

HM greets Paraguay President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mario Abdo Benítez of the Republic of Paraguay, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the President and the friendly people of Paraguay further progress and prosperity. – ONA



P12

SLUGGISH DJOKOVIC BATTLES TO ROME WIN



P13

DUQM DRY DOCK EMBARKS ON 5-YEAR GROWTH STRATEGY



P20

ROME, SACRED GROUND FOR NEARLY 3,000 YEARS, AND COUNTING



MUSCAT

TEMPERATURES TO RISE FURTHER

Temperatures are expected to touch the mid-40s in the coming days, Oman Meteorology said in a statement as Saturday recorded the hottest day of this season. According to the Met, some stations such as Suhar (44°C), Saham (43°C), and even Muscat (43°C) recorded high temperatures in the morning by 10 am, and most of these places were expected to have temperatures above 45°C to 50°C by afternoon. “The temperatures may exceed the mid-forties in parts of the governorates of North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah,” the statement said.

DETAILS ON P2

TWO MISSING FISHERMEN FOUND ALIVE



Two Omani fishermen who went missing at sea were located by a Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) reconnaissance aircraft marking the end of a search and rescue mission carried out by RAFO in cooperation with the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). The two men went missing in the sea while on a fishing trip in North Al Batinah Governorate several days ago. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said both of them are in good condition. The two fishermen were found 43 nautical miles off the coast of Liwa. Their boat was towed to the beach by a Coast Guard vessel. – ONA

OMAN, SAUDI TRADE CLIMBS TO RO 2.7 BN

Trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia surged 123 per cent to RO 2.7 billion in value at the end of 2022 compared to the previous year's figure. Bandar bin Ibrahim al Khorayef, Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, said a remarkable growth in bilateral trade underscored the growing integration between the two countries, as well as opportunities for joint investment in logistics and mining. In a statement to Oman News Agency, Al Khorayef said the two countries seek to develop the industrial sector by adopting the latest technologies.

DETAILS ON P13

Sudan talks to resume as fighting flares

KHARTOUM: Khartoum residents described fierce battles on Saturday with fighters roving the streets and little sign Sudan's warring sides were respecting an agreement to protect civilians ahead of ceasefire talks due to resume in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Fighting has rocked Khartoum and adjoining areas as well as Geneina in the Darfur region since the warring army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary force agreed a “declaration of principles” last Thursday.

“It was much worse this morning compared to the past two days. You could clearly hear the tanks and the RSF were patrolling the streets more than usual,” said Hani Ahmed, 28.

The conflict that broke out a month ago has killed hundreds of people, sent more than 200,000 into neighbouring states, displaced another 700,000 inside the country, and risks drawing in outside powers and destabilising the region. **SEE ALSO P6**

75% of children use mobiles in Oman: Report

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

We live in an era where the use of Internet via electronic devices is not only inevitable, but also the need of the hour. As years pass by, the use of social media is increasingly becoming an integral part of growing children, their parents, and even teachers.

A report by the National Committee for Family Affairs said that social media has emerged as an alternative to traditional means of communication, which can have both pros and cons.

The study conducted in 2020 by the Ministry of Social Development said that 99 per cent of children in Oman use electronic devices, 75 per cent of children use mobile phones and 45 per cent have computers.

It revealed that more than 35 per cent of children own video games, some of them are inappropriate and may pass on wrong message to these generations. Children use smart devices for one to two hours (24 per cent), two to three hours (21 per cent), and three to five hours (17 per cent), the report said.

MEDIA ACCOUNTS

More than 50 per cent of children use Internet every two to five hours and frequently during weekends, holidays and nighttime, indicating that some children have their private social media accounts.

The study said that 90 per cent of children use these applications for entertainment, while others use them for information and making new friends. “Social media can be defined as the hidden factor that lives with us by influencing our feelings, behaviour and practices,” the study added.

TURN TO P2



المدينة المستدامة - يتي
THE SUSTAINABLE CITY - YITI



A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

The answer to green living. The Sustainable City – Yiti is a world-class development that meets the highest standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability.

An inclusive community with over 1650 luxury residential units and a host of world-class wellness, recreational and educational facilities, the Sustainable City – Yiti promises residents a lifestyle that is second to none.

Welcome to a sustainable world built around you.

Book Your Home Now

8000 33 33

TheSustainableCity-Yiti.com



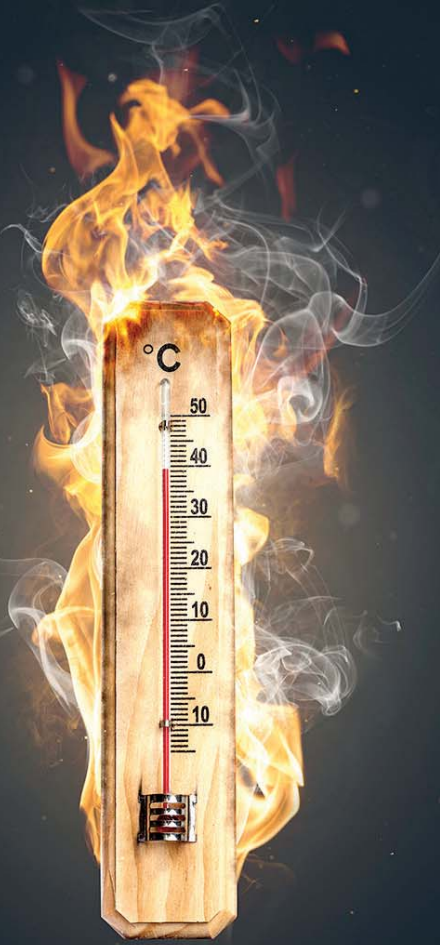
Temperatures likely to rise in coming days

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Temperatures are expected to touch the mid-40s in the coming days, Oman Meteorology said in a statement as Saturday recorded the hottest day of this season. According to the Met, some stations such as Suhar (44°C), Saham (43°C), and even Muscat (43°C) recorded high temperatures in the morning by 10 am, and most of these places were expected to have had temperatures above 45°C to 50°C by afternoon.

“The temperatures may exceed the mid-forties in parts of the governorates of North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah,” the statement said. There have been apprehensions over the severity of summer heat during May and July, with several countries in Asia facing fighting heat waves this year. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) urged people, especially outdoor workers, to avoid exposure to direct sunlight, especially during the afternoon, as there is a possibility of experiencing

sunstrokes, heat exhaustion, and other symptoms associated with high temperatures. Many jobs and field activities require workers to be exposed to sunlight and high temperatures,” the report said. It urged that work hours for workers should include rest periods during the peak heat hours. The WHO warned people to avoid going outside during the hottest time of the day. “Take cool showers or baths. Alternatives include cold packs and wraps, towels, sponging, foot baths, etc. Wear light, loose-fitting clothes made of natural materials. If you go outside, wear a wide-brimmed hat or cap and sunglasses. Use light bed linen, sheets, and no cushions to avoid heat accumulation,” the WHO said.



Oman attends IDB meetings in Jeddah



JEDDAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, took part in the 48th annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank's Board of Governors in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In his speech, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said it is important for the Islamic Development Bank to embrace an approach aimed at building sustainable partnerships among member states with a view of promoting joint interests between them and in a way that enables them to face crises. This, he said, can be achieved through establishing strategic projects that enhance cooperation and

partnership between the member states. He pointed to the importance of focusing on infrastructure and economic and investment integration in important sectors such as health, education and transportation. The meetings were attended by a number of ministers of economy, planning and finance from 57 member states of the Islamic Development Bank Group, in addition to representatives of Islamic banks, international and regional financial institutions, federations of contractors and consultants from member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). — ONA

Oman, Iran discuss transport, logistics cooperation

TEHRAN: An official session of talks was held in Tehran last week between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The session covered areas of transport and logistics. The Omani side was chaired by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. Meanwhile, the Iranian side was chaired by Mehrdad Bazrpash, Minister of Roads and Urban Development. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and discussed means of enhancing



cooperation between Oman and Iran in the fields of transport, logistics and aviation. The two sides stressed the importance of utilising the investment opportunities available in the maritime and air transport sectors, as well as areas related to logistics. They also underscored the need for integration between Omani and Iranian ports to support investment and import and export activities, in addition to linking the two countries with more shipping lines. The session was attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

75% of children use mobiles in Oman: Report

FROM P1
Speaking to the Observer, a student counsellor said: “Social media and the Internet are the prime sources of information these days, and these cannot be kept away from children. What is important is to have some degree of control so that parents can monitor the data accessed by children, which is not impossible to do so. Necessary measures should be taken to protect a child from the negative impact of social media.” According to the recently published market indicators by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), for the second half of 2022, Facebook saw an increase in the number of users by 12 per cent compared to



the first half of the same year. Adnan bin Mustafa al Farsi, Director of the Technical Secretariat of the National Committee for Family Affairs, said: “Technological developments are very rapid, as the whole world is in our hands through a small device (smartphone), in addition to wide spread of applications

such as Instagram, Snapchat and the like, which have all come to represent a frightening obsession for families and communities.” He stated that the Ministry of Social Development conducted, in cooperation with the Omani Social Society, in 2020 a study on the impact of the use of social media on a child in the society (social, educational, psychological health), which was applied to a sample of school students exceeding 2,000 male and female children of different stages. The number of users of TikTok dropped by 57 per cent, followed by YouTube (-8 per cent), WhatsApp (-12), and Zoom (-3). The number of Twitter users also dropped by five per cent. — With ONA inputs

Korean army chief of staff visits SAF museum



MUSCAT: General Kim Seung-kyum, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the friendly Republic of Korea, and his accompanying military delegation visited the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, on Saturday. The guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on the developments and progress witnessed by the Sultan's Armed Forces. They also took a tour around the museum and were briefed on the glorious military heritage it contains. — ONA

JOB ADVERTISEMENT
CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (CAA)
HR DIRECTOR

The Civil Aviation Authority is pleased to announce the availability of a vacant position for the "Director of the Human Resources Department." We invite qualified and interested candidates who meet the specified criteria to apply for this role.

To apply, candidates should submit their application to the Human Resources Department located in the main building of the Authority. Alternatively, they can send their application along with the required documents (CV, copy of educational qualifications, copy of ID card) via email to recruitment@caa.gov.om. Applications must be submitted within fifteen (15) days from the date this advertisement is published.

For detailed requirements and qualifications for the aforementioned position, please visit the Civil Aviation Authority's website at www.caa.gov.om.

CAA
WWW.CAA.GOV.OM
968 24 354433
MUSCAT, AL SEEB

Oman airports post growth in line with global trends

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced strong demand growth in air travel for March 2023 even as in the Sultanate of Oman, the number of incoming and outgoing international flights through Muscat, Salalah and Sohar airports grew by 112.4 per cent by the end of February 2023, to reach 14,250 international flights. The total number of arriving, departing, and “transiting” passengers at Muscat, Salalah, Sohar, and Duqm was 2,231,451 passengers, an increase of 94 per cent during the same period. Globally, traffic is now at 88 per cent of March 2019 levels. Total traffic



in March 2023 (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) rose 52.4 per cent compared to March 2022. Middle Eastern airlines saw a 43.1-per cent traffic increase compared to March a year ago. Capacity climbed 30.5 per cent, and the load factor pushed up 7.0 percentage points to 79.4 per cent. North American carriers’ traffic

climbed 51.6 per cent in March 2023 versus the 2022 period. Capacity increased 34 per cent, and the load factor rose 9.8 percentage points to 84.8 per cent, the highest among the regions. “As traveller expectations build towards the peak Northern Hemisphere summer travel season, airlines are doing their best to meet the

desire and need to fly. Unfortunately, a lack of capacity means that some of those travellers may be disappointed. Part of this capacity shortfall is attributable to the widely reported labour shortages impacting many parts of the aviation value chain, as well as supply chain issues affecting the aircraft manufacturing sector that is resulting in aircraft delivery delays. However, a significant share of recent flight cancellations, primarily in Europe, are owing to job actions by air traffic controllers and others. These irresponsible actions resulted in thousands of unnecessary cancellations in March. This is unacceptable and should not be tolerated by the authorities,” said Walsh.



Follow us on **Twitter**
@omanobserver

OMANDAILYOBSERVER
SUNDAY | MAY 14 | 2023

oman
3



‘Blue, maybe’ wins jury award

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 13

The short film ‘Blue, maybe,’ directed by Mohammed al Kindi and produced by Oman Film Society has won the jury award at the festival organised by the Culture, Tourism and Sports Films Promotion Association (TANITMADER) with the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, held at the Antalya Culture and Art Auditorium Hall on May 12.

The short film ‘Blue, maybe’ looks at thinking of the youth which is not always in harmony with the family.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Kindy, director of the ‘Blue, maybe,’ said the “aim of the youth in life does not meet the expectations of the family. I would like to thank Oman Film Society.”

The film produced by Oman Film Society had Raid al Amri as the lead actor with two scenarists in Dr Salim al Maamari and Hilal al Maamari.

The 16 minute long film story shows the struggle of a young man trying to convince his father about wanting to pursue art as his career path. The film has participated in Digital International Film Festival in Algeria, festivals in Al Ain, Film Lab in Bangladesh, Al Batinah Film Festival as well as Women and Youth in Oman.

The film was made as part of the workshop that was conducted by the Oman Film Society



(OFS) and directed by Mohammed al Kindy. The participants were predominantly from OFS.

Approximately 350 films and documentaries from 38 countries competed in nine main categories at the festival.

The works that won were “On a Quest With Jaswant” in the tourism movies category, “Barcelona Timelapse” in the city category, “Rutas De Espana” in the regional category, “Formentor, The Sea Of Words” in the documentary category, and “Cultural Tourism In Ukraine” won in the cultural tourism category.

In the festival, “My Year 2021” stood out in tourism promotion, “Come To Bulgaria” in the tourism service category, “The King And The Sun” in television show, “Budapest Mice Image Film” in the event tourism, and the special jury award was given to the short film “Blue, maybe”.

The production “Cultural Tourism In Ukraine” received the Grand Prix award.

Mohammed al Kindy will be conducting his film workshop in Nizwa on May 18, 19 and 20 with the theme, ‘How to produce a documentary.’

“What are movies? It is about sound and image. It is about human and place. Whatever you record - whether with a phone or a camera, what is important is that your film should make people want to watch it. It is understanding about how to create your movie,” said Mohammed.

Dengue fever outbreak raises concern in capital areas

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

An alert has been sounded over Dengue Fever (DF), as some cases have been recorded in Ruwi, Al Hamriya and Darsait.

For the last six weeks, hospitals in Ruwi have received individuals from labour camps diagnosed with DF.

Dr Hilal al Hashami, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Consultant at Royal Hospital, said dengue fever is one of the most widespread mosquito-borne viral infections.

“Dengue Fever (DF) is a self-limiting illness in most patients, but a few patients will develop dengue haemorrhagic fever DHF, which is serious and can be a life-threatening disease,” Dr Al Hashami explained.

Aedes mosquitoes that transmit dengue lay their eggs in stagnant water, and it takes only seven to ten days for the eggs to hatch and turn into fully formed mosquitoes.

“We had patients who had low platelets, and later we had individuals coming from other areas as well, but fewer in number. Initially, the cases were in a serious degree where there were situations requiring us to perform platelet transfusion, and some of the patients needed ICU care.



Urgent action needed to combat mosquito-borne disease, say local doctors

Now the cases have reduced, and whoever was positive, the severity has come down, but we are noticing that we are getting cases from around Muscat, very few but from other locations. That makes us wonder if the mosquitoes are spreading - that is the interpretation,” said Dr Satish Babu, Specialist Internal Medicine Apollo Hospitals Muscat in Ruwi.

In relation to the symptoms of Dengue Fever, fever is present in almost all cases, but patients also might have headaches and pain behind the eyes, joint and muscular aches, the lower back ache also exists, said Dr Wahid Khan, Specialist Internal Medicine and Critical Care, Head of Acute Care, Apollo Hospitals Muscat.

“Yet, in some of the cases, the patients just came with cough with a stuffy nose and just looked like symptoms

of a common cold, but when we checked the throat, it was red, and in the current scenario, it suggested to us it could be DF. Feeling tired for weeks together could also be a symptom of Dengue Fever,” explained Dr Khan.

The incubation period is usually four to seven days. He also explained that some might be asymptomatic, but if they live in the same locality or cohort, they might prove positive if they are tested.

When asked what is the best way to improve the level of platelets, Dr Khan said hydration is important, but if there is bleeding, it is better to go through a blood transfusion.

“It is the nature of the disease to cause the platelets to go low, and the best way to tackle the issue is to give the patient a good amount of fluids orally, but if they are vomiting or have pain

in the abdomen, and have low appetite, in that case, IV hydration is the best option in the hospital setting. But if the platelets go really low and if patients develop bleeding and develop skin bruises, bleeding from the nose or mouth or dark-coloured stools that could suggest ongoing internal bleeding, then it is advisable to admit the patient in the house or be admitted to the hospital for blood transfusion,” he explained.

Dr Wahid said in some cases, a daily visit to the hospital is required to check the blood.

“What is also important is to avoid the common painkillers as dengue impacts the liver functions during its phase. Paracetamol is usually given but lets it be with monitoring, and one should not let the fever worsen in the body because if it goes wrong, it really goes wrong.

Pregnant ladies, babies, the elderly - somebody over 65 to 70 years of age, individuals with obesity, people with diabetes and kidney failure, a blood disorder, or people who are already on aspirin should definitely consult a doctor if anyone has symptoms of fever in this situation because it can become lethal. So my advice is to get medical help when it is necessitated,” Dr Wahid pointed out.

Raising funds without permission is an offence

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Fund collection through publicity on social media without permission from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is an offence.

Begging in the mosque premises, streets, and public or private establishments is an offence, the ministry observed.

Similarly, the MoSD called to refrain from donating money without checking that the entity or person has a requisite licence.

“The ministry would like to draw the attention of all the citizens and expatriates to the need to adhere to the regulations in force regarding collecting money from the public, especially through social media or otherwise, and not to collect donations from the public by any means without obtaining a licence to do so from the ministry,” a statement from the MoSD said.

According to the Article 297 of the law, ‘Whoever is found begging in mosques, roads, public places or public or private shops shall be punished by imprisonment for no less than a month and not more than a year and a fine of not less than RO 50 and no more than RO 100.’

Further, Article 299 stipulates that ‘Anyone who invites a donation or collection of money from the public by any means without a licence from the competent authority shall be punished by imprisonment for no less than a month and not exceeding three months and a fine of not less than RO 200 and no more than RO 600 or one of these two penalties.’

It also prohibits defamation of families and individuals by publishing video clips or photos about them showing details of their living or housing conditions to solicit people to collect money, bearing in mind that such matters are criminalised by law.

Outstanding students in Mudhaibi, Qabil feted

IBRA: Parents’ councils in the wilayats of Al Mudhaibi and Al Qabil in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate honoured the students who excelled academically and in various international, regional and local competitions for 2022-2023.

In the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, the honouring ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor



of North Al Sharqiyah. The celebration included the presentation of trophies for their achievements in educational activities,



presentation of an operetta entitled ‘To Al Ula’, and a visual presentation on the achievements of the students’ activities. A total of 266

outstanding students were honoured during the occasion.

In the Wilayat of Al Qabil, distinguished students were felicitated in the schools under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Ahmed al Harthy, the State Adviser.

About 435 outstanding students were honoured and the ceremony included student performances, an artistic operetta and poem recitals.

— ONA

Photography exhibition to mark 50th anniversary of Oman, Austria relations

MUSCAT: A photography exhibition entitled ‘Austria-Oman Photographic Impressions’ opened at the Bait Al Zubair Museum in Muscat Governorate on May 10. The event was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, for tourism.

The Auner Quartet performed a series of entertaining classical music pieces for about an hour. The Quartet is a classical music group that has won several international awards during its career. They are also the first Austrian ensemble to be featured on the cover of the Performing Arts Yearbook of Europe.



Later, the chief guest inaugurated the exhibition (Austria-Oman Photographic Impressions) by Austrian photographer Nikolaus Korab and the Omani photographer Qasim al Farsi.

The idea of the exhibition is to take pictures of Oman by the Austrian photographer while the



Omani photographer will do the same of the Republic of Austria, so that each photographer presents his impression of the other country. These images varied between nature, architecture, and faces, to reflect beauty through the lens of the other.

Nikolaus Korab, the Austrian artist, was born in

Vienna in 1963. Between 1986-1989 he worked as a camera assistant for Walter Kindler and Wolfgang Hackl and a teacher at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna 1998-2005 and the Vienna Art School 2009-2014. He has also held and participated in many private and public exhibitions in Austria and

abroad since 1983. He is also a member of the Vienna Artists Association (Künstlerhaus Wien) since 2020.

Omani artist, Qasim al Farsi was born in the Wilayat of Samayil in 1982, and is professional photographer of nature and architecture, a member of FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique) and an active member of the Omani Photographic Society. He also received many local as well as international awards, and he is also an international arbitrator in photography competitions and exhibitions locally and globally.

The exhibition will continue until May 25 in Bait Al Zubair every day from 9 am till 5 pm except Friday.



Stay hydrated and beat the heat

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With temperatures hitting 47-plus degrees Celsius in some parts of the country, experts advise taking necessary summer precautions. Accordingly, keeping hydrated by drinking plenty of water is necessary. It is also advisable to avoid alcohol, coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks that can cause health issues during heat conditions.

“Certain precautions to avoid sunstroke is necessary to avoid falling prey to heat waves,” says Mohammed al Rahbi, Head of Emergency Medicine at Al Nahda Hospital.

“This year, we have been blessed to have such a great climate till recently, but with the advent of summer, one needs to drink plenty of water to keep hydrated, wear loose and light coloured clothing, because dark colours absorb heat,” says Dr Rohil Raghavan, CEO of Burjeel Hospital.

“Wearing caps can protect one from direct sunlight on the face, and usage of sunscreens is advisable. It is advisable to have frequent sips of water,” Dr Rohil adds.

As summer approaches and the days get longer, the dangers of working outside during hot weather also increase.

For blue-collar workers, it is advisable to take a rest in the shade during peak hours and work either side of peak hours or in the evening and night time. They should also make sure to maintain good hydration.

“Workers who are exposed to extreme heat or work in hot environments may be at risk of heat stress. Exposure to extreme heat can result in occupational illnesses and injuries,” says Dr Viresh Chopra from Oman Dental College.

Heat stress can result in heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, or heat rashes. Heat can also increase the risk of injuries in workers as it may result in sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses and dizziness. Burns may also occur because of accidental contact with hot surfaces or steam.

“Hence, the workers, walkers and people on the move should follow certain tips to stay safe, such as wearing protective clothing and changing if it gets completely saturated. Wearing wet hats/caps or keeping drenched towels on the head is also advisable,” he adds.

One should slow down and work at an even pace. People should know their own limits and ability to work safely during the heat. One should take time for rest and take water breaks in a shaded or air-conditioned area. Experts also recommend eating fruits high in fibre and natural juice and avoiding high-protein food. People travelling in cars should also try to park in shades, as the temperature inside remains very hot, especially during afternoons. It may cause dizziness, restlessness, or vomiting.

It is advisable to start the engine, open the windows, get some fresh air, then put on the AC to cool down the temperature.

Also, check that the AC and tyres are in good condition. While travelling, one should avoid taking heavy or fatty meals. Taking light food, fruits like watermelon is advisable.

“In case of symptoms like body ache, dizziness, tiredness, shivering, fever, loose motion and vomiting, one should consult doctor/specialist immediately as timely intervention can prevent further loss of water and electrolytes from the body and hasten recovery,” adds Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist, Internal Medicine at Shifa Hospital.

KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND WHILE TRAVELLING:

- Always keep an eye on the temperature warning
- Never leave a child alone in a car, not even for one minute
- Check battery, tires and cooling systems regularly
- Close the engine while filling petrol at a petrol station
- Pack plenty of water in the car while going on a drive



financial statements for the last year 31 December 2022



Crowe Mak Ghazal LLC
Level 8, The Office, Al Khodher
P.O. Box 871, P.C. 121
Sultanate of Oman
T: +968 2423 8282
F: +968 2423 7488
www.crowe.om
CR. No. 14862/2

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (the Authority), which comprise the statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022, and the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Authority as at 31 December 2022, and its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs).

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs). Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report. We are independent of the Authority in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the Sultanate of Oman, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Responsibilities of Management and Board of Directors for the financial statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with IFRSs, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Authority or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

The Board of Directors are responsible for overseeing the Authority's financial reporting process.



INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY (continued)

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but it is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Authority's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Authority to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.



INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY (continued)

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements (continued)

We communicate with management regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

The engagement partner on the audit resulting in the independent auditor's report is Mr. Karl Jackson.

Crowe Mak Ghazal LLC

David Kafakara

Managing Partner

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

23 March 2023



TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Note	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property and equipment	4	8,883,028	9,397,055
Intangible assets	5	365,644	455,409
		<u>9,248,672</u>	<u>9,852,464</u>
Current assets			
Trade receivables	6	2,332,280	1,518,329
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	7	7,662,210	8,779,285
Financial asset at amortised cost	8	9,504,490	8,504,192
Cash and bank balances	9	12,477,439	15,114,955
		<u>31,976,419</u>	<u>33,517,061</u>
Total assets		<u>40,925,091</u>	<u>43,369,525</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Retained surplus	10	21,355,339	21,429,530
Liabilities			
Non-current liabilities			
Deferred government contributions	11	4,904,666	5,337,398
Employees' end of service benefits	12	2,480,881	2,315,154
		<u>7,385,547</u>	<u>7,652,552</u>
Current liabilities			
Contract liabilities	13	9,012,840	10,676,978
Trade and other payables	14	3,171,365	3,610,465
		<u>12,184,205</u>	<u>14,287,443</u>
Total liabilities		<u>19,569,752</u>	<u>21,939,995</u>
Total equity and liabilities		<u>40,925,091</u>	<u>43,369,525</u>

These financial statements were approved for issue on 13-03-2023 and signed by:

CHAIRMAN

EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT

The notes on pages 8 to 26 form part of these financial statements.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Note	2022 RO	2021 RO
Income			
Radio spectrum income	15	17,744,229	17,343,328
Annual telecom fee	16	3,991,232	3,984,662
Income from issuing numbers		937,892	716,697
Postal service income		896,447	831,695
Telecom equipment type approval income	17	584,661	526,710
Domain name income		71,245	62,760
Other telecom license fee		122,635	79,880
		<u>24,268,041</u>	<u>23,445,732</u>
Operating Expenses			
Salaries and employee related costs	18	(5,320,168)	(4,989,530)
General and administrative expenses	19	(2,175,098)	(1,725,791)
Consultancy fees		(730,971)	(613,373)
Depreciation	4	(981,708)	(980,333)
Amortization	5	(178,898)	(179,090)
Monitoring station cost		(470,919)	(398,261)
Donation to charitable institutions	20	(300,000)	(300,000)
Allowance for credit losses on trade receivables	6	(22,027)	(35,010)
Remuneration to Board of Directors		(49,925)	(42,250)
		<u>(10,229,313)</u>	<u>(9,168,640)</u>
Net income from operations		<u>14,038,728</u>	<u>14,277,092</u>
Non-operating income			
Interest income	21	843,389	678,217
Government contributions	11	432,732	432,733
Provisions reversed during the year		-	9,202
Other income	22	338,289	92,574
		<u>1,614,410</u>	<u>1,212,826</u>
Surplus and total comprehensive income for the year		<u>15,653,138</u>	<u>15,489,918</u>

The notes on pages 8 to 26 form part of these financial statements.



Follow us on **instagram:**
omanobserver

oman

OMANDAILYOBSERVER
SUNDAY | MAY 14 | 2023

5



State Council delegation at Islamabad IPC meeting

ISLAMABAD: The State Council delegation made a significant contribution to the proceedings of the International Parliamentary Conference (IPC) held in Islamabad, marking the 50th anniversary of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Under the theme "Our Constitution Guarantees Our Freedoms," the conference brought together heads of councils, parliaments and representatives from international and regional organisations. The event focused on crucial topics such as maintaining a balance between executive, legislative and judicial functions, as well as addressing challenges and opportunities in the pursuit of inclusive and egalitarian societies.

Led by Shaikh Dr Al Khattab bin Ghaleb al Hinai, Vice-President of the State Council, the delegation actively engaged

in sessions covering various subjects, including the role of constitutions in a rapidly changing world, the delicate equilibrium between stability and adaptability, federalism, delegation of powers, and the crucial aspect of constitutional representation.

The State Council delegation comprised distinguished members, namely Wali bin Nasser al Shukaili, Awad bin Mohammed al Mashikhi and Yaqoub bin Yousef al Kamashki, who actively contributed to the enriching discussions and exchange of ideas during the two-day conference.

The participation of the State Council delegation in this significant event underscores the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to fostering international cooperation, promoting democratic values and strengthening the bonds of friendship between Oman and Pakistan. — ONA

'Mehenah', 'Al Haylah' win Golden Swords at Al Mushrif Festival

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

'Mehenah' and 'Al Haylah' snatched the golden swords, 'Lafee' won the gun, while 'Shahenyah' took the dagger and 'Shaheen' claimed the festival icon at the Al Mushrif Festival from May 12 to 13.

The festival was organised by the local committee in Al Mudhaibi, with support of Mubarak bin Amer al Habsi, General Supervisor of the Festival, under the Oman Camel Racing Federation.

More than 600 camels took part in the festival, which was specified for 'Fatamen' category, which are one year old, for a distance of 1,200 metres for debut camels and 1,500 metres for other participating camels, competing in 17 rounds.

The conclusion ceremony was sponsored by Ali al Habsi, Oman football icon, who supported the festival with a car as an award for the winner.

Former Oman captain and Premier League player Ali al Habsi said it was a great opportunity to support Oman's traditional sport.

"First of all, we would like to thank the organising committee of the festival, and for sure the festival is a success and thanks to the supporting companies," Al Habsi said.

"We not only support football, but also other sports financially. This festival has a great impact for the owners of racing camels as it creates a big movement in the camel market by buying and selling. Some of the camel owners sold numbers of camels outside of Oman, and the winner earned great prices, that means the festival has achieved its target."



In addition, the festival was supported with two cars by Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO at Mohsin Haider Darwish, and with a car by Gulf Dam for Engineering & Services Company, owned by Shaikh Muslim bin Bakhit al Kathiri.

GOLDEN SWORD

With great competition at the first race for 1,500 metres, 'Mehenah', owned by Suhail bin Amer al Ghufaili, claimed the

golden sword and the car after finishing the race in one minute and 57 seconds. 'Lafee', owned by Mohammed bin Salim al Owaisi, claimed the second race and received the gun and a car after finishing the race distance in 2 minutes.

The third car was snatched by 'Shahenyah', owned by Sultan bin Ahmed al Habsi, with a time of two minutes. The fourth car was won by 'Thameen', owned by Bader bin Obaid al Junaibi, with

timing of 1 minute 57 seconds.

In the fifth round for cash prize, 'Shahenyah', owned by Ahmed bin Abdullah al Wahibi, came first in 2 minutes 3 seconds. 'Shaheen', owned by Mahmoud bin Salim al Wahibi, won the last round in the category in a time of two minutes and five seconds.

In the main races for first time participating camels, 'Al Haylah', owned by Hilal bin Saleh al Wahibi, claimed the golden sword and the car after completing the 1,200 metres in one minute and 39 seconds. In the second round, 'Shaheen', owned by Qaboos bin Said al Meshali, finished first in 1 min 41 sec and the third round was claimed by 'Al Bathaa', owned by Turki bin Ali al Wahibi (1m 41 sec). The fourth round was won by 'Moawad', owned by Mohammed bin Ali al Harthy (1m 41 sec) and the last round in the festival was claimed by Ahmed bin Salim al Qanoubi.

MoI to host media workshop for governorates

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information will host a workshop focused on advancing provincial media, aimed at challenges and seeking solutions to uplift the media sector in the governorates.

The workshop, held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, will take place at the Grand Millennium Hotel in Muscat.

Attended by governors, representatives of governorate-related institutions and media professionals, the workshop will encompass four key areas with



participation from governmental, private and civil agencies, including the Ministry of Information. One of the central themes will revolve around the role of community media

and voluntary initiatives in the governorates.

Additionally, an international experience in the field, exemplified by the United Kingdom, will be presented during the seminar.

This endeavour seeks to maximise the desired benefits of enhancing media work, contributing to the administrative decentralisation of the governorates, empowering them in media aspects of development, providing improved services to residents, and promoting the regions to bolster tourism and attract investments. — ONA

Nama Water Services, GUtech sign MoU

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) dealing with enhancing cooperation in research and environment projects related to the fields of water and enhancing development and innovation.

The agreement was signed by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, and Prof Michael Modigell, Rector of GUtech. The agreement stipulated conducting joint academic research in the environment field. It also deals with supporting and facilitating student research cooperation. — ONA

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/2023/082	Supervision, Configuration and Testing Activities for Electrical Distribution Projects and Improvement Projects in the Distribution Control Center	28 th May 2023	13 th June 2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/2023/086	Testing of all HT Metering Units Having Supply on 33 KV & 11 KV Voltage along with Metering Connection	28 th May 2023	13 th June 2023	RO. 26.250

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "supplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om



Nama Dhofar Services
P.O.Box: 2609, P.C.: 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number: +968 23232523 - Fax: 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om



Tender Announcement

Tender Number: Refloat T-10-2023

Tender Name: اعمال توريد وتجهيز مكتب مواصلات

Modification work of MWASALAT office in Salalah

Project Summary: Renovate MWASALAT reservation office and the scope includes Civil work, MEP work, provision for data network, provision for CCTV, supply and install AC's units and interior work.

Tender Fee: NIL

Grade & Specialty: Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution: Sunday 14th May 2023

Last date for tender document distribution: Tuesday 23rd May 2023

Last date for submission: Sunday 4th June 2023

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

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

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

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head-quarter SAOC (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

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

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tenders:

Tender Number: T-06-2023

Tender Name: Supply new of Bow Thrusters for MV Shannah and MV Jawharat

Masirah Q4 Pcs.

Project Summary: MWASALAT would like to have a qualified contractor to Supply new Q4 Pcs of Bow Thrusters for MWASALAT ferries

Tender Fee: NIL

Grade & Specialty: Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution: Sunday 14th May 2023

Last date for tender document distribution: Thursday 18th May 2023

Last date for submission: Sunday 28th May 2023

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



Fighting rages in Gaza despite latest truce efforts

GAZA CITY: Israeli air strikes battered Gaza and Palestinian groups fired rockets again on Saturday, as deadly fighting resumed after a night of relative calm despite efforts to secure a truce.

A new ceasefire proposal was circulated late on Friday by Egypt, which has been mediating between the two sides, after a previous bid fell through, a Palestinian source said.

Israel's anti-aircraft defences went into action on Saturday after a barrage of rocket fire from Gaza during the funeral of Islamic Jihad military commander Iyad al-Hassani, who was killed the previous day in an Israel strike.

The Islamic Jihad said its fighters were pursuing "missile strikes on Israeli cities" in revenge for Israeli "assassinations" of their commanders and strikes on inhabited regions.

Residents in the crowded Gaza Strip cowered indoors as the fighting raged, with streets



People inspect the damage following an Israeli air strike in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza. – AFP

empty and only a few shops and pharmacies open.

The exchange of fire came after the Palestinian health ministry reported the death of two men aged 19 and 32 in an Israeli army raid on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank city of Nablus.

The Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said the two men killed in the raid were members of its armed wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

The current bout of violence erupted when Israeli strikes on Gaza killed three leading Islamic Jihad members. Three other senior figures from the Palestinian militant group were killed in later strikes.

They are among at least 33 Palestinian lives lost in the fighting, according to Gaza's health ministry, including children.

On Saturday, sirens warning of incoming fire sounded throughout

the day in Israeli communities close to the border with Gaza.

Egypt has been working on bringing an end to the fighting, the worst since an August flare-up that killed nearly 50 Palestinians.

A Palestinian source on Friday said Gaza factions were studying Cairo's new ceasefire formula, while Israeli public television said an "improved" truce proposal had been handed to Israel.

There had been cautious optimism a truce may be nearing, but an Islamic Jihad source said Israel was "disrupting Egypt's efforts for a ceasefire".

Gaza has been plagued by poverty and unemployment since a blockade imposed by Israel in 2007 when the Islamist movement Hamas took over.

The territory has since been the site of numerous wars between militant groups and Israel, including the fighting in August 2022 in which 19 children were among the 49 killed, according to the United Nations. — AFP

Erdogan calls for a new era in relations between Ankara and Athens

ATHENS: A new era in relations between Greece and Türkiye maybe imminent after both nations hold elections, according to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"We can put aside hostilities and antagonisms. This is too much for both countries," Erdogan told Kathimerini newspaper.

"I hope that the elections in Greece and Türkiye will be the beginning of a new era," added Erdogan.

Erdogan said he was confident that he and his Islamic conservative AKP party will win Türkiye's presidential and parliamentary elections that are being held on Sunday.

The race is expected to be close in Türkiye, however, with polling putting the opposition marginally ahead. Greece is due to hold parliamentary elections on May 21. So far, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is leading in all the polls.

The two Nato member states have been working hard to ease tensions since Türkiye was rocked by devastating earthquakes in February. Since the quakes, there have been no more overflights of Turkish military aircraft over Greek islands, according to the Greek General Staff.

In the previous year, Turkish



Turkish President Erdogan addresses his supporters during a rally ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections, in Istanbul. – Reuters

jets had flown over Greek territory 234 times, which is considered a serious violation of sovereign rights.

Relations between the two countries have been strained over territorial disputes and natural gas deposits in the eastern Mediterranean.

Relatively, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says he will accept vote result and step down if he loses, refuting concerns that he may not leave power.

"A very ridiculous question ... We come to power through democratic means in Türkiye... If our nation decides otherwise, I will do what democracy requires, there is nothing else to do," Erdogan said on television in reaction to the question whether he will cling to power. — dpa

Blasts rock Khartoum as warring sides affirm humanitarian pledge

KHARTOUM: Air strikes pummelled Khartoum on Saturday, with representatives of Sudan's warring factions meeting in Saudi Arabia for talks to prevent a "humanitarian catastrophe" as the fighting entered a fifth week.

A witness in west Khartoum reported army air strikes on paramilitary forces, as brutal urban warfare continued in Sudan's densely-populated capital.

More than 750 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced since fighting erupted.

Over half a million people have fled Khartoum alone, according to the UN, with hospitals there having been shelled and rampant looting reported as residents suffer under chronic shortages of food, electricity and medicine.

Representatives of both generals have been in the Saudi city of Jeddah for a week, for talks intended "to protect Sudan from any escalation that will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe", a Saudi diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

The diplomat also said Burhan had been invited to attend the Arab League summit planned to take place in Jeddah on May 19 but it was unclear who would be representing Sudan.



People form a convoy as they celebrate in support of the Sudanese armed forces in Khartoum. – AFP

Envoys in Jeddah agreed to "affirm our commitment to ensure that civilians are protected".

However the deal, dubbed the Jeddah Declaration, did not amount to a truce and the situation on the ground appeared unchanged as battles raged throughout the week of negotiations and into Saturday.

In the capital's twin city of

Omdurman, "houses are shaking from the force of explosions", a witness said reporting "clashes using all kinds of weapons".

Thursday's deal commits both sides to let in badly needed humanitarian assistance and also calls for the restoration of electricity, water and other basic services.

Sudan launched on Saturday a call to the international

community, including the United Nations, the African Union, and other regional organisations, "to provide humanitarian assistance", a foreign ministry statement said.

The government committed to "dedicating the port and airports of Port Sudan" on the Red Sea, Dongola airport in the country's north and Wadi Seidna air base near the capital "to receive aid".

— AFP

SINGAPORE

Temperature soars to 40-year high: officials

Singapore reported its highest temperature in 40 years on Saturday, officials said, as a blistering heatwave burns through large parts of South and Southeast Asia. Temperature of 37 degrees Celsius was the highest this year, and matches the record for a daily peak recorded in April 1983, the National Environment Agency said. Some schools in the city-state have relaxed rules on uniforms over the rising mercury in recent days, according to local broadcaster Channel News Asia.



Scientists say global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, with a recent report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning that "every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards". — AFP

DHAKA

Thousands flee as cyclone Mocha heads to coasts

A powerful storm packing winds of up to 175 kph barrelled towards the coasts of eastern Bangladesh and Myanmar on Saturday.

Thousands of people in both countries have already fled to safer areas ahead of the storm.

Cyclone Mocha is likely to intensify further and make landfall on Sunday between Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department said in a bulletin.



Thousands of community workers and volunteers had already been deployed, alongside medical and rescue personnel who are on stand-by.

— Reuters

NOUAKCHOTT

Votes in preview of presidential contest

Mauritanians voted on Saturday in the first legislative and local elections since 2019 when President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani came to power in a litmus test for the veteran leader ahead of next year's presidential vote. There were snaking queues outside polling stations in the capital Nouakchott.

For the first time, voters can choose a list for candidates younger than 35, for whom 11 seats will be automatically attributed in the National



Assembly. Results from the first round of voting are expected within 48 hours of poll closings. A second round is scheduled for May 27 for half of the 176 National Assembly seats. — AFP

Ukrainian soldiers risk their lives to keep weapons from the black market



Lara Jakes

The writer is an American journalist. She currently serves as the diplomatic correspondent

Rocket launchers, precision-guided missiles and billions of dollars’ worth of other advanced US weapons have given Ukraine a fighting chance against Russia before a counteroffensive. But if even a few of the arms wind up on the black market instead of the battlefield, a Ukrainian lawmaker gloomily predicted, “we’re done.”

The lawmaker, Oleksandra Ustinova, a former anti-corruption activist who now monitors foreign arms transfers to Ukraine, does not believe there is widespread smuggling among the priciest and most sophisticated weapons donated by the United States over the last year.

“We’ve literally had people die because stuff was left behind, and they came back to get it and were killed,” she said of Ukrainian troops’ efforts to make sure weapons were not stolen or lost.

But in Washington, against a looming government debt crisis and growing scepticism about financial support for Ukraine, an increasingly sceptical Congress is demanding tight accountability for “every weapon, every round of ammunition that we send to Ukraine,” as Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., said last month.

By law, US officials must monitor the use, transfer and security of US weapons and defence systems that are sold or otherwise given to foreign partners to make sure they are being deployed as intended. In December, for security reasons, the Biden administration largely shifted responsibility to Ukraine for monitoring the US weapons shipments at the front, despite Ukraine’s long history of corruption and arms smuggling.

Yet the sheer volume of arms delivered — including tens of thousands of shoulder-fired Javelin and Stinger missiles, portable launchers and rockets — creates a virtually insurmountable challenge to tracking each item, officials and experts caution.

All of which has heightened anxieties among Ukrainian officials responsible for ensuring weapons get to the battlefield.

“It’s impossible, honestly, to ask people to go through their stocks all the time,” said Ustinova, the chair of a committee in Ukraine’s parliament that monitors the transfer of weapons, in an interview in the streets of Warsaw, Poland, last month, as she rushed to catch a train to Kyiv, Ukraine.

At the beginning of the war, she said, “it was just about survival, and people were just passing around Javelins” to repel a column of Russian armour that bore down on Kyiv early in the attack. While those sorts of weapons are now routinely tracked, it’s still “very difficult” to account for small arms, like rifles, or the millions of artillery shells that the United States and its allies



Members of the 59th Motorised Brigade of the Ukrainian Ground Forces fire a 152mm Howitzer toward Russian positions in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

have sent.

The scrutiny is heightened for Javelins, Stingers and other kinds of missiles, as well as small-diameter bombs, certain types of drones, night-vision goggles and other systems being supplied to Ukraine.

But Ustinova said she has seen “zero evidence” of illicit arms transfers of the sort that would destroy Ukraine’s credibility and threaten at least a cutback in US support.

“Once there is smuggling or misuse of weapons, we’re done,” she said.

So far, American officials said, there have been only a handful of cases of suspected arms trafficking or other illicit military transfers of advanced weapons sent to foreign conflicts that must be most closely tracked.

Currently, federal investigators are looking into reports of Javelin shoulder-fired rockets and Switchblade drones being sold online after being taken from Ukraine, according to an American official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a highly sensitive issue.

There was one confirmed report of a Swedish-made, anti-tank grenade launcher being smuggled out of Ukraine. But the theft was discovered only after the weapon exploded in the trunk of a car about 10 miles outside Moscow, injuring a retired Russian military officer who had just

returned from eastern Ukraine.

The commander of Nato troops in Europe, Gen. Christopher Cavoli, told Congress late last month that he could recall only one case of attempted smuggling — some automatic rifles — since the war began. He said he remained “highly confident” in Ukraine’s ability to secure the nearly \$37 billion in US weapons and other security assistance that has been committed so far. But the threat remains. In intense conflicts like the one in Ukraine, weapons are being used almost as quickly as they are received. That makes hand-held missile systems and other portable arms “vastly more difficult” to track, said Nikolai Sokov, a senior expert at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in Austria.

Accounting for ammunition is “next to impossible,” Sokov said. He cited unconfirmed reports of Stinger missiles “roaming Ukraine free” and said officials appeared to be trying to persuade Ukrainian citizens to return light arms they received to defend themselves last year.

“This is what happens in every large-scale, lengthy conflict, and I do not see any reason to think it may be different with Ukraine,” Sokov said.

This past December, American officials began giving Ukrainian troops hand-held

bar code scanners to instantly transmit the serial numbers of advanced weapons into a US database. The new process was part of the decision by the Biden administration to give Ukraine more authority to self-report how it is securing arms.

American military officials said the shift was necessary, given that fighting has largely prevented US inspectors from visiting battlefield units. But American officials responsible for the oversight remain concerned they cannot personally confirm the weapons’ whereabouts.

At least some Ukrainian front-line units under constant Russian fire are still waiting to receive hand-held scanners, Ustinova said. Such battlefield assessments have been infrequent in other war zones, American officials said, as smuggling generally becomes a concern when entire containers of sensitive missiles or rocket systems go missing — not individual light weapons.

Ustinova said Ukrainian officials and troops were all too aware of the stiff criminal penalties not just for smuggling US weapons but also failing to report any losses — arms destroyed or captured on the battlefield. Each lost weapon system is investigated and its serial number reported to the US Embassy in Kyiv, she said, “so in case it shows up, in Iran or somewhere, we’re not being accused of that.”

Backlogged courts and years of delays await many migrants



Zolan Kanno Youngs

The writer is an American journalist based in Washington DC

President Joe Biden’s attempt to deal efficiently with a new surge of migration following the end of Title 42 pandemic restrictions has focused new attention on a severe shortage of judges, the result of long-standing neglect that has overwhelmed the immigration court system with a backlog of more than 2 million cases.

The court system is riddled with years long delays and low morale as a workforce of about 650 judges struggles to keep up with the volume of immigration cases, leaving immigrants who have long lived illegally in the United States in limbo.

The bottleneck shows how the challenges of dealing with a surge in immigration do not end at the southern border. Even as scrutiny has focused on how Border Patrol agents will manage crowds of migrants, public officials and immigration experts say that bolstering the invisible workforce of immigration judges is crucial to reforming the system.

Biden has made some progress — hiring more than 200 judges since he came into office — but is still falling short on his campaign pledge to double the number of immigration judges. Some of the judges will be working seven days a week for a time while the administration confronts the new surge, according to the Justice Department.

Eliza Klein, who left her position as an immigration judge in Chicago in April, said the latest increase in illegal border crossings will strain the understaffed workforce as they prioritise migrants who crossed recently.

That will leave some older cases to languish even longer, she said.

“This is a great tragedy because it creates a second class



Migrants wait to be processed by US Border Patrol agents after entering the US from Mexico in San Diego.

of citizens,” Klein, who started working as an immigration judge in the Clinton administration, said of those immigrants who have been waiting years for an answer to their case. The oldest case that Klein adjudicated had been pending in the court for 35 years, she said.

“It’s a disgrace,” Klein said. “My perspective, my thought, is that we’re not committed in this country to having a just system.”

The backlog of immigration cases grew to 1 million in 2019 during the Trump administration, but it has increased since then to more than 2 million cases, according to data collected by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University. The average time it takes to close an immigration case is about four years, according to the database. But some judges say they have cases that have been pending for more than a decade.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said this week that the backlog was a “powerful example of a broken immigration system,” as he pleaded for Congress to pass immigration reform legislation.

Can books change your life?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

“The person who does not read has no advantage over the person who cannot read.”

Reading, in my opinion is one of the most important yet unappreciated skills we learn during our early childhood, even before going to school.

When I was a child, growing up in the seventies, long before the days of iPads and smartphones, I developed a passion towards reading any book I got my hand on.

These were from fairytales to comics to poster books about dinosaurs (yes, I remember most to their names and species) to self-help books, which made me wonder, can reading books change my life?

And if so, then how?

Reading is shown to have many benefits for the human brain, as it keeps our minds stimulated while also improving our cognitive abilities.

Studies show that such activities

that engage our minds can reduce memory decline by up to 32 per cent compared to other activities that require less focus.

The more we read, the easier it becomes for us to retain and recall information. From a more technical standpoint, reading stimulates neurogenesis - the creation of more neurons within the brain.

These neurons are used to send and receive information between different parts of the brain. This is not exclusive to memory, as other cognitive functions are also improved by reading.

Almost any sort of significant mental stimulation can reduce the risk of cognitive decline including Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Reading also allows us to explore different perspectives on various issues, as it provides us with a unique understanding of the author's views on a certain topic with enough context to justify these views.

THE MORE WE READ,
THE EASIER IT BECOMES
FOR US TO RETAIN AND
RECALL INFORMATION.
READING ALSO STIMULATES
NEUROGENESIS - THE
CREATION OF MORE
NEURONS WITHIN THE BRAIN

Figuratively speaking, it allows readers to walk a mile in the author's shoes. Personally speaking, every book is an adventure into the mind of the author.

Thoughts and beliefs are shaped by one's life experience and surroundings, and understanding these experiences can allow readers to properly grasp the notions that the author considers to be true.

Reading can also allow us to properly understand the reasoning behind certain actions, the relative subjectivity of opinions, and

provides a deeper appreciation of the underlying ideals of epistemology – the theory of knowledge.

From an educational perspective, reading is by far one of the most crucial skills that one can adopt. Constant exposure to visual representations of the proper way authors string together words and sentences gives people a clearer understanding of the way word sequences are put together, which ultimately improves their linguistic skills.

Needless to say, authors are the best teachers of literacy. This is not exclusive to reading books, as it was shown that even young children who watch YouTube with captions often develop better linguistic skills than those who do not.

Studies also prove that reading can improve retention skills, as most books are lengthy and require a certain amount of focus to grasp the underlying meanings behind

the text. The lack of visual aids also stimulates the brain differently, as it makes the reader create a mental image of what is going on in a certain plot.

In an age where we have shorts, reels and TikTok, our attention spans suffer greatly, as very short and stimulating videos are becoming the new norm.

Our dopamine receptors are shot, which is why many people feel bored easily – unconsciously triggering us to reach out for our phones.

On an ending note, I would like to explore this issue from a theological perspective. The holy Quran – the miracle of Islam - is a book, and the first revelation that our prophet (PBUH) received was the word 'Read,' so how can we not?

I see an inexplicable profoundness behind this simple word, as it implores us to never stop seeking knowledge.

Report highlights climate change's impact on global migration

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The World Development Report 2023, titled “Migrants, Refugees, and Societies,” highlights the profound impact of climate change on global migration patterns.

Over the past 15 years, sudden extreme weather events have internally displaced more than 300 million people.

Recognising migration as a development challenge, the report emphasises the importance of developing new and predictable financing instruments and amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups in policy debates.

Climate change exacerbates internal migration through its effects on income and habitability, such as temperature rise, sea level rise, precipitation changes, and extreme events.

With the world grappling with economic imbalances, demographic shifts, and climate change, the report asserts that migration will increasingly become a necessity across countries of all income levels.

When managed effectively, migration can be a catalyst for prosperity and contribute to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG).

The report recommends focusing on individuals living outside their country of nationality, stating that once migrants are naturalised, they face the same challenges and opportunities as other citizens. It also stresses the importance of acknowledging the complexity of cross-border movements and highlights the need for appropriate policy responses.

According to the report, approximately 2.3 per cent of the global population, accounting for 184 million people, including 37 million refugees, reside outside their country of nationality, with 43 per cent of them living in low and middle-income countries. The report underscores the significance of aligning skills and policies, as well as distinguishing different types of migration to tailor appropriate responses.

It suggests maximising net gains by matching migrants’ skills and attributes with the needs of destination societies, ensuring sustainable international protection for refugees, and reducing the occurrence of distress-driven movements.

As Covid emergency ends, surveillance shifts to the sewers



EMILY ANTHERS

The writer is an award-winning science journalist and author

When the Covid-19 public health emergency expired in the United States on Thursday, the coronavirus will not disappear. But many of the data streams that have helped Americans monitor the virus will go dark.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will stop tabulating community levels of Covid-19 and will no longer require certain case information from hospitals or testing data from laboratories. And as free testing is curtailed, official case counts, which became less reliable as Americans shifted to at-home testing, may drift even further from reality.

But experts who want to keep tabs on the virus will still have one valuable option: sewage.

People who are infected with the coronavirus shed the pathogen in their stool, whether or not they take a Covid test or seek medical care, enabling officials to track levels of the virus in communities over time and to watch for the emergence of new variants.

This approach expanded rapidly during the pandemic. The National Wastewater Surveillance System, which the CDC established in late 2020, now includes data from more than 1,400 sampling sites, distributed across 50 states, three territories and 12 tribal communities, said Amy Kirby, the programme lead. The data cover about 138 million people, more than 40 per cent of the US population, she said.

But wastewater surveillance is still missing many communities, and more work is needed to turn what began as an ad hoc emergency effort into a sustainable national system, experts said. And officials will need to be thoughtful about how they use the data as the pandemic continues to evolve.

“Wastewater has to get better,” said David O’Connor, a virus expert at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Engineering students collect wastewater samples at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, Colorado.

IN THE MONTHS
AHEAD, WASTEWATER
SURVEILLANCE WILL
BECOME EVEN MORE
IMPORTANT, SCIENTISTS
SAY, AND IT SHOULD HELP
OFFICIALS SPOT SOME
INCIPIENT OUTBREAKS

“And we have to get a bit more savvy about interpreting what the wastewater data is telling us.”

Over the past three years, wastewater surveillance repeatedly proved its worth. When testing was widely available, the wastewater trends mirrored the official Covid-19 case counts. When testing was scarce, spikes in the viral levels in sewage provided early warnings of coming surges, allowing officials to redistribute public health resources and hospitals to prepare for an influx of cases.

Wastewater sampling helped scientists determine when new variants arrived in particular communities and helped clinicians make more informed decisions about when to use certain treatments, which may not work against all versions of the virus.

“For SARS-CoV-2, our wastewater surveillance system is pretty solid now,” said Marisa Eisenberg, an infectious disease public health researcher at the University of Michigan. “We’ve kind of put it through its paces.”

The CDC will still track deaths and hospitalisations, but those tend to be lagging indicators. So wastewater is likely to remain a critical early warning system for both officials and members of the public.

“It can help people who are immunocompromised, who might want to be really cautious,” said Alexandria Boehm, an environmental engineer at Stanford University and a lead investigator for WastewaterSCAN, a sewage surveillance initiative. “It can help us make decisions about whether we want to mask or go to a really crowded concert.”

As clinical testing drops off, wastewater surveillance will also be a key strategy for keeping tabs on new variants and for gauging the threat they pose, scientists said. Variants that quickly take over a sewershed or whose spread is followed by a rise in local hospitalisation rates, for instance, might warrant increased monitoring.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Tel: 22651222

SECRETARY
Tel: 22651200

DESK
Tel: 22651209

ONLINE
Tel: 22651202

LOCAL
Tel: 22651212

DESIGN
Tel: 22651210

BUSINESS
Tel: 22651208

TRANSLATION
Tel: 22651204

SPORTS
Tel: 22651205

FEATURE
Tel: 22651220

PROOFREADING
Tel: 22651206

ADVERTISING
Tel: 24649444, 24649430, 24649437, 24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

PRINTED AND
PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974,
Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

Website: omanobserver.om

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

e-mails: editor@omanobserver.om

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

Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens!

The Sultanate of Oman, with its rapidly developing educational sector is perfectly positioned to become, and be, a world leader, by providing learning experiences that can meet its societal, commercial, industrial needs and imperatives.

Having taught in higher education, been involved in higher education administration, as a primary education teacher, a post-education teacher, tutor, and consultant, and as a social commentator, I have been privileged to see how the Oman education and training sector has developed since the turn of the century. However, rather than basking in the richly deserved plaudits and praise, I would encourage instead, grasping the opportunity to go where no nation has gone before, and tailor future education towards meeting future needs, rather than today's.

There is no doubt that the last twenty years have encouraged students to ask questions, which was great when what needed to be learned could be known, sustained, and guided by, teachers. However, times, as is their won't, have changed dramatically, and in a manner of speaking, we educators and educationalists have unleashed a beast we are no longer capable of controlling, with learning now as volatile as an out-of-control stallion. We have encouraged questions, discussion and debate, but no longer have enough answers.

We, and you, have developed the youth, taking them from confusion to curiosity, from perceptions of failure to demonstrations of resilience, from dreams to imagination. These skills didn't just happen, they were inspired. We also taught this generation to respect other's perspectives, their views and opinions. We have muted their feelings of inadequacy and rejection, and shown them that failure is not the end, but an opportunity to show the resilience they will need as they continue to grow as they spread their wings.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Economic Development (OECD) says "In the face



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

WE NEED TO PREPARE AGENTS FOR TRANSFORMATION, WE NEED TO PREPARE LEARNER PROFICIENCIES THAT HAVE BROADER PERSPECTIVES

of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula should continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways." My gut feeling is that 'radical' is the perfect road map for the future.

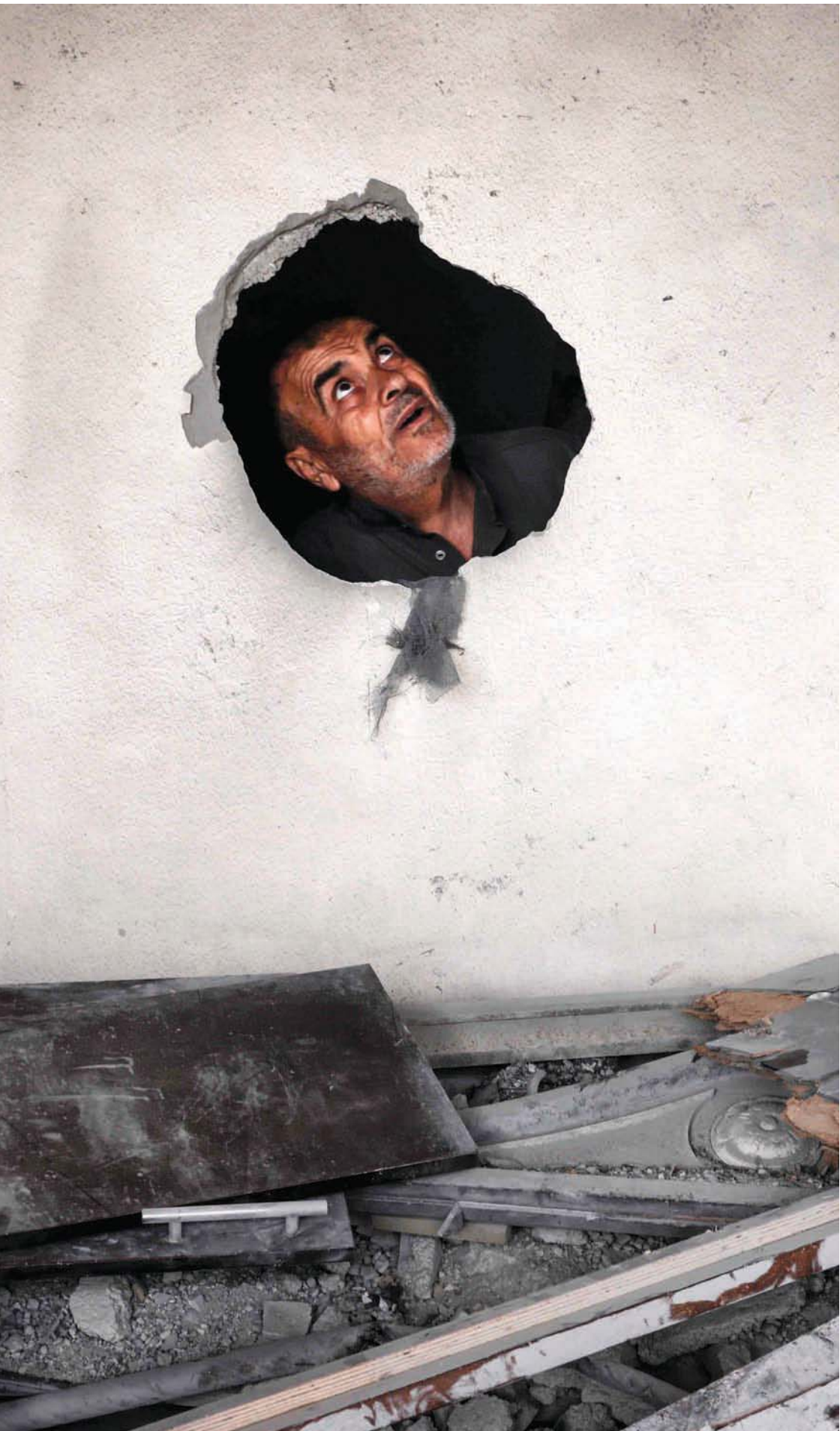
We need to prepare agents for transformation, we need to prepare learner proficiencies that have broader perspectives that are not so much contingent upon knowing, as being able to identify, tag, and absorb new knowledge, to appreciate its purposes, its limitations, and to be prepared to ask questions capable of taking their understanding further.

Confronted with curriculum overload, maintaining their balance of personal discipline, educational objectives, familial and social imperatives is difficult, and even more so when mindful of the needs of physiological sustenance, safe environment, love and self-esteem necessary to be the best one can be, academically. 'Edu-babble?' Maybe, however to put into a hierarchy the skills we need to equip our current and future learners with future-proofed skill-sets and attitudes.

Let's start with Francis Bacon's "knowledge is power," quote, as being currently 'en vogue.' Yet we don't prioritise knowledge as much as we are fixated on memorisation as an examination process. We still teach, 'old school,' that knowledge and understanding are necessities, and they are, but only to the extent that information informs knowledge, which is, in turn, the key to understanding.

Wisdom though, is what we can develop through teaching with an open mind, allowing them to access all the knowledge of the monster that the World Wide Web has become. Well, not really a pestilential monster, but more like a Shrek really, a congenial monstrous friend, a force for good.

AMIDST THE RUBBLE



A man looks through a hole amidst the rubble of a building hit by an Israeli air strike in Deir al Balah in the centre of the Gaza Strip, on Saturday. Israel and Gaza traded heavy fire on Friday but Egyptian mediators launched a new bid to end days of fighting that has killed dozens, all but one of them Palestinians. – AFP

A BRICS revival?

There was a time when everyone was talking about a group of fast-growing emerging economies with huge potential. But the BRICS — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — struggled to transform themselves from a promising asset class into a unified real-world diplomatic and financial player. Is this finally changing?

The story of the BRICS begins with a November 2001 paper by Jim O'Neill, then the head of global economic research at Goldman Sachs Asset Management, called "The World Needs Better Economic BRICS" (the original grouping did not include South Africa). At a time when the world was dealing with the fallout of the dot-com bust and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, O'Neill highlighted the BRICS' vast potential, noting that their GDP growth was likely to accelerate considerably in the ensuing decades.

At the time, China and India were experiencing rapid economic growth, and Russia, aided by booming commodity prices, was recovering from the post-Soviet meltdown of the 1990s. Growth in the BRICS was outpacing that of the advanced economies so significantly that O'Neill predicted in 2003 that their collective GDP could overtake the then-Group of 6 largest developed economies by 2040.

While the world expected the BRICS to thrive economically, few expected them to form a united grouping. After all, they represent a mix of unsteady



ANA PALACIO

The writer is a former minister of foreign affairs of Spain and former senior vice president and general counsel of the World Bank Group

ECONOMIC HEADWINDS AND INTERNAL DISAGREEMENTS HAVE LONG STYMIED THE BRICS' AMBITION TO BECOME A GLOBAL DIPLOMATIC AND FINANCIAL FORCE

democracies and outright autocracies, each with its own distinctive economic structure. And two of them — China and India — have long been locked in a border dispute, with no sign of resolution.

But the BRICS saw their economic alignment as an opportunity to expand their global influence by creating an alternative to West-led international institutions. And, for a while, they seemed to be making progress.

The addition of South Africa — then Africa's largest economy — in 2010 lent the grouping greater heft. By 2014, the BRICS Development Bank — now the New Development Bank — was formed as an alternative to the World Bank. The next year, the BRICS created the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, in order to support members experiencing short-term balance-of-payments pressures.

Economically, the BRICS continued to thrive, at least in the aggregate. Though China is the only BRICS economy that has sustained solid growth, the group has surpassed the G7 in terms of relative contribution to global GDP (based on purchasing power parity). Moreover, bilateral trade among its members is rising rapidly. But progress towards the BRICS' broader ambitions seemed to stall.

Recent developments suggest renewed momentum. Lately, members have been talking of "de-dollarising" trade, with some raising the prospect of a new shared BRICS currency. While calls for de-dollarisation are nothing new, some experts believe that a BRICS currency "has the potential to usurp" the US dollar, or at least "shake (its) place on the throne."

Moreover, the BRICS seem to be making a comeback as a platform for cooperation on a range of issues, including climate change, global governance, and development. In fact, 19 countries, including Argentina, Turkiye, and Saudi Arabia, have expressed interest in joining the BRICS — bids that will be discussed at the group's August summit in South Africa.

Though the group's

institutional framework remains underdeveloped, the motivations that led to its creation have not diminished — and are unlikely to any time soon. In fact, the BRICS and their supplicants appear to be both united and driven by one thing: grievance.

Developing economies are angry about the burdensome conditionality that has been imposed on them by Western-dominated institutions. They are sick of what they perceive as double standards on vital policy matters, such as the green transition. They are unwilling to tolerate efforts to "constrain" their economies through conservation demands or limits on technology sharing. Perhaps most important, they regard Western norms and values with suspicion as a fig leaf for Western countries' self-interested behaviour.

The West's inability — or unwillingness — to reform global governance so that emerging economies like China and India have greater influence has compounded these grievances. Calls for reform have, after all, been growing louder for decades — since around 1999, when the G20 was formed. In the aftermath of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, finance ministers and central-bank governors began holding regular high-level meetings, and non-Western representatives wanted to be heard.

With the West's pledges to pursue reform having come to nothing, potential alternatives — from development banks to currencies — look increasingly attractive to those who feel left out. The BRICS are attempting to build a new world order, "bric by bric," and the appeal of their cause among other disgruntled countries is growing.

One must wonder what would happen if countries like Argentina or Saudi Arabia joined this project. Even the "BRICS-Plus" embraced by China could go a long way towards advancing an alternative worldview and institutional system — goals that China is also pursuing with its massive transnational Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

@Project Syndicate, 2023



Economically, the BRICS continued to thrive, at least in the aggregate.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports
sport@omanobserver.om



OMAN MAKE STRONG START IN ARAB BEACH SOCCER

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

Oman beach soccer team made a strong start in the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 as they thrashed Palestine 7-1 in the opening match at King Abdullah Sports City near Jeddah in Saudi Arabia on Saturday.

Oman's goals were netted by Khalid al Oraimi who managed to score three goals besides Ahmed al Owaisi (2 goals), Sami al Balushi and Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, who netted one each. The consolation goal for the opponent was scored by Mohammed Hassan.

Oman team, led by long-serving national coach Talib Hilal, dominated the match and did not face much difficulty to end the match on a triumphant note. The victory meant the Omani men confirmed their first winning points in the group. Experienced coach Talib Hilal began the match with a starting list comprised of Amjad al Hamdani as the goalkeeper, Khalid al Oraimi, captain of the team, and Munther al Oraimi focused on defence while Yahya al Murekhi and Sami al Balushi were the attackers.

Oman team will gear up for the forthcoming match against Egypt on Monday. Then, coach Talib's men will conclude their group matches on Wednesday when they will take on Kyrgyzstan.

Oman's goals were netted by Khalid al Oraimi who managed to score three goals besides Ahmed al Owaisi (2 goals), Sami al Balushi and Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, who netted one each. The consolation goal for the opponent was scored by Mohammed Hassan

The chances of Oman team to advance to the next level of the championship is very high as the top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals besides two more teams who are the best third placed in the three groups. The quarterfinals will take place on Thursday while the semifinals are set on Friday and the final is scheduled on Saturday.

In earlier matches, Saudi Arabia defeated Mauritania in the opener 7-3 while Morocco beat Lebanon 9-5.

The 12 teams taking part in the tournament have been distributed into three groups. Hosts Saudi Arabia led Group A alongside Mauritania, Morocco and Lebanon while Oman are grouped with Palestine, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt in Group B. The Group C featured the UAE, Libya, Kuwait and Comoros.



OJA, ISPF discuss joint cooperation in sports

SEOUL: The delegation of the Omani Journalists Association (OJA) on Friday met with Gianni Merlo, President of the International Sports Press Federation, coinciding with the meetings of The International Sports Press Association (AIPS) 85th Congress which concluded in Seoul last week.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed cooperation and the importance of participating in the implementation of joint activities at the international and Asian levels.

Merlo praised the effectiveness of the Omani Journalists Association, pointing to its success in hosting the meeting of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Congress last May in Muscat.

He stressed that the Sultanate of Oman had unique characteristics, as it possesses the historical heritage, charming nature, international security, and the ability of its youth to organise international events. He also hoped



that they would work together to serve the sports journalists in the Sultanate of Oman.

Salem bin Hamad al Jawhari, OJA Vice-President, hailed the growing relations between OJA and the International Federation and appreciated the keenness of

the president to work closely and to further enhance cooperation between the two sides.

Participants from the OJA took part in the 85th Congress, which was held in Seoul, South Korea, from May 8 to 12, which saw the participation of over 77 countries.

The conference also took stock of the Ukraine war situation and the suffering of Ukrainian media professionals. It also highlighted the loss of more than 200 athletes and the destruction of over 59 sports facilities due to the war.

A short video was also relayed

about the participation of Sudanese journalists in the events currently taking place in Sudan.

NEXT CONGRESS IN SPAIN
It was also announced that Santa Susanna, a municipality in Spain, will host the next Congress during

the summer of 2024, and a short film was shown about the city and its nature. Pretor who announced said the city is not far from Barcelona and said the guests will be welcomed heartily.

Gianni Merlo, confirmed that the federation is preparing to celebrate the centenary of its founding, which falls next year, as it was scheduled to take place in Paris. But as Paris is getting ready to host the 2024 Olympic Games and the inability to obtain hotels for accommodation, it was decided that it will be held in the city of Santa Fe.

Pretor received the flag of the International Sports Press Federation from Korea's Hee Don Jung, President of the Asian Sports Press Federation and the current host President. He also noted that Spain will host the World Congress for the fifth time. The 85th Congress concluded its activities with a brief speech by Merlo, in which he spoke about the conditions suffered by sports journalists all over the world.



Surya's first IPL century seals Mumbai win

RASHID'S 4-30 AND 32-BALL 79 GO IN VAIN

MUMBAI: A blazing unbeaten century by Suryakumar Yadav helped Mumbai Indians beat the reigning IPL champions Gujarat Titans by 27 runs in Mumbai on Friday.

The world's top-rated Twenty20 batter hit a 49-ball 103, with six sixes and 11 fours, to propel his team to 218-5 and outshone an inspired all-round performance by Afghanistan and Gujarat maverick spinner Rashid Khan.

Khan, who earlier took 4-30, hit an unbeaten 32-ball 79 with ten sixes to take Gujarat from 103-8 in the 14th over to 191-8 in reply.

Gujarat captain Hardik Pandya won the toss and chose to field, but immediately faced aggressive hitting by Mumbai skipper and opener Rohit Sharma, who hit 18-ball 29, in a 61-run opening partnership with Ishan Kishan.

However, Mumbai lost Sharma, Kishan (31) and rookie Nehal Wadhwa (15) to slip to 88-3 before Yadav took charge for his first IPL century in yet another player-of-the-match performance.

RASHID FIGHTS BACK

Khan, who removed both the openers as well as Wadhwa and Tim David, was the only threatening Gujarat bowler. Gujarat then made the worst possible start, losing openers Wriddhiman Saha (2), Shubman Gill (6) and skipper Pandya (4) by the fourth over.

In-form all-rounder Vijay Shankar (29) failed to convert a promising start and fell to Piyush Chawla's leg spin.

The current IPL table-toppers kept losing wickets to tight lengths by Mumbai spinners Chawla (2-36) and Kumar Kartikeya (2-37).

Indian rookie pacer Akash Madhwal bowled four tight overs and took three wickets for 31 runs.

Mumbai had no answers to Khan's power. Pandya said that it "felt like only Rashid Khan turned up from our team (and) batted and bowled incredibly well". "People have spoken enough about 'Yadav', one of the best batters in T20 cricket. Really tough to set fields for him," Pandya said about his India team-mate after the defeat. — AFP

MANKAD, POORAN STAR AS LUCKNOW BEAT SRH

HYDERABAD: Indian batsman Prerak Mankad and Nicholas Pooran steered Lucknow Super Giants to a seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in an IPL match marred by unruly fans on Saturday.

Chasing 183 for victory, Lucknow looked in trouble at 54-2 in 8.2 overs but Mankad's 64 and a series of key partnerships including an unbeaten 58-run stand with left-handed Pooran guided Hyderabad to victory with four balls to spare.

Mankad, an up-and-coming batsman, first set the pace with a 73-run partnership with Marcus Stoinis, who hit a 25-ball 40. Mankad raced to his maiden IPL fifty and then changed gears with Pooran, who scored a rapid 44 off 13 balls.

The West Indian smashed three consecutive sixes in a 31-run over as Lucknow moved into the top four to bolster their play-off hopes.

South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen stood out with 47 for Hyderabad, in an innings interrupted by crowd trouble as the home team lost momentum and finally the match to stay in ninth position.

Things got heated in the crowd after Hyderabad's Abdul Samad, who hit an unbeaten 37, received a waist-high delivery that was called a no-ball by the on-field umpire but overturned on review. The delivery appeared to be above the batsman's waist but Lucknow reviewed it in their favour, cancelling out the run and the free hit.

Home fans got into an altercation with the Lucknow dugout, prompting a stoppage of play, with Klassen dismissed a ball later.

"Disappointed by the crowd to be honest, that's not what you want," said Klaasen after his 29-ball knock.

"That also broke the momentum, not great umpiring either, but you can't take matters in your own hands."

The no-ball decision was slammed by experts including Tom Moody, who tweeted, "How can the 3rd umpire take that long to make the wrong decision?"

Lucknow skipper Krunal Pandya returned impressive figures of 2-24 as he struck on successive balls to take down his counterpart Aiden Markram, for 28, and Glenn Phillips, for a duck. — AFP



Lucknow Super Giants' Prerak Mankad (R) and Nicholas Pooran celebrate after beating Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad. — AFP

Rajasthan, Chennai to utilise home advantage



RR VS RCB AT JAIPUR

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA - Rajasthan have just 2 games to go and they are at 12 points. They could possibly qualify with 14 points as well, considering their NRR, but that would be subjected to other results. They would like to keep things in their hand and get to 16 points anyhow. RCB are at 10 points with a poor NRR and they need to win all the remaining 3 games to have any realistic chance to qualify.

PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER - Both these teams clashed in Bengaluru in the 32nd match of this season. RCB lost early wickets but a counter attack from Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell put them on course with a 127-run partnership. At one-point RCB looked like getting 225 plus, but it could only crawl to 189 cause of the middle and lower order collapse. Chasing 190 to win, Rajasthan were on track with 99/1 in 11.3, but a few tight overs in the middle could allow them to finish at 182/6 and RCB won this game by 7 runs.

TEAM INFO - The true chokers of IPL have once again stood up to their quality and put

themselves in a difficult situation. Though they are not yet out of contention and they will need to bring their very best on the Jaipur ground, which has been just as unpredictable as RCB. Rajasthan have just got their rhythm back and they will be looking to thrash RCB into bits and pieces, as they would make their way to play-offs and RCB would just be expecting to do the opposite.

Head-to-Head - Played - 29; Won by RCB - 14; Won by RR - 12; No Result - 3

RR possible 12 - Y Jaiswal, J Buttler, S Samson, J Root, D Jurel, S Hetmyer, R Ashwin, T Boult, S Sharma, KM Asif, Y Chahal, R Parag

RCB possible 12 - V Kohli, F du Plessis, A Rawat, G Maxwell, M Lomror, D Karthik, W Hasaranga, H Patel, M Siraj, J Hazlewood, K Jadeja, V Vyshak

Pitch & Weather Report - The previous match at this venue aided the batters as over 370 runs were scored. The batters will also chance their arm with relatively shorter boundaries on offer at the venue. This venue has seen low-scoring encounters on occasions as well. On a warm afternoon with temperatures ranging between 29 and 42 degrees Celsius with no chances of rain, it will be an exhausting afternoon of cricket.

Match Prediction - RCB are not having any serious quality in the spin department and Rajasthan have the best spin attack of the season. This could very well result in the RR management asking the curator to prepare a spin friendly wicket, on which RCB would



barely stand a chance. I feel that Rajasthan are going to be the better team on the day with home conditions advantage.

CSK VS KKR AT CHENNAI

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA - CSK have 15 points with a very healthy NRR and they need to win one of the remaining two matches to qualify. They would like to win both and finish in the top 2, which will give them an added advantage in the play-offs. On the other hand, KKR are not out yet, but they rely on the mercy of other results. With 10 points and a poor NRR, they need to win both these games by massive margins and then hope for other results to be in their favour.

PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER - Both these teams clashed in the 33rd match of this edition where on the back of a prolific knock from Ajinkya Rahane, which was well supported by Conway and Dube, CSK were able to post a mammoth 235/4 at Kolkata's Eden Garden. In reply, KKR lost early wickets and despite late heroics of Jason Roy and Rinku Singh, they could only post 186/8. CSK won this one-sided encounter by 49 runs.

TEAM INFO - We predicted at the start that CSK are going to be a championship contender and they have certainly stood up to the expectations. The most important part is taking advantage of the home conditions and they have done that to perfection. KKR under the leadership of Nitish Rana have been

extremely unstable. It's often said that, the best of players do not become good captains. Consistent chopping and changing have not allowed the players to settle in their positions and hence the inconsistency in results.

Head-to-Head - Played - 28; Won by CSK - 18; Won by KKR - 9; No Result - 1

CSK possible 12 - R Gaikwad, D Conway, A Rahane, M Ali, A Rayudu, S Dube, R Jadeja, M S Dhoni, D Chahar, T Deshpande, M Theekshana, M Pathirana

KKR possible 12 - R Gurbaz, J Roy, V Iyer, N Rana, A Russell, R Singh, S Narine, S Thakur, A Roy, H Rana, V Chakaravarthy, S Sharma

Pitch & Weather Report - The pitch at MA Chidambaram Stadium is spin-friendly. The spinners will play a key role while bowling here as the ball tends to grip off the surface. Run-scoring isn't easy and the batters will have to be on their toes while batting here. Clear skies will greet both sides on a Sunday evening, with the temperature in Chennai expected to hover between 30 to 40 degrees Celsius.

Match Prediction - After the thrashing from Rajasthan, where Nitish Rana wasn't even able to convey his heart out in the post-match presentation, it's doubtful that he would have his team ready for an even bigger challenge. CSK's wicket aids spin and it doesn't allow free flowing shot making. KKR have 3 quality spinners and if they can stand up to the task and get CSK out cheaply, then that would be their best chance. This one is going to be an easy one for CSK.



Spain's Paula Badosa in action during her round of 64 match against Tunisia's Ons Jabeur.



Taylor Townsend of the US in action during her round of 64 match against Jessica Pegula of the US. — Reuters



Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov reacts after winning the first set during his round of 64 match against Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka. — Reuters

BADOSA OUSTS JABEUR, PEGULA FALLS TO TOWNSEND

SLUGGISH DJOKOVIC BATTLES TO ROME WIN

ITALIAN OPEN RESULTS

MEN (SECOND ROUND)

Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Tomas Etcheverry (ARG) 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x26) bt Stan Wawrinka (SUI) 6-4, 7-6 (7/3); Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x17) 6-3, 6-4; Cameron Norrie (GBR x13) bt Alexandre Muller (FRA) 6-2, 6-3; Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x10) 6-4, 4-6, 7-5; Roman Safiullin bt Sebastian Korda (USA x22) 6-2, 7-6 (7/5); Fabio Fognini (ITA) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB x30) 6-3, 7-6 (8/6); Holger Rune (DEN x7) bt Arthur Fils (FRA) 6-3, 6-3; Casper Ruud (NOR x4) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) 6-4, 6-0; Alexander Bublik (KAZ) bt Ben Shelton (USA x28) 6-4, 1-6, 6-2; Laslo Djere (SRB) bt Botic van de Zandschulp (NED x23) 6-2, 6-4; Christian Garin (CHI) bt Tommy Paul (USA x16) 4-6, 6-3, 6-4; Gregoire Barrere (FRA) bt Karen Khachanov (x11) 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x24) bt Wu Yibing (CHN) 4-6, 6-2, 6-3; Alexander Shevchenko bt Sebastian Baez (ARG) 6-3, 6-4; Jannik Sinner (ITA x8) bt Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) 6-1, 6-4

WOMEN (SECOND ROUND)

Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-0, 6-0; Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) bt Bernarda Pera (USA x28) 6-4, 6-4; Donna Vekic (CRO x21) bt Aliaksandra Sasnovich 3-6, 6-3, 6-3; Liudmila Samsonova (x16) bt Anett Kontaveit (EST) 6-3, 6-3; Maria Sakkari (GRE x9) bt Barbora Strycova (CZE) 6-1, 6-3; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN x24) 6-0, 6-1; Anna Kalinskaya bt Elise Mertens (BEL x25) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x7) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA) 7-6 (7/4), 6-1; Paula Badosa (ESP) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x4) 6-1, 6-4; Marta Kostyuk (UKR x32) bt Claire Liu (USA) 6-0, 6-4; Karolina Muchova (CZE) bt Martina Trevisan (ITA x18) 3-6, 6-3, 7-5; Camila Giorgi (ITA) bt Ekaterina Alexandrova (x15) 6-4, 6-2; Barbora Krejickova (CZE x10) bt Danka Kovinic (MNE) 6-2, 4-1 - retired; Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x20) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROM) 6-3, 3-6, 6-2; Julia Grabher (AUT) bt Jil Teichmann (SUI x26) 7-6 (7/4), 5-7, 6-3; Daria Kasatkina (x8) bt Lisa Pigato (ITA) 6-1, 6-2

ROME: Novak Djokovic fought his way into the third round of the Italian Open on Friday, beating Tomas Etcheverry 7-5 (7/6), 6-2 in a surprisingly tight encounter.

A six-time winner in Rome, the world number one was made to work by the 61st-ranked Argentine, prevailing in one hour, 51 minutes to set up a third round clash with Grigor Dimitrov who beat Stan Wawrinka.

Djokovic, a 22-time Grand Slam title winner, has not been knocked out of an ATP Tour event at the first attempt since the Monte Carlo Masters last year.

Still nursing an injury to his right elbow he had to battle his way past Etcheverry, winning the first set via a tie-break before finally ensuring passage into the next round.

"I've said before that this surface requires more time for me than maybe for other players to get myself to a good level, move well and hit the ball well. Rome has always been a tournament that I need for Roland Garros," said Djokovic who was plagued by 21 unforced errors in the opener.

Djokovic appeared unwell at 5-5 in the first set and took a tablet in the changeover.

"You act like you're 100 per cent," Djokovic said.

"Most of the times I guess you're not, but you want to show your opponent that you're out there trying to fight for every ball. I guess that's what happened, it's kind of cat-and-mouse always on clay."

Djokovic, 35, has made 12 finals in Rome and said on Thursday that he was feeling good ahead of the tournament despite missing last week's Madrid Masters.

Wearing an elbow brace he made a slow start, dropping his serve in the first game and struggling to deal with the Argentine's powerful shots.

The first set hinged on a scrappy game six, in which Djokovic broke to level the scores following a battle at deuce.

From there, the set went with the serve until Djokovic won the final four points in the tie-break to take the lead.

Djokovic then kicked up a level, breaking serve in the first and seventh games of the second set to give the match a more straightforward look than Etcheverry's performance deserved.

PEGULA, JABEUR OUT World number seven Holger Rune marked his Rome debut with a 6-3, 6-3 win against Arthur Fils of France.

"He made it tough. He's young, younger than me. It feels kind of crazy because I think this is the second time in my life I'm playing someone that's younger," said 20-year-old Rune. World number one Iga Swiatek started her bid to win a third straight Italian Open WTA title by demolishing Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-0, 6-0.

The Pole's path to another Rome title opened up on Thursday when world number two and third-ranked Jessica Pegula was knocked out by fellow American Taylor Townsend 6-2, 3-6, 6-3.

Swiatek faces Lesia Tsurenko in the last 32 after extending her winning streak in the Italian capital to 12 matches. — AFP



Follow us on
omanobserver.com/business
business@omanobserver.com

The offer is extended to 31 May 2023



carry out general ship repairs, including engineering, electrical, engine engineering, electrical and mechanical systems, propulsion and fittings related work, sanding and painting, as well as procurement and quality control activities, he added.

OCEC to host COMEX 2023 on May 22-25

MUSCAT: The activities of the 32nd edition of the Communications and Information Technology Exhibition (COMEX 2023) will kick off at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), organised by the Omani Group for International Trade and Exhibitions and in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Follow-up Unit for the Implementation of Oman Vision 2040.

The exhibition, which lasts for



several days, aims to promote the concept of digital investment in the Sultanate of Oman, with the participation of more than 100 local and international institutions and destinations interested in the field of information and communication technology in the region.

The exhibition is the largest

forum for modern technology in the information and communication technology sector in Oman.

This year it focuses on promoting digital investment in the Sultanate of Oman, the opportunities available to major companies in the Omani market, as well as encouraging local

companies to compete and adapt to the changes in the international market and the mechanisms developed in the field of future technologies in various industries and sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 in supporting digital transformation.

COMEX 2023 will showcase various activities and events, including the e-government pavilion, banking and financial technology pavilion, schools, universities and colleges pavilion, e-commerce, education and

information and communication technology pavilion, COMEX cybersecurity corner, programming and electronic games pavilion, the business sector section, the technology startups section, the consumer technology and smart shopping, the COMEX Hackathon and others.

It will also include the Digital Transformation Forum and the International Conference on Cybersecurity and Advanced Artificial Intelligence, in addition to holding several specialised workshops.

Muzn's Kids Wakala Account helps children save for the future



MUSAT: NBO's Islamic Banking Window, Muzn, is offering account holders even more ways to unlock opportunities and secure a safe and comfortable future for their children.

The Kids Wakala account can be opened with a minimum deposit of just RO 50, and a minimum recurring deposit of just RO 10, parents can take the first step towards building a solid foundation for a prosperous future of their children.

Kids Wakala Account is open to both Muzn and non-Muzn customers, and is available for children up to 18 years of age. The account also includes exclusive offers from a wide variety of merchants across Oman.

Salima al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager — Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Muzn, said, "As Muzn celebrates its tenth anniversary, we continue to be committed to finding new ways for our customers since providing a secure financial future for our children is dear to every parent or guardian, and with Kids Wakala we are able to ensure the child starts professional firm financial footing.

Our competitive rates offer an expected return 2% per annum paid into the account monthly."

The Kids Wakala account also provides Life Takaful and permanent disability risk coverage with a double deposit benefit up to RO 75,000.

This means that in case of a claim, the Takaful Insurance Company shall pay an extra amount equal to the deposit amount, hence, the higher the amount deposited, the more security and added piece of mind should the unexpected occur.

As the first Islamic banking window in Oman, Muzn believes in a better way and as pioneers at its core is committed to fostering the development of Oman's Islamic Finance sector, while offering its customers the best banking experience without compromise.

With an all-encompassing range of Sharia-compliant banking services delivered to a growing customer base, the bank ensures convenient, headache-free Islamic banking products that are accessible to all.

MHD Automobiles launches Jetour Dashing

MUSCAT: Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles LLC, the official distributor of Jetour in Oman, introduced its newest model, the Jetour Dashing at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Muscat. The new entrant is expected to set new benchmarks in terms of design, safety and technology with its striking exterior design, athletic proportions, a contemporary cabin and intelligent safety features.

Highlighting the introduction of the Jetour Dashing, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, said, "We are thrilled to bring the Jetour Dashing to Oman, which represents our commitment to offering our customer base with vehicles that focus on innovation, design and engineering excellence.

We are confident that the newest addition to our Jetour line-up will appeal to customers who are looking for a car that combines style, comfort and cutting-edge technology to make their journeys even more memorable."

The Jetour Dashing hosts a 1.6TGDI turbocharged 4-cylinder engine, capable of generating up to 197hp and 290N.m of torque, ensuring enhanced power and stability. With Intelligent Driver Assist Systems including adaptive cruise control to ease long rides and advance hill ascent and



gentle descent systems offers effortless performance.

The interior encompasses sport-designed seats, a spacious 5-seater cabin configuration, 15.6-inch smart touchscreen. Other features also include a panoramic sunroof, a Smart Key that integrates keyless Go and remote start facilities, in addition to a 360° panoramic visual parking assist, AEBs (Advanced Emergency Braking System), LDWS (Lane Departure Warning System and RCTA (Rear Side Collision Alert) to ensure safe driving.

The Jetour brand is created for those who desire modern technology, comfort, adventure and affordable luxury. Jetour commits to creating the best Chinese luxury cars covering SUV/MPV at an affordable price. Customers can reach out to the team on 2453 3373 or via WhatsApp on 7146 1999 and get in touch with any of the brand's sales personnel to request a test drive.

Omantel and Telkomsel sign up to GSMA blockchain trials

MUSCAT: The GSMA announced wholesale roaming trials for its next-generation telco blockchain network — the GSMA eBusiness Network — to demonstrate the benefits of blockchain technology for mobile network operators (MNOs).

Blockchain pioneers and roaming partners Omantel and Telkomsel have already signed up to the GSMA eBusiness Network Accelerator programme to monitor inter-operator roaming processes, support roaming agreement negotiations and expedite billing and settlement. The trials will go live in June 2023.

Blockchain technology securely automates the complex business processes for wholesale roaming, ensuring that the interoperability between MNOs is accurate, transparent and verified in the shortest possible time.

Omantel and Telkomsel anticipate multiple benefits from using blockchain, including operational



efficiency through decreased manual intervention, greater accuracy in charging, reduced billing disputes and rejections and quicker time to market for roaming products and offerings.

Talal al Maamari, CEO, Omantel, said: "We want to lead the pack with the implementation of this revolutionary blockchain solution, which will not only automate our systems further, but also help us to optimise costs and become more efficient by reducing margins of error.

In addition to the operational benefits that we expect to achieve, we

foresee an improvement in customer-experience by way of fewer disputes in invoices and improved roaming services and products.

It will also allow us to partner with more operators to exchange data over blockchain, thereby enabling future technology developments like 5G Standalone Roaming and the Billing and Charging Evolution. Such initiative reflects our commitment of enriching the experience of our customers to complement our wide international roaming footprint to over 200 countries with more than 700 partners."

Bank Muscat honoured with two prestigious awards by Arab Federation of Capital Markets

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been honoured with 2 prestigious awards by the Arab Federation of Capital Markets.

The awards for Best Investment Bank (Oman) and Best ESG Integration (Oman) were announced at a glittering event held recently in Muscat as part of annual Arab Federation of Capital Markets conference organised in partnership with UK-based Global Economics.

Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO, Muscat Stock Exchange handed over the awards to Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager — Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, in presence of number of CEOs of other regional stock exchanges.

Speaking on the occasion after receiving the awards, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager — Investment Banking and Capital Markets,



Bank Muscat, said: "We are really delighted to receive these prestigious awards from the Arab Federation of Capital Markets. They are a testament to the bank's pioneering role in Oman and its long-standing experience in continuously delivering distinguished services and solutions to its customers and partners.

We take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their

continuous trust in the bank as well as constant feedback which helps us serve them better, every day."

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

The bank provides corporate finance and advisory services for a number of prestigious

clients including for Government Related Entities as well as corporates.

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

As the market leader in corporate finance and advisory solutions encompassing corporate finance, project finance, debt capital markets, debt refinancing and restructurings, IPOs, structured financings, quasi-equity financings, private placements, as well as mergers and acquisitions in Oman, the bank prides itself in its intricate understanding of diverse business requirements of its clients. It offers unmatched financial expertise and guidance, innovative funding solutions and wide array of services for various

customer needs.

It is also the largest asset manager in Oman with approximately US\$ 2.5 billion of Assets under Management (AUM).

During its successful four decade long journey, Bank Muscat has also made its mark in the fields of sustainability and CSR in serving different segments of society in the best manner possible.

The bank runs a number of programmes and one-off initiatives in this regard including the landmark Green Sports programme, the Tadamun programme to provide household appliances to social welfare families, and the Al Wathbah SME Academy, which equips Omani entrepreneurs with business skills and help them acquire internationally-accredited certification. The bank is also well-known for its efforts in the field of corporate governance and timely disclosures.



Oman's nominal GDP jumps 30% in Q4 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 13

The nominal GDP, as per the preliminary data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), showed an increase of 30 per cent at end of Q4 2022 over the same period of 2021. The expansion was driven by increase in output of the hydrocarbon sector by 61.6 per cent and non-hydrocarbon sector by 16.9 per cent, according to the 'Review of Banking and Monetary Developments – March 2023' issued by the Central Bank of Oman.

As for the real GDP, it demonstrates an increase of 4.3 per cent during the same period under discussion. Similarly, this expansion was driven by 10.2 per cent of hydrocarbon sector and 1.6 per cent of non-hydrocarbon sector.

Meanwhile, the Omani oil average price at end of March 2023 at \$81.5 per barrel was higher by 3.2 per cent than that in March 2022. The average daily oil production at 1063.8 thousand barrels as of March 2023 increased by 2.6 per cent. The Sultanate of Oman's average Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed a Y-o-Y inflation of 1.8 per cent as of March 2023.

Other depository corporations (ODCs) consist of conventional and Islamic banks in Oman.

Total outstanding credit



extended by ODCs grew by 6.9 per cent to RO 29.9 billion at the end of March 2023, with credit to the private sector demonstrating an increase of 6.8 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 25.1 billion.

Non-financial corporations received the highest share of the total private sector credit at approximately 46.3 per cent at end-March 2023, followed by household sector at 44.4 per cent.

The share of financial corporations was 5.6 per cent while other sectors received the remaining 3.7 per cent of total private sector credit as at end-March 2023. Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y significant

growth of 4.6 per cent to reach RO 27.1 billion at the end of March 2023. Total private sector deposits increased by 1.4 per cent to RO 17.7 billion.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution is from household deposits at 52.1 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 28.7 per cent, financial corporations at 16.4 per cent and other sectors at 2.8 per cent. The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 5.6 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-March 2023. Credit to the private sector increased by 4.8 per cent to reach

RO 19.9 billion while their overall investments in securities witnessed a decline by 14.6 per cent to RO 4.5 billion at end-March 2023.

Investment in Government Development Bonds marginally increase by 2.7 per cent to RO 2.2 billion, while foreign securities increased by 23.7 per cent to RO 0.9 billion, at the end of March 2023. On the liabilities side, aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 3.4 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 22.2 billion at end-March 2023.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 9.4 per cent at RO 5.3 billion, and deposits of public

enterprises increased by 24.8 per cent to RO 1.8 billion.

On the other hand, private sector deposits, which accounted for 65.9 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, decreased by 0.2 per cent as of March 2023 to reach RO 14.6 billion. The total assets of Islamic banks and windows increased by 10.0 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 6.6 billion and constituted about 16.4 per cent of the banking system's assets at end-March 2023.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 5.6 billion at the end of March 2023, recording a growth of 13.4 per cent over that a year ago. Total

deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 10.3 per cent to RO 4.9 billion. Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, broad money supply M2 at end-March 2023 increased slightly by 2.4 per cent to reach RO 21.0 billion. The narrow money (M1) increased slightly by 0.3 per cent, the increase in M2 is attributed to the 3.3-per cent increase in quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits).

Looking at components of narrow money (M1) during the same period, currency with the public fell by 5.2 per cent, while demand deposit in Rial Omani increased by 1.9 per cent.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase from 1.923 per cent at end-March 2022 to 2.124 per cent at end-March 2023, and the weighted average lending rate decreased from 5.485 per cent to 5.381 per cent over the same period.

The overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate rose to 5.073 per cent in March 2023 from 4.409 per cent a year ago. This is an outcome of the increase in the average Repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO to 5.323 per cent from 0.500 per cent a year ago, moving with US Federal Reserve.

The Sustainable City – Yiti: Mainstreaming sustainability in urban developments

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, MAY 13

In line with Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman is moving away from one-sided socio-economic development dependent on oil and gas towards a diversified, inclusive, equitable and sustainable national economy.

To make good on its commitment to the Paris Agreement that aims to keep global warming within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the country is working to reduce its carbon footprint, drive the transition to renewables and embrace circular economy practices.

Amidst these efforts, urban sustainability is fast entering the mainstream. Many developers have been pursuing the goal of providing residents with a superior quality of life for decades, but now they need to do so without compromising the needs of future generations.

The pinnacle of this trend is The Sustainable City – Yiti, set to be the largest operational sustainable community in the world, which is taking shape on an ocean shore in Yiti, Muscat, in north-eastern Oman.

The project is a joint partnership between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and Diamond Developers.

The city follows the blueprint for low-carbon living pioneered by The Sustainable City in Dubai which opened in 2015. The model ensures a reduction in carbon footprint from design to operation, using disruptive innovation to achieve transformational societal change.

The Sustainable City – Yiti aspires to become Oman's first Net-Zero-Emissions community by 2040.

Estimated for full completion by 2025, the city will serve as a living lab for testing sustainable technologies,



ESTIMATED FOR FULL COMPLETION BY 2025, THE CITY WILL SERVE AS A LIVING LAB FOR TESTING SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES, PRESENTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH AND LEARNING AND PAVING THE WAY FOR A WIDESPREAD DEPLOYMENT OF CUTTING-EDGE GREEN SOLUTIONS.

presenting opportunities for research and learning and paving the way for a widespread deployment of cutting-edge green solutions.

Designed with the highest social, environmental and economic sustainability standards in mind, the masterplan of the one-million square-foot development was inspired by Omani heritage. As a result, the look and feel of the entire city will be in perfect harmony with the environment.

The Sustainable City – Yiti has adopted energy-efficient home design, eco-friendly building materials, and design and construction methods that surpass requirements set by major building rating systems.

In construction, the \$1 billion development favours high-quality, durable materials with an extended lifecycle, as they cut down on the long-term costs associated with maintenance or replacement.

The Sustainable City – Yiti will use precast wall panels to reduce the volume of construction waste. It will also incorporate recycled materials

in playgrounds and other outdoor facilities.

The integrated development seeks to generate 100 per cent of its operational energy requirements from renewable sources (solar and biogas). In addition, it aims to achieve 100 per cent water recycling, 100 per cent waste diversion from landfill and 80 per cent self-sufficiency in food.

Each of its more than 1,650 residential units will feature energy-efficient appliances to minimise electricity consumption and associated costs.

Implementing circular economy principles will enable residents to enjoy a large reduction in their utility bills — up to 100 per cent on electricity and up to 50 per cent on water — compared to conventional households.

The extensive urban landscape and green spine will enhance the microclimate, lower ambient temperature and improve air quality at The Sustainable City – Yiti. Shaded sikkas (narrow streets) and porous pavements will reduce heat, while wind corridors will further enhance

thermal comfort.

In line with the development's live-work-thrive philosophy, everything — from retail, dining, hospitality, leisure, and services to healthcare, education and jobs — will be available on site, minimising the need for travel and slashing the carbon footprint.

By focusing on soft mobility (walking and biking) and deploying electric buggies and autonomous shuttles across its car-free premises, The Sustainable City – Yiti will prevent transport-related air pollution. The development will promote a culture of sustainability among its residents by involving them in urban farming and encouraging waste separation at source.

The city will place high emphasis on celebrating environmental occasions, including World Environment Day, World Water Day, Earth Hour, and Earth Day, and organising eco-friendly events, such as the Electric Vehicle Road Trip. It will also be home to a sustainable market that will sell local and organic products.

The Welcome Centre at The Sustainable City – Yiti will offer tours and field visits to relevant stakeholders, including government, private sector, academia and professional associations, as well as school and university students.

Once open, it will host prominent guests from across the globe to exchange best practices, share experience in green cities and climate action and explore strategies for protecting the environment and conserving the planet's precious natural resources.

The Sustainable City – Yiti is a clear proof that sustainability can be achieved at no additional cost to developers and residents while creating in-country value and driving the adoption of a circular economy.

Al Kamil tipped to host Oman's latest 500 MW solar project



CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MAY 13

The Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate has been identified as a possible location for the establishment of a grid-connected solar 500 MW solar PV power plant, which is slated to come into operation in the second quarter of 2027.

Al Kamil is the third location — after Ibri (Al Dhahirah Governorate) and Manah (Al Dakhiliyah Governorate) — to be evaluated by authorities for its suitability to host large-scale solar farms to support Oman's transition to renewables resources for electricity. While Ibri already hosts Oman's first grid-connected solar PV scheme — a 500 MW project that came into operation in Q4 2021, Manah will shortly welcome developers who recently won mandates to build a pair of solar power schemes of a total capacity of 1,000 MW.

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the state-run single buyer of electricity and water output, is overseeing the procurement of new solar and wind farms in line with a national commitment to secure at least 39 per cent of domestic electricity needs from renewable sources by 2040.

The next solar scheme — a 500 MW capacity scheme — is planned to come up at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate. It will be connected to the grid by Q1 2026, according to national grid operator Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), member of Nama Group.

Wind farms are also planned for implementation over the next several years in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Ras Madrakah, Duqm and Harweel.

5 ways to perform a property valuation



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association.

If you're looking to buy or sell a property, it's important to have a clear understanding of its value. Property valuation is the process of determining the current market value of a property. The valuation is based on various factors, including the property's location, size, condition, and recent sales in the area.

In this article, we'll explore the key elements of property valuation and how to determine the value of your property. For the sake of the illustration, let's assume that the size of the unit is comparable, so that size is taken out of the equation.

Market analysis

One of the key elements of property valuation is conducting a market analysis. A market analysis

helps you understand the current state of the real estate market in your area. You can start by researching recent sales of similar properties in your area. This can give you an idea of what similar properties are selling for and help you determine the market value of your property.

Location

Location is a critical factor in property valuation. A property's value can vary widely depending on its location. For example, a property in a desirable neighbourhood with good schools and easy access to amenities will likely be worth more than a similar property in a less desirable area. When assessing the value of your property, consider factors such as proximity to public transportation, shopping centres,

restaurants, and other amenities.

Condition

The condition of a property is another critical factor in property valuation.

A property in good condition with modern amenities will likely be worth more than a similar property in poor condition. When assessing the condition of your property, consider factors such as the age of the property, the quality of the construction, and the state of the appliances and fixtures.

Comparable sales

Comparable sales are an essential element of property valuation. Comparable sales refer to recent sales of similar properties in your area. By comparing your property to similar properties that have sold

recently, you can get an idea of what your property is worth. Look for properties that are similar in size, condition, and location to get the most accurate estimate of your property's value.

Ask your bank

Banks use their own internal valuation methods to determine the value of a property when considering a mortgage or loan. Banks use the loan-to-value (LTV) ratio to determine how much they are willing to lend against a property.

The LTV ratio is calculated by dividing the loan amount by the appraised value of the property. For example, if a bank is willing to lend up to 80% of the appraised value of a property, and the appraised value

is \$500,000, the maximum loan amount would be \$400,000.

Banks also use automated valuation models (AVMs) to estimate the value of a property. AVMs use algorithms to analyse data from various sources such as property records, recent sales data, and market trends to estimate a property's value.

While AVMs are quick and cost-effective, they may not take into account unique features or conditions of a property that could affect its value.

The bank's valuation may differ from the appraised value of the property, which is conducted by an independent appraiser. The bank's valuation is based on its own risk assessment and lending policies.

The road back to growth in China

YU YONGDING

According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the economy grew by 4.5 per cent year on year in the first quarter of 2023. While that hardly matches the robust growth of the pre-pandemic period, it did exceed market expectations. And with the right policies, China can do even better.

There is plenty of pessimism about China's economic prospects nowadays, with many warning, not without reason, that China has entered a deflationary period. In the first quarter of 2023, China's consumer price index (CPI) rose by only 1.3 per cent year on year, down from 1.8 per cent in the previous quarter.

More striking, China's producer price index (PPI) fell by 2.5 per cent year on year in March, its sixth consecutive month of decline.

This is not a new trend. In fact, China's PPI has been negative for the better part of the last decade. Beginning in March 2012, China's PPI was in negative territory for 54 consecutive months.

In January 2019, it turned negative again, and remained so for 17 months. While CPI has remained positive, it has grown by less than 2 per cent annually, on average, for a decade.

While claims that China has entered a deflationary period are excessive, the data indicate that China's economy continues to be hamstrung by low effective demand.

Official figures also support the claim that China's GDP growth has been below potential for some time.

This may not have been surprising when the zero-Covid policy was triggering regular lockdowns, including in economic hubs like Shanghai.

But the abandonment of strict pandemic-containment policies in December was widely expected to unleash pent-up demand, leading to a robust recovery. Some even warned that inflation could spike, as supply struggled to keep up.

None of this came to pass. Non-economic factors — linked, for example, to global geopolitical tensions — bear some of the blame.

But, in my view, one of the most important reasons for China's weaker-than-expected economic

performance since December is the government's overly cautious approach to macroeconomic policy, particularly fiscal policy.

China's government has set a growth target of "around 5 per cent" for 2023. For an economy that grew by 6.7 per cent, 6 per cent, 2.2 per cent, and 8.1 per cent in 2018-21, that is simply too low.

A better approach would aim for 6 per cent growth, an entirely feasible target, given China's recent performance. While the government's reluctance to aim for a higher growth rate is understandable, a conservative target can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, by weakening confidence and failing to exploit growth potential fully.

Some policy interventions, such as cash transfers, would provide a direct and immediate boost to consumption, which accounted for 54.3 per cent of GDP in 2021 and had been the main contributor to GDP growth for years before 2022.

But, as China's government well knows, consumption is a function of income; a sustained, broad-based increase in incomes depends on economic growth; and infrastructure investment is traditionally the state's most effective instrument for boosting growth when effective demand is weak. Despite past investments, China still has a large infrastructure gap that urgently needs to be closed.

There are risks to this approach. As China learned when it implemented a CN¥4 trillion (\$578 billion) stimulus package during the 2008 global economic crisis, large-scale public investment in infrastructure can lead to an increase in local-government debts, ultimately undermining financial stability.

But rather than discourage state-led infrastructure investment, this experience should motivate policymakers to engage in more careful planning that avoids creating additional "white elephants".

It should also spur changes to how the government finances its investments. China's authorities have historically been very reluctant to run budget deficits.

As a result, the vast majority of funding for past infrastructure investments has been raised by local governments on capital markets at high interest rates.

© Project Syndicate, 2023

Geopolitics is shrinking India's risk premium



UNA GALANI

The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist.

Indian tycoons and financiers are sitting back as global business comes to them for a change. Apple CEO Tim Cook, Microsoft boss Satya Nadella and Blackstone President Jon Gray have all visited India this year. They are lured by a country whose potential as an alternative investment destination to China increasingly outweighs the local challenges of doing business.

Visitors see many attractions. India's \$3 trillion economy is forecast to grow by 6.5% this fiscal year, continuing to outpace the rest of the world. Plentiful imports of cheap Russian oil are keeping inflation in check.

Meanwhile, the workforce of the world's most populous country offers low costs, high numbers of technology engineers, and hundreds of millions of people who speak English.

Executives and investors also see a business-friendly government that is likely to remain in power for the next half-decade. Opinion polls suggest Prime Minister Narendra Modi will win a third term next year: the biannual Mood of the Nation survey, published in January, found 72% of respondents rated Modi's performance as good, up from 66% in August.

If he wins re-election with an outright majority, businesses would not have to worry about unpredictable coalition politics.

Yet India is also benefiting from worsening relations between Washington and Beijing. Companies are looking to shift supply chains out of the People's Republic, while money managers need a place to deploy long-term funds with fewer risks of financial sanctions.

In some cases, the pivot is stark: Apple suppliers Foxconn and Pegatron, for example, are building factories in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. JPMorgan



People take pictures outside a soon-to-be launched Apple retail store at a mall, in New Delhi. — Reuters

analysts reckon India will make one in four iPhones within two years, even though manufacturing costs are higher than in China.

Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, Canada's third-largest retirement fund, closed part of its China equity investment team based in Hong Kong in April, seven months after opening an office in Mumbai.

India appeals as more than a manufacturing base, though. Its economy also dangles the promise of Chinese-style growth. GDP per capita was \$2,379 in 2022, less than one fifth of its eastern neighbour. Over 1.2 billion people have mobile phone connections; half of which are smartphones. Morgan Stanley analysts and strategists expect India to become the world's third-largest economy and stock market before the end of the decade.

India remains a tricky destination for international companies and investors. New Delhi has a long-standing fondness for import tariffs and is infamous for wrangling over tax with multinationals including Vodafone and energy group Cairn.

This has not prevented others from enjoying success, though. Blackstone has assets worth \$50 billion in the country. The US firm led by Stephen Schwarzman is the country's top owner of office and retail real estate, while India represents half its Asian private equity investments. The

\$3.8 billion of total capital in its Blackstone Capital Partners Asia I fund has earned a net internal rate of return of 29%.

India has traditionally wanted for overseas funds: it attracted 1% of the world's foreign direct investment in 2021, compared with 9% for China and Hong Kong combined, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Yet in a twist of fortunes, executives now worry about overheating.

Heightened interest from investors will further push up prices in a country where stock valuations are already at a premium: the MSCI India Index trades at nearly 20 times one-year forward earnings, against 12 times for MSCI's broader Emerging Markets benchmark.

The arrival of large pools of capital ready to snap up real estate, hospitals and other assets will force existing investors to take on more complicated projects to maintain returns.

India is an easy place to miscalculate, too. Despite the prevalence of English and a powerful diaspora which includes the bosses of Alphabet and Microsoft — two of the world's four biggest companies by market capitalisation — the South Asian nation's business environment remains poorly understood by many outsiders.

That was demonstrated earlier this year by the precipitous crash in stock prices of companies controlled by Gautam Adani following an attack by a short

seller. While a good number of clients of top Indian and Wall Street institutions had largely steered clear of the tycoon's listed vehicles, index compiler MSCI had given the conglomerate a 5% weighting in its India benchmark.

And while homegrown conglomerates like Adani and Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries highlight the business potential of meeting India's need for infrastructure and consumer goods, they also promise cutthroat competition. That's one reason multinationals eager to plant a flag in the country — including TotalEnergies, Meta Platforms and Foxconn — are teaming up with domestic players.

Growing concerns about China may be prompting investors to discount Indian risks.

Finally, investors and executives calculate that inequality between India's rich and poor, a jobs market where less than half of the urban workforce has regular employment, and supply-chain inefficiencies resulting from poor infrastructure will either be resolved by market forces, or simply won't impinge on their investments.

Ultimately, India's increasing importance as an alternative to China gives investors a growing incentive to focus on what the South Asian country can offer, while paying less attention to past barriers. The India risk premium is rapidly disappearing.

— Reuters

Classifieds

OMAN **عُضمان** DAILY
Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakht Al Shihri
92998577
bakht.omandaily@gmail.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429194
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



SQU students invent innovative airport baggage transfer device



By Buthaina al Riyamiyah

Today, educational institutions aspire not only to produce students who can keep up with and respond to technological advances but students who can drive technological progress and innovations.

Every year, many students from different educational institutions honour their university with their academic and scientific achievements and innovations. Sultan Qaboos University has always enjoyed this honour. A team at Sultan Qaboos University has developed an innovative technology for airport baggage transfers.

The team comprised five Mechatronics engineering students, namely Ahmed al Jabri, Ammar al Shidi, Asasd al Abri, and Ola al Mousawi under the supervision of Prof Said al Abri, Assistant Professor at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, develops a Baggage

Transfer Autonomous Tractor for Airport.

Baggage Transfer Autonomous Tractor is a vision system that is capable to perform sign detection, path detection, object detection, and recognition. These functions are critical to autonomous vehicle systems as they enable the vehicle to recognise and track key features of its surroundings.

The self-driving vehicle system is fortified with a C program utilising an Arduino as a microcontroller to control the vehicle's motors, which is essential since it allows the car to

move and navigate around its environment.

The team looks forward to developing their project by integrating additional components such as a decision-making algorithm and sensor fusion. Also, they are designing an environment that simulates the actual environment at Muscat

International Airport. Thus, they can test their systems in real life.

Team members look forward to transforming this project of their graduation project into an emerging

company that design self-driving systems. They are planning to provide services to Oman's airports, especially to transport cargo from and to aircraft, which is of great benefit to the company operating the airport and all logistics operations.

Working as a team redouble the gain that team members gain during their work. As well as gaining technical and scientific knowledge through research and collaboration, they also acquire teamwork skills and apply the knowledge gained in the bachelor's degree programme.

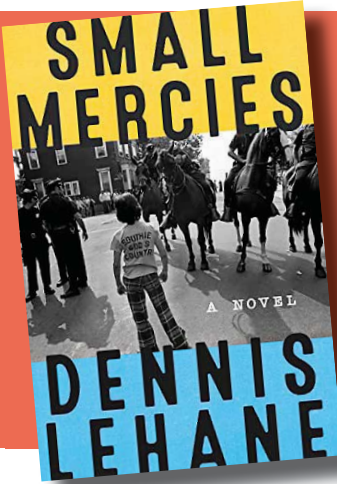
"One of the most important takeaways I gained while working on the project was teamwork and how to organise and plan a team to work towards a goal. We faced many challenges, and thank God, thanks to the efforts made by all team members, in addition to the support of the team's supervisor, Prof Al Abri, we were able to deliver good results," Al Shidi expressed.

BAGGAGE TRANSFER
AUTONOMOUS TRACTOR IS A
VISION SYSTEM THAT IS CAPABLE
TO PERFORM SIGN DETECTION,
PATH DETECTION, OBJECT
DETECTION, AND RECOGNITION.

READ

SMALL MERCIES BY DENNIS LEHANE

As desegregation comes to Boston's public schools, a young Black man is found dead and a woman searches for her missing daughter.



FASHION

Models present creations by Colombian designer Laura Aparicio during Bogota Fashion Week, in Bogota. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

The last part of the Seven Sisters book series by Lucinda Riley, called Atlas. The book has a starting circulation of 350,000 copies in the Netherlands. Never before has a book in the series been printed in this enormous number in its first edition. — AFP





find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

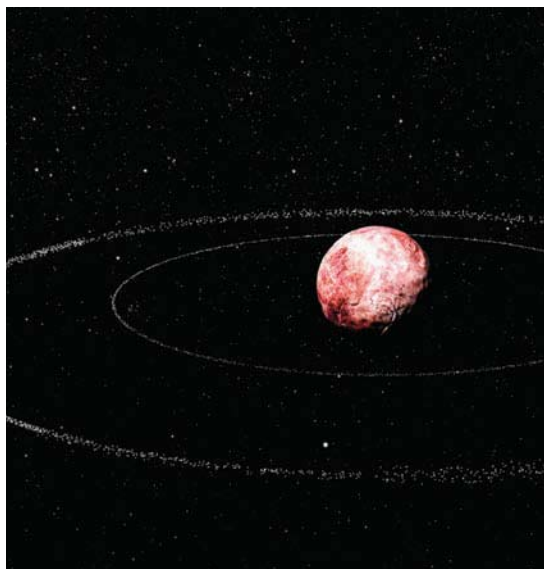


We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

AROUND THE WORLD

SCIENCE

Dwarf Planet Had One 'Impossible' Ring. Then Astronomers Found Another.



EARLIER THIS YEAR, astronomers announced that a tiny world beyond Neptune with a diameter about one-third that of Earth's moon possessed a Saturn-like ring that should not be there. It now turns out that there are two such "impossible" rings.

"It was a big surprise," said Chrystian Luciano Pereira, a doctoral student at the National Observatory in Brazil who led the observations of the world, known as Quaoar. "This implies that Quaoar is a more complex system than we initially thought."

The new ring, about 6 miles wide, encircles Quaoar at a distance of about 1,500 miles. The discovery was published recently in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics Letters*.

Scientists still do not fully understand how dust and gas in the early solar system coalesced into moons and planets.

Like the first ring around Quaoar, announced by a team of astronomers in February, the second ring lies beyond what is known as the Roche limit. Material orbiting closer than this distance tends to be pulled apart by tidal forces. Thus, a ring within the Roche limit would tend to remain a ring, while a ring of debris outside the Roche limit would usually coalesce into a moon.

For Quaoar, the Roche limit is calculated to be 1,100 miles. The second ring, at a distance of 1,500 miles from the centre of Quaoar, is closer than the ring announced in February, which has a radius of about 2,500 miles.

Quaoar (pronounced KWA-wahr) orbits the sun in the Kuiper belt, a region of frozen debris beyond Neptune that includes Pluto.

The ring is not visible in telescope images. Rather, astronomers found it indirectly, when distant stars happened to pass behind Quaoar, blocking the starlight. From 2018 to 2021, Quaoar passed in front of four stars, and astronomers were able to observe the shadow of the eclipses, also known as stellar occultations.

They also observed some dimming of the starlight before and after the star blinked out, which pointed to the first ring's existence. Another occultation occurred on Aug. 9 last year, and astronomers again pointed telescopes at Quaoar in hopes of learning more about the ring. The new observations revealed a dense, narrow core in the ring just a few miles wide, surrounded by an envelope of material that is more dispersed. — **KENNETH CHANG / NYT**

ENTERTAINMENT

Designing for This Month's Other Coronation: Queen Charlotte's



IN THE OPENING monologue of "Queen Charlotte," Netflix's new "Bridgerton" prequel, the title character imagines being impaled by her whalebone corset. "If I move too much, I might be sliced and stabbed to death by my undergarments," Charlotte, played by India Amarteifio, tells her brother with a scowl.

The series's characters are constricted by their circumstances and their costuming alike, said Lyn Elizabeth Paolo, who designed costumes for "Queen Charlotte." Minutes into the first episode, for instance, Charlotte is cinched into a gown encrusted with sapphires and squeezed into a marriage to King George III of Britain. The show, created by Shonda Rhimes, weaves the pair's eventual love story together with threads on race and mental health.

The six episodes of "Queen Charlotte" required more than 1,000 costumes inspired by the Georgian and Regency periods, Paolo said, including an estimated 500 crowns. Paolo and her fellow costume designer, Laura Frecon, combined "gobs of research" with more modern inspiration from Dior and Alexander McQueen.

"We're having a little fun with history," she said.

In an interview days after the coronation of King Charles III, Paolo discussed the process of creating costumes for fictionalised versions of a coronation and a royal wedding. She also weighed in on her favourite looks from the real-life coronation. Her remarks have been lightly edited and condensed.

Q: How did you tell the story of Queen Charlotte's character development through her costumes?

A: I wanted to see why Gilda Rosheuvel's character on

"Bridgerton" dresses the way she does. There was a Met Ball about 10 years ago based on the work of the designer Charles James, who I'm obsessed with. I said to Shonda, "I'd like this to feel as if young Charlotte is going to that Met Ball." Charlotte's costumes become more ornate as time goes on because she is embodying the whole of the royal family. Hence,



her wigs keep getting taller, and her costumes get wider and more ornate.

Q: Queen Charlotte's elaborate wigs, and the depiction of her hair as a Black monarch, have been praised since the first season of "Bridgerton." Tell me about the decision for young Charlotte to wear her natural hair.

A: The original sketches that we did for Queen Charlotte, before any of the casting process was done, had her with big, natural, curly hair. I had shown those images to Nic Collins, the hair and makeup designer, when we first started. She's so talented, and she's such a purist about period. She had said, "Do you think we can do this?" So she and Shonda spoke and decided to do it. As the disclaimer at the front of the show says, it's based on history,

but we're not going to stick to the aesthetic 100 per cent.

Q: Which costumes were inspired by real-life royals?

A: Charlotte's British wedding gown evoked Queen Elizabeth II's original coronation dress, which I saw at Kensington Palace. There was a lot of iconography on that particular gown that related to

the Commonwealth: thistle, a leek for Wales, Tudor roses. That same iconography is on George's jacket and waistcoat for the wedding.

Q: Which details of the coronation scene were the most important to get right?

A: The crowns are exact copies, except they obviously do not have real jewels. But not unlike the real coronation, it wasn't all about the monarch. If you look to the side, you see all of the barons and baronets in their robes of state, which we created even though they're just lining the stage. It was a massive amount of work for the costume team, but I think it pays off because you get the sense that it's a bigger image than just George and Charlotte. It's the whole country watching this. — **NYT**

DISCOVERY

Living Near the Ocean Floor, but Now Popping Up on the West Coast



FOR HUNDREDS OF years, a strange species of fish with long fanglike teeth that eats its own kind and spends most of its time at the bottom of the ocean has somehow found its way to the shores of the West Coast. Scientists aren't sure why. The latest appearance by a lancetfish, as the species is known, was on a beach in Oregon, state officials said recently, prompting more speculation about why the deep-sea creature occasionally surfaces on land.

Lancetfish are obscure in part because they have no commercial appeal — meaning that they don't taste good. The silvery and gelatinous fish have a scientific name that "translates to something like scaleless lizard or scaleless dragon," and they look the part, said Elan Portner, a scientist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, one place where lancetfish have been found washed ashore. Lancetfish also "migrate as far north as subarctic areas like Alaska's Bering Sea to feed," according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Portner, who has been studying lancetfish for a decade, said the fish had been washing ashore "for at least 300 years and likely longer," and like the Oregon officials, he said that "no one knows why." One Twitter user said she had spotted a curious fish in Lincoln City, Oregon, at the end of last month, asking for help from "#FishTwitter" and "#DeepSeaTwitter" to identify it. Several users replied to suggest that it was a lancetfish.

Growing to more than 6 feet long, the species is one of the biggest to roam near the ocean floor, a habitat that is difficult and costly to study.

Benjamin Frable, a museum scientist and ichthyologist, or fish expert, at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, offered some ideas for why lancetfish may wash ashore. They could have been chasing prey in shallower waters and gotten too close to shore. The fish are not very strong, he said, making it difficult for them to move away from the beach.

Oregon State Parks posted photos on social media of a lancetfish that the agency said had been found alive and which was "helped back into the ocean" and "swam off." While noting that "no one is sure why they are washing ashore," the park agency asked residents who find the fish to post photos and tag its account and that of NOAA Fisheries West Coast. — **LAUREN MCCARTHY/NYT**

Rome, Sacred Ground for Nearly 3,000 Years, and Counting

ACCORDING TO LEGEND, ROME was born April 21, 753 BC, when Romulus, the survivor of its feuding twin founders, hitched his plow and furrowed a circular perimeter in the hills above the Tiber River. Everything inside was urbs, city space consecrated by priests who interpreted the will of the gods; everything outside was ager — unhallowed open territory. “We have a city founded by the auspices and augury,” Roman historian Livy wrote. “There is not a corner of it that is not full of our cults and our gods.”

Rome, in a sense, has been sacred ground right from the start.

To many, Rome is the epicentre of Catholicism, the seat of the Vatican and home to a seemingly infinite number of churches. But in the nearly three millennia of the city’s recorded past, Christianity is but a chapter. Rome has sheltered polytheistic pagans and monotheistic Jews, adherents of Middle Eastern cults, and, in more recent times, a sizable multinational Muslim community. All have left traces — altars, temples, shrines, mosques, inscriptions — some hauntingly beautiful, others erased to stubs.

Rome being Rome, these holy places are often jumbled together or layered — a church dedicated to the Virgin on top of pagan temples; a medieval church built over an ancient home that had a shrine to the Persian sun god Mithras in its basement.

If you know where to look or what you’re looking at, you’ll find many of these shrines in the historic centre, though a few require short treks by train or car. Most pilgrims to the Eternal City declare victory when they reach St Peter’s Square. But Rome and its environs conceal many holy places beyond the ken of the Bible.

ANCIENT ROME: A DIVINE WELTER OF BELIEFS

If you think that Roman religion was essentially Greek mythology with Latinised names, think again. Pagan polytheism in ancient Rome was dizzyingly complicated, the gods seen as constant companions who hovered over the city’s mortal residents from birth to death, communicating with them incessantly but obliquely from their temples and shrines.

The best way to get a handle on this divine welter is to take a walking tour. Begin at the summit of the Capitoline, the most sacred of Rome’s seven hills and the centre of the ancient city. Duck through an arch on the south side of Michelangelo’s Piazza del Campidoglio and ascend the winding cobblestone alley until it meets Via del Tempio di Giove. You are now standing on the site of ancient Rome’s most important religious monument, the Temple of the Capitoline Triad: Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Juno Regina and Minerva.

Of the immense temple, nothing remains but a single painted roof tile and some tufa foundation blocks dating to the sixth century BC (a large chunk is preserved in the Capitoline Museums). But if you turn your back on the tangle of government buildings and tiny parking lots that now cram the summit and gaze through the flickering gray-green olive trees at the Forum below, you may feel the wing of a god brush by.

“There was a definite hierarchy among the Roman gods,” says Licia Ferro, a classical anthropologist and co-author of “Miti Romani” (Roman Myths). “The major gods lived on high and had their temples in the Roman Forum. But there were also lesser terrestrial dei-

ties.”

You get a sense of this hierarchy as you make your way south past the Area Sacra di Sant’Omobono (an archaeological site with the foundations of two ancient temples) to the Forum Boarium, the classical city’s port and cattle market. Here, across from the delicate eighth-century Basilica of Santa Maria in

this vibrant polyglot community, no trace remains. The site in Trastevere identified as the oldest synagogue in Rome — a humble brick house with a small arched loggia at narrow, cobbled Vicolo dell’Atleta, 14 — is not classical but medieval. The Tempio Maggiore (Great Synagogue) across the Tiber looks old, but in fact it is a circa 1904 Greco-

the Via Appia Antica (a 10-minute cab ride from the Baths of Caracalla) is one of five Jewish catacombs that have been excavated near Rome, and the only one open to the public (contact pa-appia@cultura.gov.it). Elsa Laurenzi, who has written about Rome’s Jewish catacombs, notes that Jews did not come to catacombs to pray, considering burial grounds impure. But today, just to stand beside the small tufa niche where a Jewish child was laid to rest 2,000 years ago feels like a kind of prayer. “She sleeps here in peace — she was deeply loved,” reads the Greek inscription on a marble plaque etched with Jewish symbols — a

Pantheon, near the site of the Iseum Campense, Rome’s largest temple to Isis. Though the temple has been lost beneath subsequent urban layers, the pink and red granite obelisks and statues plundered from the complex (many of them erected in piazzas around the city and displayed at the Capitoline and Vatican museums) give a sense of its scale and opulence. Recently, a section of the temple’s massive travertine wall and entrance arch was discovered beneath a building owned by Ducrot. It changed his life. Late next year, he hopes to inaugurate the Iseum, a museum dedicated to the history of the cult.

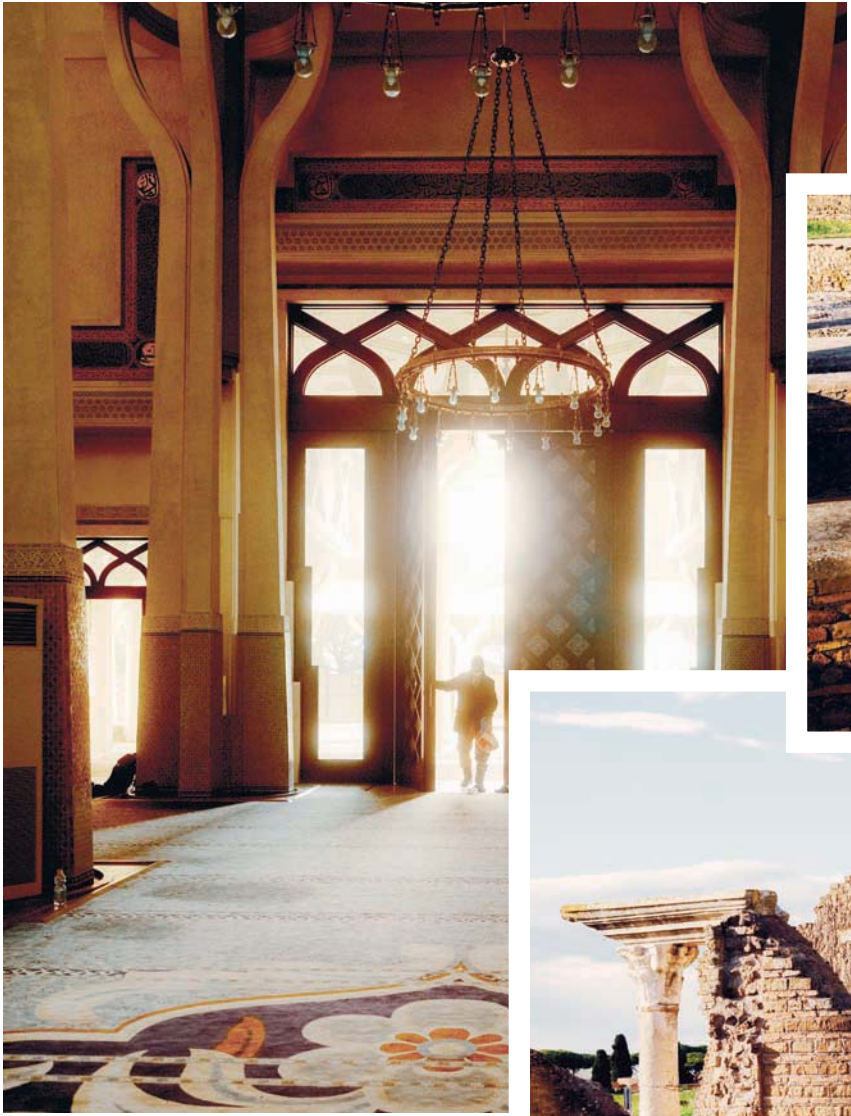
Isis, apparently, appealed to Rome’s elite, but Mithras was the god of choice for working stiffs and battle-hardened legionnaires (the cult excluded women). Traditional Roman temples were set on high, like the Temple of the Capitoline Triad, and open to the sky through colonnaded porticos or an oculus, but mithraeums were the opposite: underground, cramped, hidden beneath houses, lit only by flickering torches. The idea that the rituals enacted in these holy man caves culminated in the slaughter of a bull is probably a misconception, according to the cultural anthropologist Roberto Libera, director of the Museo Diocesano di Albano. More likely, the iconic image of Mithras kneeling on a bull and plunging a dagger into its neck was intended to inspire awe and fervour.

ISLAMIC SHOWPIECE ROME: AND GRAND QUIET STRUGGLES

The Islamic presence in Italy dates to the eighth century, but it wasn’t until 1995 that the officially recognised Great Mosque of Rome opened in Parioli, a neighbourhood that’s a short hop by taxi from the Borghese Gallery. The mosque, the largest in Europe, is a gleaming, low-slung modern structure that artfully bridges East and West. A fountain near the entrance refreshes a plaza whose pavement echoes the dazzling geometry of Michelangelo’s Campidoglio, and the rows of twinned pillars leading to the travertine-clad sanctuary recall Bernini’s monumental colonnade at St Peter’s Square.

The interior is a study in curving lines, with low-hanging circular chandeliers ringing the central dome, intricately tiled walls and a rich Persian carpet swirling across the floor. You enter to the sound of bird song, you pray in a luminous rotunda, and you emerge from the compound into a pine and cypress grove at the edge of upscale Parioli. Except when a train rumbles by, it is a lush, hushed precinct. Maybe too hushed. Rome’s fast-growing Islamic community, many of them immigrants from Morocco, Bangladesh, Albania or Senegal, resides on the other side of town in gritty, bustling piazzas near the Termini rail station. For most Roman Muslims, attending Friday services in the Great Mosque would require taking a day off from work.

“The Great Mosque is a showpiece, a symbol, a place of pride,” notes Imam Yahya Pallavicini, president of COREIS (the Italian Islamic Religious Community). “But the city’s Muslim residents are more likely to pray at smaller unofficial neighbourhood mosques, often located in private homes or garages.” On a typical Friday at the Great Mosque, hundreds gather in a space built for thousands. — NYT



Cosmedin stand two perfectly intact Roman temples dedicated to lesser gods — the toylike, circular Temple of Hercules Victor and the adjoining Temple of Portunus, sacred to the god of keys, doors and livestock. Roman merchants, fervent Hercules worshippers, swore by the divine hero when they consummated business deals by laying a hand on his Ara Maxima — an immense altar whose podium has been preserved in the crypt of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. The surrounding quarter, anchored by the shaggy marble facades of the Arch of Janus, is ideal for contemplative strolling. With a good guidebook, you can time-travel through the years.

JEWISH ROME: EXPLORING CATACOMBS AND CELLARS

Rome’s Jewish community, the oldest in Europe, dates to the second century BC, and by the imperial period the capital was home to tens of thousands of Jews, most of them packed into brick apartment blocks in the Middle Eastern quarter of Trastevere. “There were no ghettos in ancient Rome,” says Elsa Laurenzi, a researcher in classical archaeology.

Of the 11 or 12 synagogues that served

Babylonian pastiche. (Tours are available through the adjoining Jewish Museum of Rome, to attend Shabbat services, register in advance.)

Ostia Antica, the old port of Rome (an hour by train from the Ostiense station) and now one of the largest and best-preserved archaeological parks in Italy, is the site of an ancient synagogue. The majestic ruin stands alone in a grassy expanse etched with cypress and umbrella pine. Enter the sanctuary between intact columns look for a relief of a menorah jutting off one of the capitals, walk on the black-and-white mosaic floors, and peer down a marble wellhead that may once have been part of the mikvah. It’s likely you will have the place to yourself.

The catacombs of Vigna Randanini off

palm branch, a menorah, a shofar.

ISIS AND MITHRAS: GODS FROM DISTANT LANDS

The Romans, tolerant of foreign faiths, imported two gods that became wildly popular during the imperial period: the Egyptian deity Isis (a divine mother who ushered her dead husband, the fertility god Osiris, into the afterlife) and Mithras, the god of light in Indo-Iranian mythology.

“Isis was a sexy pagan version of the Madonna,” says Enrico Ducrot, an archaeologist who now runs his family’s travel business, Viaggi dell’Elefante. “Her allure is still so fundamental that it hits you at once.” It has certainly hit him.

Ducrot grew up not far from the