

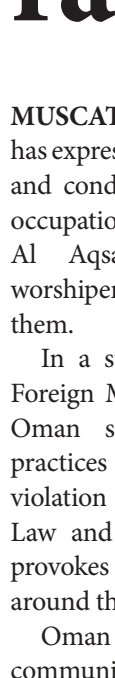
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DHOFAR DOMINATE OMAN CLUB WITH 4-1 VICTORY



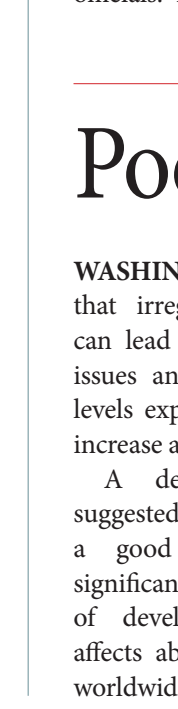
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MWASALAT OMAN TO BUILD PUBLIC TRANSPORT HUB IN AL BURAIMI



P19

IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE TOO MUCH PICASSO?



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY CYPRUS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Nikos Christodoulides of the Republic of Cyprus, in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the occasion of electing him as a president of his country. In his cable, President Christodoulides expressed his sincere thanks, appreciation and best wishes of continuous health and happiness to His Majesty. He also wished Omani people permanent progress and prosperity. He also wished continued development and growth for the bilateral relations between the two countries for the benefit of their peoples. — **ONA**

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO PUTIN

Russian President Vladimir Putin received credentials of Hamoud bin Salim bin al Tuwayah as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation, at the Kremlin Palace, on Wednesday. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty and his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Putin and further progress and prosperity to the Russian people. — **ONA**



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FRENCH PENSION TALKS END IN 'FAILURE'

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THE SIMMERING DE-DOLLARISATION

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FOCUS ON OMAN VISION 2040 UNIT'S EFFORTS

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, visited the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit to inspect the workflow and the efforts being made to follow-up on the Vision implementation, on Wednesday. Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, presented a visual display before HH Sayyid

Theyazin, explaining the methodologies and approaches applied by the unit to follow up on the implementation of national programmes and priorities. Officials at the unit presented a display on the follow-up and improvement of the indicators of Oman Vision 2040 as well as the enablers and supporting programmes aimed at supporting the implementation of the Vision. — **ONA**



Oman denounces Israeli raid on Al Aqsa mosque

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has expressed strong denunciation and condemnation of the Israeli occupation forces' storming Al Aqsa Mosque, attacking worshippers and arresting many of them.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, Oman said that such Israeli practices constitute a flagrant violation of the International Law and human law — which provokes the feelings of Muslims around the world.

Oman urged the international community to assume its responsibilities in deterring Israel's persistent, illegal and provocative practices that contradict international principles and go against norms of respect for religious sanctities. Oman also called for enabling the Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights, notably by ending the occupation and establishing a fair and comprehensive peace.

Meanwhile, the Arab League said it would hold an emergency meeting over an Israeli police raid on the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Jordan had called for the meeting in coordination with Egypt and Palestinian officials. The Arab League earlier



Palestinians pray as Israeli security forces take position at the Al Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

condemned the pre-dawn raid.

AIR STRIKES

Israeli police clashed with Palestinians inside Al Aqsa mosque on Wednesday, sparking a military exchange of rockets and air strikes in flaring violence as the Jewish Passover coincides with the holy month of Ramadhan.

Armed police in riot gear stormed the mosque's prayer hall before dawn. More than 350 arrests were made in the raid, which drew threats from Palestinian groups and wide condemnation from Muslim countries.

One Palestinian witness, Abdel

Karim Ikraiem, 74, charged that police, armed with batons, tear gas grenades and smoke bombs, burst into the mosque "by force" and "beat the women and men" worshipping there.

A video widely circulated on social media showed police clubbing people on the floor inside the mosque.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it had treated 37 people for injuries, including some after their release from custody.

Palestinian group Hamas called on West Bank Palestinians "to go en masse to the Al Aqsa mosque to defend it". — **Agencies**

Floating pier project in Musandam

KHASAB: The Musandam Municipality continues implementing a number of service and sustainable development projects to stir development in all the wilayats of Musandam Governorate.

This includes developing the historic village of Kamzar, constructing a floating pier in Khur Najd, construction of Khursham mountain path and the waterfront in the Wilayat of Dibba, among other projects.

Eng Nassir bin Humaid al Hosni, Director-General of Musandam Municipality, said that the civic body is currently handling several projects related to the economic, tourist and social domains including the construction of a 2.5-km walking track the implementation rate of which now stands at 88 per cent.

The development project of

Kamzar Village has reached 90 per cent completion rate. The project involves façade design, a bridge, constructing wave-breakers along the road leading to the village, construction of a children's park in the village in addition to the fishermen's forum project.

The floating pier project is one of the most important service projects in Musandam Governorate owing to its prime location which facilitates the movement of boats. The pier has a modern design with a 750-metre high platform that gives tourists a unique experience to watch down on stunning views.

In addition, work is under way on the waterfront project in the Wilayat of Dibba, one of the most prominent projects in Musandam. — **ONA**



Poor sleeping patterns may increase asthma risk: Study

WASHINGTON: Most of us know that irregular sleeping patterns can lead to a number of health issues and could increase stress levels exponentially, it could also increase asthma risk.

A decade-long study has suggested that regularly enjoying a good night's sleep could significantly reduce your risk of developing asthma, which affects about 300 million people worldwide.

The findings, which were first published in the journal BMJ Open Respiratory Research, revealed that poor sleeping patterns may bolster genetic susceptibility to asthma and could potentially double the risk of the inflammatory disease.

Meanwhile, a healthy sleep pattern has been linked to a lower risk of asthma, which suggests that detecting and treating sleep disorders early on may lessen the risk. Making use of the data



provided by the UK Biobank study, a team from Shandong University in China examined 455,405 people aged 38 to 73 and developed a model of risk and sleep traits after following the participants for more than a decade.

People were asked about their sleeping patterns at the start of the study. They were also asked whether they were a morning person or a night owl, how long they usually sleep, whether

they snored, had insomnia and experienced sleepiness during the daytime. The study defines a healthy sleep pattern as being more of a morning person, never having insomnia or experiencing it rarely, sleeping for seven to nine hours a night, no snoring and no frequent sleepiness during the day.

The genetic makeup of all these in the study was mapped, and an asthma risk score was drawn up.

— **Agencies**



Participants inspire entrepreneurs at ‘Pioneer Evenings’

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

Activities to inspire and motivate entrepreneurs continued during the second ‘Pioneer Evenings’ organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) in cooperation with the Youth Centre.

Through these evenings, the authority seeks to review the social incentives that contributed to refining the experiences of the participants. The second ‘Pioneer Evening’ sessions targeted young people of all categories, owners of small and medium enterprises and start-ups, in addition to those wishing to establish their own commercial projects, traders and investors, economists and those interested in the entrepreneurial

sector and those interested in success stories and challenges.

Abdulaziz bin Said al Raisi, Vice-President of SMEDA, said: “We at the SMEDA are constantly trying to get closer to entrepreneurs and young people to ensure that the flame of enthusiasm remains burning in young people to enter the arena of life in general and in the world of business leadership in particular.”

He also praised the role of the Youth Centre. “The Youth Centre is an incubator for Omani youth to practice their passion in various aspects, stressing the complementarity of roles between the Centre and the SMEDA in approaching young people, introducing them to the entrepreneurship sector and encouraging them to launch their



own enterprises and projects,” he said.

Fahd al Ismaili, the founder of Tibyan Real Estate Company, also participated. He recounted his entrepreneurial experience in the field of real estate and mentioned his difficult beginnings. He explained how he overcome the challenges, his relationship with fear and anxiety, and the role of passion that led him to launch

projects continuously.

“In Muttrah, I used to help my grandfather write real estate contracts and get a small amount of one rial and two rials. The economic movement is there, and in 2009 I received my first baby. I was in a state of complete bankruptcy in terms of financial liquidity as a result of being affected by the consequences of the global crisis in 2008. After

that, I had to work as director of real estate affairs in an embassy in the Sultanate of Oman. The overall scenario helped and in course of time I emerged as a successful business leader. I launched the GOLANDS application for buying and selling land. Even though it could not fetch a real return, it led me to my passion of doing something on my own,” he said.

Saud al Dhuhli, an adventurer

and explorer, expressed his experience in exploring nature. “When I climb a mountain peak, I focus on the details and the regularity of the universe, why do we not walk aimlessly or irregularly? Situations are opportunities and messages, and there must be determination and face challenges with determination,” he said.

‘Pioneer Evenings’ sessions take place every Tuesday evening throughout the holy month of Ramadhan and aim to encourage youth, entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to continue and sustain their projects.

It allows the attendees to discuss and ask questions from the guests and opens broad horizons for cooperation between the participants and the audience.

Riyada launches online academy

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 4

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, launched an online entrepreneurship academy on Wednesday known as the Riyada platform.

“The Riyada Academy is an online training platform specialised in developing comprehensive skills in the field of entrepreneurship. The platform provides a roadmap that shows practical steps for the success of small and medium enterprises, keeping pace with the best international practices in the field of training,” said Project Manager of the platform Laila al Maamari.

“The platform aims to provide training and qualification courses for owners of small and medium enterprises and provide them with the basic skills to manage their enterprises with a variety of interesting courses. The platform also aims to connect with beneficiaries in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman via the Internet, opening up opportunities for skill development and teaching using technology without the need to visit [physical] training facilities and saving beneficiaries time, money, and effort,” she said.

The newly launched academy will provide various courses in the field of entrepreneurship at no cost. “The platform seeks to provide various training courses in the field of entrepreneurship including entrepreneurship fundamentals, feasibility studies, market analysis, financial and marketing skills as well as e-commerce,” Laila said.

Royal Hospital awarded platinum status

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital was awarded platinum status by Accreditation Canada International (ACI), which figures among the world's leading accreditation institutions. ACI rating is applied in 35 countries and about 12,000 health institutions around the world.

This evaluation was a first instance within the stages of assessment-for-accreditation that began in 2016. It constitutes a major development after the hospital obtained the gold level. This advanced status caps up the efforts undertaken by the Royal Hospital and its management in improving and fine-tuning the services rendered to all segments of society.

Dr Sami bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Director-General of the Royal Hospital, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the hospital's attaining ACI's platinum level represents an embodiment of Oman Vision 2040.

The evaluation enhances Omani health services' position on the global arena and reflects the hospital's efforts to provide quality services to patients in line with international standards, Al Farsi added. — ONA

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Oman Participates in 5th Global Forum on Human Resources for Health

Global forum looks at protecting, investing in healthcare workforce

GENEVA: Represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Sultanate of Oman took part in the 5th Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, held in Geneva.

Oman's delegation was represented in the forum by Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs.

The global forum came this year under the theme: Protecting, safeguarding and investing in the healthcare workforce.

The ministry highlighted lessons learned from Covid-19, workforce development in the future and health workforce investment. It also reviewed Oman's experience in investment in the health field and plans

compatible with Oman Vision 2040.

The ministry also reviewed its experience in establishing an investment health laboratory by involving various stockholders nationally and globally.

The forum addressed updates on progress in implementing the Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030. It also shared evidence and experiences on workforce development, and opportunities for a post-Covid-19 era. The forum also examined the required policy solutions, investments, and multi-sectoral partnerships to address healthcare challenges.

The forum gathered a range decision-makers across education, finance, health and labour. — ONA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

It is the middle of Ramadhan and the young ones in Oman were ready for Qaranqasho with a mood of celebration on Wednesday. As a mark of celebration, children visited houses to collect goodies in their bags. Gift shops in the Sultanate of Oman had a variety of bags for the Qaranqasho collection.

The family had also been preparing for this day and each house was ready with chocolates, nuts, popcorn, coins and notes. It was truly a children's day and the kids made sure they spread happiness.

Wafa al Zadjali, from Muscat, remembers it to be a simple affair. "We would just pick up bags and we used to go to houses to collect candy. The gatherings were fun as everyone would be outside their homes. We used to live in Mabela so the crowd used to be big. They would give us chocolates and candies and some houses also would make sure to give us money as well."

For Sanat Kaf, it was a different experience, as he is from Salalah, and according to him, Qaranqasho is popular in Muscat, Al Batinah and Al Sharqiyah. It is popular there but in Salalah, we did not have the practice when we were young. However, now



children in Salalah also celebrate the Qaranqasho.

Ameera al Badi, a human resources manager, said, "Just get our bags and be ready to walk around the houses - that was the agenda. We would be singing the Qaranqasho song which is like a call to everyone in the houses to open doors for us and give us whatever they have, chocolate sweets or any small stuff," she said.

"A small chocolate could give

us happiness not because of the chocolate's value, but because of the way we were received by the families in the houses so it was a lovely moment for us, so much so that we even cherish today," she reflected.

The day is also equally important for families, as they prepare to receive the children from the neighbourhood. A link that stays connected as memories were being made.



Tender Board awards projects over RO 25m



MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Wednesday held its 2nd meeting for 2023. It awarded projects and additional works to the tune of RO 25,600,733.

The awarded projects included:

1. Maintenance of asphalt roads in the Governorate of South Al Batinah for a period of five years, at a value of RO 8,157,955.
2. Maintenance of asphalt roads in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah for a period of five years, at a value of RO 7,191,972.
3. Provision of technicians to operate and maintain devices and equipment for health units at Khoula Hospital, at a value of RO 810,828.
4. Provision of periodic maintenance services for x-ray machines in various health institutions, at a value of RO 652,356.
5. Project management of the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka (Japan) at a value of RO 635,774.
6. Replacing and updating Oman's numerical prediction devices, at a value of RO 565,367.
7. Provision of technicians to operate and maintain devices and equipment for health units at Sohar Hospital, and health units affiliated to the Ministry of Health in the Governorate of North Al Batinah, at a value of RO 441,187.

8. Management and maintenance of facilities in Oman Botanic Garden project at a value of RO 322,858.
9. Provision of news services to the Ministry of Information at a value of RO 313,241.
10. Provision of support and consultancy services for the participation of the Sultanate of Oman in the G20 summit's meetings in the Republic of India, at a value of RO 206,878.
11. Provision of periodic maintenance services for medical devices at the Royal Hospital, at a cost of RO 163,293.
12. Provision of maintenance services for medical devices at Khoula Hospital, at a cost of RO 145,402.
13. Additional works related to the practice of the project to rehabilitate the southern runway and air corridors at Muscat International Airport, at a value of RO 3,286,626.
14. Additional works for the project of connecting air communication devices and reconnaissance devices for the Omani airspace on the ground and through satellites, at a value of RO 1,332,000.
15. Complementary works related to consultancy services for the design and supervision of the Al Batinah Expressway Project

(Part Three), at a value of RO 433,705.

16. Additional works related to the preventive maintenance and technical support for the National Data Centre and the Disaster Precautionary Centre, at a value of RO 397,248.

17. Additional works related to the tender for the annual maintenance of desert dirt roads in the the Governorate of Dhofar, at a value of RO 300,400.

18. Additional works related to a contract for renting cooling units for the Innovation Park Muscat, at a value of RO 105,778.

19. Additional works related to consultancy services for the feasibility study, preparation of designs and supervision of the implementation of groundwater recharge dams, at a cost of RO 96,838.

20. Improvement works related to the consultancy services to design the update for the documents of the rehabilitation project of (Sinaw-Mahout-Duqm) road, at a cost of RO 21,060.

21. Complementary works related to the provision of consultancy services to supervise a project to design and upgrade Seih Qatanna road in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, at a value of RO 19,965. — ONA

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RAMADHAN Resolutions HOLD STRONG

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Ramadhan comes once a year, but its impact on a person is so high that he carries its positivity for years or even for life by adopting some good habits and getting rid of bad ones.

People aspire to do good deeds, they aspire to inculcate good habits and try to quit some bad habits like smoking, laziness and even being unnecessarily angry. They tend to postpone their resolutions unless things come to a pass.

Ramadhan is a source of inspiration to be better people and do as much as possible to better society. Many resolve to eat less meat, take care of their health, give proper care to family, and be ready for any voluntary service.

During Ramadhan, the atmosphere is charged with

so much positivity that people tend to quit bad habits and inculcate good ones. In most cases, a year of postponement actualises during Ramadhan.

“It worked like magic when I decided to quit smoking soon after the beginning of Ramadhan this year, and I am successful,” said Ibrahim, who works in a private sector establishment.

“Since I decided to quit, I did not touch them even after breaking my fast in the evening. This is the beauty of the holy month of Ramadhan; if you want to quit some bad habits, it becomes easy to stick to your commitment,” he said, and added that he would quit smoking permanently.

He admits his parents are very happy about this decision, as they were worried about his health and the consequences of smoking.

The same is the case with Abdullah, who has the



Since I decided to quit, I did not touch them even after breaking my fast in the evening. This is the beauty of the holy month of Ramadhan; if you want to quit some bad habits, it becomes easy to stick to your commitment

IBRAHIM

tendency of becoming short-tempered. Despite realising his bad trait, he was not able to control it. This Ramadhan he decided to do a makeover and started controlling his anger by becoming compassionate and generous to people. “I decided to sport a smile whenever I meet people and avoid any situation that could lead to an argument, and by the grace of God, I am successful till now,” he said.

“I have taken a resolve to be cool and calm and would react only after proper thinking. And surprisingly, I am managing my tempers well. Earlier I used to get irritated easily, and I was not welcomed in a team. Friends would tease me to get my bad reaction and make fun of me. I thank my sister who advised me to take resolve to become cool and calm and thanks to God, it is happening,” he

admitted.

Bringing a change in lifestyle is everybody’s challenge. Not an easy task to make resolve to control diet, spare time to do some physical activity and stay fit to avoid diseases.

“Everyone wants to get rid of obesity without doing any exercise or any control over food. This Ramadhan I decided to have full control over my food and go for a walk after dinner. I am feeling good and have decided to continue with this even after Ramadhan,” says Maryam who feels she is inviting health issues due to her bad lifestyle.

Ramadhan thus is a time for deep reflection that connects an individual with his spiritual roots. The resolutions achieved during Ramadhan continue for several years and even for life in most cases.



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5

■ **ONE FOR THE ALBUM**



A tourist takes a selfie using a mobile phone at Tulip Garden, claimed to be Asia's largest, in Srinagar on Wednesday. — AFP

Paris weighs car-sharing lane for crucial ring road

PARIS: Paris city hall plans to hold an online consultation in the coming weeks on reserving one lane of the French capital's notoriously congested ring road for car-sharing, taxis and buses.

Deputy mayor for mobility David Belliard said on Wednesday that people from the surrounding Ile-de-France region as well as Paris residents will be asked to contribute from April 17 to May 28. City leaders want to "get the opinions of all stakeholders" and especially people opposed to the plan, he added.

One lane of the 35-kilometre Boulevard Peripherique — known as the "periph" for short — will be reserved during next year's Olympic Games for athletes, officials and emergency responders.

Prolonging the scheme beyond

2024 as part of the games' legacy would aim to "develop more virtuous and economical use of cars," Belliard said.

Radars are already being tested that could detect whether a vehicle has multiple passengers and is therefore legally in the car-sharing lane, he added — while insisting that the project remains "open to discussion".

Nine out of ten respondents to a 2021 online vote held by the regional government said they were opposed to "removing" a lane.

The regional government frequently recalls that of around one million vehicles using the peripherique every day, only 20 per cent belong to Paris residents while 40 per cent are travelling from one suburb to another.

— AFP

World's largest e-crime hub shut

THE HAGUE: International police have shut down what they called "one of the world's largest" online markets dealing in millions of stolen identities and account details, Europol said on Wednesday.

The global sweep targeting the Genesis Market resulted in 119 arrests, involved 17 countries and was led by the FBI and Dutch police, the EU's policing agency said.

The operation was dubbed "Operation Cookie Monster".

"An unprecedented law enforcement operation involving 17 countries has resulted in the takedown of Genesis Market, one of the most dangerous marketplaces selling stolen account credentials to hackers worldwide," Europol said.

"Genesis Market listed for sale the identities of over two million people when it was shut down,"

An unprecedented law enforcement operation involving 17 countries has resulted in the takedown of Genesis Market, one of the most dangerous marketplaces selling stolen account credentials to hackers worldwide

EUROPOL

the Hague-based agency said.

Action against criminals took place in countries including Australia, Britain, Canada, the United States and more than 10 countries in Europe.

"Through the combined efforts of all the law enforcement authorities involved, we have severely disrupted the criminal cyber ecosystem by removing one of its key enablers," said Edvardas Sileris, who heads Europol's European Cybercrime Centre, which assisted in the operation.

The EU's judicial agency, Eurojust, which is also based in The Hague, said it was a "multi-country effort dubbed Operation Cookie Monster".

"Genesis Market customers were located all over the world and actively purchasing stolen packages of victim data until this takedown," it said.

Britain's National Crime Agency said 24 people were arrested in Britain. Another 17 people were arrested in The Netherlands.

Europol said the Genesis Market

offered "bots" for sale that had infected victims' devices through malware or other methods.

"Upon purchase of such a bot, criminals would get access to all the data harvested by it such as fingerprints, cookies, saved logins and autofill form data," it said.

The information was collected in real time so buyers would be notified of any change of passwords.

Unlike so-called "dark web" services, Genesis was available on the open web "although obscured from law enforcement behind an invitation-only veil", the agency said.

"Its accessibility and cheap prices greatly lowered the barrier of entry for buyers, making it a popular resource among hackers."

The closure of the Genesis Market comes after a number of cyber crackdowns involving Europol.

— AFP

Pakistan jumbo survives diagnosis

KARACHI: International vets "nearly lost" a 17-year-old elephant in Pakistan on Wednesday after knocking her out to perform diagnostic tests, but they now hope to treat multiple issues that have left her crippled for months.

Noor Jehan has been barely able to walk around her enclosure at Karachi Zoo because of a huge growth between her back legs, sparking concern from keepers and visitors.

A team of veterinarians and wildlife experts from Four Paws International intervened after images of the ailing African elephant were shared across social media.

"We nearly lost Noor Jehan when we gave the sedative," veterinarian Amir Khalil told reporters after the jumbo diagnosis. "It was a risky procedure."

A huge crane was deployed on Wednesday to lift the 3.5-tonne pachyderm after she had been tranquillised.

Ultrasound and other tests suggest Noor Jehan has a huge hematoma inside her abdomen, as well as issues with her intestines.

"It is clear Noor Jehan is in serious pain and suffering," Khalil said.

"There is a treatment for this... it needs some luck and it needs a lot of work in coming days."

Pakistan's zoos are frequently criticised for disregarding animal welfare, and in



Veterinarians examine Noor Jehan during a medical assessment at the Karachi Zoo in Karachi on Wednesday. — AFP

2020 a court ordered the only zoo in the country's capital to shut because of its decrepit state.

The zoo drew international condemnation for its treatment of an Asian elephant named Kaavan, who was later airlifted to retirement in Cambodia in a project spearheaded by US popstar and actor Cher, and carried out by Four Paws.

Last year a zoo in the eastern city of Lahore called off plans to auction 12 lions to private individuals after overbreeding, saying it would instead create new enclosures for the big cats.

"It is high time to phase out zoos from Pakistan," said Mahera Omar, the chief of Pakistan Animal Welfare Society.

— AFP

Trump slams criminal charges as 'insult to our country'

PALM BEACH: Donald Trump offered a full-throated defence of his conduct on Tuesday in his first public remarks since being charged over hush money payments to a star, blasting the criminal prosecution as "an insult to our country." Hours earlier, the 76-year-old former US president pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts in a dramatic hearing in New York that transfixed the nation — and began the countdown to the first ever criminal trial of an American president.

"I never thought anything like this could happen in America — never thought it could happen," Trump told an audience of several hundred donors, political allies and other supporters after returning to Mar-a-Lago, his beachfront mansion in southern Florida. "The only crime that I've committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it... It's an insult to our country," Trump said from a stage festooned with American



Donald Trump delivers remarks on the day of his court appearance in New York after being indicted by a Manhattan grand jury. — Reuters

flags in an opulent gold-and-cream ballroom that "radical left" prosecutors across the country were out to get him "at any cost."

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is prosecuting Trump for cooking his company's books to hide payments he arranged to actress Stormy Daniels days before the 2016 election. — AFP



TENDER NOTICE

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Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2023/1	Qualifying second-line leaders and developing technical economic competencies	25 Omani Rials	30/4/2023

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website and attach an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate with a value of (1%) of the value of the tender submitted and valid for (90) days from the last date of submission of bids. It has to be addressed to HE Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Ministry of Economy.

Second ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

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Thai opposition confirms Thaksin’s daughter as PM candidate

NONTHABURI: Thailand’s main opposition Pheu Thai party confirmed on Wednesday the daughter of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra as one of its candidates to be prime minister in the kingdom’s upcoming election.

Paetongtarn Shinawatra, a 36-year-old with a jet-setting lifestyle and half a million Instagram followers, stands in stark contrast to her establishment rivals, two strait-laced former army chiefs with a combined age of 146.

A sea of Pheu Thai supporters, wearing T-shirts in the party’s signature colour red, tramped into a football stadium on the northern edge of Bangkok to see Paetongtarn anointed alongside businessman Srettha Thavasin and party strategist Chaikasem Nitisitiri.

Paetongtarn, who has been campaigning energetically despite being eight months pregnant, said she relished the fight.

“It is going to be a challenge but we will go and communicate as much as possible,” she told reporters.

The parties for the May 14 vote fall into two broad camps — those backed by Thailand’s military and royalist establishment, and more reformist opposition groups with Pheu Thai at their head.

Chief among the military-friendly candidates are current Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, 69, who came to power in a coup in 2014, and 77-year-old ex-general Prawit Wongsuwan of the ruling Palang Pracharath Party.

“We believe that Thais have had a bad experience,” Paetongtarn told the crowd.

“Pheu Thai cannot win alone, country and people have to win together. So people should vote for their future with Pheu Thai,” Paetongtarn said.

The youngest of Thaksin’s three children and educated in Thailand and Britain, Paetongtarn managed the hotel branch of her family’s real estate business before stepping into politics. — **AFP**



Paetongtarn Shinawatra, shows in during an event to announce the party’s prime ministerial candidate in Bangkok. — **Reuters**



French president Emmanuel Macron visits the expo of the Red Brick Art Museum in Beijing. — **Reuters**

Macron says China has ‘major role’ to play in path to Ukraine peace

BEIJING: French President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday that China had a “major role” to play in finding a path to peace in Ukraine, as he kicked off a three-day visit to Beijing.

Speaking at a gathering of the French community in Beijing ahead of a meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Thursday, Macron said France would seek to work with China “in this shared responsibility for peace and stability” in Ukraine.

“China, with its close relationship with Russia, which has been reaffirmed in recent days, can play a major role,” he said, noting Beijing’s stated opposition to the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine as well as its proposal for peace between Kyiv and Moscow.

The French president’s first trip to China in four years is set to be dominated by the conflict in Ukraine, with an official from his office telling reporters he would seek to stand firm in talks with Xi.

Macron’s aims also include preserving and rebalancing China’s trade ties with Europe, as well as safeguarding French interests in the Asia-Pacific.

“We must not disassociate ourselves, separate ourselves from China,” Macron told Beijing’s French community upon arrival, saying France would “commit proactively to continue to have a commercial relationship with China”.

Macron discussed his trip to China and support for Ukraine during a phone call with US President Joe Biden on the eve of his visit, the White House said.

The conversation showed the “common will of France and the United States to engage the Chinese to accelerate with us the end of the war in Ukraine and build a lasting peace”, Macron’s office said.

The US and French presidents also hope to “obtain from the Chinese a contribution to the global effort of North-South solidarity” and to build “a common agenda” on climate and biodiversity.

Macron landed in Beijing at around 3:15 pm and, after emerging into the capital’s brisk spring air below overcast skies, was greeted on the tarmac by Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang as soldiers watched on.

On Friday, he will travel to Guangzhou in southern China to meet local students, taking with him a broad delegation of top politicians, business leaders and even celebrities, including composer Jean-Michel Jarre. — **AFP**

Top Saudi, Iranian diplomats to meet, say media, officials

RIYADH: The top envoys for Saudi Arabia and Iran will meet in Beijing on Thursday, an Iranian official and a Saudi-owned newspaper said, as the two countries work to hash out next steps of their diplomatic rapprochement amid a China-brokered deal.

The meeting between Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud and his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian, will be the first formal meeting between Saudi Arabia and Iran’s most senior diplomats in more than seven years.

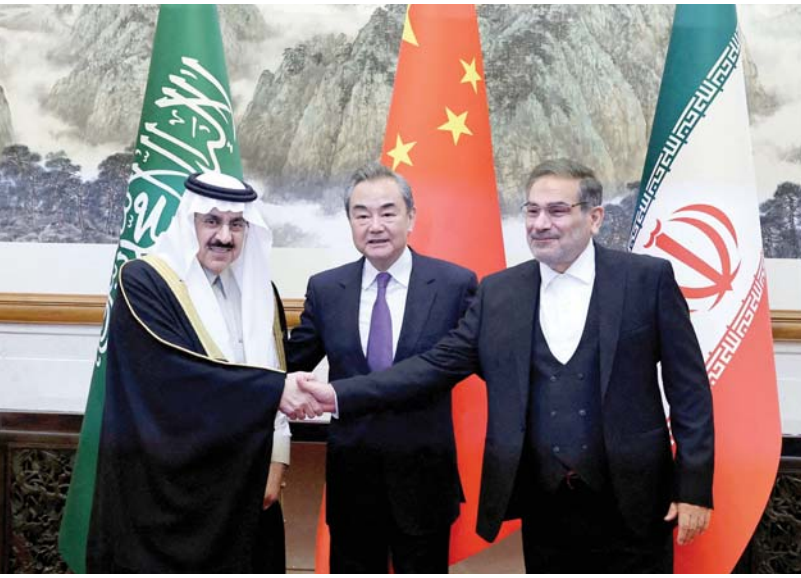
Tehran and Riyadh agreed to end their diplomatic rift and re-open embassies in a major deal facilitated by China last month.

“The top envoys agreed to meet on April 6 in Beijing as the deal was facilitated by China,” a senior Iranian official said.

Choosing China “came as an extension of Beijing’s positive role in reaching the agreement and facilitating communication between the two countries,” Saudi-owned newspaper cited an unidentified source in Riyadh as saying.

The resumption of the relations that was announced last month and arrangements for the exchange of ambassadors will be discussed in the meeting, it added.

Beijing’s role in the breakthrough between Tehran and



Wang Yi, Ali Shamkhani and Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban pose for pictures during a meeting in Beijing. — **Reuters file photo**

Riyadh shook up dynamics in the Middle East, where the United States was for decades the main mediator, flexing its security and diplomatic muscles.

“The regional countries are capable of preserving security and stability in the Middle East,” another Iranian official said.

“The next steps will be discussed in the Beijing meeting, such as re-opening of the embassies and appointing ambassadors.”

After several of its allies led the way, Riyadh restored diplomatic relations with Tehran last month in a fence-mending deal brokered by Beijing.

Raisi has accepted an invitation to Riyadh from Saudi Arabia’s King Salman, First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber confirmed on Monday.

Meanwhile, Iran has named an ambassador to the United Arab Emirates nearly eight years after his predecessor left.

“After some eight years, the foreign ministry has named Reza Ameri as the Islamic Republic of Iran’s new ambassador to the United Arab Emirates,” Iran’s official news agency reported late on Tuesday. The move comes after Iran welcomed an Emirati ambassador last September ending a six-year absence. — **Agencies**

DUBAI

UAE starts extradition of suspect in fraud case

The United Arab Emirates has begun the extradition process of a British citizen to Denmark who is suspected of defrauding Danish tax authorities of over \$1 billion.

Sanjay Shah is suspected of running a scheme that involved submitting applications to the Danish Treasury on behalf of investors and companies from around the world for dividend tax refunds worth more than 9 billion Danish crowns.

On Monday the emirate’s state media office said its attorney had rejected Shah’s appeal against his extradition.

“We note the decision by the Dubai Court of Cassation to reject the appeal of Sanjay Shah” the UAE official said in a statement. — **Reuters**



KABUL

Death toll from severe weather in reaches 21

At least 21 people have died due to heavy rainfall and earthquakes in Afghanistan during the past two weeks, an official said on Wednesday. Another 102 people were injured, National Disaster Management Authority spokesman Shafullah Rahimi said.

More than 2,600 houses have been damaged, Rahimi said, adding that hundreds of animals have perished too. According to the official figures, thousands of acres of harvest have been destroyed. Seasonal flooding is an annual event in Afghanistan.

The UN said that the country is experiencing the world’s large stand most severe humanitarian crisis, warning that millions of people are at risk of famine without lifesaving aid. — **dpa**



ISTANBUL

Nine missing after freighter sinks off

At least nine people are missing after a cargo ship sank off Turkey’s Mediterranean coastal city of Antalya, the Turkish coastguard said.

Five crew members have been rescued while helicopters and frigates were joining the search for the remaining nine.

All 14 crew members are believed to be Syrian nationals.

The freighter, flying the flag of Guinea-Bissau, was en route to Ukraine from Turkey’s port of Iskenderun, some 830 kilometres east of Antalya.

The ship sent out a distress call to the coastguard and ships in the area early on Wednesday, informing that it was sinking.

The exact cause of the ship’s sinking was not immediately clear. — **dpa**





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In brief

■ WARSAW



ZELENSKIY HAILS TIES WITH POLAND

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited neighbouring Poland on Wednesday and thanked the country for its “historic” help, saying it should become a key partner in the vast reconstruction effort needed once Russia’s war ends.

Warsaw has positioned itself as one of Kyiv’s staunchest allies, playing a leading role in persuading sometimes reluctant allies to provide it with heavy weaponry. On Wednesday President Andrzej Duda said Poland would supply Ukraine with a total of 14 MiG-29 fighter jets.

Duda also awarded his Ukrainian counterpart the Order of the White Eagle, Poland’s highest honour.

■ LONDON



RUSSIAN TYCOON CLEARED IN UK COURT

Russian aluminium tycoon Oleg Deripaska was cleared of contempt of court by London’s High Court on Wednesday in a long-running legal battle with his former business partner.

The founder of aluminium giant Rusal was alleged to have breached an undertaking to the court in a lawsuit brought by former Russian finance minister Vladimir Chernukhin over a joint venture to develop real estate in Moscow. But Judge Mark Pelling ruled on Wednesday that Chernukhin had not proved his case against Deripaska - who is subject to Western sanctions imposed due to his perceived links to the Kremlin.

■ ROME



ITALY EX-PM RENZI TURNS EDITOR

Italian ex-prime minister Matteo Renzi said on Wednesday he would take up a new job as the editor of a newspaper - without quitting his political career as a senator and leader of a centrist party.

He will lead Il Riformista, a small libertarian newspaper known for its criticism of Italy’s justice system, a subject on which Renzi has written a book.

“I will be editor for a year, from May 3 to April 30, 2024, and then we’ll see what I’ll do when I grow up,” the 48-year-old politician said in a news conference in Rome.

Renzi led a centre-left government in 2014-2016.

French pension talks end in ‘failure’ ahead of new protests

PARIS: French unions said last-ditch talks with the prime minister on Wednesday had failed to ease tensions over a divisive pension reform and called for record turnout at protest rallies the next day.

President Emmanuel Macron is facing the biggest challenge of his second term over his flagship pension overhaul, which includes hiking the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64.

Unrest erupted after Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne on March 16 invoked a controversial executive order to ram the bill through parliament without a vote despite months of mass protests against it.

Unions had warned ahead of Wednesday’s meeting with Borne that they would storm out if she refused to discuss going back on the minimum retirement age of 64.

“It’s clearly a failure when the prime minister won’t even allow a way in to that discussion,” said Cyril Chabanier, speaking on behalf of the country’s eight main unions after barely an hour of talks.

It was the first such gathering between both sides since the government presented the controversial bill in January.

“We again told the prime minister that the only democratic outcome could be the text’s withdrawal. The prime minister replied that she wished to maintain the text, a grave decision,” he added.



A banner reading “64 it is no!” hangs on the top of the Triumph Arc during an action by demonstrators against the government’s pension reform in Paris, on Wednesday. — AFP

Union chiefs called for French people to take to the streets and strike en masse on Thursday during an 11th day of nationwide action against the bill.

Sophie Binet, the new leader of the CGT trade union, called for more protests and strikes.

“We have to continue mobilising

until the end, until the government understands there is no way out other than withdrawing this reform,” she said.

“We can’t move on to anything else until this reform is repealed.”

Thursday’s protest comes ahead of the country’s Constitutional Council giving its final say on the

pension changes on April 14, the last step before they are signed into law. “We are experiencing a grave democratic crisis,” said Laurent Berger, head of the centrist CFDT union.

“We call on the wisdom of the constitutional council... Our democracy needs appeasement,

and this appeasement would be for the text not to be applied,” he said.

Macron is on a visit to China for the rest of the week, where an aide denied there was a “democratic crisis” in France despite the failure of the meeting.

“You can’t speak of a democratic crisis when the bill has been enacted, explained to the public and the government is taking responsibility for it,” said the aide, asking not to be named.

The government has argued that the changes are necessary to prevent the pensions system from plunging into deficit. In the rest of Europe, people mostly retire in their late sixties as life expectancy has increased.

Critics say the pensions reform is unfair for workers in tough jobs who start their careers early, as well as women who interrupt their work life to raise children.

Protests since January have largely been peaceful, but spontaneous rallies since March 16 have sparked clashes between protesters and police.

Rights groups have accused the police of disproportionate use of force in handling the unrest, but the interior minister has said security forces were responding to “far-left” radicals.

A record of more than 1.2 million people marched against the reform nationwide on March 7, according to official figures, but numbers have since largely waned and strike attendance has diminished in recent weeks. — AFP

Coronation roles for Prince George and Camilla’s grandchildren

LONDON: King Charles’s grandson Prince George and the grandchildren of the Queen Consort Camilla will play major roles in the coronation of the British monarch next month, Buckingham Palace confirmed on Tuesday.

George, 9, the eldest son of heir to the throne Prince William, will be one of the king’s four pages of honour who will accompany him at the grand ceremony on May 6, and join the procession through the nave of London’s Westminster Abbey. “We’re all very excited about Prince George’s role in the coronation, it will be an incredibly special moment,” a Kensington Palace spokesperson said.

Camilla’s four pages will be made up of her grandchildren Freddy Parker Bowles, and Gus and Louis Lopes, as well as her great-nephew Arthur Elliot.

British newspapers had previously reported that the queen consort wanted her grandchildren to play significant roles, even though their parents are the children from her marriage to her first husband, Andrew Parker Bowles.

The announcement comes as the Palace also released details of the invitation to “The Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla” which will be sent out to the more than 2,000 coronation guests, along with a new photograph of the couple.



The invitation for the Coronation of Britain’s King Charles III is seen in this undated handout image on Tuesday. — Reuters

The description on the invitation is the first time that Charles’s second wife has been officially referred to as “Queen Camilla”.

Her status was only made clear in February last year when the late Queen Elizabeth said on the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne that she wanted Camilla to be known as queen consort when Charles became king.

The Palace also said the invitation’s artwork, designed by

heraldic artist Andrew Jamieson, was handpainted in watercolour and gouache, and features a motif of the Green Man — an ancient figure from British folklore.

Flowers on the invitation, which will be made from recycled card, will appear in groupings of three — a nod to the king being the third monarch to be called Charles — and it will also feature a lion, a unicorn and a boar, taken from the royal couple’s coats of arms. — Reuters

US President Biden to visit UK, Ireland: White House

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden will travel to the United Kingdom and Ireland from April 11-14, the White House said on Wednesday.

Biden will first visit Belfast to mark the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement before travelling to Ireland, where he will deliver an address to mark US-Irish ties.

Biden in Belfast intends “to underscore the readiness of the United States to support Northern Ireland’s vast economic potential to the benefit of all communities,” the White House said.

In late February, Britain and the European Union settled a festering dispute over Brexit trade rules for Northern Ireland that ensures that there would be no new checks on goods crossing the land border between Northern Ireland and the republic to the south, which is part of the EU.

The agreement eased a source of tension between London and Washington. The Biden administration had voiced concern over the continued success of the Good Friday agreement which ended most of the violence in Northern Ireland that had prevailed since the late 1960s.

In Ireland, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who visited the White House in mid-March for a traditional St Patrick’s Day visit.

Varadkar hailed the Biden visit as “an opportunity to welcome a great Irish-American President home.”

“Over many decades, and to this day, he has supported the cause of peace in Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement. He stood with us as we navigated the difficult consequences of Brexit,” Varadkar said.

“His visit is an opportunity to celebrate and renew the strong political, economic and personal ties that bind our two countries together,” he added.

Biden will visit Dublin, County Louth and County Mayo, “where he will deliver an address to celebrate the deep, historic ties that link our countries and people,” the White House said. — AFP



US President Joe Biden smiles as he is asked questions during a meeting with the Council of Advisers on Science and Technology at the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. — AFP

Man-equality dialectic of the French revolution



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

Georges Lefebvre’s book *The Coming of the French Revolution* was recently translated into Arabic by Dr Abdul Nabi Kawara. It does not view the French revolution as a mere political event. It presents an elaborate economic analysis while taking into account the effect of humanism theories most importantly equality and justice and their impact on the collective mind and the subsequent social effect on politics.

The author believes that there are two major reasons behind the French revolution: First, the people’s demand for the rights of man and citizens, the lack of which caused popular agitation and, second because Louis XVI (died 1793) put his finances in jeopardy by subsidising it. He believes

that the revolutionary thoughts were spawned by the social and economic movement.

The frequently-raised question, pertaining to the making of the event and the consequences that follow, is: who makes the event. In other words, if the same personalities were reborn at a later era they would not be able to create that event out of genius.

This is why Lefebvre analyses the French revolution from the 14th century to the 18th century that evolved from the aristocratic revolution to the bourgeois revolution and from the bourgeois revolution to populism and the farmers’ revolt. He is concerned with the event rather than the personalities. This approach is different from Arabic historical

LEFEBVRE IS CONCERNED WITH THE EVENT RATHER THAN THE PERSONALITIES.

THIS APPROACH IS DIFFERENT FROM ARABIC HISTORICAL STUDIES THAT FOCUSES ON PERSONALITIES

studies that focuses on personalities instead of the conditions that caused the event.

According to Lefebvre, the primary reason for the 1789 revolution is traced to French society, which remained aristocratic and preserved its origins when the land was almost the only source of wealth. The landlords were the owners of the farmers who were in need of the land for subsistence. Starting from the 14th century, the

renaissance in trade and industry generated a new form of wealth i.e financial wealth, and a new class, the bourgeois class. In the 18th century a bourgeois used to bail out the royal treasury in times of financial crises. The bourgeoisie comprised public employees and professionals. Which is why writer François-René de Chateaubriand famously said: “The aristocracy began the Revolution, the masses completed it”.

The bourgeois revolution stood in contrast to the aristocratic revolution. Bourgeoisie is part of the third class, it ranges from the richest among the bourgeoisie to the poorest among the beggars. The third class spearheaded the revolution but the bourgeoisie reaped the fruits.

In 1789, the king rejected the wisdom of both the aristocrat and the bourgeoisie. With the nobles’ clenching to their prerogatives, the popular uprising was born and fuelled by famine and high prices. The popular uprising transformed into a full-fledged revolution that saw the exit of king. The farmers, comprising three quarters of the population, joined the revolution dealing the final blow to the feudal system.

These four revolutions, the aristocrat, bourgeoisie, the popular uprising and the farmers’ revolution resulted in the principle of equality before the law and the attachment between freedom and equality. The French people enjoyed freedom and re-established a unified, inseparable nation.

UK bell enthusiasts clamour to ‘ring for the king’

HELEN ROWE

At the top of 52 steep, narrow steps at All Saints Church near London, expert bell ringers are showing the ropes to two new recruits ahead of King Charles III’s coronation.

Senior doctor Charlotte Mafi and office administrator Anne Porter have each answered a call for volunteers to help “ring for the king” on May 6.

The day before the historic event, both women are hoping to be in the belfry tower of the 12th-century church in Kingston upon Thames, on the western edge of London, to ring a celebratory peal.

Kate Flavell, secretary of the bell-ringing society, first sets out some vital safety basics.

“Don’t walk around near the ropes and keep your feet firmly on the ground when sitting near them,” she tells Mafi.

According to Flavell, it usually takes around 10 hours to teach someone to handle a bell competently.

The novices are two of more than 1,000 people who responded to an appeal for new recruits by the UK’s Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

“It’s something I always wanted to do and then I saw this and thought ‘why not now?’,” said Mafi, adding that she finds the rhythm of the bells “very soothing”. All Saints is a fitting place to celebrate a coronation. The ceremonial crowning of up to eight Saxon kings of England in the 10th century is said to have taken place in an early church that stood on the site.

Royal occasions are a prime opportunity for Kate Flavell and her husband Paul, who has been the “tower captain” overseeing the All Saints bells for the past 35 years.

“Last year, when there was the queen’s Platinum Jubilee, we rang a thing called a quarter peal for that, which is about 45 minutes of non-stop ringing,” Kate Flavell said.

“Then, of course, not that long after that the queen died and so we rang with muffles on,” she added regarding the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September. All Saints is unusual in having 12 bells, something more common in cathedrals, and its coronation peals will ring out clear and unmuffled.

But while the church has a full team of about 20 ringers, Britain’s wider bell-ringing community is in sore need of more recruits.

There are around 6,000 sets of bells across the UK totalling nearly 38,000 bells, but only 30,000 people trained to ring them, according to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

For now, however, she is just looking forward to the celebratory peals marking the coronation.

— AFP

Trump’s anticlimactic arraignment

MICHELLE GOLDBERG

I missed George Santos at the protest outside the courthouse where Donald Trump was later arraigned on Tuesday, and I couldn’t hear a thing Marjorie Taylor Greene said over the screams of counter-demonstrators and the incessant blowing of whistles. They were the two biggest names who turned out to show their support for Trump on a day that felt at once historic and very small.

The police put up metal barriers dividing a block-sized park near the courthouse in two, with dozens of Trump opponents on one side, dozens of Trump acolytes on the other, and cops everywhere. Altogether, there were hundreds of people, often screaming at one another across the divide, chants of “USA” competing with chants of “Lock Him Up!” Some characters were familiar from the Trump campaign roadshow, including Dion Cini, a peddler of Trump merchandise who flew a giant “Trump or Death” flag, and Maurice Symonette, founder of the groupuscule Blacks for Trump and onetime member of a violent Black supremacist cult. Symonette said that Trump had immoral affair. “How is that against the law? Who hasn’t done that?” Of course, Trump wasn’t indicted for his affairs, but for the steps he allegedly took to cover them up. Before the indictment was unsealed, rumours flew across Twitter that it included a conspiracy count, but in the end, all 34 counts were for falsifying business records in connection with the payoff to silence Daniels, which Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg argued was connected to a broader scheme to squelch negative stories about Trump.

According to the indictment, the business record falsifications were done “with intent to defraud and intent to commit another crime and aid and conceal the commission thereof.” Although no other crime is charged, the statement of facts accompanying the indictment accuses Trump of violating election laws. It’s the connection to another crime that turns falsifying business records from a misdemeanor into a felony.

Observers from across the political spectrum have been skeptical of the legal theory that underlies Bragg’s case.

As I’ve argued before, if Trump’s role



Donald Trump appears in court for an arraignment on charges stemming from his indictment by a Manhattan grand jury. – Reuters

in the hush money payments broke the law, it’s a serious matter, because those payments helped him get elected, and the plot to cover them up sent his former lawyer to prison. Trump, the statement of facts says, “orchestrated a scheme with others to influence

BUT WHILE TRUMP STILL HAS AN OBSESSIVE FOLLOWING, HE CAN NO LONGER COMMAND THE COUNTRY’S STUNNED ATTENTION, EVEN BY GETTING ARRESTED.

the 2016 presidential election by identifying and purchasing negative information about him to suppress its publication and benefit the defendant’s electoral prospects.” If this is true, it’s perverse to suggest that Trump’s success in this scheme — represented by him winning the presidency — is a reason not to prosecute him.

Nevertheless, for all the hype going into Tuesday, the indictment feels anticlimactic. “True and accurate business records are important everywhere, to be sure,” said Bragg in his news conference after the arraignment. “They are all the more important in Manhattan, the financial centre of the world.” Trump, like everyone else, should be held accountable if he failed to keep such records. We’re not owed an indictment

commensurate with his depravity. Still, these are hard charges to get excited about.

Indeed, what’s struck me over the last two days in New York is a distinct lack of excitement. Many who detest Trump, I suspect, have lost faith in the ability of the legal system to hold him to account. And while his supporters may threaten civil war, not many of them seem willing to brave Manhattan, which they’ve been told is a crime-ridden hellhole.

Maybe this is to be expected: Many of the people who might have led mob violence have been either indicted or convicted for their involvement in the January 6 insurrection. And certainly, there remains an acute danger from Trump fanatics acting alone. The way the Trump camp has targeted the daughter of the judge overseeing the Trump case has been particularly unconscionable. Arguing that the daughter’s political work constituted a conflict for her father, people including Greene, Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump shared a story featuring her photograph on social media, and Trump went after her in his post-arraignment speech, likely putting her safety at risk.

But while Trump still has an obsessive following, he can no longer command the country’s stunned attention, even by getting arrested. Maybe that’s the consolation of an arraignment that doesn’t feel at all momentous.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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A return to normalcy

A glimpse into the changes that happened in the last three years and before March 20, 2020 sends shivers down my spine. It is painful to reflect on the suffering, grief, and everything we went through because of Covid-19.

Within the two years of uncertainty, struggles to adapt to a new world order, and adjusting to new and sometimes unreasonable demands, surveillance and possibly avoidable deaths, we found our weaknesses and strengths. Like me, hundreds of thousands of people have lost a family member, a friend, or someone we knew — and not been able to say goodbye or be there to give or receive comfort. We cried alone. We have mourned without being able to share our sorrow.

Covid-19 triggered new and different types of crises, exacerbated inequalities and led to wide-ranging social changes. Social scientists will spend decades elucidating the consequences of the pandemic and the various government responses. It just goes to show how much power governments have over people in the name of security or public health! With that, during pandemics, public healthcare is a must for all; it is neither negotiable nor commercial, and no community should be discriminated against.

Just weeks into March 2020 lockdowns, when the global pandemic was declared, we all knew there would be big changes and implications, but we never really considered the consequences in all areas would last for years.

A peep into today's post-Covid approach to fast and ambitious development projects gives the impression that we have forgotten about the challenges we faced over the past few years. People have returned to a semblance of normalcy. Have they? The reality is that all the changes, including the loss of privacy, continue to weigh on our minds and lives — not that we lived in a privacy haven before the pandemic.

What happens to all the data collected on citizens? I guess it will



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COVID-19 TRIGGERED NEW AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF CRISES, EXACERBATED INEQUALITIES AND LED TO WIDE-RANGING SOCIAL CHANGES

be hard for governments to let go of control over our lives.

Covid-19 was not the only factor changing the world at the time; the global oil market crash in the first half of 2020 also had an impact. The pandemic's biggest winners were four thematic companies: pharma, cloud computing, e-commerce and gaming. While the shareholders of these corporations became wealthier, workers became impoverished due to rising living costs and inflation.

We try to rebuild our lives, but distrust, misinformation, disinformation and manipulation have all taken centre stage. Furthermore, geopolitics are changing; the world is moving towards a multipolar system in which disruptions can affect a wide range of areas such as energy, food and supply chains — particularly when depending on a single country — with people and capital suffering the outcomes. Trust has been eroded.

In all parts of the world, countries and people are looking for new opportunities. It has been a bit of a challenge with financial market ups and downs, the situation in Ukraine, and the changes in geopolitics in South America, the Middle East and Asia. Will the war of Ukraine have a more lasting effect than Covid-19? International groupings and partnerships need attention. Alliances and committing to changes for prosperity, including changes in the international system, expose the big boys' political games and the struggle for global leadership while people pay the price!

The chills on my spine are not disappearing as fast as illusion sellers paint the future. The world economy is shaken and fragile in the face of other instabilities around the globe. To rebuild society in new ways will require better integration and a shift in economic priorities. What about health before wealth?

The coronavirus may be gone or exist under the radar, but the consequences, like the unpredictability of international alliances, persist.

CRICKET TIME!



Boys play cricket on the banks of the river Ganges in Prayagraj, India, on Wednesday. — AFP

The simmering de-dollarisation...

The culmination of World War II prompted the US dollar to dominate the financial world for over 80 years, but now another war in the backyard of Europe has applied a reverse gear to this phenomenon – de-dollarisation.

When the Americans imposed a cascade of sanctions against Russia last year they were expecting that the Russian economy to be squeezed to the point of surrender. However, the financial sanctions against Russia, billed as the “weaponisation” of the dollar, resulted in a different outcome — the rise of alternative financial infrastructures promoted by the US's two most significant geopolitical competitors, China and Russia.

In response to these measures, these nations have moved to develop their own financial systems, which could potentially diminish the dollars' global financial dominance. The movement towards de-dollarisation is by no means confined to Russia and China alone. Rather, it is a global trend, with nations and regions from India to Argentina, Brazil to South Africa, and the Middle East to Southeast Asia all redoubling their efforts to reduce their reliance on the dollar.

At the core of this drive towards financial independence lies a deep-seated fear among many countries: that the United States may one day use the full weight of its currency to target them with the same devastating



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

THE RECENT SURGE IN DE-DOLLARISATION INITIATIVES CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE GROWING ANXIETY, AS COUNTRIES SEEK TO PROTECT THEIR ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND SAFEGUARD AGAINST POTENTIAL FUTURE THREATS

sanctions that have been imposed on Russia.

The recent surge in de-dollarisation initiatives can be traced back to this growing anxiety, as countries seek to protect their economic interests and safeguard against potential future threats.

From the collapse of the Bretton Woods system to the launch of the euro by the European Union in 1999, and from the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis to the present day, questions about the dollar's weakening hold on the global economy have persisted.

Today, the world's central banks fell below 59 per cent of their foreign exchange reserves in dollars in the final quarter of last year — a decline from 70 per cent in 2000 — depicting the simmering trend towards de-dollarisation. During the same period, the euro has registered only a modest increase in its share of global reserves, rising from 18 per cent to just under 20 per cent today. In contrast, the Chinese renminbi (RMB/yuan), despite accounting for less than 3 per cent of the world's reserve currency holdings, has been showing very rapid growth since 2016.

The impact of US-led economic sanctions has been felt by a significant portion of the

global population. For many, the consequences of these sanctions have been severe, limiting their ability to engage in essential economic and financial activities that are often priced in dollars.

In response, there has been a growing movement towards de-dollarisation, as countries seek to reduce their exposure to the vagaries of US foreign policy and safeguard against the impact of sanctions. The rapid appreciation of the dollar in recent years has had far-reaching implications for countries around the world.

One significant impact has been on dollar-denominated debt, which has become considerably more expensive to repay as the currency has surged in value. The dollar's value has fluctuated significantly in recent years, with

the currency currently standing at over 10 per cent higher than its value at the start of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022, and a whopping 30 per cent higher than a decade ago.

In the quest for financial independence, many smaller economies have grown increasingly wary of their exposure to dollar-denominated debt. This, coupled with a push to strengthen regional trade ties, has spurred many countries to seek alternatives to the dollar.

The rise in the dollar's value has also translated into a sharp increase in import bills for essential commodities such as fuel and food. This has been a particular concern for nations that rely heavily on imports from other countries, as the cost of

these goods can quickly become prohibitive in the face of a strong dollar.

Egypt provides a compelling example of the challenges faced by countries burdened by dollar-denominated debt. In recent years, the country has been forced to take on ever-increasing levels of borrowing in order to stabilise its economy and prop up the value of its currency, the Egyptian pound. However, this strategy has come at a significant cost, with the country's sovereign debt soaring by a factor of four over the past decade.

The challenges faced by Egypt are emblematic of the broader challenges faced by many countries around the world, as they seek to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected economic landscape. Same is the case with many other countries who are being excessively burdened because their currencies are pegged with the dollars. As nations grapple with the impact of sanctions, shifting trade patterns, and volatile currency markets, the move towards de-dollarisation represents a critical response to these challenges, offering a way to safeguard against the uncertainties of the global economy and chart a course towards greater stability and prosperity.



There has been a growing movement towards de-dollarisation.

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Al Bashayer, Nizwa enter Ministry's Shield semis

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Al Bashayer and Nizwa booked their spots in the semifinals of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's 13th basketball shield competition.

Al Bashayer emerged Group A champions with a 60-51 win against Nizwa in the group match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Tuesday.

Al Bashayer have four points from two wins while Nizwa have three points with a win and a loss.

Despite the defeat, Nizwa finished second to qualify for the semifinals along with Al Bashayer.

Oman Club were out of the competition after finishing third in the group.

The match showcased impressive offensive activity from both teams, with Al Bashayer leading the group in a game where the winner took the lead early on.

The match opened with Al Bashayer's Mahmoud al Souli scoring two points after a shot from under the basket, followed by two points from his teammate Aaron Claudi. Nizwa responded with two three-pointers from Faisal al Jamudi. The excitement continued with more attacks, in which Al Bashayer managed to add 13 points, while Nizwa added 11 points, to end the first quarter with a score of 17-17.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer took the lead, scoring

10 points while Nizwa added 8 points, with the first-half ending with Al Bashayer ahead by only two points at 27-25.

In the third quarter, Al Bashayer's offensive prowess was on full display, while Nizwa struggled to keep up. Al Bashayer scored 21 points, with players taking turns to contribute. Nizwa only managed to add 14 points, resulting in Al Bashayer leading 48-39 at the end of the quarter.

The fourth quarter saw both teams performing equally well, with Al Bashayer scoring 12 points, the same as Nizwa's total points for the quarter. The match concluded with Al Bashayer defeating Nizwa 60-51, securing their place in the semifinals.

SEEB, AHLI SIDAB IN SEMIS

In the second group, Seeb emerged on top with six points and made the semifinals along with second-placed Ahli Sidab with three points. Salalah were out after finishing third.

Al Bashayer will meet Ahli Sidab and Seeb will take on Nizwa in the semifinals.

The match was officiated by first referee Rashid al Mushaifri and second referee Al Khalasi, both international-level referees, and third referee Ali al Salmani. The technical observer was Engineer Younis al Zadjali, and on the table were Hafez Awlad Ahmed, Yaqoub al Nadabi, Umainah al Hajriyah, and Fatima al Harithiyah.



DHOFAR DOMINATE OMAN CLUB WITH 4-1 VICTORY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Dhofar thrashed Oman Club 4-1 in the 20th round of the Omantel League at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium on Tuesday.

In the first-half, Dhofar advanced with two goals from two penalty kicks executed by professional players Braya Wilmerson and Abdullah Fawaz.

In the second half, another professional player Joseph added two goals for Dhofar, while Majid al Balushi pulled one back for Oman Club.

After this victory, Dhofar jumped to sixth place with 30 points. Oman club remained in fifth place with 31 points.

The match started with mutual attacks with an advantage for Dhofar.

In the 11th minute, Dhofar Club got a penalty kick, which was executed by Brazilian Praia Wilmerson, scoring the first goal for the team. In the 23rd minute, Dhofar got another penalty kick, executed by Abdullah Fawaz, scoring a second goal for the team in the 34th minute.

The second half began with cautious attacks, and in the 53rd minute, Dhofar added their third goal through Joseph. In the 57th minute, Joseph netted the fourth goal. Oman Club managed to reduce the deficit in the 90th minute through Majid al Balushi header.

Omar al Yaqoubi was the chief referee and assisted on the lines by Hamed al Ghafri, Saleh al Balushi, Mazin al Mashikhi Rabaa and Abdullah bin Omar Baaboud. Saeed al Matroushi was the match observer and Asim Bahajaj, general coordinator of the match.

MUSANNAH, BAHLA SHARE POINTS

At the Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Al Musannah and Bahla ended the match in a 1-1 draw. Bahla advanced with the goal of Ghanaian Robert Jansa, and Al Musannah scored the equaliser through Hammoud al Saadi to share the points.

Al Musannah remained in ninth place with 24 points, while Bahla jumped to fourth place with 31 points.



Asian Cup confirmed for Jan-Feb slot in Qatar next year

BENGALURU: The next edition of the Asian Cup will be held in Qatar from January 12 to February 10 in 2024, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) confirmed on Wednesday.

The quadrennial continental championship was awarded to China in 2019 but the world's most populous country relinquished the rights this year as it pursued a zero-Covid policy.



Qatar, which hosted the men's World Cup finals last year, was then named the host after the Gulf state was preferred to bids from South Korea and Indonesia.

The 24-team tournament has been moved from mid-2023 to early 2024 to avoid the heat of the Gulf summer.

Qatar has staged the Asian Cup twice, in 1988 and 2011 and it won the last tournament

in the United Arab Emirates in 2019.

The AFC said that the tournament will be staged across eight stadiums, six of which were used during the World Cup, where Argentina were winners.

The Asian Cup will coincide with the Africa Cup of Nations finals, which will run from January 13 to February 11 in Ivory Coast. — **Reuters**



No jet lag as Miller steers Gujarat to top of IPL table

NEW DELHI: David Miller hit an unbeaten 31 to power holders Gujarat Titans to their second straight IPL victory on Tuesday, hours after he flew in from South Africa for the T20 tournament.

Miller put on an unbeaten stand of 56 with young Indian talent Sai Sudharsan (62) as Gujarat chased down a target of 163 to defeat hosts Delhi Capitals by six wickets.

Gujarat were in early trouble after an excellent spell of fast bowling by South African Anrich Nortje, but Sudharsan anchored the innings and Miller provided the finishing touches with his 16-ball blitz.

"Didn't have time to get jet-lagged," said Miller, whose flight landed on Tuesday morning and who made the XI in place of the injured Kane Williamson.

"We were within range. It was a matter of three sixes or four fours."

Miller was one of the South Africans to have joined the Indian Premier League after the recent ODI series against the Netherlands at home.

But it was the 21-year-old

Sudharsan who showed an ice cool temperament, holding firm after Gujarat slipped to 54-3 when skipper Hardik Pandya departed.

"He has been batting beautifully," Pandya said of Sudharsan.

"You can see the fruit of his hard work. In two years he will do something big in franchise cricket and hopefully for India."

Rashid makes his mark

Gujarat pace spearhead Mohammed Shami and leg-spinner Rashid Khan took three wickets each as they restricted the opposition to 162-8 before handing Delhi a second straight loss.

Gujarat did not have the best of starts as Nortje removed both openers, including bowling Shubman Gill for 14, and were in further trouble when left-arm quick Khaleel Ahmed got Pandya caught behind for five.

But Vijay Shankar replaced Ireland fast bowler Josh Little under the new "impact player" rule introduced this season and joined Sudharsan in the middle to revive the chase.

Mitchell Marsh broke the

dangerous-looking stand of 53 after he trapped Shankar lbw for 29 but Sudharsan and Miller completed the job.

Delhi's batsmen never really got going despite skipper David Warner's 37 and a quickfire 36 from Axar Patel as they posted a below-par total.

Shami struggled to control his line and length and gave away runs at the start before he found his groove with the two key wickets of Prithvi Shaw and Marsh. Warner fell to Alzarri Joseph as he chopped on to his stumps. Joseph bowled at a lively pace and dismissed Rilee Rossouw for a first-ball duck.

Rashid claimed the wicket of Sarfaraz Khan who struggled to a 34-ball 30.

Coming in at number seven, Axar took on the bowlers with three sixes and two fours in his 22-ball innings but could not haul Delhi to a big enough total.

Delhi's Rishabh Pant was in attendance to cheer on his team he led last year. He is recovering after surgery to his leg following a car crash in December and will miss the season. — AFP



Confident RCB take on Kolkata in Eden Gardens



A lot is happening in the Indian Premier League and still it's just the seventh day in progress. Shreyas Iyer is set to miss the IPL 2023 and World Test Championship, since he is travelling to London for back surgery. Dasun Shanaka replaces the injured Kane Williamson for Gujarat Titans. In-form Rajat Patidar has been ruled out of IPL for Bangalore due to an Achilles heel injury. KKR have roped in Jason Roy in place of Shakib Al Hassan.

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS (KKR) VS ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE (RCB)

TEAM INFO: RCB will be travelling to the home of Rabindra Sangeet (Kolkata), where they will be taking on the home team Kolkata Knight Riders. KKR have dominated the head-to-head battle by +3, but in the last seven encounters, they have only been able to beat RCB two times. KKR are coming on the

back of a soul crushing defeat from the hands of Punjab at their home. While, RCB broke the back of MI in a one-sided encounter at home. RCB have been so clear about their plans that they didn't need to use the impact player in the first game. Head-to-Head - Played - 31; Won by KKR - 17; Won by RCB - 14
KKR Possible Impact player - Varun Chakravarthy, Venkatesh Iyer, N Jagadeesan, Vaibhav Arora, Suyash Sharma, Kulwant Kejroliya, Harshit Rana
RCB Possible Impact player - Mahipal Lomror, Sonu Yadav, Suyash Prabhudessai, Anuj Rawat, S Kaul, Mohd Siraj.
Pitch Report - The Eden Gardens is renowned for its batting-friendly pitch and has produced high-scoring T20 matches. In the IPL, the pitch is expected to be competitive. But as the game progresses, it can be very helpful to the bowlers, particularly spinners.
Match Prediction - KKR is a decent side, but in the absence of their captain Shreyas Iyer, they have looked extremely shaky. They do have some match winners and one of them will have to come to the party almost immediately. On the other hand, RCB, who have been making the play-offs in the last few years are oozing with



confidence on the back of ex-captain Virat Kohli and they would want him to continue in the same manner. In fact, it was RCB's bowling that was always the concern and this year with Siraj's form, RCB looks like a team to beat. Hence, Royal Challengers Bangalore will continue their momentum.

FAN COMMENTS

"With KKR missing the links and players, it's going to be AreeCeeBeeeee (RCB) all the way." - Mohd Rizmi, 39, Operations Manager, Sri-Lankan.
"Supporting RCB because of fantastic batting, better bowling and smart captaincy." - Tavish P Sharma, 22, Show Host, Indian.

"Most players of RCB are in brilliant form, while Chandrakant Pandit is doing a lot of chopping and changing with KKR, so it's going to be hands down RCB." -- Subhash Suvarna, 30, Accounts Executive, Indian. "RCB have ticked almost all the criteria. One area they need to look into is the death bowling. Hopefully their play in bold approach

and go all the way." - Meera Freddie, 18, Student, Indian. "As a Kannadiga, I am supporting RCB, Ee Sala Cup Nammade (this year the Cup is ours). RCB is going to come out with flying colours once again." Surendra Shetty, 50, Businessman, Indian. "I am a big fan of Russell, but KKR persists in sending him lower down the order to bat. Want to see him bat immediately after powerplay once." - Faisal Farid, 38, Businessman, Pakistan. Tomorrow's going to be a high-voltage clash and I am pretty sure KKR will outperform their opponents in front of the home crowd after 3 years! - Arinjoy Mitra, 24, IT Professional, India.

Send us your comment for the next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 92470544' and the best comments will be included. 30 words on the team that you support, full name, age, designation and nationality. You could post us your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles. TWITTER - @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM - @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

Muharraaq defeat Seeb in penalties to advance

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Bahrain's Muharraaq club advanced to the second round of the King Salman Cup for Arab Football Clubs after they defeated Seeb 5-4 in penalties late on Tuesday.

At Seeb Stadium, the 2022 AFC Cup winners managed to end the regulation time by a 2-0 and it was the same result in the first leg in Manama city in Bahrain on March 14.

In penalties, Seeb's Salah al Yahyai missed the second penalty with his kick missing the target. The triumph of Bahraini side meant, they will meet either Tunisia's US Monastir or Yemen's Fahman club in the second round of the King Salman Cup for Arab Football Clubs.

Seeb opened the scoring in the 43rd minute from the corner spot. Mohammed al Musallami's header went to Abdulaziz al Maqbali who put the ball in the net with another header to put Seeb in lead.

In the deciding half, Seeb



players pressed hard towards the box area of the rival side through movement of Salah al Yahyai, Marwan Taeab and Mohammed al Habsi.

After several attempts, Abdulaziz al Maqbali doubled the result in the 77th minute from the penalty spot. In the penalty shoot-out, Seeb's Mohammed al Musallami, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohammed Ramadhan and Marwan Taeab converted their penalties into goals except Salah al Yahyai's who's shot went away

from Muharraaq goalkeeper Sayyed Mohammed Abbas while Seeb keeper Ahmed al Rawahi could not save the opponents' penalties.

Seeb head coach Rasheed Jaber said post the match that the team delivered a top game. "The players showed a solid performance during the match and they were focused. This assisted the team to win the game in the regulation time. We were the better side throughout the game and missed several scoring attempts which could not take us to penalties. The team missed one of the penalties and this caused us to exit from the tournament."

Coach Rasheed Jaber affirmed that taking part in the King Salman Cup for Arab Football Clubs was an advantage for the team. "The team obtained the desired experience from this participation and the team will utilise from this assignment in future games. Now our focus will be shifted to the domestic league as some rounds are remaining and we will aim to register more victories," he concluded.



Oman club among 11 in 25th Asian Championship in Iran

MUSCAT: The 25th edition of Asian Championship for handball clubs draw will be held in Kuwait on Wednesday.

Eleven clubs are taking part in the tournament namely: Oman club, Foolad Mubarak Sepahan club (Iran), Shahid Shamili Kazroun club (Iran), Kuwait Club (Kuwait), Kazma Club (Kuwait), Junior Club (China), Tashkent Club (Uzbekistan), Al

Duhail Club (Qatar), Al Rayyan Club (Qatar), Al Najma Club (Bahrain) and the Al Gaysh Club (Syria).

Iranian city of Isfahan will host the championship from June 1 to 11. The teams will be divided into two groups, and the top winner will qualify for the seventeenth Super Globe Championship which will be held from October 17 to 23, in Saudi Arabia.



Fifa president Gianni Infantino (L) greets UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin after his re-election during the 47th UEFA Congress held in Lisbon on Wednesday. – AFP

Aleksander Ceferin re-elected UEFA president until 2027

LISBON: Aleksander Ceferin was re-elected unopposed for a third term of four years as president of UEFA at a meeting of European football's governing body in Lisbon on Wednesday.

The 55-year-old Slovenian lawyer, first elected in 2016 following the downfall of Frenchman Michel Platini, will now remain in the role until 2027.

"I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your unanimous support. It really means a lot to me," Ceferin told delegates at the UEFA Congress in the Portuguese capital.

"It is a great honour but mainly it is a great, great responsibility, towards you and towards football."

The UEFA Congress came just a few weeks after Gianni Infantino was re-elected as president of the sport's world governing body Fifa, also unopposed.

Ceferin recently successfully opposed proposals by Infantino to hold the World Cup every two years, and his re-election by acclamation comes after he also fought off the breakaway European Super League project during his second term.

He will now oversee the introduction of a new format for the Champions League starting next year.

However, the Super League is not dead yet, with Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus continuing to pursue the project.

A lawsuit has been launched against UEFA and Fifa at the European Court of Justice, accusing the governing bodies of abusing their power by threatening to expel clubs and players interested in joining a breakaway league.

A final ruling is expected in the coming weeks, although the court's advocate general, whose opinions are often followed by judges, provided a first ruling favourable to UEFA in December.

"Those who promote this project are now claiming that

"I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your unanimous support. It really means a lot to me"

ALEKSANDER CEFERIN
President of UEFA

they want to save football," Ceferin said.

"Is anybody fooled? Here we have two opposing world views, cynicism over morality, selfishness over solidarity, greed over benevolence, shameful lies over the truth, cartel over meritocracy and democracy, the quest for profit over the quest for trophies.

"Domestic leagues must remain the foundation of football," he added.

The new Champions League format will be introduced from the 2024/25 season, with the number of clubs involved in the group stage increasing from 32 to 36 teams all playing in one pool using what is known as the Swiss system.

The new format will see all participants play eight matches against eight different opponents.

Currently the group stage is divided into eight sections of four teams playing each other home and away.

While he seeks to calm tensions with Infantino, who also addressed the meeting in Lisbon, Ceferin will in addition be able to focus on pursuing the planned introduction of new Financial Fair Play rules.

Clubs will be forced to limit spending on player and staff wages, transfers and agents fees to 70 per cent of total revenues by 2025/26. — AFP

MESSI 'LIKELY' TO LEAVE PSG AT END OF SEASON

PARIS: Lionel Messi is "much more likely" to leave Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season than sign a new deal, a source close to the club said on Tuesday.

"The dynamics have completely changed with PSG less pushing to renew (his contract)," the source said, adding that there was "no deal, no exit yet. But exit is much more likely."

World Cup winner Messi, who will turn 36 in June, joined in 2021 on a two-year deal which expires at the end of this campaign.

On Sunday, the Argentine's name was jeered by some PSG fans as the teams were announced prior to the 1-0 home defeat against Lyon in Ligue 1.

Supporters of the Qatar-owned club are unhappy at the malaise around the team since they were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich last month.

PSG have lost eight times in 18 games in 2023, a run which has seen them go out of the French Cup prematurely although they remain six points clear at the top of the French table.

"The fans have changed things completely," the source said of the chances of Messi's deal being renewed and the supporters' reaction at the weekend.

Messi has scored 29 goals and set up 32 more in 67 appearances for PSG in all competitions.

Yet his form has dipped since he led Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar at the end of last year.

Some fans see him as a symbol of all the club have done wrong in focusing on superstar signings while failing to build a genuinely



competitive team.

Messi is currently costing PSG around 40 million euros (\$43.6 million) a year in wages at a time when the club have to keep in line with UEFA's Financial Fair Play rules, although there have been suggestions they could offer him a new deal on a reduced salary.

Barcelona have been openly courting Messi, hoping to persuade the Argentine to return to the Camp Nou two years after

he left the club where he won four Champions League titles. He left Barcelona when the club could not afford to renew his contract.

"I would love it if he returned," Barca vice-president Rafael Yuste said last week as he admitted there had been "contact" with Messi.

He has also been linked with a possible move to Major League Soccer where Inter Miami are said to be interested in signing him.

If Messi departs, PSG would

likely be doubly determined to keep hold of Kylian Mbappe for at least one more season, a year after persuading the France striker to sign a new deal and turn down overtures from Real Madrid.

As well as the uncertainty over Messi's future, there are doubts about coach Christophe Galtier, who was only appointed last July but has come under intense pressure following recent results. — AFP

Ronaldo overshadowed by prolific Al Nassr team mate Talisca

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo continues to find the net in Saudi Arabia, scoring two goals to reach 11 in nine league games - but still can't step out of the shadow of team mate and Al Nassr's top scorer Anderson Talisca.

The Brazilian also hit the net twice in the 5-0 victory over Al Adalah on Tuesday and is the league's joint top scorer with 16 goals, level with former Manchester United and Watford forward Odion Ighalo who plays for Al-Hilal.

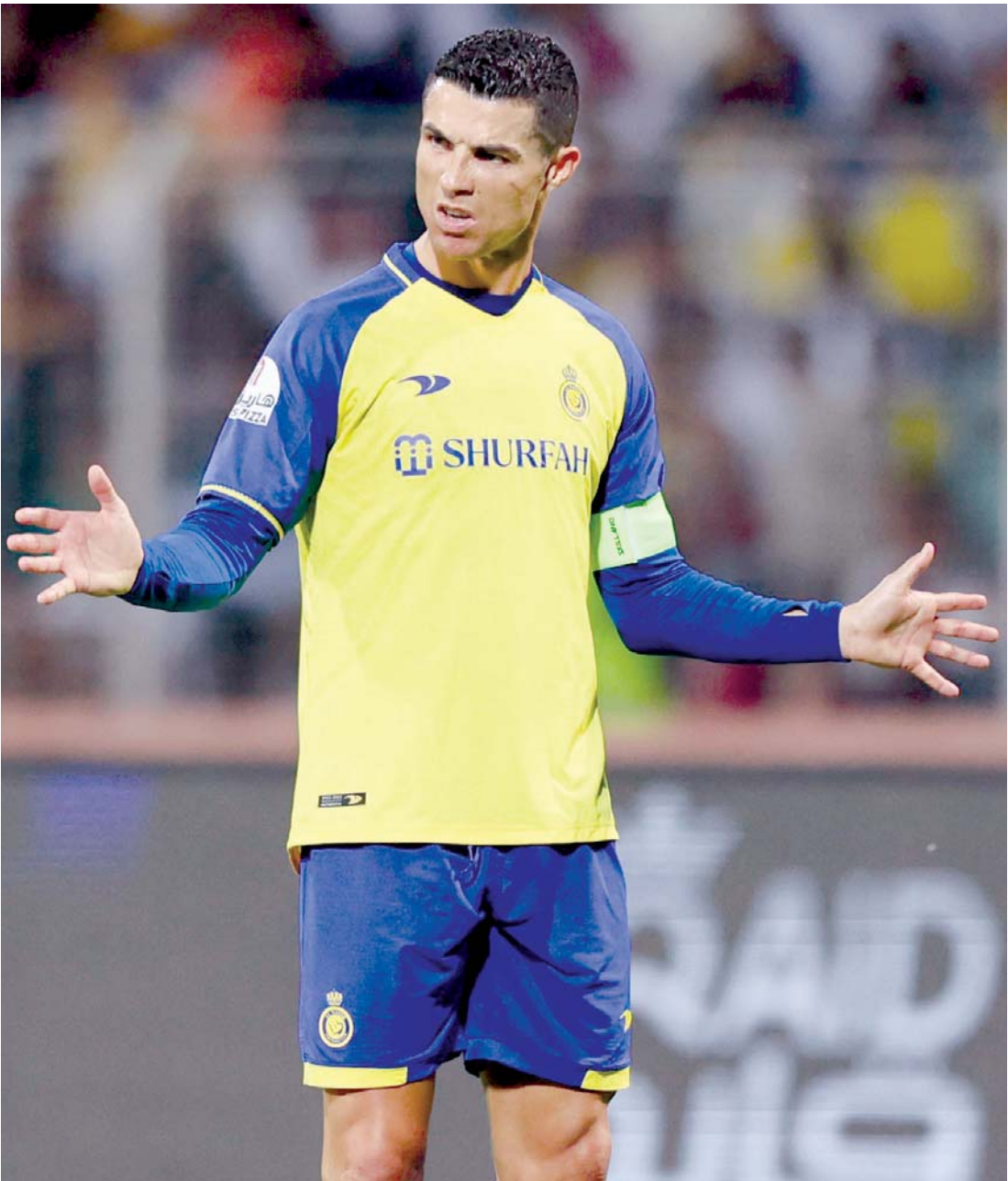
Al Nassr, who signed 38-year-old Ronaldo in January until 2025 in a contract estimated by media to be worth more than 200 million euros (\$219 million), are second in the league standings on 52 points, one behind leaders Al Ittihad.

There are eight games remaining in the season for each team.

"Every top player does his job. My full focus is on Al Nassr winning, not on being the league's top scorer. My main goal is to lead the team to win, and then everything else will come," Talisca told Saudi's SSC channel through a translator.

Just before the international break, Ronaldo handed Talisca the task of converting the winning penalty against Abha four minutes from time, which the Brazilian scored and described the gesture as "mutual respect" from Portugal captain.

On Tuesday, Al Nassr took the lead from a penalty in the first half, but this time Ronaldo decided to take it and scored to reach double figures for the season. — Reuters





First privately-funded women and children’s speciality hospital launches in Suhar

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Aman Healthcare Services SAOC, a healthcare sector focused private equity management vehicle of Oman Investment Corporation SAOC (OIC), has announced the launch of Saada Hospital - Oman’s specialised hospital for women and children – in Suhar.

After receiving a completion certificate from the Municipality and approval from the Ministry of Health (MOH), Saada Hospital opens its doors to provide much needed high-quality infrastructure and medical services to the Suhar and North Batinah community.

Kalat al Balushi, Chairman of Aman Healthcare and the Chief Executive Officer of OIC, stated: “I am pleased to announce the opening of Saada Hospital. I am extremely proud of the efforts put in by Saada Hospital’s executives and staff in obtaining the MOH certification and commissioning the operations in a record time, which enables us to offer our



world-class facilities to improve healthcare delivery for women and children in our society.”

He further added, “I am especially thankful to our investors, lenders, and stakeholders who have continued to put their faith in us to deliver the hospital’s vision.”

Commenting on the vision

behind Saada Hospital, Subba Rao Rajavarapu (Raj), CEO of Saada Hospital, said, “Saada Hospital’s vision is to be Oman’s healthcare leader in Women and Childcare. At Saada Hospital, we are committed to providing world-class healthcare services and experience through unparalleled expertise, modern

infrastructure, quality care, service excellence and skilled doctors to meet the unique healthcare needs of expecting mothers, women, and children in Oman.”

Dr Khalid al Balushi – Operations and HR Director of Saada Hospital further added: “The soft launch of Saada Hospital

is a significant milestone for the healthcare sector in Oman. The hospital’s commitment to quality, excellence, and patient-centred care will undoubtedly significantly improve the healthcare services to the people in the country.”

Saada Hospital is the unique and dedicated women and children hospital of its kind in Oman as its purpose-built state-of-the-art medical facilities over more than 10,000 square meters of built-up area opens with 32 inpatient rooms, 15 outpatient consultation rooms, nine modern labour delivery suites, three hi-tech operation theatres, a full-fledged emergency department, dedicated indoor and external kids play areas and a full range of NICU & ICU services.

Each inpatient room of Saada Hospital is designed to meet women and children’s requirements and local cultural needs with majlis to accommodate visiting family and friends.

Saada Hospital offers high-quality medical facilities with

maternity, surgical gynaecology, paediatrics, neonatal intensive care (NICU), fetal medicine, and infertility services.

In addition, it offers normal and high-risk pregnancy care, ante-natal and post-natal care, breastfeeding support, and parenting education with its patient-centric approach.

Saada Hospital also provides general healthcare services such as Internal Medicine, ENT, Cosmetic Dermatology, General Surgery, and General and Paediatric Dentistry. Saada Hospital is Aman Healthcare’s first project, with plans for expansion in Muscat and other GCC countries.

Aman Healthcare is backed by Oman’s most respectable pension funds, family houses and institutions as shareholders.

OIC, a leading Omani private equity investment company established in 2005, focuses on investing in healthcare, logistics, real estate, power, infrastructure projects, and asset and project management services.

Mwasalat Oman to build public transport hub in Al Buraimi



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

State-owned multimodal public transport operator Mwasalat – part of Asyad Group – is setting up an integrated public transport bus and taxi station in Al Buraimi Governorate – a move that will strengthen connectivity with the strategically important region of the Sultanate of Oman.

An MoU to this effect was signed recently by Mwasalat with the Ministry of Interior, represented by the Office of the Governor of Al Buraimi.

“The MoU aims to strengthen public-private sector partnerships (by developing) bus stations for city and intercity transport, waiting area for passengers and taxis, and a smart micro mobility station with shaded and public parking spaces,” said Mwasalat in a post.

The new hub will be the latest addition to an expanding public transport network encompassing new intercity routes, introduction of high-tech commuter buses and coaches, enhanced WiFi connectivity and innovative conveniences on board passenger buses, air-conditioned bus stations along key routes, and enhanced safety as well.

Public uptake of Mwasalat’s bus services has been growing dramatically with the state-run operator transporting over 3 million passengers across its network in 2022, up from 1.6 million a year earlier, representing a jump of 87.5 per cent.

Around 8,400 passengers patronised Mwasalat’s services on a daily basis in 2022, up from 6,000 in 2021. Its fleet of high-speed ferries carried 221,000 passengers during the same period, down from 245,000 passengers in 2021.

A new integrated public bus and taxi station in Al Buraimi will add to a makeover underway in the governorate to help strengthen its investment and tourism appeal. It includes the construction of Al Buraimi Gate, an imposing edifice that will also double as a virtual museum of the governorate’s natural and tourist attractions.

Omran, the government’s tourism investment and development arm, is also supporting the establishment of a major public park, Al Abila Park, in the governorate. Covering an area of 181,000 sq metres, the park will serve as an important recreational setting for local residents and tourists alike.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Majority state-owned Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) — member of Nama Group — said that the first phase of its ‘Rabt’ project is now 93 per cent complete and is preparing to commence the phase 2 later this year.

“The project is expected to enhance the efficiency and integration of the national electricity transmission networks. The project will also play a key role in securing the electricity network and opening up new horizons for the use of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar which are abundant in Al Wusta region,” Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, Chief Executive Officer of OETC said.

“The project will connect isolated areas from the main system such as Haima, Duqm and Mahout with the national grid. Moreover, ‘Rabt’ project will help in reducing the cost of energy produced in Duqm and Mahout using diesel due to its high cost and its negative impact on the environment,” the CEO added.

With a total cost of RO 183 million, the first phase of ‘Rabt’ — the North-South Interconnector project consists of 660 km 400 kV overhead lines, five main grid stations in Nahida, Barik, Suwaihat, Duqmum and Mahout. The first phase is divided into five projects:

The first project entails construction of 400 kV grid stations at Barik and Suwaihat and linking them to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO)



network. Barik station consists of twelve 400 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, two 132/400 transformers with a capacity of 500 Megavolt Ampere (MVA) for each of them.

This project also involves the installation of ten 132 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, four shunt reactors, control and relay panels and communication instrument in addition to associated construction works.

The Suwaihat station, on the other hand, consists of twelve 400 gas insulated switchgear bays, two 132/400 kV transformers with a capacity of 500 MVA for each of them in addition to twelve 132 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, six shunt reactors, control and relay panels and communication instrument in addition to associated construction works.

The second project entails the construction of 400 kV overhead lines with a total length of 129

kms between Barik and Suwaihat stations and 400 kV transmission lines with a total length of 195 kms between Barik and Nahida stations. The project includes construction of overhead lines towers, insulators and associated construction works.

The third project involves the construction of Duqm and Mahout 400 kV stations. Duqm station consists of twelve 400 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, two 132/400 transformers with a capacity of 500 Megavolt Ampere each, eight 132 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, four 132/33 kV transformers with a capacity of 125 MVA for each of them in addition to forty-two 33 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, six shunt reactors, control and relay panels and communication as well as associated construction works.

The fourth project entails the construction of 400 kV overhead lines with a total length of 191

kms between Suwaihat and Duqm stations and overhead lines with a total length of 152 kms between Duqm and Mahout stations. The project includes construction of overhead lines towers, insulators as well as associated construction works.

The fifth project involves the construction of Nahida 132/400 kV station. Nahida station consists of fourteen 400 kV gas insulated switchgear bays, two 132/400 transformers with a capacity of 500 MVA each, eight 132 kV gas insulated switchgear bays in addition to control and relay panels, communication and associated construction works.

This project also involves the diversion of 400 kV transmission line linking Izki and Ibri stations through Nahida station. This station is considered as the main interconnecting point between National Grid in north of Oman and PDO electricity network.

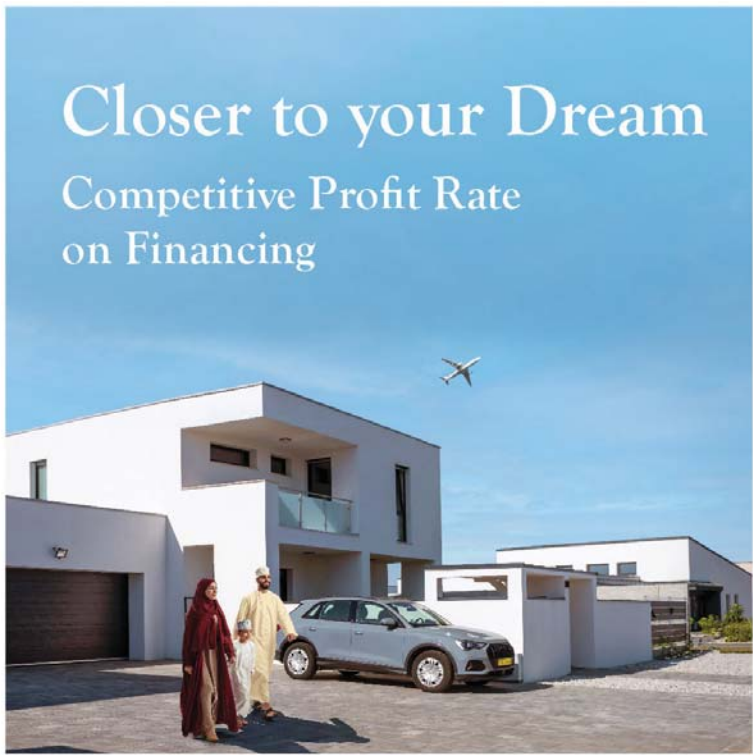
Everyone can now enjoy 4.5% financing rate with Meethaq’s Ramadhan offer

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to offer the best customer value proposition. Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat has announced an exclusive offer to commemorate the holy month of Ramadhan.

Customers will be able to avail competitive profit rate of 4.5 per cent on home finance, auto finance, personal goods finance, education finance, marriage finance, travel finance and financing consolidation till May 31, 2023.

New and existing customers can apply for any of the products and benefit from swift processing and minimal documentation.

Customers are eligible for up to 80 per cent financing for home or auto financing while 100 per cent financing is available for travel, marriage, education and personal goods finance. In addition, customers



can consolidate any existing debt that they may have and move to Meethaq under the special

Ramadhan offer. Customers working in the Government and Private sectors can avail the

special profit rates on Meethaq's products.

Applications may be submitted at any of Meethaq's 24 state-of-the-art branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, said: “we are delighted to be the leading provider of Islamic retail finance products in Oman and would like to show our gratitude through the special Ramadhan package which offers customers the opportunity to save on our product suite of housing, auto and personal finance products during the Holy Month of Ramadhan”.

He thanked all customers for their patronage and confidence in the financing offers and the various products and services of Meethaq.

In line with its commitment

to offer a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers across the country, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic network in Oman consisting of 24 branches across Oman.

Meethaq also has a dedicated network of over 40 ATMs and CDMs, and provides free access to more than 800 ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari'a compliance certification by the Shari'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

For more details about Meethaq's various financing options, please go to <https://www.meethaq.om/en/consumerfinancing/Pages/default.aspx>, or call on 24656666.

KR infrastructure’s Roca wins Oman’s most trusted brand award



MUSCAT: Popular sanitary-ware brand — Roca —from Khimji Ramdas (KR) Infrastructure’s Bath Solutions vertical, celebrated another successful year at Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards (OMTB), taking home the award in the bath fittings and accessories category at a ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Designed to encourage the general public and consumers to vote for their favourite brands, the OMTB Awards are revered within the industry for their recognition of trust.

This year’s programme was held under the auspices of Said bin Hamoud al Ma’awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Commenting on the award, Varun Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group mentioned, “At our core, we will always remain a customer-centric organisation, committed to delivering exceptional service

and top-quality products. Given our comprehensive approach to business, we provide end-to-end services to support clients at every stage of their journey. We are pleased a key brand such as Roca for sanitary-ware within our Infrastructure portfolio, has established itself as a standout player in the market, as evidenced by the winning of this award and its growing popularity.”

Ravi Dhulipala, Chief Operating Officer - KR Infrastructure Cluster stated, “Our tailor-made solutions align perfectly with our customer expectations and are equally well-complimented by our comprehensive services, including installation, maintenance, and support.

Offering a range of solutions that integrate innovative engineering with stunning aesthetics and sustainability to discerning customers, Roca has bagged OMTB award for the second year consecutively.”

Oman Data Park, Uqudo ink pact to roll out digital identity solutions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 5

Oman Data Park (ODP), the leading provider of cloud and data centre services in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced a strategic partnership with Uqudo, a well-known digital identity tech firm, to contribute to accelerate the digital transformation in Oman.

This partnership was celebrated in a ceremony held in Muscat on Tuesday. Based on this partnership, Uqudo and ODP will work together to integrate digital identity solutions into ODP's existing infrastructure, enabling individuals and organisations to securely authenticate and verify their identities online.

This strategic partnership will lead to leveraging Uqudo's platform that provides end-to-end digital identity technologies for customer enrolment, digital identity verification and biometric detection, NFC-based passport reading and verification, document cognitive analysis and scanning as well as utilising the (eKYC) technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Commenting on this partnership, Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park said, “While we at Oman



Data Park are committed to provide our customers with the latest and most advanced technologies, our partnership with Uqudo, will contribute to enhance our customer services through providing digital identity solutions that are resistant to digital fraud.”

Al Wahaibi added: “In accordance with this strategic cooperation, both parties have committed to building combined offerings to facilitate and accelerate the digital journey in Oman. This will enhance user experience and security and improve access to online services across the country, supporting Oman's efforts in the process of digital transformation.”

Mohamed Fagiri, CEO of Uqudo, said: “This partnership

will be a vital step toward Oman's digitalisation after our recent participation with ODP and Omantel in conducting the first fully digital national elections in the region.

Uqudo will provide extensive digital on boarding services for all companies supported by ODP.

With Oman accelerating towards an inclusive digital society with rapid digital growth, comprehensive digital on boarding is necessary for companies to scale.”

This cooperation will also contribute to enhance the businesses on the ODP platform, which will gain access to exhaustive identity solutions that can support their overall growth while being compliant with regulatory requirements.

TotalEnergies, Towell Auto Centre host seminar on natural gas value chain in Oman

MUSCAT: TotalEnergies, one of the world's leading integrated energy companies, along with its partner Towell Auto Centre hosted a seminar on the natural gas value chain in Oman. The seminar was held on March, 2023, at Novotel Muscat airport hotel.

The seminar focused on the opportunities and challenges of the natural gas value chain in Oman and brought together experts from the energy sector to discuss the latest trends and innovations in the industry.

The event provided an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the natural gas value chain, including exploration, production, processing, transportation, and distribution.

“This seminar is an opportunity to showcase TotalEnergies' commitment to supporting the development of Oman's energy sector and promoting sustainable development,” said Sergio Giorgi TotalEnergies' Country Chair in Oman.

“We are delighted to partner with Towell Auto Centre to share our expertise and knowledge on the natural gas value chain, which is a critical part of Oman's energy mix.

With experience of serving Oman Industrial customer with speciality lubricants, we want to grow further with our value adding products for Natural Gas value chain market,” said Nishant Soni, Global Market Manager Energy from TotalEnergies Lubrificants, France.

Towell Auto Centre is one of Oman's leading automotive companies, and its participation in the seminar reflects its commitment to supporting the country's transition to a more sustainable energy future.

“We are proud to partner with TotalEnergies to host this seminar, which provided valuable insights on lubricants dedicated for the natural gas value chain,” said S Kasthuriengan, CEO of Towell Auto Centre.

The seminar attracted a wide range of participants, including government officials, industry experts, academics, and students.

The event featured keynote speeches, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, providing attendees with a comprehensive overview of TotalEnergies Lubricants product and service offer for natural gas value chain in Oman.

OTE celebrates achievements of high-performing employees

MUSCAT: The OTE's Annual Excellence Awards ceremony was an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of high-performing employees of the Group, and to recognise them for their contribution to the organisation.

Around 70 Omani and expat employees who did the company proud with their outstanding performance in 2022 were feted at a grand ceremony held recently



at the Group's headquarters in Wattayah (Muscat).

In congratulatory remarks, OTE Group Director Mohammed Saad Bahwan applauded the winners of Excellence Awards for 2022 and thanked them for their dedication, sincerity, and steadfast commitment to their workplace responsibilities.

“Employees are our most valuable asset. By recognising and rewarding employee performance,

our goal is to keep workplace motivation and morale at elevated levels throughout the year,” he said.

Established in 1991, OTE Group is one of Oman's largest business houses representing renowned international brands distributed across the automotive, auto ancillary, electronics, home appliances, and leasing and finance segments of the consumer business.

Assessing the social impact of social responsibility



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

Many issues of concern to civil society, companies and the government were raised at the recent Omani Forum for Partnership and Social Responsibility.

We focus here on the issue of the social impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) adopted by organisations in country.

Through the CSR mechanism, organisations pledge to abide by international conventions and ethical standards in fostering the growth and development of communities in which they operate.

In Oman, we see many Omani companies showing interest in

social responsibility issues, and there is a commitment to promote charitable work and investment in the local community. This is achieved by directing some of financial resources to community support activities, such as securing jobs for the unemployed, funding training programmes, supporting the rehabilitation of young people, providing housing and services to low-income families, and so on.

From this standpoint, CSR must benefit deserving sections of society and the needs of voluntary and humanitarian associations working in this field.

The last forum discussed the need to form an independent institution to manage issues

of social responsibility instead of having multiple agencies distributed between the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority, among others. A unified institutions will ensure that CSR funding resources will be distributed equally to the needs of the community.

Further, these funds and services provided by Omani companies must remain inside the country and be spent on internal projects as envisioned under the In-Country Value model.

However, the Foreign Ministry or the Ministry of Finance can have provisions to enable friendly countries that have suffered from

natural disasters to benefit from humanitarian support.

Omani laws need to organise the process of social responsibility in the private sector in a way that keeps pace with modern trends.

This is not to prescribe certain percentages for CSR budgets by public share holding companies, but rather to provide advice, ensure support for higher education and specialised programmes for greater to the local economy.

It also requires Omani government institutions to motivate the companies that contribute to enhancing the resources of institutions and local communities with tangible projects, and to assist registered donor institutions in getting

approvals for their initiatives.

In the Sultanate of Oman, charitable activities have resulted in more social solidarity among the various segments of society.

However, what we see today in terms of donations and funding for some institutions do not yield the desired results, often resulting in the waste of resources. This requires a scientific methodology for evaluating the impacts of such CSR initiatives.

It is also very important to identify impartial bodies to measure the social impact of social responsibility, and to ascertain how money is spent and to assess their impact on societies and individuals based on governance and transparency principles.

Swiss mega-bank has scope to shrink to greatness

European bankers have long dreamed of creating a financial giant to match US rivals like JPMorgan. In UBS, which is rescuing Credit Suisse in a government-brokered deal, they almost have one. The irony is that returning CEO Sergio Ermotti's No. 1 priority should be to shrink it as quickly as he can.

The combined Swiss mega-bank will start out with a \$1.7 trillion balance sheet, making it the 10th largest Western bank, based on Refinitiv data. It could hold 30% of total deposits in its home market, according to 2021 figures from the Swiss National Bank, double the next largest player's share.

The combined global wealth-management business, meanwhile, should have roughly \$3.4 trillion under its purview based on 2022 data, second only to Morgan Stanley.

The deal will also initially propel UBS into the investment-banking big leagues, with combined advisory and underwriting revenue of \$3.2 billion last year, ahead of both Bank of America and Citigroup.

Given that scale, it might be tempting to go for more growth. Credit Suisse was in the process of running down, selling or carving out trading and investment-banking businesses with risk-weighted assets (RWAs) of \$68 billion.

If UBS kept all that it might be able to prise open the Wall Street oligopoly and reverse a decade of shrinking overall market share for European firms.

However, the opposite seems more likely. Ermotti's departing predecessor Ralph Hamers said the enlarged UBS would cap RWAs devoted to investment banking at 25% of the bank's total.

Based on balance sheets at the end of 2022, the combined figure was 29%. That implies UBS could shed RWAs worth at least \$26 billion.

Indeed, Ermotti has scope to slash deeper. Credit Suisse CEO Ulrich Körner was hamstrung by large losses, which drained capital and limited how quickly he could shrink.

By contrast, UBS generated \$9.6 billion of pre-tax profit last year, roughly three times the total amount that Körner had pencilled in for restructuring and impairment charges during his turnaround plan.

The discounted takeover also gives UBS an opportunity to jettison unwanted businesses. The \$3.7 billion outlay, based on UBS's current share price, is \$43 billion less than Credit Suisse's tangible book value at the end of last year.

Add the \$18 billion capital boost from writing off Credit Suisse's hybrid debt instruments and throw in about \$10 billion of possible balance sheet insurance from the Swiss government, and Ermotti has lots of wiggle room.

RBC analysts reckon that even if the new UBS wrote down assets worth \$20 billion, it would still have a chunky 15.4% common equity Tier 1 capital ratio. The emergency combination of UBS and Credit Suisse has created a banking giant. Unlike previous empire-builders, Ermotti's job is to unmake it. — Reuters

THE COMBINED GLOBAL WEALTH-MANAGEMENT BUSINESS, MEANWHILE, SHOULD HAVE ROUGHLY \$3.4 TRILLION UNDER ITS PURVIEW BASED ON 2022 DATA, SECOND ONLY TO MORGAN STANLEY.



ANA SWANSON

The author writes about trade and international economics for The New York Times. She previously covered the economy, trade and the Federal Reserve for The Washington Post.

Since President Joe Biden came into office two years ago, the United States has declined to pursue new comprehensive free-trade agreements with other countries, arguing that most Americans have turned against the kind of pacts that promote global commerce but that also help to send factory jobs overseas.

But in recent months, with the rollout of a sweeping climate bill intended to bolster clean energy manufacturing, the lack of free-trade agreements with some of America's closest allies has suddenly become a major headache for the administration.

The dispute, which centres on which countries can receive benefits under the Inflation Reduction Act, has caused significant rifts with foreign governments and drawn blowback from Congress. And it is helping to reignite a debate over whether the United States should be working to break down trade barriers with other countries — or keep them intact in an attempt to protect American workers.

The law as written offers tax credits for electric vehicles that are built in North America or that are made with battery minerals from the United States and countries with which it has a free-trade agreement.

Those provisions have angered allies in Europe and elsewhere that, despite close ties with America, do not actually have free-trade agreements with the United States. They have complained that companies in their countries would be put at a disadvantage to US firms that can receive the subsidies.

To soothe relations, the Biden administration has developed a complicated workaround, in which it is signing limited new trade deals with Japan and the European Union. But that solution has vexed

Biden's reluctant approach to free trade draws backlash



President Joe Biden speaks at the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company factory under construction in Phoenix. — NYT

lawmakers of both parties, who say that these agreements are not valid and that the administration needs to ask Congress to approve the kind of free-trade agreement the law envisions.

"It's a fix," said Edward Alden, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who specialises in trade, adding that they were not free-trade agreements "by any reasonable definition of the term."

The World Trade Organization defines a free-trade agreement as covering "substantially all trade" between countries.

In the United States, such broad agreements need the approval of Congress, although the executive branch has the authority to negotiate much narrower agreements.

Administration officials argue that because the Inflation Reduction Act does not define the term "free-trade agreement," these narrower pacts are allowed.

But in hearings before the House and the Senate last month, lawmakers criticised the administration for bypassing Congress in making these agreements.

Some lawmakers argued for more traditional free-trade deals, while others voiced support for new deals with higher labour and environmental standards, like the North American agreement Congress approved in 2020.

In her opening statement at the hearings, Katherine Tai, the US trade representative, set out a vision for a trade policy that was

different from those of previous administrations, focused more on defending American workers from unfair foreign competition than opening up global markets. Tai said she and her colleagues were "writing a new story on trade" that would put working families first and reflect the interests of a wider cross section of Americans.

Speaking before the Senate on Thursday, Tai said she remained "open minded" about doing more trade agreements if they would help address the challenges the country has today.

The Biden administration has long insisted that past approaches to trade policy — in which other countries gained access to the US market through low or zero tariffs — ended up hurting American workers and enriching multinational companies, which simply moved US jobs and factories overseas.

In contrast, Biden officials have pledged to strengthen the economy and to make the country more competitive with China by expanding the country's infrastructure and manufacturing, rather than negotiating new trade deals.

The administration is currently negotiating trade frameworks for the Indo-Pacific region and the Americas, and is engaging in trade talks with Taiwan, Kenya and other governments. But, to the dissatisfaction of some lawmakers in both parties, none of these

agreements are expected to involve significantly opening up foreign markets by lowering tariffs, as more traditional trade deals have done.

Rep Adrian Smith, R-Neb., who leads the House Ways and Means trade subcommittee, said in the hearing that he was concerned the United States had "lost momentum on trade" even as China continued to aggressively broaden its own partnerships.

"I cannot express strongly enough," he added, "that the administration cannot just come up with new definitions of what a trade agreement is for some reason, and certainly not to give handouts for electric vehicles."

"You have to appreciate that we live in a very different world," Tai responded.

She said the Biden administration sought to adapt its policies to respond "to the world we're living in, and not the world that we want to live in."

Part of the pressure stems from the fact that other countries — including China — are continuing to pursue more traditional trade deals that lower their tariffs with trading partners, giving their companies an advantage over businesses based elsewhere. On Friday, British officials announced that they had reached an agreement to join a Pacific trade pact that, despite being devised by the Obama administration, does not include the United States.

— The New York Times

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

we shall overcome

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

NEW RO SO BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

Be Careful, Be Responsible!

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call, he commended the Sultanate's role in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. "The United Nations values the vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East but also in the world. He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advancing and supporting peace and stability.

SOME PEOPLE, NOT POLICIES, ARE THE PROBLEM

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SOME PEOPLE, NOT POLICIES, ARE THE PROBLEM



ramadhaan



Qaranqasho: a tradition eagerly awaited by kids in Oman during the holy month

Qaranqasho is a long-awaited Omani heritage festival that children and adults prepare for days in advance. On this evening, children wear their finest, colourful traditional costumes that were tailor-made and chosen with passion... **P20**

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

Say, "O people, I am Allah's Messenger to you all—He to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no god except He. He gives life, and He causes death." So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the Gentle Prophet, who believes in Allah and His Words. And follow him, so that you may be guided.

(Surah Al-Araf, 158)

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "The person who strives on behalf of the widows and poor is like those who strive in the way of Allah and like those who fast in the day and pray at night."

HEALTH TIPS

A change in routine, like fasting during Ramadan, could lead to constipation. Consume more fiber-rich foods including fruits, whole grains, legumes, and veggies to avoid this. Keep hydrated and endeavour to stay active whenever you can.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN



The Story of the Sabbath Breakers

ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY SAYS :{ And ask them about the town by the sea, when they violated the Sabbath. When they observed the Sabbath, their fish would come to them surfacing. But when they violated the Sabbath, they would not come to them. Thus We tried them because they disobeyed.

And when a group of them said, "Why do you counsel a people whom Allah will annihilate, or punish with a severe punishment?" They said, "As an excuse before your Lord, and so they may abstain." And when they neglected what they were reminded of, We saved those who prohibited evil, and

We seized those who did wrong with a terrible punishment—because of their sinfulness. And when they stubbornly rebelled against the command to refrain, We said to them, "Be despicable apes."} Surah al A'raf

THIS STORY RELATES to a small fishing community comprised of Bani Israel. One of these injunctions was the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday), where Bani Israel was completely prohibited from doing any work or lighting a fire. For this fishing village, it meant that they were not allowed to fish on Saturdays.

This injunction was particularly difficult to comply with, because, the seas in which they fished proved to be poor fishing grounds for six days of the week, but every Saturday, all types of fish would appear.

On all other days, the fish would vanish and the fishermen would come back empty-handed.

The appearance of the plentiful fish was a trial from Allah to test the faith, obedience, and patience of the community. This greatly frustrated the fishermen. They could not tolerate the observance of the Sabbath any longer, but at the same time, did not want to outrightly disobey Allah.

Therefore, they devised a scheme to circumvent Allah's order. They would lay out their fishing traps on Fridays, and the fish that come on Saturdays were caught in the traps. On Sundays, the fishermen would collect the fish. In doing so, they deliberately disobeyed Allah – even if technically they did not fish on Saturdays, the fish in fact were caught because of their trickery and deception.

They understood that they were breaching the observance of the Sabbath in substance. The rest of the villagers, who did not participate in such sinful acts, were divided into two groups. The first actively disapproved of the actions and warned the wrongdoers to rectify their ways before the punishment and torment of Allah fell upon them.

The second remained silent in the face of all this wrongdoing. They did nothing to reprimand the wrongdoers. They allowed the disobedience to continue, even though they did not actively participate in such wrongdoing. Finally, the curse and wrath of Allah fell upon the community. So when they exceeded the limits of what they were prohibited, we said to them: "Be you monkeys, despised and rejected." (Surah al A'raf 7:163 -7:166)

IN PHOTOS



A man offers dates to a woman in front of the Dome of the Rock at Al-Aqsa mosques compound — considered Islam's third holiest site — in the old city of Jerusalem during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan. Muslims follow the tradition set by the prophet Mohammed whom believers say used to break his fast by eating dates and drinking goat's milk during the holy month. The dawn-to-dusk fast is conceived as a spiritual struggle against the seduction of earthly pleasures, but the evening iftar festive meals traditionally bring families together during Ramadhan. — AFP



A displaced Syrian child displays a date, during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan, at a camp for people who had to leave their homes due to February's massive earthquake in Syria's rebel-held town of Al Dana, in the northwestern Idlib province, bordering Türkiye. —AFP



People serve themselves at a buffet at an Iftar fast-breaking meal during the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan at a luxury hotel in Dubai. — AFP



Ramadhan in the Netherlands



By Kabeer Yousuf
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Photo MSA Nederland

The holy month of Ramadhan is an imperceptible chord that binds humans together with the same feeling, which is hunger. Believers sacrifice their hunger and thirst for the sake of the Almighty who ordained to feel the pangs of hunger to understand how much one's poor neighbour must be suffering and to be grounded just as the palm tree bends further down to earth just as the fruits on them gets ripens day by day'. Although the believers are separated by the geographical boundaries from each other, the feeling of Ramadhan unites them

all and albeit various countries have different variants of iftar and suhour delicacies, the one thing that joins them all is the feeling of hunger and the willingness to sacrifice material pleasures during the day and to be kinder and more merciful to the fellow beings. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims in the Netherlands started the fasting month of Ramadhan along with the rest of the world on March 22. During this period, Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, have sex, or smoke from dawn until evening, and they're encouraged to do more charity work. Moroccan-Dutch Muslims follow the Islamic calendar based on the moon's position and the new month begins when the moon's first crescent appears in the sky. However, Turkish-Dutch Muslims

use a slightly different calendar as the Turkish government determines the division of the months a few years in advance, based on computer calculations on the moon's position over the capital Ankara. Nonetheless, both Turkish-Dutch Muslims started Ramadhan fasting with the other Muslims across the world this year. In the Netherlands, mosques across the country host joint iftars and Muslims and Islamic organisations distribute food packages during the month catering to the people on the move, in neighbourhoods, and at the mosque. During the month, the Dutch Muslims host numerous activities such as the Ramadhan Conference (a la New Year's Eve conference), while sports clubs organise sports competitions for young people at later times besides offering meals. Various student associations also participate in the celebrations. The Amsterdam SUN organisation has been organising an iftar meal in the EYE film museum while Muslim Student Associations (MSA's) take active part in various iftar-suhour programmes and charity initiatives. In the Netherlands Muslims observe the holy month of Ramadhan in diverse ways. For most, it is a time for devotion and reflection through fasting, praying and engaging in acts of charity. As community plays a significant role during this month, Muslim Student Associations across the Netherlands are providing a space for young Muslims to come together and celebrate Ramadhan. "We see in the past years more and more international Muslim students, in search of finding a community, take on an active role within their MSA's. Most now have international board members, with a handful having international presidents too", says Rehan Siddiqui, a 24-year old student who is the Vice President of MSA Netherlands (MSA NL), the national umbrella organisation of 16 local Dutch MSA's. "Having grown up in the Gulf myself, I definitely missed the Ramadhan environment when I first

arrived here and searched for a group to share my iftars and spend the month with," Siddiqui adds. As the national umbrella for Muslim students in the Netherlands, MSA NL aims to ensure Muslim students are represented in education and society. This now includes a growing proportion of international Muslim students in addition to Dutch Muslims. This Ramadhan, MSA NL has been organising two iftars, i.e. one with the Dutch Ministry of Interior Department Tackling Racism and Discrimination, and a National Iftar with various figures from the Dutch government. "We aim to create a better understanding of Islam within Dutch society and institutions, and motivate students through their faith to give back to their society. At the same time, uniting and bringing together our multi-ethnic and diverse group of students, including many from Oman," Rehan adds. The understanding of giving back to society and to connect globally through local networks is also facilitated by student-led charity initiatives, such as The Barakah Projects, who each year collectively raise money for a humanitarian aid project in a different country. Last year, The Barakah Projects raised over 15055 euros (RO 6281 approx) for food aid parcels in Afghanistan. This year, students across the Netherlands are organising different activities, such as iftars and lectures, to raise money for the accessibility to education for children in refugee camps in the Banaadir region in Somalia. "The concept of charity, infaq, from an Islamic perspective is immensely diverse and engaging since the concept of giving is much more than handing over part of your wealth. We aim to inspire and inform many with the importance of this noble act, and the care taking role we have as Muslims for our communities, both local and global. What better time than the month of Ramadhan?" Raziye Basaran, co-founder and board member of The Barakah Projects asked.

In the 'Garden of England', loss-making orchards are cut down

THE STUMPS OF DOZENS of apple trees lie discarded along the side of a field. The fruit that helped give the "Garden of England" its name hundreds of years ago no longer makes money so farmer James Smith is tearing down his orchards. Shortages of tomatoes and cucumbers on Britain's supermarket shelves earlier this year turned the spotlight onto the country's food producers. For some of them, the ultra-competitive grocery market has gone too far. "I don't really want to get rid of all of my fruit but I simply cannot see a way of overcoming all of the challenges," Smith said at his farm amid the rolling hills of Kent, southeast England, where his family have grown apples since 1882. Turning a profit from selling red apples to supermarkets has been a struggle for years, he said. A more unpredictable climate has been compounded by the lack of labour to pick fruit in the years after Britain left the European Union. The surge in inflation over the last year brought the situation to a head. For 2022's crop to break even, he said he needed supermarkets to pay him 20% more than the previous year for each giant wooden crate of apples. Supermarkets offered 0.8% more. It was the final straw after years of losses. "If I stop growing fruit I can make money," he said, explaining his plans to diversify away from apples by turning to livestock, a vineyard and shop.



Britain's fruit production has been in decline since 2015, according to government figures, and was down 12% in 2021 from the previous year. The United Kingdom imports about 85% of its fruit needs annually. Supermarkets say they need to hold prices down for consumers, who are grappling with a cost of living crisis. Grocery price inflation stood at a record level of 17.5% according to the most recent industry data for March. The British Retail Consortium, which represents supermarkets, said they source the majority of their food from the United Kingdom and know they need to pay farmers a sustainable price.

PROBLEMS FOR THE FUTURE "Given the pressure on British farmers at the moment, retailers are paying more for their produce," BRC's Director of Food & Sustainability Andrew Opie said. But Smith, who over the last decade said he has supplied all the big supermarkets, including most recently Tesco and Aldi, via a partner group, said supermarkets do not pay enough. "Retailers are completely committed to making sure we can't make any sensible profit, not even in the good years," said Smith, whose title is managing director of Loddington Farm. By squeezing domestic producers so hard, he believes retailers are stor-



ing up problems for the future. If other farmers like him stop producing at scale, Britain will be more reliant on imports and vulnerable to supply shocks. For the farmers that stick it out, it will be a battle. "Clearly a grower with no margins hasn't got the profits to invest back in the business," said Richard Napier, professor in plant and agricultural biosciences at the University of Warwick. In Kent, Smith is removing 80% of his orchards. Last year growing apples lost him 150,000 pounds (\$186,000), a loss which would have been higher had it not been cushioned by other income streams from his land. Last harvest's Braeburn apples have not been sold. Wooden crates stacked eight high are loaded in a warehouse where they are kept at between 0.5 and 1 degree Celsius to keep them fresh and provide supply whatever the season. That means big energy costs. Last

October, Smith's monthly energy cost per kilowatt hour was 450% higher than the previous year. Labour costs were up 15%, while the price he paid for the wires and posts used to structure the orchards rose 15%. Watching tree after tree being ripped out of the soil as most of his orchards are cleared, Smith said he had no time to be nostalgic as turning his back on commercial apple production was the best way to ensure his family's farm survives. He's bought a juicing business for which he will continue to grow a small amount of apples. Pigs and chickens will be brought in to graze on the former orchards and there's a farm shop selling juice and other produce. He's also planting a vineyard and is growing small amounts of cherries, the fruit which legend has it prompted King Henry VIII to first call Kent the "Garden of England". Under Smith's plans, the garden lives on, but is producing less food than it once did. — Reuters



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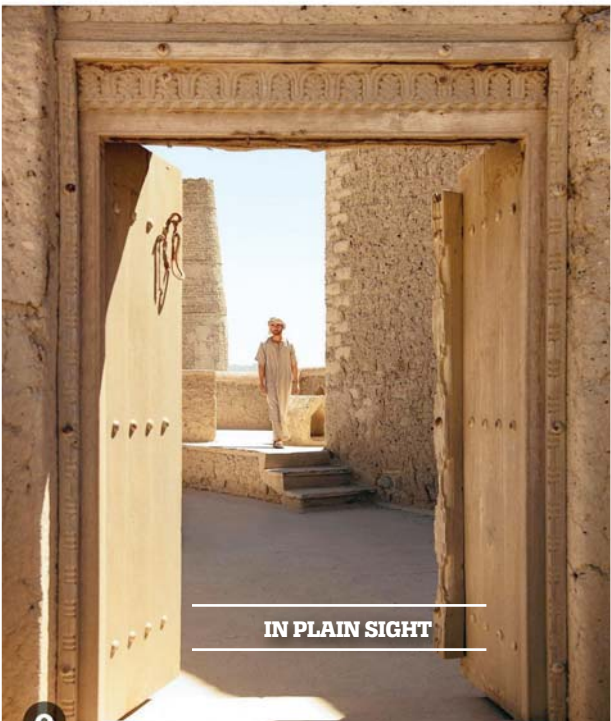


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AROUND THE WORLD

ANIMAL PLANET

Easy, tiger: Study maps big cats' personalities



ASK ANY PET owner if their beloved companion has a personality and you'll most often get an emphatic "yes". But now tiger researchers can nod along too – a study published on Wednesday reveals that the world's largest felines have individual character traits.

The behaviour of the 248 Siberian tigers observed through a personality test showed that the endangered cats had unique traits influencing both their success in reproduction and survival, researchers reported in the journal Royal Society Open Science.

"We found that tigers are very individual, and that people who've worked with them and know them well see their individual personalities," co-author Rosalind Arden of the London School of Economics said.

The study adapted a commonly used human personality test to explore tiger traits such as confidence, sincerity, bullying and savagery in two separate populations of tigers held in semi-captivity in China.

Questionnaires with a list of 70 personality indicators were filled out by veterinarians and feeders who work with the tigers on a daily basis.

The combined results found that both tiger populations displayed characteristics that fell into two overarching personality categories: majesty and steadiness.

Tigers scoring higher for "majesty" were healthier, preyed more on live animals, and ate and mated more. They were also "regarded by their human raters as



having higher group status among tigers," the study said.

But being collaborative and gentler had its evolutionary benefits too: "steady" tigers were shown to be gentler, more sincere and more loving.

Such traits may play a role in the unusual length of time – two to three years – that tiger cubs remain with their mothers.

The study found very few sex-related differences in tigers' personalities, however, and father tigers have also been observed taking part in raising their young.

"It's pleasant to see that you don't have to be dominant, fierce, competitive and aggressive in order to succeed as a tiger," said Arden.

Similar studies illuminating the personality and mental abilities of primates have helped humanise them, Arden said.

"There is evidence that it does, in fact, improve animal welfare and conservation," she added.

Siberian tigers are endangered due to poaching and habitat loss. Only around 500 remain living in the wild. — AFP

ART

Is it possible to have too much Picasso?



WHY CAN'T THE world get enough of Pablo Picasso? On the 50th anniversary of his death, it seems the appetite for the Spanish master is inexhaustible.

Picasso's ceramics, Picasso's sculptures, Picasso and feminism, Picasso's use of white, celebrity photographs of Picasso... the list of exhibitions marking the half-century since his death on April 8, 1973 runs on and on.

"Picasso gobbles everything up, and still we are hungry for more," grandson Olivier Widmaier-Picasso said, adding that he was "fascinated by the number of curators, historians and researchers that continue to find new angles to explore."

Explaining his ubiquity is another matter.

The genius of his talent seems largely beyond dispute, and this combined with his emergence at the start of the 20th century, just as the last obstacles to free expression were being dismantled, leaving him free to explore in every direction.

And he simply never stopped, working from his teens right up to his death on the Cote d'Azur at 91.

"He remains above everyone," said Bernard Blistene, a former director of the Pompidou Centre modern art museum in Paris.

"The permanent invention, the journey across all the great currents of modernity, the continuous experimentation for 80 years, the desire to please and displease... all of it is without equal," Blistene said.

- NO MORE 'MUSES' -

The MeToo movement has slightly rattled the elevated plinth on which Picasso's reputation stands, as accusations that he was an abusive misogynist towards his wives and girlfriends trigger calls for a reappraisal.

"We must stop talking about

the women in his life as 'muses'. Some committed suicide, others sank into madness," said Emilie Bouvard, former curator at the Picasso Museum in Paris.

The exception was Francoise Gilot, the only mistress who dumped Picasso and lived to see 50 years pass since the death of "the tyrannical, superstitious and egotistical being" that she

denounced in a famous book in the 1960s.

But the damage has been limited. Picasso still regularly tops the list for highest-grossing artists at auction: his paintings generated \$494 million last year alone, according to Artprice.

There is a balance to be found, said Bouvard.

"Picasso is someone who appropriated things, people," she said. His work often spoke of violence and sexuality – often with brutal, even courageous honesty – but he also turned those feelings on the women in his life.

"Dealing with this question means speaking differently but

fairly about Picasso," said Bouvard.

That only opens up more ways to prime the pump of the Picasso industry.

An exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum this summer, promising to reevaluate the artist "through a feminist lens", is being curated by comedian Hannah Gadsby, one of Picasso's most outspoken critics.

Meanwhile, crowds are flocking to a much lighter retrospective at the Picasso Museum in Paris curated by fashion designer Paul Smith.

It suggests politics have done nothing to undermine the simple pleasure that comes from seeing Picasso's work.

"I made it very decorative because the idea is that young school children and teenagers will come and see his work in a different light," Smith said.

"Many of us have already seen Picasso many times around the world, so we hope to show it in a new way." — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

BTS's Jimin first S Korean solo artist to top US songs chart



JIMIN, A MEMBER of the K-pop supergroup BTS, has made history as the first South Korean solo artist to land the number one spot on the top US songs chart, Billboard announced on Monday.

The single "Like Crazy" debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100 this week, bumping Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" out of the top spot, where it had reigned for eight weeks.

Jimin is the first South Korean soloist to score a No. 1 hit on the #Hot100, thanks to "Like Crazy," Billboard tweeted.

The song, off Jimin's first solo album "Face," is the 66th track to debut at the peak of the Hot 100 chart, which dates back to 1958 and combines all-genre US streaming, radio play and sales data, the industry tracker reported.

"Face" hit Billboard's main albums chart at No. 2, making it the highest-charting album by a South Korean solo musician and beating fellow BTS member RM's "Indigo," which reached No. 3 in December, industry outlets reported.



BTS is considered South Korea's biggest-ever cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums around the world and dominating the charts while raking in billions for the country's economy and building a global legion of fans known as ARMYs.

But the K-pop juggernaut announced a hiatus last year due to South Korea's required military service.

All able-bodied men in South Korea must serve at least 18 months in the military and, after a years-long debate about whether BTS deserved an exemption, Jin, the oldest member of the group, enlisted last year.

Before the pause, BTS bagged six No. 1 hits on the Hot 100 and all seven members of the boyband have reached the top songs chart with solo tracks, Billboard said.

Before BTS's dominance, South Korean rapper Psy's global hit "Gangnam Style" peaked at No. 2 in 2012, according to Billboard. — AFP



ramadhan

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THURSDAY | APRIL 6 | 2023

Qarraqasho: a tradition eagerly awaited by kids in Oman during the holy month

By Badriya Al Balushi

The 14th day of the holy month of Ramadhan is one of the most highly anticipated events by children from across the Sultanate of Oman, as it is on this occasion that the country celebrates the beloved-family event of "Qarraqasho."

Qarraqasho is a long-awaited Omani heritage festival that children and adults prepare for days in advance. On this evening, children wear their finest, colourful traditional costumes that were tailor-made and chosen with passion. The children start the journey of receiving their candies from neighbourhood houses after Maghrib prayer and continue until 11:30 pm. They sing on the door of each house the Qarraqasho traditional lyrics "Qarraqasho yo nas, atona shwayat halwa," which means "It is Qarraqasho time, give us some sweets," and they keep repeating the same song to collect their well-wrapped giveaways of sweets, nuts, and money.

After visiting the houses separately, the children gather to share the amazing feelings of joy and appreciation and see who among them received more sweets. These giveaways bring smiles to the faces of children. They fall in love with the beautifully designed pots and bags in which the money, candies, and nuts are placed in.

Most of the children enjoy this occasion more than any other as they are offered a full range of delicious sweets that are gifted to them in an attractive way. This unique occasion is represented by colourfully enchanting themes. Parents and adults are in the mood of giving and sharing joy on this day as well. They compete with one another for organising the best and most picturesque theme of Qarraqasho.

They wear enchanting traditional costumes along with their children and take beautiful photos that bring life to the hearts of those who celebrate this occasion with enthusiasm.

Some families invite their relatives and friends on this day to commemorate the occasion together. They prepare many delicious Omani traditional dishes like harees, halwa, and luqaimat and serve them on decorated plates. Also, they exchange Qarraqasho giveaways among adults in their gatherings as well. Qarraqasho boosts the social communication skills among them, and symbolise the spirit of Ramadhan.

Since Qarraqasho has been passed on from older generations to the present, this celebration started as a way to reward children for successfully fasting for the first half of the month, and to motivate them to continue through the second half.

Sumiya Al Balushi, from the Wilayat of Al Musannah, spoke about this day, "It is very important to me to prepare for this day in advance. I buy traditional dresses for my children to wear, and I prepare colourful giveaways that go along with the theme of their costumes. My children never miss celebrating this day, they excitedly wait for it."

It is worth mentioning that educational institutions in Oman prepare ahead to acknowledge this day, along with social institutions and commercial entities, as part of their corporate social responsibility.