “And then we need to push for more progress. We should use the rest of the year to undertake



US TREASURY SECRETARY JANET YELLEN

additional reforms through a staged implementation approach that can be agreed upon by the Board and implemented on a rolling basis.”

Yellen gave no specifics in the excerpts, but said upcoming events could be leveraged to

keep momentum strong for the evolution of the World Bank. Those included the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact to be hosted by France in June, the Group of 20 Leaders’ Summit in India in September, the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Morocco in October, and the United Nations COP28 climate conference to be held in Dubai in November and December.

In addition to bolstering the bank’s financing capacity, Yellen said the bank was also working to systematically integrate regional and global challenges into its country diagnostic reports and country engagement, while expanding focusing more on raising additional private capital.

A US Treasury official this week called the financing change a “downpayment” on further reforms at the World Bank and other multilateral development banks.

Outgoing World Bank President David Malpass, who will leave his post on June 1, Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Japanese Finance Minister Shun’ichi Suzuki are among those expected to attend Yellen’s roundtable. — Reuters

Ahli Bank declines merger proposal from Bank Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Local Omani lender Ahli Bank has turned down the non-binding merger offer made by Bank Dhofar on Tuesday.

The decision, announced via a regulatory filing yesterday, came after a “careful evaluation” by Ahli Bank’s board of directors of Bank Dhofar’s merger offer.

“The decision has been communicated to Bank Dhofar and Ahli Bank expressed its appreciation to stakeholders for their continuous support and confidence in the organisation,” it further noted.

A non-binding offer allows the parties involved to explore the possibility of a merger without being legally bound to proceed.

SOHAR Freezone incentives provide ideal environment for long-term business growth

MUSCAT: Continuing to drive growth for new and expanding local and international businesses, SOHAR Freezone has extended its competitive rates on General Trade License (GTL), allowing businesses from around to base themselves within the complex at a reduced rate for up to three years.

Companies can save up to 50% on the regular rates and begin trading immediately by using SOHAR's electronic portal to secure all required permits through the on-site one-stop.

SOHAR Freezone is targeting further growth in 2023 and has



extended its competitive rates for new and renewing tenants to encourage trading in an already rapidly expanding SOHAR Port and Freezone.

Businesses seeking to relocate can also access a complete working solution through Corporate Parks, SOHAR's commercial office partner, which offers a reduction

of between 15% and 40% in office rental rates for up to three years to help their operations thrive.

Investors can also enjoy 0% personal income tax, 0% import and re-export duties and a corporate tax holiday of up to 25 years, with no minimum capital requirement.

Meanwhile, the partnership with Corporate Parks offers businesses access to meeting room space with high-speed Internet and utilities included for one competitive annual fee.

The success stories emerging from SOHAR Freezone have highlighted its unique value as

a rapidly growing business hub. Companies from diverse sectors such as automotive and metals, polymers and chemicals have all benefitted from our strategic position and access to raw materials.

The logistical and financial incentives, such as exceptional transport links to key markets and low rates, provide an ideal trade gateway to neighbouring countries and beyond for companies looking to establish a presence in the region and enjoy a multitude of benefits within an environment that encourages long-term business growth.

Oman Air boosts flights to Istanbul

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced the expansion of its flights to Turkey. In response to the growing demand for travel to this popular destination, the airline has re-launched its popular Trabzon route and it is increasing the frequency of its flights to Istanbul, providing passengers with more options and flexibility during the peak season. As of June, holiday-goers can choose from twice-daily flights to Istanbul as well as daily flights to Trabzon, at convenient times. Passengers travelling to Turkey should ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country. Those wishing to enhance their stay can also book a customised Turkey holiday package through Oman Air Holidays by visiting holidays.omanair.com. – **ONA**

ahlibank celebrates Ramadhan with employees with a grand Iftar



MUSCAT: To celebrate the holy month of Ramadhan, ahlibank held a group Iftar for its employees, in the presence of Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, with the aim of enhancing relationships and creating an atmosphere of intimacy and communication between team members outside of the official work environment.

This Iftar comes as an affirmation of the importance of strengthening social relations between employees away from the daily work routine, and deepening the ties that bind them to work more efficiently.

Having Iftar in the blessed month of Ramadhan has become a valuable religious practice that enhances the belonging of individuals and allows them to have a deeper spiritual connection during the holy month.

The Iftar included a number of interactive activities that brought joy to the employees present, including some entertainment competitions, in addition to honouring employees who have completed ten years of giving at ahlibank.

In light of the Iftar, the CEO Said Abdullah al Hatmi, stressed in his speech during the ceremony the importance of Ramadhan gatherings, because of their prominent role in strengthening social relations between employees outside the boundaries of the work environment, and

their role in easing pressures related to daily tasks.

He emphasised that such events inculcate a family atmosphere that perpetuates the concept of harmony and social cohesion, and expressed his thanks and appreciation to the attendees for accepting the invitation, congratulating them on the holy month, and wishing them continued success in their career.

The CEO further noted the bank's endeavours towards providing a stimulating work environment that supports the journey of development and growth of employees and inspires them to lead more creativity and innovation.

At ahlibank, we believe that our human cadres are our true capital, and for this reason we constantly seek to enhance ways of engaging with employees in order to get closer to them and build their trust and appreciation for the organisation.

This positively influences their level of performance and, thereby raising productivity and in turn adding value to customers.

We will work together to devote our efforts to achieve the bank's vision of being an integrated centre for banking services, and an environment that supports innovation. We will accomplish milestones by using the ideas and creativity of our human resources, our most important resource, as they are the pillars of our success.

Bank Nizwa launches Sadaqah and Zakat campaign with charity organisations

MUSCAT: As the pioneer Islamic bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa has keenly advocated Shariah-compliant financial solutions while consistently spreading the Islamic values of generosity and benevolence.

In accordance with the same and with the commencement of the holy month of Ramadhan, the bank has joined hands with Oman Charity Organisation, Imam Jabir bin Zaid Foundation and Dar Al Attāa to further its philanthropic efforts.

In an endeavour to enhance the Islamic banking ecosystem, individuals, can leverage the bank's payment channel via the app or website to make payments toward their Sadaqah and Zakat commitments.

Moreover individuals can also capitalise on the bank's collaborations to directly transfer



contributions to one or more of the charity organisations as part of Sadaqah.

Commenting on the bank's collaboration, HH Sayyidah Wisam bint Jaifar al Said, Head of marketing and Corporate communications at Bank Nizwa said, "At Bank Nizwa, our focus will continue to be on making

Islamic banking more convenient, responsive, and dynamic.

Our collaboration with leading charitable organisations as well as our open, transparent and direct payment channels have made it even easier for individuals to confidently fulfil their Sadaqah and Zakat obligations during the holy month of Ramadhan."

She added saying, "As an Islamic bank, we place the utmost importance on humanitarian work and community welfare, and our ongoing initiatives affirm our unfaltering attention to the same.

Even in the past, Bank Nizwa has recorded significant donations made through its payment channels.

This is, indeed, a reflection of the human cohesion and inherent compassion that is prevalent in Omani society and Bank Nizwa will continue to play its dutiful role in being a medium to ensure that the necessary aid reaches the people in need and helps achieve the desired causes. It is also important to acknowledge that the various tools of Islamic finance have repeatedly proved its resilience and contributed to developing a more sustainable socio-economic structure."

AVOD non-hydrogenated products fortify Oman's health and wellbeing

MUSCAT: Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives SAOC (AVOD)'s transformation strategy has always put health and customers' wellbeing at the forefront, and this has gained it the distinction of being Oman's Most Trusted Brand year after year.

The brand's Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is its consistent delivery of products, which offer the ideal balance of nutrition, health and wellness and taste, and encourage consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families.

'Eat Right, Live Well' philosophy is the epicentre of the company's product development process and has made AVOD a trustworthy specialist in refining, processing, packaging and distribution of high-quality trans fat free cooking oils, non-hydrogenated margarines, vegetable ghee, fats and mayonnaise.

The company's continuous transformation takes a multi-pronged approach to create health-focused products. The state-of-the-art modern factory is constantly upgraded to meet



stringent quality controls.

Packing materials such as tins, cans, plastic bottles, etc are manufactured in-house and filled immediately using automatic packing machines to ensure highest standards of hygiene.

The company's commitment to safeguarding health and safety has earned it the ISO 9001 certificate for Quality Management System, ISO 14001 certificate for Environmental Management System and ISO 22000 certificates for Food Safety Management."

Eng Salem Bortmany, CEO – AVOD, says, "Every product that comes out of the AVOD stable is a testament to its commitment to offer consumers the best of health and value.

After thorough research on the health risks that hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils pose to the physical well-being, which is trans-fats is converted into saturated fat.

AVOD decided to invest in technology to ensure that all its products are non-hydrogenated and free from harmful trans-fats. All products go through a heart-friendly process which is recognised and recommended by WHO.

AVOD is the first company in Oman to fortify and enrich its top-quality cooking oils with vitamins A & D, making them healthier choices in this category while Khafeef is the lightest frying oil, the first of its kind in the

Sultanate of Oman"

He adds, "Our own transformation journey has mirrored that of our valued consumers. We are committed to building healthier and happier communities to ensure that our nation-building process is fortified further.

With more than three decades of successful operations in the Sultanate of Oman, AVOD has built a product portfolio that prides itself on being both high on quality and taste. The Company's leading brands Minara, Suhar, Khafeef, Jabal Akhdar and Muscat Margarine are on every Omani kitchen.

A heritage brand and a market leader in delivering high quality and innovative products, AVOD is amongst the 20 largest public limited companies in the country and enjoys a substantial market share in Oman and its current exports are more than 75 per cent of its total business. All the products are marketed in the GCC as well as other 30 export countries through experienced dedicated distribution chains.

Teaching the young about the importance of saving



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Banking institutions in the world are showing increasing interest in savings for young people and children, by encouraging them to save part of their money for the future.

This effort is not exclusively targeted at affluent families, but economically weaker groups are also keen even small amounts from their monthly income for the future.

Many forums and events are held every year that discuss these issues, which help countries rely on the savings of their citizens to fund the development of important projects.

These funds strengthen their infrastructure without the need to go to international banking institutions for loans or external financing, which come with large interest payments and financial costs.

Several governments, such as Japan, China and others, have been able to harness their savings and the private funds of their citizens to help local banks secure loans at low interest rates, which helps in establishing more projects and providing many opportunities for job seekers.

Central banks and banking institutions, for their part, participate in a number of activities held for this purpose.

Recently, the Central Bank of Oman participated in the “Global Money Week” campaign organised by the International Network for Financial Education of the Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development (ECD/INFE) with the aim of enabling children and youth to learn how to manage their financial resources wisely and help them learn ways to save and earn money.

These events provide the young with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to make sound financial decisions in order to achieve financial success.

Such goals are being achieved in cooperation with several savings agencies and local banks, which are required to show greater care in campaigns to carry out activities that help children save and preserve money.

These activities and campaigns mainly aim at educating young kids from schools, colleges and universities, where the focus is on savings and financial sustainability issues, in addition to raising awareness about the beneficial effects of good financial habits to secure one’s future and contribute to a productive economy.

All of these activities help children imbibe a culture of saving at a time when some social media and modern technologies can be a negative influence and even encourage wasteful and reckless spending.

In the belief of these institutions, they consolidate the principle of financial inclusion, which it aims to achieve and reach every person in the country.

It improves the youth’s understanding of financial well-being and financial sustainability.

Also, it empowers them to manage their commercial set-ups and enterprises so that they can be independently employed in the future.

Banking institutions today must continue to provide more services and offer a helping hand to self-employed entrepreneurs, as well as the facilities and benefits that they seek to help build their savings in their own interest and that of the national economy.

OPAZ signs cooperation pact with Industrial Innovation Academy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed a cooperation programme with the Industrial Innovation Academy aimed at strengthening cooperation between OPAZ and the Academy.

Through this programme, both parties seek to boost the local added value in the special economic, free and industrial zones affiliated with OPAZ.

The initiative will allow OPAZ and the Academy to capitalise on their competences, improve the efficiency of national cadres, and empower existing industries in the different zones.

The pact was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudailli, Acting CEO of the Industrial



Innovation Academy.

The programme stipulates that both, OPAZ and the Academy, will implement ‘Rabt Programme’, which aims to link local products with government tenders and procurement process in the zones.

This Programme serves creating a database of products and services of the companies operating in the zones and will

be linked to the government tenders and procurement, so such products are given a preference.

Thus, the companies that are awarded the tenders are obliged to purchase and supply their projects with local products and industries.

Moreover, the two parties will provide an integrated programme focusing on localisation, training

and qualification services for the zones affiliated with OPAZ, by developing and reviewing employment plans for companies requesting additional workforce and submitting proposals in this regard to OPAZ labour licensing employees.

In addition, the training and localisation plans will be evaluated to ensure their effectiveness.

Asyad Line bolsters shipping fleet with new eco-friendly 2800 TEU vessel

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

Asyad Line, part of Asyad Group, announced two new additions to its maritime and shipping capabilities, a brand-new vessel added to its sizeable commercial fleet and an increase in the frequency of one of its flagship lines, the India Express Service (IEX).

Eyeing both sustainability and improved competitiveness in the maritime sector, Asyad Line acquired the state-of-the-art vessel that features a capacity of 2800 TEU and excellent environmental efficiency rating thanks to its low carbon footprint.

The latest addition to the elite global carrier’s maritime arsenal puts into action Asyad Group’s bullish growth plans and proactive sustainability strategy, as it spearheads Oman’s drive to green



logistics.

Additionally, Asyad Line has reinforced its IEX service by doubling its frequency, from two to four sailings per month, responding to the increasing global and regional demand.

IEX has proven to be a reliable and hugely popular direct route that connects Oman’s ports to India’s, calling on major GCC ports from Sohar Port to Dubai’s Jebel Ali, Qatar’s Hamad Port and Saudi Arabia’s King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam, as well as Mundra,

Nhava Sheva and Hazira ports in India.

Underlining the value of Asyad’s improved capabilities to global costumers and trade, Imad bin Said al Khadouri, CCO of Asyad Shipping and Drydock: “The addition of a new vessel to Asyad Line’s growing fleet, as well as transforming IEX into a weekly service, reflects our dedication to meet all customers’ demands while simultaneously employing innovative technologies that limit the environmental impact of

logistics operations.

Our high-quality services, along with Asyad’s continuously expanding resources, create strong and long-lasting trade and shipping connections across the Asia-Pacific.”

“Asyad Line, powered by Asyad Group’s integrated logistics ecosystem, capitalises on Oman’s unique location in proximity to Indian and Southeast Asian markets to provide efficient shipping solutions with ever-increasing delivery speeds, meeting the demand of rising trade volume in the Asia-Pacific region.

Our reliable shipping services also ensure the uninterrupted transport of vital goods to and from Oman, underlining Asyad Line’s unwavering commitment to supporting the development and food security of Oman and the region,” Al Khadouri added.

Why a Silicon Valley Bank-like crisis is unlikely in Oman



KARL JACKSON

We have all heard about the abrupt failure of the Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) in the US, so soon after the year end and after receiving a clean bill of health from its Auditors.

Originally the bank’s depositors were facing the prospect of losing their deposits until the FED stepped in and provided a safety net.

The problem at SVB was not complicated, it was simply an

almighty bet that went badly wrong. Basically, the management decided to accept \$190bn of short-term customer deposits and invest most of them in long-term fixed rate securities, with Shareholders Equity of just \$16bn to cover for any potential losses.

When the FED initiated its programme of raising interest rates to combat inflation, the income from the fixed securities did not change but the cost of the deposits followed the upward path of the FED interest rates.

This is a classic example of poor/inappropriate interest rate risk management and is typically referred to as collecting pennies in front of a steam roller. It turns out that management even awarded themselves generous bonuses for the pennies they were collecting – then bang, the rest is history.

Whilst the SVB does not have

Amounts in OMRm	<1yr	1-5yrs	>5yrs	No Repricing
Bank Muscat	(1,957)	928	3,463	(2,434)
Bank Dhofar	(1,025)	305	1,637	(917)
Sohar International	(71)	1,304	-	(1,233)
National Bank of Oman	(151)	28	573	(450)
Oman Arab Bank	196	451	307	(954)
Ahli Bank	364	(532)	685	(517)
HSBC Oman	623	437	-	(1,060)
Bank Nizwa	342	26	56	(424)
Total	(1,679)	2,947	6,721	(7,989)

a branch in Oman many people have asked me if, in the current environment of rising interest rates, the same fate could behold any of the Oman banks. In order to answer this question, we need to look at two factors. The first factor is the exposure to rising interest rates and the second is the adequacy of capital should any bank incur such losses.

Fortunately, both of these factors are duly disclosed in the publicised annual financial

statements.

Moreover, whilst some risk exists in Oman, it is not in the same league as SVB and it is related to commercial lending activities of the two largest banks where the funding of long-term assets is one of the important key intermediary activities that banks undertake within any economy.

Looking at the Oman banks disclosures of their sensitivity of assets and liabilities, overall, we see a fair balanced match of repricing

short-term assets with liabilities and for the banks that have longer term repricing assets, these are covered substantially by liabilities and shareholders’ equity that have no repricing terms, to keep the risk within tolerable levels.

Thankfully, what we do not see is entirely speculative investments into long-term non-commercial assets.

Another potential anomaly unique to Oman that needs to be carefully watched is the CBO imposed 6% ceiling on lending to the retail sector, including housing loans. With the CBO repo rate (i.e. emergency borrowing rate) now reaching 5.5%, retail lending becomes less attractive to the banks.

Whilst the banks generate a large proportion of their funding from interest free savings and current accounts, they still need to pay market term deposit rates

for approximately 60% of their funding.

As per data released in the latest CBO Statistical Bulletin, average USD deposit rates have risen by 2%, whilst RO rates have remained flat. It will be interesting to see if this imbalance persists, or if the RO rates also begin to rise (by 2%) to restore the historical USD/RO interest rate spread.

In terms of capital, we can see that the banks in Oman are very well capitalised. Under the close regulatory supervision of the CBO over the last 10 years, the banking sector has increased substantially its Shareholders Equity (from 16% to 19% of risk weighted assets), which is used to absorb losses before regular depositors get affected.

(The author is a seasoned Bank Risk Manager and now an Audit and Assurance Partner with Crowe Oman karl.jackson@crowe.om)

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

Be Careful, Be Responsible!
 PLANNING WITH JOY

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 expressed his appreciation for the global coalition initiative, G20, and the international community in general for the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. G20 members agreed to a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world, to engage other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advancing and supporting peace and stability. — OMS

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Hamood bin Al-Mutairi, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Sayed Shaleh bin Saad bin Shaleh al-Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court, Shaleh al-Mutairi, said Abdullah bin Saad al-Hadhri, head of the office at Al-Tarbiyah Palace, on Thursday. — OMS

MUSCAT: To mark the 10th anniversary of the Oman National Day, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage has organized a series of events to commemorate the day. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage has also organized a series of events to commemorate the day. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage has also organized a series of events to commemorate the day. — OMS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has issued a series of guidelines to ensure the safety of the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines include wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and avoiding large gatherings. The Ministry of Health has also issued a series of guidelines to ensure the safety of the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. — OMS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education has issued a series of guidelines to ensure the safety of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines include wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and avoiding large gatherings. The Ministry of Education has also issued a series of guidelines to ensure the safety of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. — OMS

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Map out your Eid holiday with these activities

In previous years, Oman has been a popular destination for Eid holidaymakers, with visitors flocking to the country to witness the festivities and enjoy the many activities on offer. This year is no exception.... **P20**

QUR'AN VERSE OF THE DAY

{And those who have believed and done righteous deeds - We will surely assign to them of Paradise [elevated] chambers beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. Excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers}

Surah Al-Ankaboot, 58

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Jabir reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Beware of injustice. Injustice will appear as darkness on the Day of Rising. Fear avarice. It destroyed those before you and caused them to shed one another's blood and to make lawful what was unlawful."

Sahih (Al-Albani)

HEALTH TIPS

Avoid salty foods, such as canned or processed foods, salted nuts, and pickles, because these will increase your thirst during the fasting period.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN

The Story of Prophet Ayyub

ALMIGHTY GOD SAYS: { And [mention] Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful." So We responded to him and removed what afflicted him of adversity. And We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for the worshippers [of Allah]} Surah Al-Anbiya (verses from 83-84)

PROPHET AYYUB (JOB) was a descendant

of Prophet Ibrahim. Ayyub lived in Rome with his wife and children. Ayyub was strong and healthy, had large plots of land, abundant livestock, and a righteous and beautiful family he was also a community leader who was highly respected and loved by his people. Despite his status and wealth, Ayyub was never arrogant; he was always humble, he readily helped the deprived, and constantly thanked and glorified Allah for everything he was blessed with.

As time passed, Prophet Ayyub's wealth

began to diminish—his land, livestock, servants, and money slowly evaded him until he was left with nothing. Then he lost all of his children, and then he got sick.

For years, Ayyub continued to suffer through his condition, with none but his wife by his side to take care of him. They had no money and no income, so his wife took up a job to provide for him. However, the people of the city did not allow her to work for long for they feared that she would afflict them with the same illness as her husband.

Ayyub meanwhile, continued to pray to Allah to give him the strength and patience to endure this pain and suffering.

Ayyub's wife went to him and wailed, "O Ayyub, you are the prophet and the messenger of Allah. You have the closest relationship with Allah.

Ask Allah to take you out of this harm that you are in!" Ayyub sighed and replied, "Satan must have whispered to you and made you dissatisfied. Tell me how long did

I enjoy good health and riches?" His wife responded, "Eighty years or so."

He replied, "For how long am I suffering like this?" She said, "Seven years." Ayyub then said, "In that case, I am ashamed to call on my Lord to remove my hardship, for I have not suffered longer than the years of good health and plenty.

It seems your faith has weakened and you are dissatisfied with the fate of Allah. If I ever regain health, I swear I will punish you with a hundred strokes! From this day onward, I forbid myself to eat or drink anything by your hand. Leave me alone and let my Lord do with me as He pleases." Feeling helpless Ayyub turned to Allah seeking His mercy. "Verily, Satan has touched me with distress (by losing my health) and torment (by losing my wealth)!" He prayed. Allah immediately responded to Ayyub's desperate call for help. Allah said, "Strike the ground with your foot: This is a spring of water to wash in and cool and a refreshing drink."

Ayyub immediately performed Allah's bidding. As he struck the ground with his foot, cold water gushed at his feet. As commanded, Ayyub drank and washed his entire body using the water. Within a short while, Ayyub's blisters disappeared, his skin renewed completely and his internal organs began functioning. Indeed, Ayyub was completely cured by the grace of Allah! When his wife saw him, she did not recognise him. She asked him, "Where is Ayyub? Who are you? You look very similar to him." He replied smiling, "It's me!" Overjoyed, she thanked Allah for His mercy.

Ayyub remembered his promise to punish his wife with a hundred strokes once he regained his health. He did not want to hurt his beloved wife, nor did he want to break his oath to Allah; so Allah, the Most Wise, instructed Ayyub, "Take in your hand a bundle of thin grass and strike therewith your wife, and break not your oath." Allah then restored Ayyub's wealth. Ayyub and his wife were also given back their family.



When it's dumpling-eatin' time in Georgia...

IN THE MOUNTAINOUS Caucasus nation of Georgia, dumpling-eating is a serious affair.

"I'm not Georgian, but the first rule I learnt when I came to Georgia was how to eat khinkali," says Sergei Shirinsky, who dubs himself a connoisseur.

Typically filled with a mix of raw ground beef and pork, herbs and spices, then boiled and served steaming hot in platters by the dozen, Georgian khinkali is a national symbol, source of pride, and reason behind many a dinner table debate.

"You should know that it's eaten with hands only. That's the first rule," Shirinsky says.

Typically, eaters hold a single khinkali by its tough stem - a clump of dough pinched together during the folding process to bring the dumpling together - and then bite into the soft underbelly, being sure to catch any escaping juices in the process.

The second rule is no condiments.

"If you add something other than pepper you can go to prison in Georgia," Shirinsky jokes as he manoeuvres the fluffy parcel past his moustache, completing a demonstration of how khinkali should be eaten.

The exact origins of the dumpling in Georgia are unclear, but it has been prepared in towns and villages across the



country for centuries and different regions still bicker over who invented it and who makes it best.

Modern versions include an array of different stuffing options such as the elastic Georgian sulguni cheese, mushrooms and potatoes.

Khinkali making has also become a hit among tourists - who flock to the country in their millions every year, in no small part to savour Georgian cuisine.

In the capital Tbilisi, retired doctor Irina Djandieri offers cooking classes in her living room.

"It's fun, it's fascinating and in the end it is very tasty," she says.

"Every week we have a khinkali day in our family... It's a great excuse to gather with friends and relatives," says Christine Mamasakhlishi, a dance teacher from Tbilisi, as she picks up an order of uncooked khinkali to boil at home.

"Everything revolves around khinkali here. This is not just a dish, it's an integral part of Georgian culture and identity."

—Reuters

DISCOVERY

Search for alien life extends to Jupiter's icy moons



COULD VAST, LONG-HIDDEN oceans be teeming with alien life in our very own Solar System?

A new chapter in humanity's search for extraterrestrial life opens on Thursday as Europe's JUICE spacecraft blasts off on a mission to investigate the icy moons of Jupiter.

First discovered by Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei more than 400 years ago, these ice-covered moons are so far from the Sun that they were long dismissed as possible candidates to host life in our backyard.

Until recently, the Solar System's habitable zone was thought to "end at Mars", French astrophysicist Athena Coustenis, one of the scientific leads of the European Space Agency (ESA)'s JUICE mission, said.

But NASA's Galileo probe to Jupiter in 1995 and the more recent Cassini spacecraft's trip to Saturn caused scientists to broaden their horizons.

The gas giant planets themselves were correctly ruled out, but their icy moons - particularly Jupiter's Europa and Ganymede, and Saturn's Enceladus and Titan - offered fresh hope of nearby life.

Under their icy surfaces are thought to be huge oceans of liquid water - a crucial ingredient for life as we know it.

Nicolas Altobelli, a JUICE project scientist at ESA, said it would be "the first time that we explore habitats beyond the frost line" between Mars and Jupiter.

Beyond that line, temperatures plummet and "liquid water can no longer exist on the surface", Altobelli said earlier this year.

GIGANTIC' OCEAN

The Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer (JUICE) mission launches from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana on Thursday on an eight-year odyssey through space.

By July 2031 it will have entered Jupiter's orbit, from which it will probe Ganymede, Europa and fellow icy moon Callisto.

Then, in 2034, JUICE will enter the orbit of Ganymede, the first time a spacecraft has done so around a moon other than our own.

As well as being the largest moon in the Solar System, Ganymede is also the only one that has its own magnetic field, which protects it from dangerous radiation.

This is just one of several signs that Ganymede's hidden ocean could provide a stable environment for life.

Unlike similar missions to Mars, which focus on finding signs of ancient life long since extinguished, scientists hope Jupiter's icy moons will still be home to living organisms, even if only tiny or single-celled.

Such habitability requires a power source. Lacking energy from the Sun, the moons could instead take advantage of the gravity that Jupiter exerts on its satellites.

The force creates a process called tidal heating, which warms the interior of the moons and keeps their water liquid.

Ganymede's "gigantic" liquid ocean is trapped between two thick layers of ice dozens of kilometres beneath the surface, said Carole Larigauderie, JUICE project head at French space agency CNES.

"On Earth, we still find life forms at the bottom of the abyss," she added.

Tiny microbes such as bacteria and archaea have been found to be able to survive on Earth without sunlight, raising hopes that life elsewhere will be able to do the same.

As well as water and energy, life needs nutrients.

"The big question is therefore whether Ganymede's ocean contains" the necessary chemical elements, Coustenis said.

The ocean would need to be able to absorb the nutrients from anything that fell on the moon's surface, for example, which would eventually dissolve into the water, she added.

NOT ALONE

JUICE's array of instruments will probe Ganymede's ocean to determine its depth, distance from the surface and - hopefully - its composition.

The ESA's 1.6 billion euro (\$1.7 billion) probe will spend eight months orbiting Ganymede, getting as close as 200 kilometres (125 miles) from the moon, all while sheltered from radiation.

It will not be the only spacecraft lurking around Jupiter.

NASA's Europa Clipper mission is scheduled to launch in October next year. It will take a quicker path to Jupiter, arriving at Europa in 2030.

If one - or more - of Jupiter's moons ticks all the boxes to host life, the "logical next step" would be to send a mission to land on the surface, said Cyril Cavel, JUICE project manager at manufacturer Airbus.

Although there are no plans for such a mission, which could definitively prove the existence of life outside of Earth, "that's part of the dream," he said. — AFP



AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Researchers confirm finding most-complete sauropod skull in Australia



RESEARCHERS ON WEDNESDAY confirmed the discovery in the Queensland outback of the most complete skull of an “enormous sauropod” in Australia.

The finding, published in Royal Society Open Science on Wednesday and completed in collaboration with the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History, supports a theory that sauropods were travelling between South America and Australia via Antarctica during the mid-Cretaceous period.

The near-complete skull, belonging to dinosaur nicknamed Ann and excavated in 2018 at Elderslie Station in Queensland, was identified as belonging to the Diamantinasaurus matildae species, a member of the dinosaur group Sauropoda known for having small heads, long necks and tails, barrel-like bodies and columnar legs.

The fossilised skull fragments date to 98-95 million years ago.

Lead researcher Dr Stephen Poropat from Curtin’s School of Earth and Planetary Sciences said Ann is the first sauropod dinosaur found in Australia to include most of the skull.

“This skull gives us a rare glimpse into the anatomy of this enormous sauropod that lived in northeast Australia almost 100 million years ago,” Poropat said in a Curtin University release.

“In analysing the remains, we found similarities between the Annskull and the skull of a titanosaur called ‘Sarmientosaurusmusacchio,’ which lived in South America at about the same time as ‘Diamantinasaurus’ lived in Queensland.

“These similarities include details of the braincase, the bones forming the back end of the skull near the jaw joint and the shape of the teeth.”

Poropat said that the finding supports a theory that sauropods were travelling between South America and Australia via Antarctica between 100 and 95 million years ago.

“The window between 100 and 95 million years ago was one of the warmest in Earth’s geologically recent history, meaning that Antarctica, which was more or less where it is now, had no ice,” Poropat said.

“Similarly, Australia, which was much further south than today, was warmer with less seasonality. In that climate, Antarctica was forested, and might have been an attractive habitat or pathway for wandering sauropods.” — dpa

ENTERTAINMENT

Three new Star Wars films on the way: Producers



THREE NEW STAR Wars movies are in the making, studio executives announced on Friday, including the first film in the cinematic universe to be directed by a woman.

Pakistan-born Oscar-winner Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy is leaping from the Marvel universe to the Star Wars galaxy to direct a new film set 15 years after the end of the last movie.

“I spent the better part of my lifetime meeting real heroes who are overcoming oppressive regimes and battling impossible odds and I think that’s the heart of Star Wars,” she said.

Obaid-Chinoy directed last year’s Ms. Marvel television series featuring a Muslim superhero.

Kathleen Kennedy, president of Lucasfilm, the studio bought by Disney in 2012, said each of the three films would cover different periods in the Star Wars narrative. And each will have a different director.

James Mangold, himself a two-time Oscar nominee, will helm another of the films, fresh from directing the latest in the Indiana Jones series, which is due for release later this year.

His film will look at the origins of the Jedi order, thousands of years before the original storyline.

And the third film will be directed by Dave Filoni, an old hand in the Stars Wars universe, having produced several television series, including the wildly successful The Mandalorian, now in its third season.

Fans at the convention also got a first view of US actress Rosario Dawson in the role of Ahsoka, a female Jedi warrior who first appeared in an animated series.

The character has been such a hit with the Star Wars fanbase that she has graduated to a live-action television series, due out in August.

But fans will have to wait until 2025 for the first of the three films to be released. — AFP

CULTURE

At Mexico’s Chichen Itza, archaeologists discover Mayan scoreboard



A STONE SCOREBOARD used in an ancient soccer-like ball game has been discovered at the famed Mayan Chichen Itza archaeological site in Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula, archaeologists said this week.

The circular piece, measuring just over 32 centimetres (12.6 inches) in diameter and weighing 40 kilos (88 lb), displays hieroglyphic writing surrounding two players standing next to a ball, according to a statement from Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).

“In this Mayan site, it is rare to find hieroglyphic writing, let alone a complete text,” said Francisco Perez, one of the archaeologists coordinating the investigations in the Chichanchob complex, also called Casa Colorado.

The stone, believed to be a scoreboard, dates from between 800 AD and 900 AD.

The ball game was a traditional practice of Mesoamerican peoples and is believed to have had ritual undertones.

INAH researchers are now preparing to take high-resolution images of the text and iconography for detailed study, while preparing it for conservation.

The Chichen Itza complex, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is one of the main archaeological centres of the Mayan civilisation in the Yucatan Peninsula. According to official data, about 2 million people visit the site every year. — Reuters



Map out your Eid holiday with these recommended activities

As the holy month of Ramadhan comes to a close, Muslims all over the world look forward to celebrating Eid Al Fitr, a joyous occasion that marks the end of the month-long fasting. And there's no better place to brate Eid than Oman, a country that's steeped in history, culture, and natural beauty.

In previous years, Oman has been a popular destination for Eid holidaymakers, with visitors flocking to the country to witness the festivities and enjoy the many activities on offer. This year is no exception, and if you're planning a trip to Oman for Eid, here are five recommendations to make the most of your holiday.

EXPERIENCE THE FESTIVITIES IN DIFFERENT WILAYATS

The first three days of Eid are usually reserved by Omanis in celebrating with their families for the month of Ramadhan. As a reward, different wilayats will have their own celebration – be it congregating in a prominent location in villages like Al Razha. Within these two days, families will also get together to prepare the beloved shuwa and a whole village having a celebratory throwing of the shuwa into the pit after which it will be cooked to stay underground for planning for two days. If you're Eid holiday, make sure to visit some villages like Al Hamra or AL Rustaq to witness the vibrance of this celebrations.

GO ON AN EXCITING WATER ADVENTURES

The waters off the coast of

VISIT HISTORIC PLACES

From Muscat all the way to Salalah, Oman is filled with ancient forts and bustling marketplaces that are a treasure trove of experiences for the curious adventurer. If you're new to Oman, then you want the following to be crossed off your list.

One of the country's most impressive architectural wonders is Bahla Fort built in the 13th century with intricate details that are a testament to the craftsmanship of the region's builders. Explore the inner chambers and courtyards of the fort, and learn about its fascinating history as a centre of commerce and culture.

If you have ample time, then getting early to Nizwa Souq to witness a taste of the vibrant traditional Omani life will be a good learning opportunity for you and the family. A side trip to Jabreen Castle would also be a great alternative for those wanting to learn more about Oman's history. If Souq and Forts Muttrah and Jalali will be a great starting point for your historical expedition. For those in Salalah, the Al Baleed Archaeological Park and Samahram ruins and museum will be a great places to spend the time in.

Always make sure to check the timing hours as some of these places may close during special occasions, including Eid.

RELAX ON THE BEACH

Oman has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and there's no better time to enjoy them than during Eid. Head to the beaches of Salalah, Musandam, or Qurum and relax in the sun, swim in the crystal-clear waters, or take a sunset cruise. With so many beaches to choose from, you're sure to find one that's perfect for you.

If you're willing to go for a drive, beautiful, stunning beach areas will be waiting for you in Hikman, and even Mirbat and Salalah. If you want it to be an educational beach trip, then the shores of Ras Al Jinns and Ras Al Hadd would be a teaching moment for you and the kids about the fragile lives of the sea turtles. If you're planning to camp, the long stretch of Finns, Quriyat, and Sur are popular spots for visitors able to spend a night under the stars and wake up to the sound of waves crashing against the shore.

Oman are home to a variety of marine life, including dolphins and whales. Take a boat tour and get up close and personal with these majestic creatures. The tours run throughout the year, but Eid is a particularly good time to go, with calm seas and clear skies. Places perfect for this are Bandar Khayran and Dimaniyat Islands in Muscat.

Surfing enthusiasts, on the other hand, can catch some of the best waves in the Middle East along the coastal areas of Al Ashkarah, Masirah and even Salalah.

For those seeking a more tranquil water adventure, a dhow cruise along the Musandam Peninsula is an unforgettable experience. The peninsula, located in the northernmost region of Oman, is a rugged and remote landscape of towering cliffs and hidden coves. Visitors can sail on traditional Omani dhows and take in the dramatic scenery while enjoying a traditional Omani lunch.

For adrenaline junkies, Wadi Bani Khalid, Wadi Hawir, Wadi Shab, and Wadi Mibam are must-visit destinations. These wadis offer a range of water-based activities, including cliff jumping, rappelling, and swimming in natural pools. Visitors can also take a scenic hike through the rocky terrain and explore hidden caves and waterfalls.

