

Belgian minister thanks Oman for securing release of detained citizens

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, received a phone call from Hadja Lahbib, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Foreign Trade and Federal Cultural Institutions of the Kingdom of Belgium, in which she expressed her deep thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for the role it has played for the release of the Belgian citizen and the citizens of Austria and Denmark, within the framework of the settlement previously concluded between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Belgium for the mutual release of the nationals detained in the two countries. — ONA



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SWIATEK SHINES IN 51-MINUTE BLITZ



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RAMPED UP EFFORTS TO PROMOTE DHOFAR FOR UPCOMING KHAREEF



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DESERT WELLS HELP IRAQI HARVEST BUMPER WHEAT CROP AS RIVERS DRY



**MUSCAT**

**INITIAL CANDIDATE LISTS FOR SHURA ELECTIONS TODAY**

The Ministry of Interior will announce today the initial lists of candidates who will be standing for elections of the tenth term of Majlis Ash-Shura on the website elections.om and Intikhab application. The ministry said that any stakeholders may reject any of the names included in the initial candidate lists by presenting an application on the election's website within five days from the date of publishing of the candidate lists stating the reasons for the rejection and attaching the required documents. The application will be processed within ten days.

— ONA

**OMAN FUTURE FUND TO BOOST TOURISM**

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has praised the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the launch of the Oman Future Fund with a capital of RO 2 billion. The new fund will enhance economic activity and encourage the private sector to enter into partnerships or finance viable investment projects in the sectors of economic diversification targeted by Oman Vision 2040, including the tourism sector. **SEE P15**

**DUTCH COACH LIKELY TO JOIN HOCKEY TEAM**

Dutch hockey coach Siegfried Aikman is likely to join Oman national hockey team as head coach soon after talks with Oman Hockey Association, according to some sources. Aikman, who recently parted ways with the Pakistan team over a payment issue, is currently without any team. The Oman Hockey Association didn't renew the contract of current head coach Malaysia's Lim Chiow Chuan, which expired after the Junior Asia Cup. The former Japan coach reportedly met with Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma during the Men's Junior Asia Cup Championship in Salalah. **SEE P11**

INDIA'S TRAIN CRASH IN DECADES KILLS 288

**His Majesty sends condolences**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India on the victims of trains' collision in the eastern Indian state of Odisha. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the president, the victims' families and the friendly Indian people wishing a speedy recovery for the injured. — ONA

**BAHANAGA, INDIA:** At least 288 people have died in India's worst rail crash in over two decades, officials said on Saturday, after a passenger train went off the tracks and hit another one in an accident, a preliminary report blamed on signal failure.

One train in Friday's accident also hit a freight train parked nearby in the district of Balasore in Odisha state in the east of the country, leaving a tangled mess of smashed rail cars and injuring 803. The death toll has reached 288, said K S Anand, chief public relations officer of the South Eastern Railway.

Dead bodies are still trapped in the mangled coaches and the rescue operation is continuing, a witness said, while the death toll is expected to rise. A preliminary report indicates that the accident was the result of signal failure, Anand said.



“The Coromandel Express was supposed to travel on the main line, but a signal was given for the loop line instead, and the train rammed into a goods train already parked over there. Its coaches then fell onto the tracks on either side, also derailling the Howrah Superfast Express,” he said.

Surviving passenger Anubha Das said he would never forget the scene. “Families crushed away, limbless bodies and a bloodbath on the tracks,” he said. Video footage showed derailed train coaches and damaged tracks, with rescue teams searching the mangled carriages to pull the survivors out and rush them to hospital. — Reuters

HONOUR FOR MASIRAH AS FIRST HEALTHY ISLAND



The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared Masirah Island as the inaugural healthy island in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This prestigious recognition highlights the island's exceptional efforts in promoting health and well-being among its residents. The WHO will formally present the international recognition certificate to the Ministry of Health at a ceremony today on Masirah Island. The event will be graced by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

PICTURE BY TURKI IBRAHIM AL JUNAIBI

OMAN STRESSES MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

**SINGAPORE:** The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) which debates security and geopolitical issues in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, is heading the Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the summit.

The minister on Saturday attended the First Plenary Session of the 20th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue taking place in Singapore from June 2-4.

He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman attaches a great importance to international law and is committed to collective cooperation being the keys to sustainable maritime security.

Al Busaidy explained that cooperation, information exchange and confidence-building between maritime nations and the relevant authorities could ensure security of navigation and international movement of goods.

He noted that the common challenges facing the Indian Ocean states require a strong cooperation and effective coordination to overcome these threats and ensure maritime security.

**COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP**

The foreign minister stressed that the Sultanate of Oman is open to cooperation and partnership with all countries, organisations, companies and investors.

He noted that the Sultanate of Oman continues to develop special economic zones at its ports overlooking the Indian Ocean namely the Port of Duqm, the Port of Sohar and the Port of Salalah.

The Shangri-La Dialogue is an annual forum, held in Singapore, where security and political issues are discussed, with the participation of senior leaders, officials, decision-makers, defence and foreign ministers, national security advisers, military leaders, intelligence specialists and researchers, from countries around the world. — ONA

# Restructuring creates two separate entities

**MUSCAT:** The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the completion of a project to restructure the distribution and supply companies in the electricity sector, which resulted in the merger of the electricity distribution and supply companies of the Nama Group into two companies: Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply.

The restructuring is in line with government directives to enhance the overall efficiency of the sector, reduce operational costs and optimize performance. While the new Nama Electricity Distribution entity will focus on advanced metering, low-voltage networks, transformers and building connections,



Nama Supply will oversee billing and collection operations.

The restructuring is expected to improve the overall performance of electricity companies and provide timely services to customers through the Unified Services Center for Nama Group, which is an integrated service window for electricity and water under one umbrella for all subscribers.

It is hoped that the merger

**Restructuring expected to improve overall performance, provide timely services to customers, and streamline operations**

project will contribute to improving the performance of electricity companies, improving their services, reducing their operational costs, facilitating subscribers and saving time and effort through the 'Unified Services Centre for Nama Group', which is an integrated service window for electricity and water under one umbrella for all subscribers. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



SHOWCASING THE ARTISTIC TALENTS OF TOMORROW

P4



# SULTAN HAITHAM CITY TO OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

KABEER YOUSUF & VINOD NAIR  
@kabeeryousef, @vinot\_nair

“Investing in such cities is an investment in the quality of life in itself, so the ratio and proportionality between the spaces occupied by construction and green spaces should be taken into consideration to create a healthy environment for the residents in the city with the presence of gardens for children to interact with and with the outside environment, and for young people and the elderly to exercise,” she added.

“Sultan Haitham City is one of the integrated cities and will contain various services in various sectors, and the largest sector in it will be the real estate, health, education, sports and youth sectors, and all these sectors constitute promising investment opportunities and will be transformed into projects to serve more than 100 thousand people,” Siham al Harthy said.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a senior official from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said that the project would be a geographically inclusive development that follows a decentralised approach and develops a limited number of major urban centres and sustainable land use whose pillars are based on a competitive economy, creative human society, a responsible state apparatus and a sustainable environment.

“We make a real difference in urban planning in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the general framework for controlling and directing urban development in the various governorates to achieve a balance between the requirements of economic and social growth and the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage for future generations,” he said.

**SULTAN HAITHAM CITY** will meet the aspirations of youth in the Sultanate of Oman and open up many opportunities for them at various stages of its implementation, according to experts. Younis al Harrasi, Deputy Chairman of Oman Real Estate Association (ORA), said that the proposed Sultan Haitham City is expected to create a significant economic impact upon completion. It is going to open up opportunities for different businesses in the economic supply chain like contractors, developers, suppliers of building materials, consultants, brokerage companies, marketing agencies, and many more,” Younis al Harrasi said. Al Harrasi, also the CEO of Tibiaan Properties, further said that the project would be delivered through partnerships between public and private sectors, accelerating the implementation and enhancing its competitiveness and creativity. Also, due to the size of the project, there is an opportunity for forming consortiums between the different developers here in Oman which will send positive messages about the Omani economy and is expected to generate interest from various international investors as well.

Siham al Harthy, Founder of Siham Development and Investment, opined that Sultan Haitham City was designed in accordance with strategic objectives related to the themes and priorities of Oman Vision 2040, such as creating smart, sustainable, vibrant cities and balanced and fair development.

**Muscat will be a regional powerhouse for knowledge and innovation**

**THE SULTAN HAITHAM CITY** will undoubtedly be the country’s largest integrated urban development project, in line with Oman Vision 2040. The project is in line with the Oman National Spatial Strategy, ONSS, approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in 2021, which offers a broad framework to direct urban growth over the next 20 years.

ONSS is expected to ensure cities’ competitiveness and ability to withstand many variables, as well as its alignment with the United Nations’ goals for Sustainable Development 2030. Oman Investment Company will attract investments to the city and provide sustainable service through its companies.

**JOB OPPORTUNITIES**  
Through its Urban Strategy, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning aims to achieve more balanced development, which shall lead to job opportunities in various urban centres based on their developmental capabilities, thus reducing internal migration. The strategy seeks to develop Muscat as a major regional capital city, supported by the growth of the knowledge and innovation economy, logistics, finance, tourism, and the service sector.

The policies of spatial development will focus on sustainability and response to climate change, livable, resilient cities and the use of all soil and groundwater/surface water resources in the Sultanate to preserve groundwater resources.

On Tuesday, the cabinet also approved the establishment of a national centre for women’s and children’s health in SHC to provide healthcare as per the highest international standards, which will also be a scientific, research and treatment reference.

The Ministry of Health will go ahead with the implementation of this project. Spread over 14.8 million sqm, SHC will be home to 100,000 people in 20,000 residential units over 19 integrated neighbourhoods.

The projects will include 25 mosques, 39 schools, 11 health facilities (including a referral hospital), a university, a central park, and a boulevard, among others. SHC master plan has been meticulously designed to provide a wide range of housing options for Omani citizens, welcome everyone, and celebrate all cultures.

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Sultan Haitham City is one of the integrated cities and will contain various services in various sectors, and the largest sector in it will be the real estate, health, education, sports and youth sectors, and all these sectors constitute promising investment opportunities and will be transformed into projects to serve more than 100 thousand people

**SIHAM AL HARTHY**  
Founder of Siham Development and Investment



# State Council chairman attends inauguration of Erdogan

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, took part in the inauguration ceremony of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who has been elected to a new presidential term, at the presidential palace in the Turkish capital Ankara, on Saturday.

During the inauguration ceremony, the chairman of the State Council conveyed His Majesty's greetings and wishes to the Turkish leadership wishing the friendly Turkish people more progress and prosperity. — ONA



# Call for lighting solutions on Al Batinah Expressway

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Al Batinah Expressway, a crucial transportation artery connecting the largest governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, is experiencing a pressing issue with its lighting infrastructure. Despite installing approximately 11,400 lighting poles along the expressway, as highlighted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology during the project's official opening, certain areas still suffer from non-functional lighting.

Highways play a pivotal role in showcasing a country's infrastructural advancements and facilitating commercial, economic, and social activities. Despite facing challenges posed by the rugged geography of the region, Oman has made significant progress in this domain. However, the absence of operational lighting on these highways poses an additional danger to its users, especially considering the abundance of stray animals, which significantly impairs visibility.

A citizen of the wilayat of Shinas, Mohammed al Raisi, says: "I frequently travel from Al Batinah highway to Muscat for work, but the lack of lighting makes it extremely challenging



for me." He further emphasised that the highway serves as a vital link between Oman and neighbouring countries. Visitors from neighbouring countries often question the absence of lighting on the highway. With the recent addition of petrol filling stations, the importance of lighting is no less significant than the availability of petrol stations.

According to Amjad al Balushi, "The Al Batinah Expressway, especially in sections distant from residential areas, becomes exceptionally dark during evenings, necessitating the use of full vehicle lights. This has negative repercussions for drivers in the opposite direction, as it hampers their focus and impairs lane

identification, ultimately making it difficult to navigate safely." Al Balushi highlighted that the limited visibility of vehicle lights adversely affects drivers' vision, posing significant dangers to road users, particularly those who commute daily or weekly. Al Balushi urged the concerned authorities to expedite the installation of lighting infrastructure to mitigate risks and enhance road safety.

Youssef al Abri stated, "With the increasing traffic on Al Batinah Expressway, renowned for its safety features and meticulous design, the road has become a vital lifeline and a reflection of improved services in Oman. However, ensuring proper lighting across the majority

of the highway is essential to enhance its functionality." Abdullah al Zaabi, who uses the road frequently, acknowledged the efforts of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and emphasised the importance of finding alternative options in the road infrastructure.. Al Zaabi stressed the urgent need to activate road lighting, especially considering the prevalence of stray animals, which pose various risks if drivers fail to notice them.

To address this pressing issue, it is essential for the authorities concerned to explore innovative alternatives, such as the utilisation of solar energy or low-energy consumption lamps, thereby promoting sustainable solutions. By doing so, the highway will enhance road safety and contribute to the country's commitment to environmental conservation.

The voices of citizens like Mohammed al Raisi and Amjad al Balushi highlight the daily challenges commuters face and the crucial need for improved lighting infrastructure. As Youssef al Abri rightly points out, the Al Batinah Expressway serves as a lifeline for countless individuals and communities, and its functionality must be optimised through proper illumination.

# OJA to organise Omani-Egyptian Forum in Cairo

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Omani-Egyptian Forum, will take place at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) in Cairo, Egypt, on June 5-7.

The forum will be organised by the Omani Journalists Association (OJA) and the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Egypt in collaboration with Egypt's Journalists Syndicate (EJS) and with the participation of Omani Society for Writers and Literati, Oman Film Society and the National Records and Archives Authority.

Dr Nevine Youssef el Kilani, Egyptian Minister of Culture, will preside over the opening of the forum. The three-day forum will be attended by top media, cultural and political personalities as well as academics and researchers from the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt. A number of Omani and Egyptian journalists, academics, literati and researchers will take part in a dialogue session that will deal with press, history, culture and the future of the Omani-Egyptian friendship relations.

The first day of the forum will see the opening of a photo exhibition which will showcase nearly 200 photos featuring several historical, tourist and economic events. The photos are provided by members of the OJA photography committee. The exhibition will display manuscripts and documents chronicling the march of the Omani media over the past 100 years in addition to some manuscripts that indicate the depth of historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt. The Omani Film Society will stage a number of films about Oman and the Omani Society for



ABDULLAH BIN NASSIR AL RAHBI



DR NEVINE YOUSSEF EL KILANI

Writers and Literati will present a wide range of varied publications.

By organising this forum, the Omani Journalists Association aims to establish an open and broad-minded press and media dialogue that serves as an incubator for all journalists and media professionals in the Sultanate of Oman. The forum also aims to promote the Sultanate of Oman in terms of civilisation, economy and tourism and highlight the level of development the country has achieved under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The idea of the forum stems from OJA's keenness to provide its members with local and international expertise.

Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, will deliver a speech at the opening of the forum. Other speeches will also be delivered by Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araimi, OJA Chairman, Khaled El-Balshy, EJS Chairman and Amre Moussa, former Egyptian Foreign Minister and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

# Oman geared up for Special Olympics in Germany

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

The Oman Special Olympics team will leave for Germany on June 12 to participate in the games on June 17.

As per the plans, the participants will first attend the events at the host cities and then proceed to Berlin for the games on June 17.

According to Special Olympics sources, Berlin will welcome 7,000 Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners from approximately 170 countries from June 17 – 25 to compete in 24 sports. The athletes will be supported by more than 3,000 coaches and 20,000 volunteers.

At the press conference held at the Ministry of Social Development, the Chairman of Oman Special Olympics said the Oman team will participate in 13 sports.

The Chairman of Oman Special Olympics, Salem bin Ahmed al Rashdi, said, "We have participants from the various governorates of Oman. There are 19 athletes who will be participating in the Special Olympics, but we also have partner athletes who can be with them as per the norm, and they are nine." They started preparations in November 2022, and since June 2023, they have been trying in various regions of Oman.

Four players have been training in Nizwa for Athletics, two in Badminton in Salalah, two from Saham are participating in Bocce Ball, two in Bowling from Muscat, two from Muscat in Equestrian events, and ten from Ibri will be partaking in Futsal (football in the artificial grass). One Golf player from Muscat and two in powerlifting have been practising in Sur. Rollerskating will see two



participants from Muscat, two members from Muscat will be taking part in Sailing, while two members from Suhar and one from Muscat are competing in Swimming, Table Tennis has two participants from Ibri, and two players from Muscat will be taking up the challenge in Tennis.

There are more elements to the Special Olympics. Dalia al Bassami,

in charge of Public Relations, said, "Beside the games, during the Youth Leadership Conference, our youth leader, Athlete Abdurrehman al Raqadi, will present his project - his experience with Special Olympics and his journey from being an athlete to a Coach Assistant." "In addition, this time, some of the parents are also going to be there to watch them participate," she added.

Abdurrehman, at the press conference, said, "Sports is more than playing games." He is encouraging community members to take up Special Olympics "Because what you achieve in sports cannot be achieved outside of it." He won in the 2015 winter games in Austria and in 2017 third place in ice skating and first place in the relay. His ambition is to be a coach in Tennis and have his own Tennis Academy.

Special Olympics is an opportunity to contribute to the betterment of life, proved two other athletes who also were present at the press conference - Zaid Ahmed al Abry, who will be competing in Golf and Ameera bint Abdulaziz al Raisiyah who will be competing in Bowling.

Specific programmes for families aimed at 'Healthy Athletes' give parents a chance to support their

children.

Zaid's father, Ahmed al Abry, who is also the Chairman of the Oman Down Syndrome Association, said, "Some of our children from the Down Syndrome Association are participating in the games and will be leaving for Germany. Zaid is the first Omani youth Golf player with Down Syndrome." The parents, family members, along with volunteers also have the opportunity to attend the opening and closing ceremonies. In addition to sports, there are health programmes such as health checkups where the athletes will be supported if they need special devices such as vision or hearing.

Two of the doctors from Oman Special Olympics will be attending to observe the procedures and implement them if the need be later in the future programmes.



# UNIQUENESS EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS AT ART GALLERY

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

Fine art is one of the main pillars for showcasing students' talents, motivating creative individuals and shedding light on the remarkable role of teachers in producing artwork, not just in teaching them as units and lessons.

Teachers' roles have surpassed expectations in supporting students' talents and skills in the arts. There is a constant need to motivate and showcase these efforts. It is necessary to showcase students' talents in pencil drawing, graphic design, 3D formation, oil and watercolour painting, sculpture, and photography skills and display their work throughout the academic year.

What is truly interesting and fascinating is how to add value to the subject of plastic art in schools and reflect it on students' bright futures and interests. The aim of student art galleries is usually to highlight the role of plastic arts in refining student talents and expressing the outcomes of the subject's units and lessons. Thus, motivating and encouraging students to participate in outdoor art exhibitions and facilitating the exchange of artistic experiences among students and visitors have become essential goals for many teachers in the country.

Nowadays, unique participation in the activities and events of plastic arts has become one of the teachers' main priorities to conclude the academic year in a distinctive way. Art is a lofty bridge that illuminates the way for students to appreciate beauty, acquire new skills and embrace new values. Students have the chance to meet famous artists, specialists and those interested in such art galleries, allowing them to learn from them. They also receive guidance from experts that helps develop their technical skills and expertise.

We have observed excellent and brilliant ideas emerging from the surrounding community, where teachers are competing to present unique ideas to emphasise new concepts and values in the art subject. They consider the value the gallery would add to participants and society, its impact on society, and how to touch hearts and minds while achieving sustainability through such works.

One of the latest examples of such an effort is an outdoor art gallery titled "Messages of the Sea." It is not just a title of an outdoor art gallery conducted by a group of artists; it is an innovative idea considered to be out of the ordinary. Students have succeeded in transforming their artistic drawings from paper into real modern works in innovative ways that carry meanings, ideas, concepts and a set of human values! What distinguishes this exhibition is



its location between the arms of the seas, the principles reinforced by the participants, and the idea itself. It embodies the values of community support, with a group of companies and individuals contributing to support this gallery in a sophisticated manner for the public. This art gallery also represents the principle of sustainability, as artistic ideas and sensations materialise from paper into great works that become self-marketing products, attracting competition among visitors who are willing to acquire them.

Supporting talented

participants and transforming these products, made from environmentally friendly raw materials, into sustainable products for office and home decoration, the messages carried across the seas are represented on kites, skateboards, carpets, and other tools that have turned into distinctive handicrafts, sought after by everyone.

Such efforts by teachers are increasing day by day, showing that our students are ready for a new era of arts with more optimistic and sustainable ideas and purposes, with the support of our remarkable and enthusiastic art teachers.



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# Over 55,000 students to start GED exams in 361 centres today

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The final exams of the second semester for students of the General Education Diploma and their equivalents for the academic year 2022-2023 will begin today (Sunday). The total number of students taking the exams is 57,034 students in the various governorates.

The number of examination centres is 361 distributed in the governorates according to the student density of each governorate. Correction work will be held in four centres in two shifts (morning and evening) with 6,400 personnel and about 6,500 observers, according to a press statement from the Ministry of Education (MoE).

MoE stated that it has formed committees to follow up on all examination work. The committee is formed at



the level of the governorates represented by the departments of educational measurement and evaluation, and at the level of the ministry, represented by the Centre for Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and its main task is to prepare for educational evaluation work for the academic year.

The Examination Management Committee in the governorates is another committee tasked to carry out management of general education diploma exams and their equivalents in the

governorates and supervising students' performance during the exams.

Other committees are the Correction Committee at the level of the ministry and correction centres in the governorates and their tasks are to manage the work of correcting examination booklets for general education diploma materials and its equivalents. The correction process, according to the initial approved time plan for correction, will begin tomorrow, Monday, June 5, and will end on Sunday, July 2.

MoE confirmed that the mechanisms used to prepare general education diploma students and their exams were represented in the educational directorates in the governorates providing the examination centres with an atmosphere that contributes to helping the examinee to submit the exam in comfort and calmness.

Regarding the punishment on any violations while doing the exams, MoE affirmed that the ministerial decisions regulating the work of the exams will be implemented which include all the controls, instructions and procedures that must be followed in the management and implementation of the exams, as well as the types of violations and their penalties, whether for the examinees or those in charge of the exams in case of non-compliance with the controls.



## Oman Perfume Show brings the best of fragrances

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

Oman Perfume Show 2023 has perfumes from the Arab world, Asia and the GCC, with a large number of participants from the Sultanate of Oman. The show, which opened at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on May 31, will conclude today (Sunday).

Among the varieties, 'oud' dominates the scene of scent, while frankincense is making its presence felt with its use in incense as well as in perfumes.

According to the organiser, Oman Events, the third edition of Oman Perfume Show has brought in up to 70 local, regional and international representatives from the finest

perfume houses, fragrance brands and frankincense suppliers.

The event also features new product launches and opportunities for attendees to win gifts.

A fascinating exhibit is the underwater 'oud'. It looks like a piece of ordinary wood but can cost about RO 45 for one tola (14 grammes). "So one kg of it will cost about RO 2,500," said an exhibitor. The 'underwater oud' is used for special occasions like Eid, weddings and other celebrations. There is normal oud, and the price of this oud is five rials for one tola, said Ahmed from Oud Al Anoud. About its use, he said, "We can have this for daily use." Some best qualities of 'oud' are available the exhibition from Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India.



## Korean boy-band B.I.G to perform in Muscat on Friday

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

B.I.G (Boys in Groove), a Korean boy band, will hold a concert on Friday, June 9, 2023 at Madinat Al Irfan Theatre, OCEC (Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre).

The group was also invited to perform at the Korean Presidential House in 2019

on the occasion of the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince to Korea. The group will continue their regional tour after its forthcoming performance in Muscat by performing in Kuwait on June 12.

The upcoming concert is a joint effort organised and co-sponsored by the Korean Embassy to the Sultanate, the OCEC and the Korea-Arab



Society. Tickets for the concert are available for reservation at ocec.om and muscat.platinumlist.net.

The concert will showcase the beauty of contemporary music

exchanges between Korea and Arab countries by incorporating a blend of Korean and Arabic titles including popular songs such as 'La Bezzaf' and 'LM3ALLEM'.

The concert will also serve as a rich platform for talented musicians from Arab countries, featuring performances by Mustafa Waad from Iraq and Anas Marzi from Morocco.



## RE-TENDER

Nama Shared Service LLC invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

| Tender Number  | Tender Name                                  | Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents | Last Date for Proposal Submission | Tender Fee (OMR)                        |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| RE-NSS/2023/01 | Nama Holding Data Centre Network Enhancement | 8 June 2023                                  | 25 June 2023                      | 50/- Plus VAT<br>Total amount: 52.5 OMR |

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website ([www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders](http://www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders)). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available in website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 01.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday 25 June 2023.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NH 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.



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## Citizen dies after drowning in Qurayat

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

A 24-year-old citizen has died after drowning in Wadi Al Arbeieen in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Muscat Governorate. In a statement, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said, "The rescue team of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in the Governorate of Muscat responded to a report of the drowning of a 24-year-old citizen in the stream of Wadi Al Arbeieen in the Wilayat of Qurayat." It added that his body was recovered.

**Sultanate of Oman**  
**Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources**

**TENDERS NOTICE**

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender:-

| Tender No.           | Description                                                                                                                                   | Tender Documents Price (R.O) | Class     | Last Date for Collection of Documents | Last Date for Submission of Documents |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 367/2023/MAFWR/HQ-26 | Design and build services for manage / alleviate sedimentation problem and addition of marine and allied facilities to Raysut Fishery Harbour | 300                          | Excellent | Sunday 11/6/2023                      | Thursday 29/6/2023                    |
| 369/2023/MAFWR/HQ-27 | Construction of an administrative building and an accommodation building in the fishing harbour of the Hallaniyat Islands                     | 250                          | Excellent | Monday 12/6/2023                      | Monday 3/7/2023                       |

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources. And the bidders can contact the Esnad technical support team at the number listed below.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or [etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om)

**TENDERS COMMITTEE**  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

**SULTANATE OF OMAN**  
**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

| Tender Ref.           | Description                                                                     | Last Date for Collection of Tenders Document | Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday | Eligibility                                                                                          | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| MOH/DGKH-12/2057/2023 | Refurbishment Work for Main Corridors (Ground & First Floor) at Khoula Hospital | 18/June/2023                                 | 12/July/2023                                              | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade | R.O 25.000                  |

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)



ANTONY BLINKEN  
US SECRETARY OF STATE

## US top diplomat Blinken to visit Saudi Arabia

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Saudi Arabia next week at a time of touchy relations between Washington and its long-time Middle East ally, the State Department announced.

The Sudan and Yemen wars and building relationship are on the menu for Blinken's June 6-8 trip.

It comes as both the United States and Saudi Arabia are seeking to broker a durable cease fire between Sudan's warring generals in talks in the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

"There is just a tremendous amount of work that we're trying to do" with the visit, said Daniel Benaim, a senior State Department official dealing with Arabian Peninsula affairs.

"We're focused on an affirmative agenda here and the great deal of work our countries can do together."

Blinken will participate in a ministerial meeting on Wednesday with the Gulf Cooperation Council, and on Thursday he will join a meeting in Riyadh of the 80-strong coalition of countries fighting the IS group. — AFP

# 3 soldiers, security force member killed in shooting

JERUSALEM: Three Israeli soldiers and a member of Egypt's security forces were killed on Saturday in a rare exchange of fire near the border between the two countries, official sources from both sides said.

The Israeli army said an Egyptian assailant shot dead two soldiers "in the early morning... while they secured a military post at the Egyptian border" on Mount Harif, near the town of Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev desert.

The discovery of their bodies triggered a manhunt during which the third soldier was killed.

An army statement identified the assailant as an Egyptian policeman, saying he was killed by Israeli troops after being found "in Israeli territory".

The statement said an investigation was being carried out "in full cooperation with the Egyptian army".

A fourth Israeli soldier, a non-commissioned officer, was lightly wounded and evacuated to hospital, the military added.

An Egyptian army spokesman said "a member of the security forces... chased drug smugglers. During the chase, the security agent crossed the security fence (border)" and an exchange of fire took place.

Israel's army had initially declined to confirm media reports of the first two deaths, while the families were being notified.

The two soldiers, a man and a woman, were "killed by live fire adjacent to the border", it said in a statement.

A barrier runs along the Israel-Egypt border, and an army spokesman said Israel was looking into how it had been breached.



An Israeli soldier stands guard outside the Mount Harif military base in Israel's southern Negev desert, adjacent to the border with Egypt. — AFP

Hours before the deadly shooting, Israeli soldiers had foiled an attempted drug smuggling operation at the border, seizing contraband goods estimated to be worth 1.5 million shekels (\$400,000), a spokesman said.

The spokesman added that no link had been established between the drugs seizure and the attack on the border post.

Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said he conducted a situational assessment with the chief of staff and that the military "will investigate the event as required". — Agencies

The Israeli military spokesperson said that while drug smuggling attempts in the area were frequent, the last known infiltration into Israel happened some 10 years ago.

There have been several previous incidents along Israel's border with Egypt.

In August 2012, 16 Egyptian soldiers were killed in a major attack on a military checkpoint on the Sinai Peninsula. The attackers then tried to break through the border with Israel in two captured military vehicles. — Agencies



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan takes oath after his election win at the parliament in Ankara, Türkiye. — Reuters

## Erdogan sworn in for third term as president

ANKARA: Türkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdogan was on Saturday sworn in for a third term as president, promising to serve "impartially" after winning a historic runoff election to extend his two-decade rule.

The inauguration in parliament will be followed by a lavish ceremony at his palace in the capital Ankara attended by dozens of world leaders.

Türkiye's transformative leader won the May 28 runoff against a powerful opposition coalition. Erdogan won 52.18 per cent of the vote while his secular rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu scored 47.82 per cent, official results show.

"As president, I swear upon my honour and integrity, before the great Turkish nation ... to work with all my power to protect the existence and independence of the state ... and to fulfil my duty impartially," Erdogan said in parliament after a ceremony outside the building where he saluted soldiers under pouring rain.

Supporters in parliament gave Erdogan a minute-long standing ovation after his swearing in, while some opposition lawmakers refused to stand up.

In his oath, Erdogan also promised not to deviate from

the rule of law and the secular principles of the republic.

Türkiye's longest-serving leader now faces significant immediate challenges in his third term, including the slowing economy and tensions with the West.

"From a geopolitical point of view, the election will reinforce Türkiye's recent pursuit of an independent foreign policy," said Matt Gertken, chief geopolitical strategist at BCA Research.

"This policy aims to extract maximum economic and strategic benefits from eastern and autocratic states while still preventing a permanent rupture in relations with western democracies," he said.

Addressing the country's economic troubles will be Erdogan's first priority partly due to his unorthodox policy of cutting interest rates to stimulate growth.

The president is due to unveil his new cabinet soon, with media speculating that former finance minister Mehmet Simsek, a reassuring figure with international stature, could return.

Nato allies are anxiously waiting for Ankara to green-light Sweden's drive to join the US-led defence alliance, before a summit in July. — AFP

# Sudanese forces clash in Khartoum after talks break down

KHARTOUM: Sudan's warring parties fought in the capital on Friday after the collapse of talks to maintain a ceasefire and ease a humanitarian crisis.

Residents of Khartoum and Omdurman across the Nile said the army had resumed air strikes and was using more artillery. But said there was no sign the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was retreating from streets and homes it had occupied, they said.

"We are suffering so much from this war. Since this morning there have been sounds of violence. We're living in terror. It is a real nightmare," said Shehab al-Din

Abdalrahman, 31, in a southern district of Khartoum.

Seven weeks of warfare between the army and RSF have smashed up parts of central Khartoum, threatened to destabilise the wider region, displaced 1.2 million people inside Sudan and sent 400,000 others into neighbouring states.

The United Nations Security Council on Friday condemned attacks on civilians and called on the factions to cease hostilities and ensure humanitarian access throughout the country, according to a statement.

Washington imposed sanctions on businesses belonging to the



A man stands with a bicycle by a medical centre building riddled with bullet holes at the Souk Sitta (Market Six) in the south of Khartoum. — AFP

army and RSF and threatened more action "if the parties continue to destroy their country", a senior US official said.

Sudan's ambassador to Washington, Mohamed Abdallah Idris, said the government and army remained committed to the truce and any penalties should be "imposed on the party that did not abide by what it signed" - a reference to the RSF.

Outside Khartoum, the worst fighting has been in the Darfur region, where a civil war in which about 300,000 people have been killed has simmered since 2003.

More than 100,000 people have

fled militia attacks in Darfur in the west to neighbouring Chad since the latest fighting began, and the numbers could double in the next three months, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said on Thursday.

A truce was aimed at enabling aid to be delivered to civilians caught in the war that has disabled power and water networks, ruined hospitals and hampered food distribution.

Aid workers in Sudan say fierce fighting, rampant looting and reams of red tape are hampering aid. The United Nations called on all parties to respect humanitarian work. — Reuters

### ATHENS

#### Police find 3.2 mn euros of cocaine in containers

Police in northern Greece have seized dozens of packages of cocaine stashed in containers laden with bananas that had been shipped from Latin America, they said on Saturday.

Police seized two suspect containers at the port of Piraeus and, after taking them to the port of Thessaloniki, found 100 "bricks" of concealed cocaine, weighing 161 kilos. The drugs, which would have been distributed across Greece and other European countries, are estimated to be worth about 3.2



million euros, police said.

The consignment was found as part of an investigation Greece launched last month. Some 14 people have been arrested in that case. — Reuters

### POTSDAM

#### Large fire spreads in forest full of ammunition

A forest fire that broke out on a former military training ground in the German state of Brandenburg on Wednesday was on Saturday still defying efforts of firefighters to contain it.

"The fire is just increasing in size," the fire brigade's head of operations Rico Walentin said. Local authorities reported earlier that a total area of about 35 hectares was burning.

The operation to extinguish the blaze was also complicated by the munitions-infested terrain.



Fire crews could not reach the location because of the danger of old ammunition exploding.

Two fire-fighting planes were no longer in action as the effect was insufficient. — dpa

### DAKAR

#### Death toll climbs in violent protests

The death toll from anti-government protests in Senegal has risen to 15, police said on Saturday, as authorities in the capital Dakar began to clear up debris and secure looted shops after two days of unrest.

Sonko's sentencing on Thursday, which could prevent him from running in the February presidential election, sparked the latest turmoil as protesters heeded his call to stand up to the authorities.

Mobs smashed windows and



looted at least two gas station shops overnight in Dakar's Ouakam and Ngor districts, while a supermarket in densely populated Grand Yoff was torched and ransacked. — Reuters

# The debt-limit deal suggests debt will keep growing, fast



Jim Tankersley

The writer is a White House correspondent for The New York Times, with a focus on economic policy

Republicans cited that mounting debt burden as a reason to refuse to raise the limit, risking default and financial crisis, unless Biden agreed to measures to reduce future deficits

The bipartisan deal to avert a government default featured modest cuts to a relatively small corner of the federal budget. As a curb on the growth of the nation’s \$31.4 trillion debt load, it was a minor breakthrough, at best.

It also showed how difficult it could be for lawmakers to agree anytime soon on a major breakthrough to demonstrably reduce the nation’s debt load.

There is no clear economic evidence that current debt levels are dragging on economic growth. Some economists contend that rising debt levels will hurt growth by making it harder for businesses to borrow money; others say spiralling future costs of government borrowing could unleash rapid inflation.

But Washington is back to pretending to care about debt, which is poised to top \$50 trillion by the end of the decade even after accounting for newly passed spending cuts.

With that pretence comes the reality that the fundamental drivers of American politics all point toward the United States borrowing more, not less.

The bipartisan agreement to suspend the debt ceiling for two years, which passed the Senate on Thursday, effectively sets overall discretionary spending levels over that period. The agreement cuts federal spending by \$1.5 trillion over a decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office, by essentially freezing some funding that had been projected to increase next year and then limiting spending to 1 per cent growth in 2025.

But even with those savings, the agreement provides clear evidence that the nation’s overall debt load will not be shrinking anytime soon.

Republicans cited that mounting debt burden as a reason to refuse to raise the limit, risking default and financial crisis, unless Biden agreed to measures to reduce future deficits. But negotiators from the White House and House Republican leadership could only agree to find major savings from non-defense discretionary spending.

That’s the part of the budget that funds Pell grants, federal law enforcement and a wide range of domestic programmes. As a share of the economy, it is well within historical levels, and it is projected to fall in the coming years. Currently, base discretionary spending accounts for less than one-eighth of the \$6.3 trillion the



House Speaker Kevin McCarthy ( R-Calif.) speaks to reporters after the House on May 31, overwhelmingly passed a bill to defer the debt ceiling and curtail spending.

government spends annually.

The deal included no major cuts to military spending, which is larger than base non-Defence discretionary spending. Early in the talks, both parties ruled out changes to the two largest drivers of federal spending growth over the next decade: Social Security and Medicare. The cost of those programmes is expected to soar within 10 years as retiring baby boomers qualify for benefits.

While Republicans at first balked when Biden accused them of wanting to cut those politically popular programmes, they quickly switched to blaming the president for taking them off the table.

Asked on Fox News on Wednesday why Republicans had not targeted the entire budget for cuts, Speaker Kevin McCarthy replied, “Because the president walled off all the others.”

“The majority driver of the budget is mandatory spending,” he said. “It’s Medicare, Social Security, interest on the debt.”

Negotiators for McCarthy effectively walled off the other half of the debt equation: revenue. They rebuffed Biden’s

pitch to raise trillions of dollars from new taxes on corporations and high earners, and both sides wound up agreeing to cut funding for the IRS that was expected to bring in more money by cracking down on tax cheats. Instead, Republicans attempted to frame mounting national debt as solely a spending problem, not a tax-revenue problem, even though tax cuts by both parties have added trillions to the debt since the turn of the century.

Republican leaders now appear poised to introduce a new round of tax-cut proposals, which would likely be financed with borrowed money, a move Democrats decried during the floor debate over the debt-ceiling deal.

“Before the ink is dry on this bill, you will be pushing for \$3.5 trillion in business tax cuts,” Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Wis., said shortly before the final vote on the Fiscal Responsibility Act, as it is called, on Wednesday. Those comments reflected a lesson Democrats took from 2011, when Washington leaders last made a big show of pretending to care about debt in a bipartisan deal to raise the borrowing limit. That agreement, between President

Barack Obama and Speaker John Boehner, limited discretionary spending growth for a decade, helping to drive down budget deficits for years.

Many Democrats now believe those lower deficits gave Republicans the fiscal and political space they needed to pass a tax-cut package in 2017 under President Donald Trump that the Congressional Budget Office estimated would add nearly \$2 trillion to the national debt. They have come to believe that Republicans would happily do the same again with any future budget deals — putting aside deficit concerns and effectively turning budget savings into new tax breaks.

At the same time, both parties have grown more wary of cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Obama was willing to reduce future growth of retirement benefits by changing how they were tied to inflation; Biden is not. Trump won the White House after promising to protect both programmes, in a break from past Republicans, and is currently slamming his rivals over possible cuts to the programmes as he seeks the presidency again.

# Russia denounces west over drone strike on Moscow



Anatoly Kurmanaev

The author is a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, covering Russia’s transformation after its invasion of Ukraine

Britain’s foreign secretary said that Ukraine had “the right to project force beyond its borders.”

The U.S. response was more circumspect, but it stopped short of criticizing the first military strike to hit

A day after a drone strike on Moscow, Kremlin officials jumped on the refusal of Ukrainian allies to denounce the attack as proof that Russia’s real war was with the West.

The Kremlin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said Russia “would have preferred to hear at least some words of condemnation” from Western capitals.

“We will calmly and deliberately think how to deal with this,” he said.

While none of Ukraine’s allies went so far as to endorse the drone attack, Britain’s foreign secretary said that Ukraine had “the right to project force beyond its borders.”

civilian areas in the Russian capital since the start of the war. Ukraine officials have said they were not “directly involved” in the drone strike.

From the outset of the conflict, Russia has portrayed the invasion of Ukraine as a defensive war provoked by the West, and Wednesday it seized on the attack.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia’s national security council and a former president, said Britain “de facto is leading an undeclared war against Russia” by providing Ukraine with military aid and called it “our eternal enemy.”

Known since the war began for staking out extreme positions, Medvedev argued that now any British official “can be considered as a legitimate military target.”

The Russian ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Antonov, called the U.S. refusal to condemn the attack “an encouragement for Ukrainian terrorists,” his embassy said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia has repeatedly hit civilian areas of Ukraine over the course of the war, though it has denied targeting nonmilitary sites. And in recent weeks it has turned up the barrage of missiles and attack drones aimed at Kyiv, the capital. Thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children, have been killed in Russian airstrikes and artillery bombardments, U.N. officials say.

Although the drone strike Tuesday was unusual, it was not the first one on Russian soil since the war began.



A makeshift memorial outside a clinic that also served as a shelter where people died outside during a missile strike, in Kyiv.

Drones have hit military air bases deep inside Russia, as well as an oil facility near an airfield in the province of Kursk. And this month, drones exploded over the Kremlin. The incursions continued Wednesday, when, Russian authorities said, Ukrainian drones attacked two oil refineries in the region of Krasnodar. They also said that four people had been injured by shelling in the border region of Belgorod.

Russia has long accused the West of waging a proxy war against it. Those claims grew louder this month when a group of Ukraine-based Russian paramilitary members staged a multiday raid in Russia’s Belgorod border region — apparently with U.S. armored vehicles.

A New York Times analysis found that at least three of what appeared to be U.S.-made MRAPs had been part of the attack. A leader of one of the groups claimed the weapons had not been provided by the Ukrainian military.

Russian officials have said that NATO’s decision to send weapons, which have become increasingly advanced as the war has worn on, raises the risk of a direct confrontation and a potential nuclear war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also made an oblique reference to this threat, calling the drone strike on Moscow an attempt “to create a response reaction from Russia.” He accused unspecified forces of trying to sabotage a Ukrainian nuclear plant occupied by Russia or to use “a type of a dirty bomb related to the nuclear industry.”

# What is your mindset?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi  
@alsinawi

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

PROFESSOR Carol Dweck is an American psychologist who introduced the concept of Mindset, how it affects us, and how we can improve it.

According to her, there are two types, fixed and growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset believe that we are born with certain abilities, skills, and intelligence that cannot be changed.

Such people tend to think in terms of black or white. They either like a subject or dislike it. They are either talented or not and a certain field of life is suitable for them or not.

Such people tend to document their achievements, avoid challenges and feel bored when they try learning new skills. A person with a fixed mindset hates criticism and takes it personally. He does not like to change his ways of doing things and believes failure is a measure of his abilities.

So if he fails say in learning computer programming he would believe that he will never be able to learn it again. On the other hand, a person

with a growth mindset thinks in a different way. He believes skills and intelligence can be acquired and there is always room for improvement. He sees success as continuous work and tells himself that he can learn new skills if he is not perfect at them.

Such people like challenges and self-development, view criticism as a way of becoming a better person.

Reading about successful people inspire them to improve their own skills. They view failure as a way of developing or succession in another aspect.

According to psychologists most people have fixed mindsets and the media may have a role in influencing this. If you are watching a movie about superheroes you notice they are more powerful than the average person which enables them to do what others can't do.

So from the superhero's point of view, average people have no power and would not be able to achieve much. If you are unable to pass exams or get a promotion this will mean you are a failure. A person with a flexible mindset is driven by his values not what other people think of him or her.

YOUR MINDSET CAN INFLUENCE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM AND HOW YOU PROGRESS IN LIFE. PEOPLE WITH A FIXED MINDSET BELIEVE THAT WE ARE BORN WITH CERTAIN ABILITIES, SKILLS, AND INTELLIGENCE THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED

Psychology tells us that our mindset develops around the age of three and that children tend to copy mindsets from their parents so a child with a fixed mindset finds it hard to accept challenges because he fears failure, whereas those with a growth mindset keep learning and challenging themselves.

Praise and bullying are two main tools to influence how mindsets develop. For example, if you tell a child he is smart he would avoid making more effort to reach a higher level so instead of praising the person, psychologists suggest it is best to praise efforts as this encourages the child to grow and develop.

The same can be applied at the workplace when efforts are praised, a worker learns that he can do better and progress well in his job.

On the other hand, bullying makes the victim feel weak and want to seek revenge from the bully.

People can have a different mindsets in different aspects and change them as they grow older. So whatever is your mindset, remember it's not written in stone.

## Nigeria grapples with end of fuel subsidy

ALEXANDRE MARTINS LOPES

NIGERIANS are struggling with surging fuel prices after newly elected President Bola Tinubu declared an end to popular subsidies, a move analysts and experts said was long overdue. On his first day in office, Tinubu kept to his campaign promise and announced an end to the long-running arrangement, which has given Nigerians access to cheap petrol.

The continent's biggest economy is oil-rich but has meagre refining capacity. For years, it has swapped crude for gasoline that it then subsidises for its domestic market, causing a huge drain on revenue, foreign exchange and contributing to ballooning debt. None of Tinubu's predecessors had managed to scrap the hugely popular system, which has been a burden on public coffers for decades. Last year, the country spent more than 96 per cent of its revenue on servicing its debt.

After his inauguration on Monday, Tinubu announced the "fuel subsidy is gone".

The price of petrol tripled to around 540 naira (\$1.20) at government-run filling stations on Wednesday, effectively putting an end to subsidised fuel for Nigerians already battling inflation of over 20 per cent.

But analysts believe Tinubu made a necessary political calculation to follow the lead of the previous administration and phase out the subsidy.

Tunde Ajileye of the Nigerian consultancy SBM said it was "only a matter of time before they stopped the subsidies".

"Economically, it was a sound and logical decision. Politically, it is a touchy decision," Ajileye said. "But it was the best timing to do it. By the end of the administration, people are going to forget."

The president now has the chance to introduce reforms over the next four years to mitigate the effects, Ajileye added.

A key problem with the scheme was that it left ample room for embezzlement, with people falsifying documents to get hold of subsidies for products they never imported.

Others would buy cheap fuel in Nigeria and sell it at higher prices in neighbouring countries.

Ajileye said this "explains why daily consumption is so high in Nigeria."

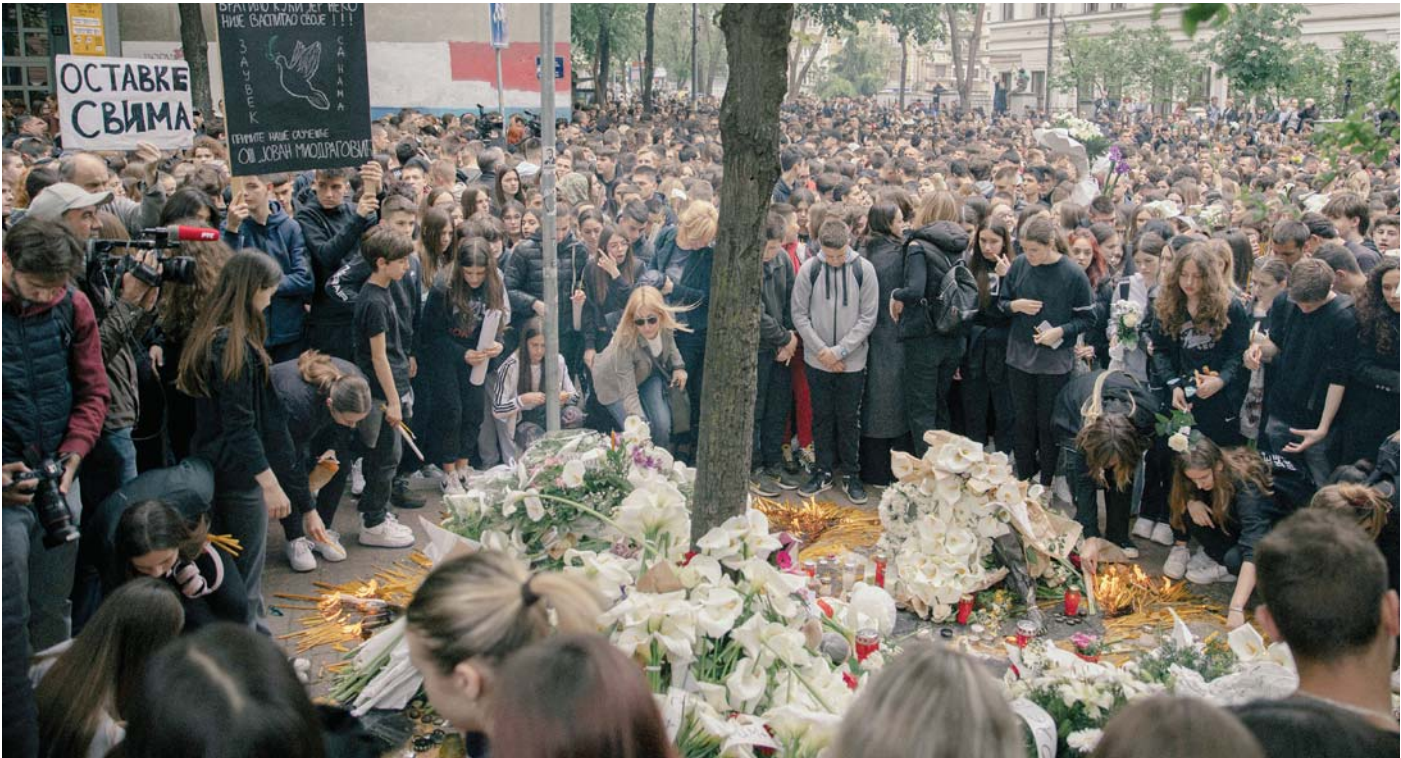
Following the announcement, there was confusion over when the measure would come into force, and the apparently sudden change caused panic. But in the long run, the move will save billions of dollars, encourage investment, and reduce pressure on the foreign exchange market, said Abayomi Adebayo, an economics professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife, northeast of Lagos. — AFP



ANDREW HIGGINS

FOLLOWING THE KILLINGS, PRESIDENT ALEKSANDAR VUCIC VOWED TO TIGHTEN GUN CONTROL LAWS SO AS TO ENFORCE 'ALMOST COMPLETE DISARMAMENT'

## After mass shootings in Serbia, few are ready to give up their guns



A vigil in the Serbian capital of Belgrade after a deadly school shooting on May 4.

THE writer is the bureau chief for East, Central Europe based in Warsaw

He learned how to shoot a gun from his grandfather before he started school, and he fought in three wars as a soldier in the Yugoslav and then the Serbian army during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s.

Sinisa Janicijevic became such a good shot that he regularly gets invited to weddings in villages around his hometown, Kraljevo, in central Serbia, to make sure the bride shows up — which, by tradition, involves shooting down an apple placed in a tree outside her family's home.

The groom is supposed to perform this task, but, anxious about missing, he often calls in a substitute shooter.

Serbia's deep attachment to guns and the plethora of them have been widely cited as an explanation for back-to-back massacres in May — one at a school in Belgrade, the capital, and another in nearby farming villages — that stunned the nation, even if the rate of violence involving weapons is low. Following the killings, President Aleksandar Vucic vowed to tighten gun control laws so as to enforce "almost complete disarmament."

The two shootings appeared to have little in common other than the youth of the culprits; the school shooting by a 13-year-old involved legally registered pistols, and the other massacre, by a 21-year-old, an illegal automatic rifle.

The killings have sparked a nationwide debate over what to do about the large number of guns in the country — and over whether that is even the problem.

**TIGHTEST RESTRICTIONS**

The picture is far more complicated than one of simple gun control. Serbia already has some of the tightest restrictions in Europe. But patchy enforcement has left a large number of weapons illegally in private hands — the guns that Vucic is mainly going after — and many Serbians, whether gangsters who use them for their work or villagers who cherish old family rifles, are unlikely to hand them over, experts say.

In a series of huge street protests in Belgrade, demonstrators have accused the government of focusing on gun control in order to avoid dealing with deeper and more intractable social ills, particularly among young people.

Janicijevic, the veteran, who is also a keen hunter, said he believed gun

control laws were too strict and that the real problem was a pervasive "culture of violence" aggravated by social media.

He noted that there had been no mass shootings in Serbia in the 1990s, when gun laws were relatively lax and rarely enforced, and the country was awash with weapons from the wars in neighbouring Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo.

All automatic weapons are banned in Serbia, as are most semi-automatic ones. A criminal conviction for a traffic accident or other offenses makes legal gun ownership impossible. People who manage to obtain a gun permit for reasons of personal security need to apply for a separate permit if they want to take weapons out of their homes.

To obtain permits for his two hunting rifles, Janicijevic had to undergo psychiatric and medical examinations, be vetted by a state hunting association and wait for months until police officers had interviewed his neighbours about whether they had seen signs of aggressive behaviour. He has to keep his guns locked in a cabinet separate from his ammunition.

Instead of tightening these already strict controls, Janicijevic said, the government should focus on controlling social media. — **The New York Times**

# The ‘Echo Chamber’ phenomenon

When we see people protesting, particularly on social and environmental issues, have you ever noticed how it can be difficult to empathise, or sympathise, with them?

To be honest, I thought it was just me being me. Mature, white, middle-class-ish, set in my ways, and that this lack of empathy for many of their objectives was a ‘me’ issue.

But the more I think about it, the more I am leaning towards feeling that we, protesters, and I, have so little common ground in terms of the people we surround ourselves with, the environments in which we live, and critically, our openness to a diversity of opinion.

In a manner of speaking, either we have a determination to maintain and/or keep what we have, or we are open to change, to sharing, to letting others in, either to our world, our societies, or our environments. Captains of commerce, politicians, and financial ‘wizards’ often speak of being honest, and yet today, and history, bear the scars of rank dishonesty, and dismissal of contradictions as acceptance because, “everyone else is doing it!”

Honesty though, is not a dependent noun. It doesn’t need a collective basis to be proven in the manner of that which, if you hear it often enough... it must be true.

We are on dangerous ground if we immerse ourselves in the echo chamber of the mind where everything we say and do is, or becomes, the rationale, the vindication, and eventually perhaps, the absolution, for those words and deeds.

In psychology, it is “an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own. Echo chambers can create misinformation and distort a person’s perspective, so they have difficulty considering opposing viewpoints and discussing complicated topics.”

The echo chamber effect identifies, and eventually amplifies the passions, the borderline obsessions, and the latent prejudices that eventually will define us as individuals, and by focusing on those vulnerabilities,



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The writer is a media consultant

it legitimises them, exponentially developing their significance in their lives.

The echo chamber effect becomes much more sinister online when like-minded individuals find solace, comfort, and support, however facile or disingenuous, that develops a kind of tunnel vision where one can likely have their opinions initially sustained, and eventually made to feel essential. An ‘echoing’ process of sycophancy results in their beliefs being so overwhelmingly supported, and argument so excluded, the absolute-ness of their stance becomes the essential reality.

The fear, based upon many experiences with the current teen generation, and its Internet obsessions, is that extremism and polarisation could emerge from the chatroom environments. These young people don’t know who they are speaking and listening to... the face on the screen could be far removed from the reality, and to a genuine extent, we can find ourselves, whether as teachers or parents, facing ‘backed-into-a-corner’ situations where their burgeoning, fragile, and untried trust, even their faith, can be manipulated by something more dangerous than stronger individuals.

Can you imagine? Your teen has strong opinions about a football club and goes online to talk to others with the same enthusiasm. They end up having a quality, for them, experience, and become firm supporters of the club. Healthy, yes, sure and who can be critical. It may be healthy, harmless, and in fact, entirely positive.

But what of the next big question in their lives... and you can think of a hundred topics... where they feel they need to talk, to listen, to be heard, and it’s a little more critical, and draws a different audience?

The way identities can be manipulated today we must be wary of who, and given technological and AI developments, what our teens are talking to, and genuinely be wary of the dark side. Radicalisation is not the enemy to be wary of; isolation though, certainly is!

Be aware, and be alert because that echo could just herald a chamber of horrors.

ECHO CHAMBERS CAN CREATE MISINFORMATION AND DISTORT A PERSON’S PERSPECTIVE AND THEY HAVE DIFFICULTY CONSIDERING OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS AND DISCUSSING COMPLICATED TOPICS

## VIBRANT ROMA RHYTHMS



Participants of the Khamoro World Roma Festival dance in the historical centre of Prague, Czech Republic. – Reuters

# Europe’s climate quandary

As Europe sets its sights on becoming the world’s first carbon-neutral continent, it must perform a delicate balancing act. Can the European Union transform its economy while enhancing its competitiveness? And can it achieve these goals while maintaining its status as a shaper of global standards and adhering to its principles of fiscal responsibility?

The answer to these questions is a resounding no. Trade-offs are unavoidable, and identifying the concessions required to strike the right balance could prove more challenging than policymakers may think.

In 2019, when the EU unveiled its Green Deal and pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, its primary goal was to bolster the 2015 Paris climate agreement and help limit greenhouse-gas emissions. But policymakers had a second, clearly defined objective: to turn the EU into a green industrial leader. This is why European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described the policy framework as Europe’s “man on the moon moment.”

Whether the Paris accord would have collapsed without Europe’s commitment to carbon neutrality is anyone’s guess.

Nevertheless, the EU deserves high praise for devising a comprehensive



Jean Pisani-Ferry

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legislative package within a few years, which many had considered impossible. The European Green Deal relies on a vast array of tools, ranging from regulation (like the prohibition of sales of new internal-combustion cars after 2035) to carbon pricing (through the expansion of emissions quota trading).

But things have changed since 2019. First, China has emerged as a global leader in various green technologies, including solar panels and electric-vehicle (EV) batteries. The scale and speed at which it has pursued green industrial policy may have solidified its comparative advantage.

Second, former US President Donald Trump’s tariffs on Chinese imports, which remain in place under his successor, Joe Biden, have resulted in lasting damage to the multilateral system. For all intents and purposes, the World Trade Organization is now a shell of its former self.

Third, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has deprived Europe of unrestricted access to Russian natural gas, which had previously given it an edge in the global scramble for energy resources.

Lastly, the United States has joined the global fight

against climate change, albeit in its own way. The Inflation Reduction Act, Biden’s landmark climate legislation, excludes carbon pricing, does not cap subsidies, and conditions access to them on distortionary local-content requirements. These characteristics make the IRA a game changer, leaving the EU’s consistent and carefully planned strategy increasingly vulnerable.

Despite these challenges, the EU has remained steadfast in its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. While seeking to position itself as a global player in emerging green industries,

it is also determined to uphold multilateral principles and rules. Moreover, the bloc plans to do all this while maintaining its existing fiscal framework. In fact, it is currently exploring reforms that barely provide flexibility in accommodating the expected budgetary consequences of the net-zero transition.

The new reality, however, may soon force the EU to reassess its stance. Given the substantial political capital that has been invested in pursuing carbon neutrality, it is hard to envision the bloc explicitly renouncing it. But it could maintain the pretense of

working towards it, fail to meet its 2030 targets, and then gradually accept its new position as a follower rather than a leader. This scenario seems increasingly likely, as the EU has not established the internal governance mechanisms needed to ensure member states’ compliance.

While the EU retains direct control over some measures, such as the ban on sales of new carbon-emitting vehicles and the allocation of emissions quotas, supporting policies still largely fall within the jurisdiction of member states. Unless European governments implement policies to discourage the continued use of aging combustion-engine cars or subsidise investment in new EVs, for example, such cars could remain on the road for many more years.

In order to reduce the costs of achieving carbon neutrality, Europe may be tempted to sacrifice its competitiveness. If Chinese EVs prove to be more affordable than those manufactured in Europe, ardent climate advocates may argue in favour of buying Chinese cars. But Europe cannot afford to squander the opportunity to revitalise its auto industry.

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European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

# sport

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Poland's Iga Swiatek in action during her third round match against China's Xinyu Wang. – Reuters

**PARIS:** World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek took just 51 minutes to reach the French Open fourth round on Saturday as Coco Gauff ended 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva's memorable Paris debut.

Swiatek blitzed 80th-ranked Wang Xinyu of China 6-0, 6-0 on the back of 21 winners as the 22-year-old Pole took another step closer to becoming the first woman since Justine Henin in 2007 to win back-to-back titles at Roland Garros.

Of the six sets she has played so far, four have been to love. In all she has dropped just eight games through three rounds.

"It was a really solid performance from me. It's not easy to stay disciplined and keep your focus," said Swiatek.

"I took care of everything and I'm pretty happy with my performance."

Swiatek, who also won the title in 2020 and is targeting a fourth Grand Slam triumph, will face either 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu or Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko for a quarterfinal berth.

Her path to the final was made easier earlier on Saturday by the withdrawal of Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, a possible last-four opponent, due to illness.

Rybakina had been due to face Sara Sorribes Tormo of Spain in the third

round in the opening match on Court Philippe Chatrier but said she was suffering with a fever.

**RYBAKINA WITHDRAWS**

"I was not feeling good yesterday and the day before. I didn't sleep last night," said the 23-year-old Kazakh.

"I had fever and a headache and it's difficult to breathe. I tried to play in the warm-up but I feel it's the right decision to withdraw."

Sorribes Tormo, ranked 132 in the world, will be playing in the second week of a Grand Slam for the first time. She will face either Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia or Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia for a place in the quarterfinals.

World number six Gauff, the runner-up to Swiatek last year, came back from a set down to defeat Andreeva 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-1.

Andreeva, ranked a lowly 143, had come through qualifying and was the youngest player to make the third round since 2005.

"Mirra is super young and has a big future," said Gauff. "I remember I played here when I was 16 so she has a lot to look forward to. I'm sure you'll see a lot more

matches between us."

Gauff said that despite her first set problems, she was confident she could pull through.

"I was a little undisciplined in the tie-break but I knew what the game plan was so I just tried to execute that in the second and third sets."

Gauff, 19, will face either fellow American Kayla Day or Anna Karolina Schmiedlova of Slovakia for a place in the quarterfinals.

Despite pocketing the first set, Andreeva collected a code violation for petulantly swiping a ball into the Court Suzanne Lenglen crowd.

Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal in 2022, dropped the first set before easing to a 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-4 win against China's Zhang Zhizhen.

The 26-year-old Zhang was bidding to become the first Chinese man since 1936 to reach the fourth round in Paris.

"It was very tough in the first set, he was hitting many winners and I couldn't find a hole in his game," said fourth-ranked Ruud.

"At 5-4 in the second set, he played some sloppy shots and that gave me the set, maybe the match," said Ruud, who

hit 36 winners and saved seven of 10 break points.

**RUUD, RUNE THROUGH**

Ruud will next face in-form Nicolas Jarry after the Chilean edged out Marcos Giron of the United States 6-2, 6-3, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3.

Jarry had arrived in Paris with the Geneva clay court title under his belt and will be making a maiden appearance in the last 16 of a major.

Also featuring in the second week for the first time will be 49th-ranked Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina who stunned 15th seed Borna Coric 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2.

Etcheverry will next face Japanese 27th seed Yoshihito Nishioka who edged a dramatic five-set battle with qualifier Thiago Seyboth Wild to reach the fourth round for the first time.

Nishioka battled back to win 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 against the Brazilian who had knocked out world number two Daniil Medvedev in the first round.

Danish world number six Holger Rune eased through, seeing off 231st-ranked Argentinian qualifier Genaro Alberto Olivieri 6-4, 6-1, 6-3.

Djokovic, Alcaraz reach last 16

Novak Djokovic battled into the fourth round for a 14th consecutive year late on Friday as Carlos Alcaraz also progressed.

The Serb star was made to work hard by Spanish 29th seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who served for the first set and missed a set point in the second, but won 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier. "I thought if I lost the second set we would play five hours today, but I'm proud of the performance," said Djokovic.

Two-time champion Djokovic, who has also made the French Open quarterfinals in each of the past 13 years, will take on Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas in the last 16.

Alcaraz thrashed Canadian 26th seed Denis Shapovalov for the loss of just seven games in the night-session match.

The Spaniard powered to a 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 victory, with the only slight blip when he trailed 4-1 in the second set.

He reeled off seven straight games after that wake-up call, though, to set up a fourth-round meeting with Italian 17th seed Lorenzo Musetti who dismantled British number one Cameron Norrie 6-1, 6-2, 6-4.

"I knew I'd have my chances in the second set to come back a bit and that's what I did," Alcaraz said. — AFP



US Coco Gauff plays a backhand return to Russia's Mirra Andreeva during their match on day seven of the French Open tournament at Roland Garros. – AFP



Norway's Casper Ruud reacts during his match against China's Zhang Zhizhen on day seven of the French Open tournament at Roland Garros. – AFP



First placed Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen flanked by second placed Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr (R) and McLaren's British driver Lando Norris (L) pose on the podium at the end of the qualifying session for the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya. — AFP

# Verstappen takes pole for Spanish GP

MONTMELO, SPAIN: World champion Max Verstappen claimed his maiden pole position for the Spanish Grand Prix after leading qualifying on Saturday on the Montmelo circuit outside Barcelona.

The championship leader took his fifth pole of a season already dominated by Red Bull to start ahead of Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz with Britain's Lando Norris of McLaren in third.

"Not bad," said Verstappen, with his customary understatement. "It's very nice to come here and get my first pole. I like the circuit and I have a lot of good memories here."

Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton took fifth place on the grid, ahead of Canadian Lance Stroll of Aston Martin.

Local hero Fernando Alonso could only set the ninth fastest time after damaging his car when going off the track in the second qualifying period.

Frenchman Esteban Ocon of Alpine, who took third place in Monaco last weekend, will start in seventh, ahead of German Nico Huelkenberg of Haas, while Australian Oscar Piastri will complete the top 10 in a McLaren.

Qualifying was contested on a slippery track at the start of the session and it featured several big surprises.

First it was Monaco's Charles Leclerc who was eliminated in Q1 and he will only start in 19th and penultimate place.

Then Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate, Mexican Sergio Perez, who made a mistake and took a lap in the gravel, was taken out in Q2 and will start in 11th, ahead of Briton George Russell, who also disappointed with the other Mercedes. — AFP



Red Bull's Max Verstappen poses with Chelsea's Mason Mount after receiving the pole position award. — Reuters

## ENGLAND BEAT IRELAND BY 10 WICKETS IN LONE TEST

**LONDON:** England overpowered Ireland by 10 wickets to win their Ashes warm-up Test at Lord's on Saturday.

It took England just four balls to score the 11 runs they needed for victory, with Zak Crawley hitting three fours off Mark Adair.

Ireland, yet to win any of their seven Tests, did well to take the match beyond tea on the third day of four as they avoided an innings defeat with a score of 362. A record Ireland stand of 163 between the seventh-wicket duo of Andy McBrine (86 not out) and Adair (88) kept England at bay in an innings where home fast bowler Josh Tongue (pictured) marked his Test debut by taking 5-66.

England's win was built on an imposing first-innings total of 524-4 declared featuring player of the match Ollie Pope's 205 and Ben Duckett's 182.

Victory meant England had now won 11 of their 13 Tests under captain Ben Stokes — who didn't bat or bowl in this match — and coach Brendon McCullum.



(O Pope 205, B Duckett 182, Z Crawley 56, J Root 56) Ireland 2nd Innings 362 all out (M Adair 88, A McBrine 86 no, H Tector 51; J Tongue 5-66) England 2nd Inns 12-0 Result: England won by 10 wickets. — AFP

**BRIEF SCORES**  
England 1st Innings 524-4 dec

# Aikman likely to join Oman national hockey team as head coach

**ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH**  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Dutch hockey coach Siegfried Aikman is all likely to join Oman national hockey team as head coach soon after talks with Oman Hockey Association, according to some sources.

Aikman, who recently parted ways with the Pakistan team over a payment issue, is currently without any team.

The Oman Hockey Association didn't renew the contract of current head coach Malaysia's Lim Chiow Chuan, which expired after the Junior Asia Cup.

The former Japan coach reportedly met with Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman

Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma during the Men's Junior Asia Cup Championship in Salalah.

India beat Pakistan 2-1 in the final to win the title in the Junior Asia Cup at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex on June 1.

OHA chief Dr Marwan said Aikman's appointment is still to be confirmed. "We are in negotiations with Aikman. The deal is still to be finalised. Nothing is confirmed at the moment," he told *Oman Observer*.

Commenting on Oman's performance in the Junior Asia Cup, Dr Marwan said it was a good outing by the Omani boys with a seventh-place finish among the top 10 hockey nations in Asia.

"We actually had a target of finishing sixth in the Asia Cup. We



couldn't manage it, though Oman had played some good matches against semifinalists Malaysia (lost 1-0) and Uzbekistan (won 2-1). We will try to get more consistency in our game," he added.

If appointed, Aikman will be an ideal candidate to lead the Oman team in the Hockey5s World Cup to be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman in January 2024. The

Dutch veteran will join the Oman team in the middle of June if the OHA succeeds in roping in the coach, the sources said.

Aikman led the Japanese team to the Asian Games title in 2018, one of the crowning moments of his coaching career.

The Dutch coach is a FIH High Performance Senior Coach as well as a FIH Academy Trainer and Educator.

The vibrant 64-year-old coach had also conducted FIH's high profile coaching courses, some of them with FIH President Tayyab Ikram. Aikman, with roots in the Caribbean country of Suriname, has been a full time coach since 2017 — four years with the Japan men's national team and then with Pakistan.

# Ahmad set for maiden Le Mans 24 Hours



AHMAD AL HARTHY  
SET FOR FIRST OUTING  
IN WORLD'S BIGGEST  
ENDURANCE RACE

OMANI RACING STAR  
TO DEBUT IN 24H  
LE MANS IN RACE'S  
CENTENARY YEAR

AL HARTHY AIMING  
HIGH FOR OMAN  
RACING IN FIA WORLD  
ENDURANCE RD4

HUGE WEEK OF  
ACTION TO BEGIN  
WITH OFFICIAL  
TESTING ON SUNDAY

WORLD motorsport's greatest and most prestigious race, the annual Le Mans 24 Hours, welcomes Ahmad al Harthy and the Oman Racing team for the first time this year – the huge event marking the fourth round of the FIA World Endurance Championship season.

Taking place on June 10/11 June at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France, the build-up to the 24H Le Mans actually starts later this week ahead of the first official test sessions on June 4. Notably too, Al Harthy's debut in the endurance classic will form part of the race's landmark centenary year.

The crown jewel event of the FIA WEC calendar couldn't come at a better time for the Oman Racing with TF Sport team, the squad heading to France off the back of a season-best third place last time out at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium.

Following two challenging races to begin Oman Racing's maiden season in World Endurance, at Sebring in America and Portimao in Portugal, a welcome change to the Balance of Performance rulings meant

the No 25 Aston Martin Vantage was able to compete on an even footing at Spa.

After chalking-up his first GTE Am pole position in style with a superb performance at the Ardennes track, Al Harthy then starred in the race along with team-mates Charlie Eastwood and Michael Dinan to secure a first WEC podium finish, mere tenths of a second shy of the runner-up position.

**EIGHTH PLACE**

Climbing into eighth place in both the GTE Am driver and team standings as a result, the trio now head to Le Mans with confidence high and a determination to challenge strongly in the greatest and most spectacular race global motor racing has to offer.

While the 100th anniversary instalment of the 24H Le Mans will mark a career milestone for Oman's most successful racing driver, Al Harthy has, of course, raced as part of the Le Mans 24 Hours event previously in the 'Road to Le Mans' support races on two occasions. Back in 2017 he claimed a double victory, returning in 2021 and again finishing on the podium – that time alongside Dinan.

Competition in the GTE Am class will

PROVISIONAL  
2023 FIA WORLD  
ENDURANCE  
CHAMPIONSHIP  
GTE AM DRIVER  
STANDINGS:

8. AHMAD  
AL HARTHY /  
MICHAEL DINAN  
/ CHARLIE  
EASTWOOD,  
23 PTS

PROVISIONAL  
2023 FIA WORLD  
ENDURANCE  
CHAMPIONSHIP  
GTE AM TEAM  
STANDINGS:

8. OMAN RACING  
WITH TF SPORT,  
23 PTS

be fierce, with 14 entries from WEC joined by six other standalone entries. All told, including prototype cars from the Hypercar and LMP2 classes, the combined grid for this year's 24H Le Mans is expected to be north of 60 cars.

As ever, Al Harthy will be supported by his prestigious portfolio of partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, with huge numbers of fans also set to make the journey from Oman to France to cheer-on their home hero.

**AHMAD AL HARTHY:**

"I truly cannot wait for Le Mans week to begin, this is such a huge event for everyone at Oman Racing with TF Sport and the biggest race of my entire career so far. Le Mans is such a famous event around the world, there is so much history associated with it and I am unbelievably proud to be representing Oman on the biggest stage of them all in endurance racing.

"Everyone has been preparing so hard behind the scenes and we head to Le Mans in very good spirits after the podium finish at Spa last time out in WEC. We're obviously very experienced in 24 hour races from GT World Challenge Europe, where we have won of course, but Le Mans is another level again. It really is going to be an amazing experience, and we intend to do Oman proud."

Opening practice for this year's 24H Le Mans will get underway at 10.00 local time on June 4, Sunday, with session two following at 15.30. On June 7, Wednesday, a further practice session will begin at 14.00 ahead of qualifying at 19.00 – in the latter the top eight from each class will progress to 'Hyperpole' on June 8. Wednesday concludes with another practice at 22.00.

More practice time is available on Thursday afternoon at 15.00, with Hyperpole starting at 20.00 and then a final night-time practice at 22.00. After that, it's all about the big race. Following a 15-minute warm-up at 12.00 on June 10, the 24H Le Mans will begin at 16.00. All of the action can be followed at [www.24h-lemans.com](http://www.24h-lemans.com) and also at [www.radiolemans.co](http://www.radiolemans.co)

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## Ramped up efforts to promote Dhofar for khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate is actively preparing for the upcoming khareef season in collaboration with partners from various governmental and private sectors in the tourism industry. Their goal is to ensure the success of the season and enhance tourism services.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, announced that the ministry is implementing an active programme to promote the khareef holiday. It includes a plan to host influential personalities from the Gulf and Arab regions on social media to create awareness.

Additionally, the authorities are working closely with airlines and hotel establishments to carry out a joint promotional campaign.

The khareef season will be divided into three time periods, and attractive promotional packages will be designed in cooperation

with airlines and hotels.

To facilitate travel, direct flights from several regional and international airports to Salalah Airport will be operated, with over 160 weekly flights during the khareef.

In preparation for the season,

the ministry has been actively promoting Dhofar Governorate through conferences and regional and international travel and tourism markets.

They participated in the Arabian Travel Market exhibition in Dubai last May, with the

active involvement of Dhofar Municipality.

Furthermore, they conducted promotional activities in the Saudi market and visited major cities in coordination with the Omani Embassy in Riyadh and the Tourist Representation Office.

THE KHAREEF SEASON WILL BE DIVIDED INTO THREE TIME PERIODS, AND ATTRACTIVE PROMOTIONAL PACKAGES WILL BE DESIGNED IN COOPERATION WITH AIRLINES AND HOTELS

Specialists from Dhofar Municipality and representatives from tourism institutions participated to highlight the tourism potential of Dhofar Governorate and showcase the upcoming events and activities planned for the season.

Several historical monuments that are operated by the private sector, including the Al-Askar Tower and the Rakhut Fort, will be opened during the fall season.

Visitors will also have access to attractions such as the Kofan Heritage House and the Museum of Generational Communication in the state of Taqah.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director of Quality Control, announced that additional licensed hotel apartments will be added to the accommodation

sector this year.

They also plan to open a number of licensed tourism facilities, bringing the total number of hotel rooms in Dhofar Governorate to nearly 6,000.

The quality control team at the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate conducts regular visits according to a scheduled plan to inspect hotel establishments and ensure their readiness to serve tourists.

They hold meetings with specialists in hotel establishments to discuss their preparedness for the upcoming tourist season.

The team has confirmed that all hotel establishments are ready to receive visitors by meeting all the necessary requirements based on their approved classification.

These preparations encompass all services, facilities, and the readiness of staff in the establishments. It also emphasises the importance of collaborating with tourism companies and licensed guides approved by the ministry.

### Power distribution and supply firms restructured

MUSCAT: The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the completion of a project to restructure the distribution and supply companies in the electricity sector, which resulted in the merger of the electricity distribution and supply companies of the Nama Group into two companies: Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply.

The restructuring is in line with government directives to enhance the overall efficiency of the sector, reduce operational costs and optimise performance. While the new Nama Electricity Distribution entity will focus on advanced metering, low-voltage networks, transformers and building connections, Nama Supply will oversee billing and collection operations.

The restructuring is expected to improve the overall performance of electricity companies and provide timely services to customers through the Unified Services Center for Nama Group, which is an integrated service window for electricity and water under one umbrella for all subscribers. — ONA

## New Advisory Board to oversee Oman’s hydrogen infra development

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Hydrom, the independent orchestrator and master-planner of Oman’s green hydrogen industry, has announced the formation of an advisory body comprising representatives of all key stakeholders investing in this new sector.

Its remit is to support the sound and cost-competitive development of common utilities infrastructure critical to the successful implementation of mega-scale green hydrogen projects due to come up in Oman over the coming years and decades.

The establishment of the advisory body was announced by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, during the signing of landmarks agreements on Thursday for the award of land blocks for the development of a trio of green hydrogen projects.

The Advisory Board will oversee the development of common utilities infrastructure, orchestrated by Hydrom in coordination with the lead developers of green hydrogen projects, national utility operators and international developers of green hydrogen infrastructure.

These common utilities will include, among other components,

Dr Firas al Abduwani, Acting Managing Director of Hydrom and Eng Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, Managing Director of OQ Gas Networks, signing the MoU on Thursday.

pipelines for the transportation of ultrapure desalinated water for electricity, potable water and wastewater, and potential hydrogen gas, in addition to electrical networks, specialised storage capacity for hydrogen, ammonia and methanol, and so on. To support this initiative, an MoU was signed between Hydrom and OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive operator and owner of Oman’s natural gas transportation system.

The MoU was signed by Dr Firas al Abduwani, Acting Managing Director of Hydrom and Eng Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, Managing Director of

OQGN.

It aims to establish collaboration between the various stakeholders involved in the field of green hydrogen pipelines development. “We are delighted to have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hydrom for the development of green hydrogen common use infrastructure.

This will allow the acceleration and enhancement of efforts to develop Oman’s green hydrogen infrastructure for transportation, transmission and storage,” said OQGN in a statement.

Significantly, representatives from the winning consortiums that have secured land blocks for green

hydrogen projects will also be invited to be part of the Advisory Board — a move designed to give “assurance” to international investors, said Al Aufi. Speaking at the event on Thursday, Al Aufi welcomed the idea — first proposed by investors — for an advisory body with representatives from the ministry, Hydrom, OQ Gas Networks and the wider industry.

Future developers of the green hydrogen industry will also be invited to join in as well to help support the development of common utilities infrastructure that serves everyone’s interests, he added.

### 30.8% increase in production of refineries, petroleum industries

MUSCAT: The production of refineries and petroleum industries in Oman increased by 30.8 per cent until the end of April 2023. Liquefied petroleum gas and paraxylene products led to the rise in exports, recording an increase of 2,277.8 per cent and 621.3 per cent, respectively, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Sultanate of Oman’s exports of motor fuel M91 increased by 230.7 per cent, recording 1,202,100 barrels, while exports of M95 fuel until the end of April 2023 reached to about 201,600 barrels, a decrease of 87.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2022. The exports of gas oil (diesel) rise to 6,743,100 barrels, up by 84.2 per cent.

Jet fuel exports increased to 2,101,300 barrels, up by 89.8 per cent. — ONA

# OPAZ installs EV chargers in its premises in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) installed charging devices for electric vehicles, as a new service for investors who visit the premises and to encourage employees to own electric vehicles (EV).

This endeavour comes in line with the government's efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to compliment the incentives announced recently in this regard.

Abdulmajeed bin Abdullah al Ansari, General Manager of the Support Services Sector at the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, said, "As a first phase, OPAZ installed a charging device for



electric vehicles in the designated parking lots in OPAZ premises in Muscat. This comes as part of a gradual initiative that includes increasing the number of devices in the buildings in Muscat and of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Further, OPAZ will make the electric vehicles charging service available in all the existing and



under development free and economic zones and industrial cities that are affiliated with OPAZ."

"As the demand for the service is expected to increase in light of the incentive package recently announced by the government for those who purchase electric vehicles, OPAZ will respond to the commendable demand for this service, whether by visitors or employees. OPAZ is always seeking to keep abreast of the various technical developments by providing an advanced infrastructure to support the use of modern technologies.

In this regard, it has already started using artificial intelligence techniques in its premises post using these technologies in Duqm. It adopted a central monitoring from its office in Muscat to reduce

over consumption of energy and water in the buildings", Al Ansari added.

He further explained, "Bringing the electric vehicles chargers marks a new addition, reflecting OPAZ plan to own some electric vehicles for official use in Muscat and Duqm on an experimental basis.

Moreover, this serves spreading the culture of environmental sustainability in particular among employees and visitors as there is a high interest from the economic zones and free zones to produce solar and wind energy. Thus, the move towards using electric vehicles requires a change in the culture".

## MCBS students win first place in information security competition



MUSCAT: Modern College of Business and Science (MCBC) student team wins first place at the "Capture the Flag" (CTF) competition organised by the National Technology Group (NTG) Hacktivate. The CTF competition finals were held at Oman exhibition and convention centre in Muscat, Oman.

It is the largest annual information security contests in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Dean of Modern College of Business and Science, Dr Moosa al Kindi, expressed his appreciation to National Technology Group.

He added, "The win affirms that Modern College of Business and Science reinforce students' skills in the field of cybersecurity and increase their employment opportunities in the information technology sector aligning with the growth of the country's digital economy and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040."

In March 2023, college and university students were invited by NTG to learn about the programme and the competition. More than 64 teams from over 30 higher educational institutes across the Sultanate of Oman participated in the competition. NTG ran the competition in two stages: an online first-stage competition and an additional speed-running stage for the best 12 teams.

"We were pleasantly

surprised that our efforts during the challenge were well-rewarded. We really enjoyed participating in the CTF Competition, where we got to apply our wide breadth of knowledge and showcase our skills in various cybersecurity categories.

We are grateful for the chance to engage in hands-on challenges and put our expertise to the test. Thank you for organising such an enriching event that contributed to our growth and development in cybersecurity," said Ibrahim al Malki, MCBS Student Team Leader.

The winning team from Modern College of Business and Science is comprised of five students Ibrahim al Malki, Haider Ali, Iliyas al Jabri, Haitham al Sudairi and Labeel al Bahlani.

The team was supported throughout the challenge by their faculty adviser Dr Basant Kumar. The winning MCBS team earned their win through their evaluation, report, presentation at the 32nd Annual COMEX event organised by Oman International & Trade Exhibitions (OITE).

Engineer Badar al Salehi, Director General, Oman National Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) and Engineer Dr Omar al Rasbi, Chief Executive Officer at National Technology Group presented the awards to the winning team.

## Bank Nizwa wins two awards at banking summit

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in Oman, showcased its commitment to driving digitalisation and revolutionising the FinTech landscape at the highly anticipated New Age Banking Summit 2023.

The bank's unwavering commitment to innovation and exceptional service has earned it the esteemed title of 'Best Bank in the Mid-Size Banks' category, as recognised by the renowned OER Report on the Best Banks in Oman.

Additionally, the bank was also awarded the 'Industry Leadership in Innovative Islamic Banking Services' title. Hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani at Sheraton Oman Hotel, the distinguished Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker, Tahir al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman,



presented Bank Nizwa with these esteemed awards.

As the "Islamic Banking Partner" of the summit, Bank Nizwa solidified its position as a trailblazer in the financial sector by actively participating in the event. The New Age Banking Summit, renowned for its focus on cutting-edge banking practices and disruptive

technologies, provided an ideal platform for Bank Nizwa to highlight its innovative solutions and contributions to the industry.

The bank's involvement included a panel discussion on the topic of "Navigating the Digital Age of Banking" featuring Mujahid al Zadjaly, General Manager of IT & Operations, as a prominent speaker.

Additionally, Sadiq al Lawati, Head of Digital, eSales and Payments, delivered a presentation on the collaboration of FinTech with banks, shedding light on Bank Nizwa's efforts in this area.

Khaled al Kayed, Bank Nizwa's CEO, expressed his delight, saying, "We are thrilled to have received these prestigious awards at the New Age Banking Summit 2023. These accolades underscore our commitment to delivering exceptional banking experiences and driving digital transformation.

At Bank Nizwa, we continuously strive to enhance our digital services, adopt the latest technological updates and provide innovative solutions to meet the evolving needs of our customers. These awards serve as a testament to the dedication and hard work of our team."

## 30.8 per cent increase in production of refineries and petroleum industries in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

The exports of liquefied petroleum gas amounted to 292,700 barrels. Paraxylene exports reached 158,600 metric tonnes, while gasoline exports increased by 363.2 per cent, recording 51,400 metric tonnes.

Polypropylene exports increased by 41.5 per cent, recording 79,300 metric tonnes. Meanwhile, the statistics indicated an increase in the production of M91 by 56.1 per cent, to 5,888,800 barrels, while its sales amounted to 4,596,300 barrels. On the other hand, production of M95 decreased by 20.5 per cent to 3,730,800 barrels, hence its sales also decreased to 3,804,600 barrels.

The production of gas oil (diesel) increased by 33.9 per cent, recording 11,351,500 barrels, and its sales recorded 4,531,400 barrels. Jet fuel production also increased by 76.1 per cent, recording 3,485,100 barrels, with sales of 1,311,600 barrels. The production of liquefied petroleum gas increased by 47.4 per cent, to reach 2,676,200 barrels.

With regard to petrochemicals, gasoline production increased by 289.3 per cent, recording 46,400 metric tonnes, while paraxylene production reached 155,300 metric tonnes, an increase of 829.1 per cent. Polypropylene production increased by 27.2 per cent, recording 87,900 metric tonnes. — ONA

## Pay your bills through Bank Muscat Internet and Mobile Banking

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has called upon customers to take full advantage of its powerful omnichannel Internet and Mobile banking platform for their daily transactions and bill payments.

The platform, which is being continuously upgraded, has been recording a massive rise in popularity with well over 1.6 million customers using Mobile and Internet Banking to conduct a wide variety of banking transactions including utility and educational fee payments.

Being available 24/7, 365 days a year, Mobile and Internet Banking provide customers the convenience of banking from the convenience of their homes or offices without having to visit a branch.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili (pictured), Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, said: "In line with our customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat is continuously launching new features to enhance banking convenience for customers, and the consistent rise in active customers reflects the popularity of Mobile and Internet Banking. We thank our customers for their strong



confidence and trust in the bank and request them to use the constantly upgraded platform for their banking transactions conveniently any time and from anywhere. In particular, the platform will be very useful in making utility bill and fee payments to a number of institutions in the country."

Bank Muscat's continuously upgraded Internet and mobile banking services offer customers a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience.

Today, retail banking customers use various features like real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups, instant credit card bill payments, educational institutions fees payments etc.

It is important to note that Mobile and Internet banking allows customers to securely manage and pay all their bills from one place.

Also, both mBanking and Internet banking are able to

show the outstanding bill amounts and also payment history with the functionality of date-based searches.

Instant payment confirmation is provided at the end of a successful transaction. Some of the newly added billers include: A'Sharqiyah University (fees), FRIENDi (top ups), OpenSooq Services, Awasar (Internet bills), ONEIC (electricity bills) and MEDC (electricity bills).

Mobile and Internet banking also enable a variety of fund transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; speed transfers to a number of countries including Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, Pakistan Sri Lanka and Egypt; Zakat calculator and charity payments.

Among the other useful features is the ability of customers to set or reset PIN and disable or enable their debit card for international usage through Internet banking or mBanking, thereby adding an extra layer of security for the benefit of customers.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches.



# Oman Future Fund to fuel tourism sector growth: MoHT

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has praised the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the launch of the Oman Future Fund with a capital of RO 2 billion.

The new fund will enhance economic activity and encourage the private sector to enter into partnerships or finance viable investment projects in the sectors of economic diversification targeted by Oman Vision 2040, including the tourism sector.

In a statement, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said the establishment of the fund represents a strategic path to



strengthen the constant national endeavours towards achieving 2040 Vision's objectives to build a diversified and sustainable economy.

He added that a national fund of this scale will be an effective tool in financing tourism investment, and will contribute to overcoming the challenges facing investors in this sector, accelerating the implementation of projects in a way that supports the well building of a diversified and integrated tourism sector.

The fund is also an important step to enable the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to achieve its goals in the sector, and to create new opportunities for ambitious youth and entrepreneurs, to achieve their aspirations into

successful projects that can contribute to create new job opportunities, as well as increasing the investment volume in the tourism sector, he stated.

Following the establishment of the Fund, the Ministry has begun setting up a comprehensive matrix for evaluating projects that are eligible for financing, taking into account the strategic importance of the project, its location, elements of sustainability, operation, its total cost of investment, its value added, local content, implementation plan, innovation, and the possibility of linking the project vertically and horizontally with supply chains, intertwining with other sectors, and the transferring of knowledge as well, Al Mahrouqi added.

## Ominvest to redeem perpetual subordinated bonds

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) — the leading investment company in the Sultanate in Oman — announced its decision to redeem its perpetual bonds on its first call date. The bonds are valued at RO 60.638 million and are listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange with a fixed annual interest rate of 7.75 per cent.

The bonds will be redeemed on June 6, 2023, followed by the payment of the principal amount and accrued interest, and the delisting of the bonds from the Muscat Stock Exchange. Ominvest's decision to take this step is a direct result of the company's strong financial



performance and robust liquidity position.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi (pictured), the GCEO of Ominvest, commented on the call option decision, stating: "The strong financial position of the group and the availability of good liquidity enabled us to take this strategic step, particularly after announcing the issuance of new perpetual bonds in April 2023, with a value of RO 60.158 million and a fixed annual interest rate of 5.25 per cent. After completing the redemption process, Muscat

Clearing and Depository Company will disburse the value of the bonds, along with the due interest, to the bondholders based on their records as of June 4, 2023."

In addition, Ominvest reported strong unaudited results for the first quarter of the year, which included a 104.9-per cent increase in group revenues to reach RO 116.0 million, compared to RO 56.6 million in the same period of the previous year.

Net profit attributable to Ominvest shareholders also increased by 37.2 per cent to reach RO 12.1 million, compared to RO 8.8 million in the corresponding period of 2022, placing the company in an excellent position to achieve outstanding results in the

remaining months of 2023.

The GCEO of the group further added, "We are pleased with these outstanding results in the first quarter of 2023, which happen to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the group's establishment.

"Today, we stand on the threshold of a completely different phase in the company's journey, as Ominvest aims to solidify its presence as a regional and global player.

"We plan to expand our business portfolio geographically and sector-wise in the coming period, and achieving such promising results is a testament to that commitment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our bondholders for their participation and continuous support."

## Energy executives from Oman attend 'Women and Climate' event in Doha



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Women from around the world have come together at the CCUS Forum that concluded in Doha (Qatar) last week, uniting at the Gulf's first Women and Climate event. The event was held as part of a global movement to harness the collective power of women to drive positive change and build a resilient future for all.

The event was made possible through the generous support of Women and Climate (a New York based non-profit), the US Embassy Qatar and Birba (an Omani event and media company supporting industries of the future).

Climate change is a threat that requires immediate action. Women, particularly those in marginalised communities, are disproportionately affected by its impacts. However, they also possess unique knowledge, skills and perspectives that can contribute to innovative solutions.

Recognising this, Women and Climate seeks to amplify women's voices and leadership in tackling climate change.

"The United States government realises that women are on the frontlines of the climate crisis worldwide, and women suffer disproportionately from its impacts.

"These challenges are not insurmountable, but to beat them we need the innovation, creativity, and power that can only come from diverse teams.

"Women's perspectives and efforts are essential in this fight. We are proud to work with the

women and men of the Arab Youth Climate Movement Qatar, Earthna, of the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, and other organisations in Qatar to tackle these challenges together," said US Deputy Chief of Mission Natalie Baker.

Doha's Women and Climate event united women from diverse backgrounds, including technology and policy experts, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs and community leaders from around the globe. A number of women energy industry professionals from the Sultanate of Oman were in attendance as well.

"Women and Climate is committed to elevating the voices of women in climate discussions at local, regional and international levels. By providing platforms for sharing experiences, knowledge and ideas, the movement seeks to ensure that women's perspectives are included in decision-making processes. I want to thank Birba for working with us to make our first event in the Middle East a reality," said Michelle Li, Founder, Women and Climate.

Women have a vital role to play in driving innovative solutions to climate change. By nurturing a pipeline of women leaders, Women and Climate seeks to foster inclusive and sustainable development and invites women to join hands in this global movement.

To create a sustainable future that values the contributions of women and promotes environmental stewardship for generations to come.

## EDO, Siemens MoU to drive R&D to sustain Oman's green energy future

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by wholly state-owned national energy company Energy Development Oman (EDO) with global tech giant Siemens Energy on Thursday will seek to leverage R&D to unlock new opportunities as Oman charts an economic future powered by green hydrogen.

The MoU, signed by Eng Mazin bin Rashid al Lamki, Chief Executive Officer of EDO, and Khalid bin Hadi, Managing Director of Siemens Energy, came against the backdrop of landmark agreements inked by Omani authorities with the developers of the first three land blocks earmarked for green hydrogen projects.

In a post over the weekend, Khalid bin Hadi of Siemens Energy, stated: "We at Siemens Energy are proud to expand our collaboration with various partners in Oman. Last week, we signed an MoU with Energy Development Oman, which reflects our innovation commitment and the pursuit of a sustainable energy landscape in alignment with Oman's Vision.



"Through this agreement, we aim to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, which we believe will pave the way for job creation and the empowerment of local talent."

"We are dedicated to supporting Omanisation efforts and nurturing the growth of a skilled workforce within the Sultanate. By working together with EDO on accelerating R&D in Oman, we can create a sustainable energy future that benefits the economy and the society of the Sultanate," he added.

Earlier, speaking during the MoU signing, Mazin al

Lamki of EDO underlined the importance of collaboration and knowledge exchange in optimising value creation from the new hydrogen economy. "This MoU signifies a new chapter of cooperation between our companies," the CEO said.

"Through this partnership, we will join forces to push the boundaries of green hydrogen technology, foster innovation and exchange expertise," he said. EDO, as the parent company of Hydrom — the orchestrator and master-planner of the nation's green hydrogen industry, is at the forefront of the energy revolution,

the official stressed.

"At EDO, we understand the world is changing. And within our energy mix we recognise the urgent need to transition to cleaner, more sustainable sources of energy. As the parent of Hydrom, we have taken up the responsibility of orchestrating the green hydrogen sector in Oman.

"And today's event is a testimony to our commitment. By investing in green hydrogen projects, we are investing in a brighter future for Oman," he noted. The ground-breaking hydrogen projects signed off by Hydrom "will not only contribute to our national energy security, but will also position us as a regional hub for green hydrogen projects, export and innovation," said Al Lamki.

"The scale and ambition of these projects are a testament to the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders involved, the government agencies, international partners and technology providers, along with the investors," he added.

A global technology powerhouse, Siemens Energy provides equipment and services to the power sector, earning revenues of an estimated 32 billion euros in 2022.

# The evolving landscape of the lithium industry



**STEFANO VIRGILLI**  
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The lithium industry is currently experiencing an intriguing confluence of factors that have caught the attention of market observers.

Key developments in China's spot pricing, Chile's strategic project policy, and the growing size of the lithium industry are all shaping the landscape. As a result, diversified mining companies are increasingly considering acquisitions in the lithium space.

One significant factor driving the current state of the lithium industry is the recent trend in spot pricing in China.

After a period of decline, lithium spot prices have finally started to increase on a week-over-week basis. This turnaround marks a noteworthy shift since December of the previous year.

The stabilisation of negative

rate changes indicates a potential shift in the supply-demand balance and hints at increased market confidence.

Chile, responsible for approximately 33 per cent of the world's lithium production last year, has implemented policies to increase state ownership of strategic projects.

This move aims to assert control over key lithium resources and ensure their responsible and sustainable development. Given Chile's significant role in the global lithium market, this development holds profound implications for the industry's future.

Another compelling aspect of the lithium industry's current state is its increasing size, which has garnered the attention of diversified mining companies.

The growth of lithium businesses now justifies acquisitions by these miners.

For instance, Albemarle, a prominent player in the lithium sector, generated over \$3 billion in EBITDA last year. Similarly, Rio's base metal unit and Valleys base metal unit also generated substantial earnings. The financial scale of these lithium-focused businesses makes them attractive prospects for acquisition.

Lithium producers like ALB and SQM are strategically acquiring assets to align with the expanding EV supply chain. This approach allows them to capitalise on initiatives such as Biden's Infrastructure Bill, which supports EV infrastructure development. Diversified mining companies are also considering lithium acquisitions to diversify portfolios and capitalise on the EV revolution.

The surge in M&A activity extends beyond the lithium industry. Various commodities

vital to the energy transition, such as copper, nickel, graphite, and platinum, are also witnessing increased interest.

Companies, armed with substantial cash reserves, are eager to secure assets and diversify their holdings. The urgency surrounding these metals aligns with the accelerating demand for battery production, primarily driven by the rise of electric vehicles.

A critical factor impacting the lithium industry and other commodities is the drive for domestication and vertical integration of supply chains.

China's dominance in EV processing and supply chains necessitates most lithium to pass through the country before reaching EV manufacturers worldwide, including the United States. To mitigate supply chain risks and secure a stable lithium supply, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) are seeking partnerships and even acquisitions of upstream mining assets.

As the lithium industry continues to evolve, the trend of OEMs acquiring upstream assets to secure their supply is likely to intensify.

This progression echoes historical patterns, such as the rubber plantation acquisitions in Brazil a century ago. Recent rumours of Tesla's interest in acquiring Sigma Resources, along with their lithium refinery project in Texas, further illustrate this growing trend.

The current landscape of the lithium industry is witnessing a convergence of factors that are reshaping its dynamics. M&A activity is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the lithium industry.

## Unravelling the controversy over price caps in Oman

SAIF AL ABRI

In Oman, the topic of price caps has sparked widespread public debate. As people witness fluctuations in the prices of goods and services over time, they question why the government doesn't simply fix prices. While this may seem like a straightforward question, the matter is actually quite complex.

Before delving into the Fiqh of the question, which Shaikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti, has discussed, let's consider the perspective of free market economics on pricing.

Prices are viewed as signals and incentives for both buyers and sellers. Artificially setting prices disregards this valuable information and hampers the necessary market adjustments. For instance, when a good becomes limited, its price naturally rises, encouraging people to consume less of it while motivating producers to increase its availability.

However, imposing a price cap suppresses this crucial signal, leading to reduced consumption and limited production.

In neoclassical economics, the point where welfare is maximised for both buyers and sellers is under the assumption of perfect competition. However, what if there is a monopoly or oligopoly with complete control over prices, acting as the sole seller? In such cases, prices would be set higher than the prices that would maximise welfare.

Similarly, when a single or colluded buyer monopolises the market, prices would be lower than the welfare-maximising level.

Interestingly, much of the Fiqh literature, not only in Ibadism but also in Sunnism and Shism, suggests that in most cases where price increases occur due to natural causes, fixing prices is

impermissible unless there is a monopoly or collusion among sellers manipulating prices to artificially increase them.

Taken from the Prophetic hadith, "Indeed, Allah is the One who fixes prices, the Withholder, the Extender, and the Provider". Violating this principle is considered an injustice to property and blood, reflecting similarities to Locke's tripartite concept, excluding liberty.

However, if price manipulation occurs through intentional supply restriction to drive up prices (which is Islamically prohibited) or financial speculation, it is seen as an injustice, and some jurists allow government intervention, with a smaller number of jurists even permitting price caps in such cases.

Notably (similar to the Pigouvian intervention), a team of experts, not politicians, should set the price caps.

Interestingly some jurists who prohibit price caps in all cases cited government failure and the potential for tyranny; this position is taken by the Austrian school in modern economics.

However, determining how to price goods is an extremely challenging topic, even for modern economists, which is why alternative approaches should be explored.

As Shaikh Dr Kahlan al Kharousi pointed out, it is important to note that government bureaucracy can themselves be the source of price increases-e.g., restrictions hinder producers from entering the market- which constitutes an injustice.

This is a simplified account of the discussion on price fixation, as there are peculiarities to consider, such as the question of patent systems, what qualifies as supply restriction, and the concept of a monopsony (a single buyer controlling prices). Furthermore, various types of markets warrant further discussion.

## Ajay Banga era begins at the World Bank



ALAN RAPPEPORT

The author is an economic policy reporter at The New York Times, based in Washington.

Ajay Banga officially became the 14th president of the World Bank on Friday and urged staff to join him in developing a "new playbook" for a global institution whose relevance has come into question in recent years.

The ascension of Banga to be the next leader of the bank comes at a pivotal moment in its 77-year history. The pandemic reversed decades of global progress in poverty reduction, Russia's war in Ukraine continues to be a threat to economic stability and the World Bank is under new pressure to become a more ambitious player in the fight

against climate change.

"Making good on our ambition will require us to evolve to maximise resources and write a new playbook, to think creatively, take informed risks and forge new partnerships with civil society and multilateral institutions," Banga wrote in a note to staff that was viewed by The New York Times.

Banga was nominated by President Joe Biden in February after the resignation of David Malpass, the outgoing World Bank president who had been selected by President Donald Trump.

The World Bank's executive board approved Banga in May following an extensive listening tour that included visits to eight countries and dozens of meetings with government officials around the world.

In his message to staff, Banga defined the bank's mission as aspiring to "create a world free from poverty on a livable planet."

It is the second part of that mission by which Banga will be likely be judged.

Malpass left the job a year early after failing to sufficiently demonstrate his commitment to combating global warming amid a renewed emphasis

from the Biden administration broadening the bank's focus on the environment.

However, Banga, a former CEO of Mastercard, does not bring extensive climate credentials to the job and will be under pressure to demonstrate progress on the bank's environmental agenda. He has described the tasks of dealing with climate change and poverty as intertwined.

"The World Bank's challenge is clear: It must pursue both climate adaptation and mitigation; it must reach out to lower-income countries without turning its back on middle-income countries; it must think globally but recognise national and regional needs; it must embrace risk but do so prudently," Banga wrote in a statement to World Bank's executive board that accompanied his memo to staff.

Climate activists plan to appear outside the World Bank on Friday and attempt to hand postcards to staff with demands that they want Banga to heed during his first 100 days on the job. They continue to be frustrated that the World Bank finances coal, oil and gas projects despite its pledges to prioritise clean energy projects.

Banga is expected to use his expertise to amplify the resources

of the World Bank and build new partnerships between the private and public sectors.

The former finance executive added in his memo that accomplishing the World Bank's many goals will require an annual global investment of trillions of dollars.

Banga will also face a difficult diplomatic task as he seeks to satisfy the climate ambitions of the United States and Europe while facing scepticism from some developing countries.

He will also confront the delicate task of urging China, a major World Bank shareholder and creditor, to allow poor countries that have borrowed huge sums from Beijing to restructure their debts.

The World Bank president is traditionally chosen by the United States; the managing director of the International Monetary Fund is selected by the European Union.

Banga met on Thursday with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. They discussed ways to refine how the bank operates and make it more agile and responsive, according to a summary of their conversation released by the Treasury Department.

— The New York Times



Activists protest during meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington. — The New York Times

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**US actress and model Ming-Na Wen reacts during her Hollywood Walk of Fame star unveiling ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP**



**A model presents a creation by Moroccan designer Fadila El Gadi during a fashion show in Rabat. — AFP**



New director  
of the  
'Theatre  
National de  
Strasbourg'  
(TNS) Caroline  
Guiela Nguyen  
poses in the  
stage costume  
workshop in  
Strasbourg,  
eastern  
France. —  
AFP



Argentine DJ and record producer Bizarrap performs onstage during the Estéreo Picnic. His face remains partly a mystery, but at 24, he is the most listened to Argentine artist in the world. — AFP



People look  
at a koala  
lantern  
on display  
during Wild  
Lights at  
Taronga Zoo.  
— AFP

# art & life

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

# Lebanon's private museums offer educational discovery

The Museum of Minerals in the heart of Beirut offers insight into a remarkable private collection of more than 1,650 minerals, one of the finest compilations worldwide in terms of variety and quality



# Kanchha Sherpa: The last of the first on Everest

The future co-summiteer had already established himself in the hilly Indian region, which was the starting point for expeditions at the time as Nepal had only recently opened to foreigners.

In oversized clothes brought by the British, the Nepalis would sing songs as they ferried supplies to ever-higher camps.



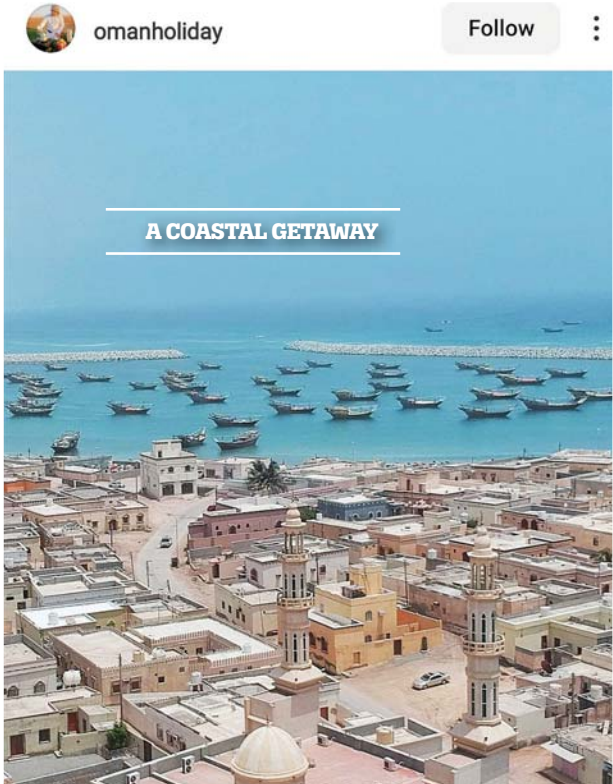
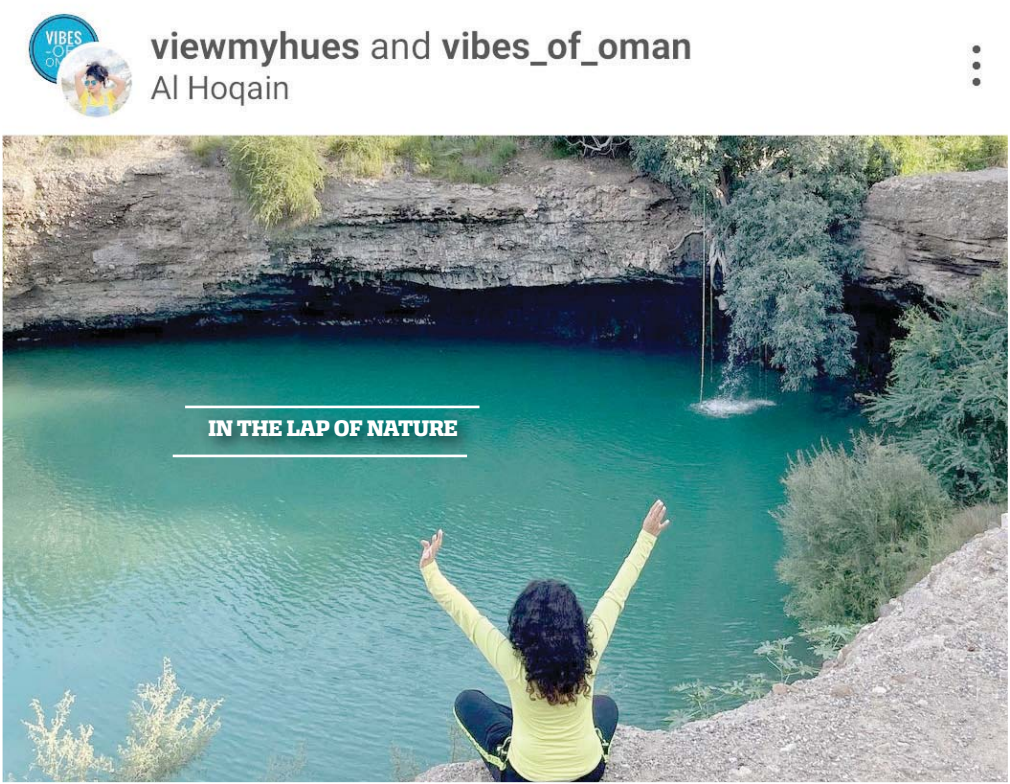
But in a 2019 interview with local channel YOHO TV he said: "Tenzing and Hillary opened our eyes and made development possible here. Life was very hard

But he added: "I fear that the Sherpa youths are getting too influenced by Western culture and might slowly forget the Sherpa culture and language." — **AFP**



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By Khaled H Abdul Malak

A number of specialised museums, most backed with private money and displaying private collections, have been popping up in Beirut, offering an instructive and cultural experience.

Among the best known are the Museum of Minerals – MIM – and the Les Merveilles de la Mer (The Wonders of the Sea). The oldest museum, Nicholas Sursock's, dates from 1961 and hosts a permanent collection of Islamic artwork.

MIM, in the heart of Beirut, offers insight into a remarkable private collection of more than 1,650 minerals, one of the finest compilations worldwide in terms of variety and quality. Drawing its name from the phonetic pronunciation of the 24th letter of the Arabic alphabet (MIM) equivalent to the letter "M", which is the first letter of the words museum, minerals and mines, the collection is the brainchild of Salim Edde.

"While I inherited my passion for collecting from my father, who collected oriental rugs and old coins, it is probably from my grandmother that I got the idea for the museum," Edde said. "As the collection grew, I couldn't stop thinking of what she often said of people accumulating material things: 'My grandson, no one has ever taken anything with him (after death)'. Guided by her words, and in particular by a desire to share my passion with the greatest number of people, I began considering creating a museum of mineralogy in 2003."

The museum came into being in 2013 at the Jesuit University, which had a display room on its campus. Stacked on two levels, it consists of several beautifully choreographed clusters. The atrium hosts a selection of minerals designed to give the visitor a taste of what comes after. The space unfolds into a large hall where each of the nine classes of minerals is represented by a single large piece. Interactive screens explain what a mineral is and how it is formed.

In the main exhibition area, specimens of some 380 different species of all classes are displayed. A special section has been devoted to radioactive minerals containing uranium and thorium, the two major radioactive elements found in nature. Then comes the trophy room, which has about 30 examples considered to be the best ex-amples of their species, including famous specimens that were purchased after fiercely competitive auctions.

Describing his fascination with minerals, Edde, a chemical engineer, said: "I have always been amazed by the variety of geometric forms of crystals and the perfection of the plane surface and the angles between them... these wonders of creation that have formed under the sole influence of temperature, pressure and the incredibly complex work of water and time."

MIM is financed mostly by Edde and 15 per cent of the revenues come from ticket sales, a museum gift shop and renting space for events. "This imbalanced way of financing will



undoubtedly have to improve in the future to keep the museum life sustainable in the long term," Edde admitted.

MIM is definitely a museum with special mission, one to promote the historical, industrial and economic but also aesthetic aspects of mineralogy till now unknown in the world of museums.

About 7 km north of Beirut, in the suburb of Jdeideh, lies another hidden treasure – The Wonders of the Sea. Set within the traditional Lebanese house of Assaad Yaz-beck, the museum hosts a fantastic collection of sea-shells and species of marine life.

"The idea of turning this house into a museum was the brainchild of the whole family but the collection is entirely mine," said the manager Jeanine Yazbeck, one of Assaad's four grandchildren. "I have always been fascinated by the sea and have been collecting seashells since my early childhood."

The site is magnificent with a beautifully maintained garden surrounding the big 19th-century house with its red-tiled roof. A massive centenary eucalyptus greets visitors at the entrance of the two-storey house where the first floor has been transformed into a large exhibition space. The extraordinary sea-

shell collection is displayed in wooden and glass cases in a 15-metre-long central room. More than 3,000 shells of about 630 varieties are exhibited alongside red and blue coral from the Pacific Ocean and the Red Sea, as well as a collection of fossils. The shell collection includes different families, among which the cypraeidae (cowries) and conidae (cones) are the most popular.

Apart from the shells, the museum has aquariums. One holds a baby green sea turtle with a "congenital malformation that makes it vulnerable in front of her predators", said Yazbeck. "I'll keep it until it is mature and

release it afterward. It will have more chance to survive in the nature."

With schoolchildren as its main visitors, "the project has a target", Yazbeck explained. "It is designed to make children aware that the oceans host an infinite number of magnificent living creatures that we have to protect."

Also on display is a fun movie that shows various sea creatures eating, molting and giving birth. A big sign at the exit says: "If you like what you have seen, keep your sea clean."

When I travelled to Lebanon in March 2023 I found out that unfortunately this superb museums had closed down.

ENTERTAINMENT

Animated Spider-Man back with 'arthouse' sequel to Oscar winner



NEARLY FIVE YEARS after the animated "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" won an Oscar with its innovative, biracial take on the beloved web-slinger, a wildly ambitious sequel aims to further blur the boundaries between superhero films and art-house cinema.

"Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," out on Friday in the United States, picks up the story of half-Black, half-Latino Miles Morales, again using an eye-popping blend of decades-old 2D comic book drawing techniques with the latest computer-generated visual effects. This time, the action takes place across several parallel universes, each one visualised in its

own unique animated style, from a paint-streaked, grungy 1990s New York to a kaleidoscopic futuristic hybrid of Mumbai and Manhattan.

The movie employed three directors, more than 1,000 artists, and runs at two hours and 20 minutes – unusually long for an animated film.

Its creators said that the success of the first movie – which holds the highest-ever rating for a superhero movie on Rotten Tomatoes (97 per cent) – "gave us permission to just be even more daring on this film."

"I feel like we got the amazing opportunity as directors to make the world's biggest independent film, basically," said co-director Justin K. Thompson.

"It's an arthouse film, disguised as a superhero movie."

THE SPIDER-VERSE

The film's hero Morales was first introduced to comic books in 2011, but came to mainstream attention with "Into the Spider-Verse," which won the Academy Award for best animated feature in 2019.

Morales shares a familiar backstory with Peter Parker – bitten by a radioactive spider, he quickly deploys his new powers to swing between Manhattan skyscrapers and fight crime. But his diverse ancestry and fondness for trendy sneakers and rap music set him apart from the "traditional" Spider-Man.

It is all made possible thanks to the concept of a "multiverse," in which different versions of the same characters exist in parallel dimensions – and occasionally interact – that has been used in comic books for decades.

In recent years, the multiverse has become popular in Hollywood too, as movie studios feed audiences' boundless appetite for more and more superhero films, and writers scramble to explain how they can possibly all fit together.— **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

Fish relocating to colder waters as a result of global warming



FISH POPULATIONS are relocating to colder waters in the north and south poles as a result of global warming, research has found.

The latest study, by academics at the University of Glasgow, has found the majority of the world's fish population are shifting closer to the poles or deeper waters in order to stay cool.

Rising temperatures affect the critical functions of marine life such as their metabolism, growth and reproduction.

Marine creatures often have a very narrow liveable temperature range, making even small differences in water impossible to cope with.

Changes in marine life have been up to seven times faster than animal responses on land.

Climate change has had a substantial impact on marine ecosystems over the last century. Some fish species have completely disappeared from some locations.

While in some cases some fish species may be able to change aspects of their biology in order to adapt to warmer conditions, a relocation may be the only means of coping with rapid increases in temperatures.

The latest study looked at data on 115 species of fish across all major oceanic regions.

It is the first time such a comprehensive global analysis has been

undertaken.

Carolyn Dahms, lead author on the study, said: "We observed a striking trend wherewith species living in areas that are warming faster are also showing the most rapid shifts in their geographical distributions."

"It's possible that rate of warming in some regions may be too fast for fish to adapt, and so relocating may be their best coping strategy. The paper, titled "Temperature change effects on marine fish range shifts: a meta-analysis of ecological and methodological predictors" is published in Global Change Biology. — **PA Media/dpa**



CULTURE

# Desert wells help Iraq harvest bumper wheat crop as rivers dry

**AMIN SALAH** used to grow wheat near the banks of Iraq's Euphrates River, but persistent droughts have led him to switch to farming unlikely new grounds deep in the harsh desert of Najaf.

Watered by sprinklers fitted to wells dug more than 100 metres under the sun-bleached earth, his land now produces double what it did compared to when he relied on ancient methods that flood fields with river water, he said.

"It's a golden year, a golden season," said Salah, wearing a traditional white robe and reflective sunglasses as he walked his field and noted the benefits: less money and water spent, as well as a bigger and quality harvest.

Iraq's government says this officially-supported shift has allowed the country to double areas cultivated with wheat this year to some 8.5 million danams (850,000 hectares) compared to roughly 4 million (400,000 hectares) last year.

Agriculture ministry spokesperson Mohammed al Khuzai said that has translated into a harvest of around 4 million tonnes of wheat — the largest in years and 80% of the needs of a country with a 43 million population who eat bread at almost every meal.

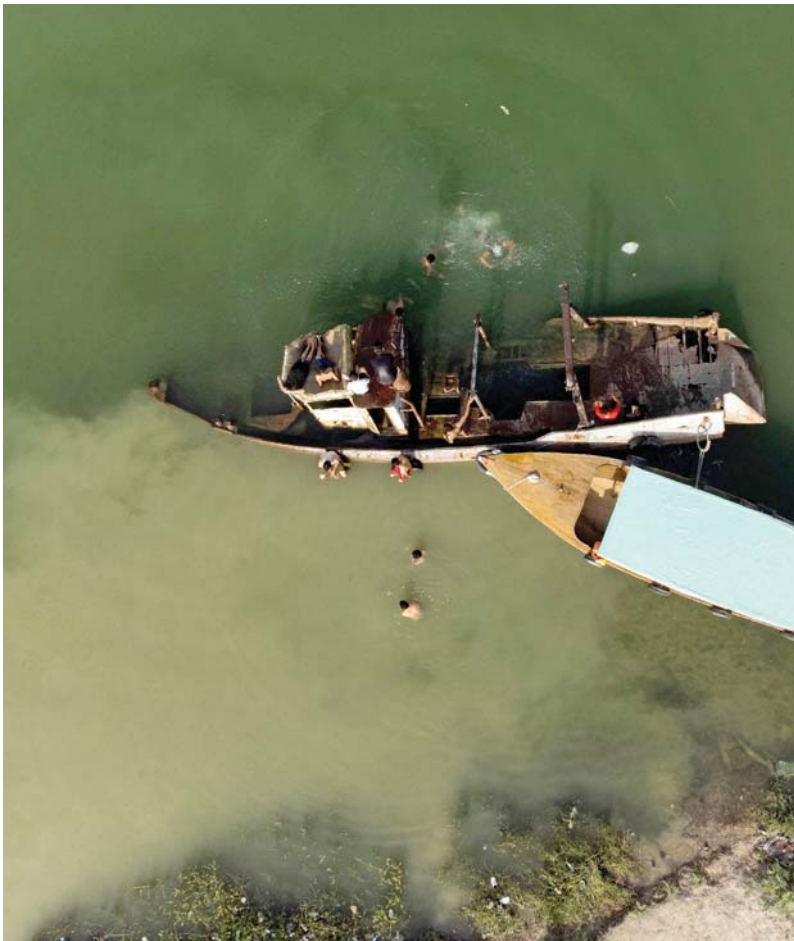
The shift in methods is driven by necessity: Iraq's two main rivers, along which civilisation emerged thousands of years ago, have lost more than half of their flow due to reduced rainfall, overuse and upstream dams.

Drilling the desert for water could provide immediate relief in a country that the United Nations says is among the five nations most vulnerable to climate change in the world, and where climate-induced migration has already begun.

However, heavy use of the wells could bleed desert aquifers dry, agricultural experts and environmentalists warn. Some farmers, including one near the Imam Hussein Holy Shrine in Karbala, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, have already noted a drop in the

## GROUNDWATER WELLS

Iraq has more than 110,000 wells, but only a fraction, some 10,000, are fitted with modern systems that prevent water waste, said Karim Bilal, an agricultural engineer and former director of Najaf's agriculture directorate.



water table.

Neighbouring Saudi Arabia in 2009 scrapped a 30-year wheat-growing programme relying on desert wells that achieved self-sufficiency but depleted the kingdom's scarce water supplies.

Hadi Fathallah, director of public policy at consultancy Namea Group who has researched agriculture in Iraq said: "It's very desperate to go to desert wells."

"You are plugging into aquifers that have been gathering water for thousands of years

and will disappear in a few years if used this way," he said.

Iraq should focus on modernising agriculture, engage in water diplomacy with its neighbours to increase river flows and revitalise agricultural areas that have not recovered from war, Fathallah said.

Al Khuzai played down the likelihood of Iraq following a similar path as Saudi Arabia and said the government was focused on sustainable use, supporting the installation of drip and sprinkler systems.

Large institutions have bought into the shift to desert wells: The body that oversees the Imam Hussein Holy Shrine now farms 400 hectares of wheat in the desert — 55 kms (34 miles) from the shrine — up from 100 hectares in 2019.

"We have turned the desert into a green oasis," declared Qahtan Awaz, an agricultural official with the shrine, though he noted that the water table had sunk between 12 to 15 metres (39.4-49.2 ft) since last season.

Behind him, a pair of large green US-made harvesters pulled in wheat grown in large circles, then funnelled processed grain into waiting trucks for delivery to government silos.

From there, much of the grain enters one of the largest government-run food programmes in the world, which provides most families with monthly rations. Crop failures in 2021 and 2022 driven by drought, and a surge in food prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine put the scheme under pressure, which the government wants to avoid.

"The government are trying to alleviate a lot of pain," Fathallah said. "But this is not adaptation to climate change. It's a kind of morphine."

— Reuters

LIFESTYLE



## Vietnam battles plastic blight in idyllic Ha Long Bay

**SQUINTING IN THE** bright light of a hot summer morning, Vu Thi Thinh perches on the edge of her small wooden boat and plucks a polystyrene block from the calm waters of Vietnam's Ha Long Bay.

It's not yet 9 am, but a mound of styrofoam buoys, plastic bottles and beer cans sit behind her.

They are the most visible sign of the human impacts that have degraded the UNESCO World Heritage Site, famed for its brilliant turquoise waters dotted with towering rainforest-topped limestone islands.

"I feel very tired because I collect trash on the bay all day without much rest," said Thinh, 50, who has been working for close to a decade as a trash picker.

"I have to make five to seven trips on the boat every day to collect it all."

Since the beginning of March, 10,000 cubic metres of rubbish — enough to fill four Olympic swimming pools — have been collected from the water, according to the Ha Long Bay management board.

The trash problem has been particularly acute over the past two months, as a scheme to replace styrofoam buoys at fish farms with more sustainable alternatives backfired and fishermen chucked their redundant polystyrene into the sea.

Authorities ordered 20 barges, eight boats and a team of dozens of people to launch a clean-up, state media said.

Do Tien Thanh, a conservationist at the Ha Long Bay Management Department, said the buoys were a short-term issue but admitted: "Ha Long Bay.. is under pressure".



## HUMAN WASTE

More than seven million visitors came to visit the spectacular limestone karsts of Ha Long Bay, on Vietnam's northeastern coast, in 2022.

Authorities hope that number will jump to eight and a half million this year.

But the site's popularity, and the subsequent rapid growth of Ha Long City — which is now home to a cable car, amusement park, luxury hotels and thousands of new homes — have severely damaged its ecosystem.

Conservationists estimate there were originally around 234 types of coral in the bay — now the number is around half.

There have been signs of recovery in the past decade, with coral coverage slowly increasing again and dolphins — pushed out of the bay a decade ago — coming back in small numbers, as a ban on fishing in the core parts of the heritage site expanded their food source.

But the waste, both plastic and human, is still a huge concern.

"There are so many big residential areas near Ha Long Bay," said conservationist Thanh.

"The domestic waste from these areas, if not dealt with properly, greatly impacts the ecological system, which includes the coral reefs."

"Ha Long City can now handle just over 40 per cent of its wastewater."

Single-use plastic is now banned on tourist boats, and the Ha Long Bay management board says general plastic use on board is down 90 per cent from its peak.

But trash generated onshore still lines parts of the beach, with a team of rubbish collectors not able to block the eyesore from tourists.

## 'PLASTIC POLLUTION CRISIS'

Pham Van Tu, a local resident and freelance tour guide, said he had received a lot of complaints from visitors.

"They read in the media that Ha Long Bay is beautiful, but when they saw a lot of floating trash, they didn't want to swim or go canoeing and they hesitated to tell their friends and family to visit," he said.

Rapid economic growth, urbanisation and changing lifestyles in communist Vietnam have led to a "plastic pollution crisis", according to the World Bank.

A report in 2022 estimated 3.1 million tonnes of plastic waste are generated every year, with at least 10 per cent leaking into the waterways, making Vietnam one of the top five plastic polluters of the world's oceans.

The volume of leakage could more than double by 2030, the World Bank warns.

Larissa Helfer, 21, who travelled to Vietnam from her home in Germany, said Ha Long Bay was beautiful but the trash problem would be one of her strongest memories of the trip.

"Normally you (might say) 'Look at the view! Look at the fishing villages!' she told AFP.

But here "you have to talk about the trash, (you say) 'oh god... look at the plastic bottles and things in the sea.' And it makes you sad."

Thinh, the trash collector, grew up in Ha Long and remembers a very different bay.

"It didn't look so terrible," she said. "Of course, a lot of work makes me tired and irritated," she admitted. "But we must do our work."

— AFP