

PEOPLE FLOCK TO LOGOS HOPE

The Logos Hope, the world's largest floating book fair, began a weeklong port call at the Port of Salalah on Friday. Its landmark visit coincided with the Khareef season underway in Dhofar Governorate. Thousands of visitors and book lovers have been flocking to the vessel, which will remain in the harbour until August 4. **SEE P5**



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FIVE-STAR SARAH SETS WORLDS ALIGHT, LEDECKY AND MCKEOWN WIN



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TOMATO PLANTS ARE SEEN UNDER A PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM



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INSURANCE SECTOR CONTRIBUTES 1.23% TO OMAN'S GDP



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S KING OF MOROCCO

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco on the anniversary of his accession to the throne. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to King Mohammed VI wishing him good health, happiness and long life and praying for the return of this occasion and similar ones while the friendly Moroccan people have achieved their aspirations for more progress and prosperity.

HOW WILL THE NEW LAWS BENEFIT EXPATS

The two laws for social protection and labour law issued last week will have a far-reaching impact not on just citizens but also residents of the Sultanate of Oman. The Social Protection Law (Royal Decree 52/2023) will replace the current end-of-service system with a savings system that is applicable to all expatriates employed in the country. Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed al Tai, a legal counsel at Decree.om, said, "The protections offered under the law are very wide in scope, and while Omanis are the primary target of these protections, some also apply to non-Omanis." He said the Social Protection Law has replaced the current system of end-of-service grants or gratuities with the savings system. **SEE P2**

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HM heads to Germany for private visit



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left for Germany on a private visit on Saturday. May Allah the Almighty protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him good health, well-being and long life. — ONA

OMAN PLANS NEW LAW TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will join the rest of the world countries in marking the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, which falls on July 30. The theme of this year is "Reach every victim of trafficking, leave no one behind".

Oman continues its relentless efforts to combat human trafficking. It is considered one of the first countries to endorse a special legislation to eliminate this crime, namely the law on combating human trafficking.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs and Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), said that the Sultanate of Oman has paid great attention to combating the crime of human trafficking and all practices associated with it that contradict human principles and values.

He affirmed that combating this crime requires regional and international cooperation, as Oman continues to protect people and their dignity, and achieve their ambitions and aspirations.

He also confirmed that Oman, represented by the NCCHT, continues to work diligently in accordance with internal and regional laws, treaties and conventions related to combating human trafficking to address this phenomenon. He

pointed out that the committee works within the framework of cooperation with its partners in civil society at the national and international levels to combat human trafficking, uphold the rule of law and preserve human values.

Shaikh Al Harthy further noted that the Sultanate of Oman has shown unremitting efforts in confronting this crime, based on the Basic Law of the State, which guarantees justice and equality for all segments of society, and maintains security and protection for citizens and residents from any transgressions affecting their dignity and legitimate rights.

PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS

Stemming from the belief in the importance of involving all government and non-government units in providing protection for victims of human trafficking, Shaikh Al Harthy explained that Oman's government cooperates with institutions of the private sector, as well as the civil society in this regard.

He affirmed that the national committee has been exerting sincere efforts to address these crimes. In this context, he pointed out that the committee has completed the preparation for the new draft law to combat human trafficking, in cooperation with international and local experts, as well as the the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

- New Labour Law guarantees workers' rights on occupational safety and health
- A national committee set up to combat human trafficking
- 24x7 hotlines for reporting human trafficking in Arabic and English
- Judicial prosecution office in the Public Prosecution, the ROP, the Ministry of Labour and the Foreign Ministry
- Rapid intervention headed by the Public Prosecution to curb trafficking

New Labour Law to create more jobs for youths and bring in foreign investment

MUSCAT: The new Labour Law will generate more jobs for Omanis and make the country more attractive for foreign investors, Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said on Saturday. He said the law will improve the business environment and enhance market competitiveness that would attract investment and help in achieving the target of the 10th five-year development plan.

He said the law would boost investment to GDP ratio to 27 per cent and help to increase the private sector's contribution to 60 per cent of total investments.

"The Labour Law will enhance the ranking of the Sultanate of Oman on international indicators, and help keep the momentum of



Dr Nasser Al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy

the country's economic growth."

He said, "The Labour Law will contribute a lot in providing employment opportunities for Omani youths and will highlight the focus on Omanisation. We are counting on the Omani labour force to make a significant contribution

to the national economy and their empowerment will boost the private sector in the future."

Dr Al Maawali said: "The Labour Law is one of the most prominent aspects governing the legislative framework of economic affairs in the Sultanate of Oman, as the labour market and employment policies are fundamental pillars of economic development. The groundbreaking Royal Decree on Labour is closely aligned with the principles of Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th five-year development plan (2021-2025). It is specifically tailored to address the needs of the labour market in the country and in line with the basic labour standards of the International Labour Organisation."

He said, "We need to provide

a labour market that is attractive for competent workers and keeps pace with demographic, economic, knowledge and technical changes."

Dr Al Maawali stressed that the new provisions of the law will enable the private sector to take charge of the economic growth and achieve the desired integration.

He said: "The growth in the private sector will help in the contribution of increased labour productivity. The new provisions of the law will empower the private sector and overcome the challenges it faces. The law has given clear importance on upgrading national capabilities and providing attractive modern work patterns related to working hours, flexibility and remote work." — ONA **SEE ALSO P2**

INSIDE

THE OTHER SIDE OF BED ROTTING



SPOTLIGHT

P4





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HOW WILL THE NEW LAWS BENEFIT EXPATS IN OMAN?

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The two laws for social protection and labour law issued last week will have a far-reaching impact not on just citizens but also residents of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Social Protection Law (Royal Decree 52/2023) will replace the current end-of-service system with a savings system that is applicable to all expatriates employed in the country.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed al Tai, a legal counsel at Decree.om, said, “The protections offered under the law are very wide in scope, and while Omanis are the primary target of these protections, some also apply to non-Omanis.” He said the Social Protection Law has replaced the current system of end-of-service grants or gratuities with the savings system that is disbursed by the employer for expatriates.

Several expatriates contacted the Observer seeking more details, including people with over 20 years of service in their respective jobs. They wanted to know whether their end-of-service would be calculated as per the new system or the existing system. One expatriate asked whether the new policy would be applicable to unskilled workers (domestic maids) and those employed in small salons, restaurants, and flower shops.

Details of the provisions of specified articles will be issued at a later date as the law will come into effect over the next six months.



Article 138 of the law states that the employer is obligated to pay an end-of-service grant or gratuity for the period of service until the date of the implementation of the new savings system as stipulated in Clause (1) of Article (139) upon the termination of service or in provisions of the Labor Law.

Article 139 states that the funding for the savings system will be as follows - The employee monthly contribution will be nine per cent of the basic wage, and any savings amounts paid by the employer, the insured, or others to the savings system will be as per the provisions of the regulations, gifts, bequests, and donations allocated to this system that is approved by a competent council and loans approved by the Council for the savings system after the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

Article 140 states that the

regulation shows the dates for paying the contributions stipulated in Article 139 of this law and the additional amounts that are imposed on the employer in the event of non-compliance with these dates.

Article 141 states that the saver is entitled to the total contributions and amounts deposited in his personal account and the returns on their investment. The regulations may specify a minimum for investment returns.

Article (142) Based on the request of the saver, his or her savings may be spent in one of the following ways, as indicated by the regulations - in one go or in annual or monthly installments, taking into account the additional returns received until the end of the savings.

The saver is entitled to his savings from the fund in any of the following cases - the

termination of the employment relationship of the non-Omani worker, unless it is linked to another work contract within the period indicated by the regulations, payment of monthly subscriptions or deposits will be a maximum period of no less than 180 months (15 years), on the death of the saver, savings are disbursed to the legal heirs, and the savings are transferred to the savings system in the event that there are no beneficiaries in accordance with the provision of this clause, permanent disability.

The savings may also be used to pay the insured's contributions in the elderly, disability, and death insurance branch and the work injury and occupational disease insurance branch in the cases indicated by the regulations.

By a decision of the Council, it is permissible to add or amend cases of entitlement in the savings system, provided that the decision indicates the basis and controls for entitlement.

Article 144 states that in the event of leaving the savings system or losing any of the conditions of its provisions, the saver shall notify the fund of that in the manner indicated by the regulations. The regulations also indicate the administrative fines resulting from not notifying the fund.

Labour Law 53/2023 also protects expatriates by ensuring that the employer may not keep the worker's passport or private documents, except with written consent, and that the non-Omani worker is entitled to 30 days leave and a return air ticket to his country for vacation.



Dhofar Municipality takes action against illegal restaurants

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

Dhofar Municipality has launched a crackdown on illegal restaurants operating in the region during the fall of Dhofar Khareef. The municipality has undertaken an extensive campaign to ensure strict compliance with safety standards and legal requirements. Non-compliant establishments and those employing unsafe practices, such as the use of crackers, will face immediate removal from the area.

With this action, the primary objectives of the municipality are to enhance the overall appearance, establish a secure and welcoming environment for residents and tourists alike, and prioritise public health. Additionally, the preservation of the environment and the sustainable utilisation of natural resources remain at the forefront of the move.

Supporting economic and social growth in various areas of Dhofar Governorate during the summer tourism season (khareef) is a key element of the municipality's strategy, aimed at bolstering the region's allure to tourists while preserving its

pristine natural beauty.

A spokesperson from the municipality emphasised, “The crackdown includes stringent regulations governing the operation of mobile cafes and street vendors, effectively curbing the unauthorised sale of food and goods without proper licenses and compliance with health requirements. Our ultimate aim is to ensure the well-being of consumers and maintain the overall aesthetic appeal of our beloved region by designating specific allocated sites for those engaging in these commercial activities.”

Furthermore, the municipality has issued a stern warning to owners of unlicensed mobile vehicles and kiosks, urging them to halt their operations until obtaining the necessary approvals and licenses. Unlicensed mobile coffee shop vehicles that fail to meet health requirements will be subject to prompt removal.

In conclusion, Dhofar Municipality demonstrates its unwavering commitment to enforcing safety measures, enhancing the region's appearance, promoting public health, and fostering sustainable growth during the peak tourism season (Khareef).

Job Vacancies Announcement:

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn", in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, is pleased to announce the availability of the following vacancy posts:

Unit	Job No.	Position	Grade	Number of Vacancies	Place of Work	Job Requirements
Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn" Head Office	1	Cyber Security Specialist (Male)	10	1	Muscat Governorate	- Master's Degree in IT Security or Cyber Security. - Bachelor's Degree in IT Security or Cyber Security, with a minimum of (3) years of relevant work experience after obtaining the required qualification.
Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn" Head Office	2	Internal Auditor (Male/Female)	10	1	Muscat Governorate	- Master's Degree in Accounting or Finance. - Bachelor's Degree in Accounting or Finance, with a minimum of (3) years of audit-related work experience after obtaining the required qualification. - Proficiency in spoken and written English. - Report writing skills. - Data analysis skills. - Willingness to travel for auditing purposes within and outside Muscat Governorate based on the auditing plan. - Possession of professional certification(s) such as CISA, CIA, CMA and CPA.

To view the job requirements and submit your application, kindly visit the following link: www.linkedin.com/company/madaynoman. The application period will be open from Sunday, July 30, 2023, until the end of official working hours on Sunday, August 13, 2023.

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Oman plans new law to combat human trafficking

FROM P1

On his turn, Dr Hatem Ali, Regional Representative of the UNODC Regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council, lauded the efforts exerted by Oman to combat this crime through developing the national system, which includes the establishment of a national referral system, building and developing the capabilities of law enforcement agencies, criminal justice and the labour system, in addition to the human rights system.

In a high-level international meeting on combating human trafficking held at the United Nations headquarters in New York in 2021, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed that this phenomenon is not compatible with its firm principles and values. Oman also underscored its determination to eradicate this phenomenon by all legal means. The Sultanate of Oman has achieved many successes in the past period through the



SHAIKH KHALIFA BIN ALI AL HARTHY
Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs

National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), including the accession of the Sultanate of Oman, by Royal Decree No 46/2020, to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which is related to granting individuals, including workers, their rights and preventing them from being subjected to any violation.

Oman is also making extensive efforts to improve working conditions and

guarantee workers' rights in terms of occupational safety and health, and guarantee their legal rights. The issuance of the Labour Law by Royal Decree No 53/2023 represents one of these efforts.

The law included many articles covering labour issues, such as work contract, employer and worker obligations, working hours, vacations, wages, employment of minors, occupational safety and health standards at work, settlement of labour disputes, penalties, and others.

Oman's efforts in this regard also includes the formation of a national committee comprising several government units concerned with developing a high-level national plan to combat human trafficking, based on the provisions of Article 22 of the Anti-Human Trafficking Law issued by Royal Decree No 126/2008.

The committee conducts relevant studies and research,

and carries out media campaigns to combat the crime of human trafficking and protect the victims.

Oman provides hotlines for reporting the crime of human trafficking, operating around the clock in Arabic and English. Reporting can also be done through the committee's website, which provides reports in 14 languages.

The most remarkable efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman in terms of judicial prosecution were allocating an office for combating human trafficking in the Public Prosecution, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Labour and the Foreign Ministry.

The efforts also include the formation of a rapid intervention team in 2019 headed by the Public Prosecution and comprises the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development and the Royal Oman Police.

— ONA



THE OTHER SIDE OF BED ROTTING

BALQEES ALORAIMI

Lying in bed during holidays or leisure time was a natural way to rest in the past. There has been a concerning trend these days known as 'bed rotting,' which has gained popularity, particularly on social media platforms. This trend attracts many teenagers who spend extended periods in bed, voluntarily seeking complete rest accompanied by snacks and devices like mobile phones.

'Bed rotting' is a favoured pastime among individuals aged 11 to 25, who are also more prone to mental health issues like stress. They share videos on social media, showing themselves under layers of blankets with their phones and snacks.

Medical experts hold different views and caution against staying inactive in bed for more than a day or two, as it could be indicative of underlying mental health problems.

Dr Dilip Kumar Singhvi, a Specialist in Internal Medicine, warns against overdoing such behaviour, as it may lead to increased stress, mood swings, less physical activity and weight gain. It could also indicate the need for professional help if the habit of bed rotting becomes repetitive.

Dr Mizun Tufail al Rahman, a Senior Consultant Family Physician, emphasises the negative impact of a sedentary lifestyle and the importance of addressing this habit to prevent various health issues, including obesity and other diseases related to a lack of mobility.

To protect our teenage children from such phenomena, psychiatrists recommend close monitoring of their behaviour at home, engaging in open and frequent communication, sharing their activities, and encouraging them to participate in homework, reading and physical activities. Limiting excessive screen time on phones and electronic devices is also essential.

Furthermore, doctors and psychological consultants suggest creating a structured physical routine and involving teenagers in sports activities like athletics, football, swimming, karate and martial arts. These activities contribute to enhancing their physical, mental and psychological well-being.

Additionally, nurturing religious faith and fostering a connection to societal values and traditions can help guide teenagers away from following every external trend from other societies.



Book lovers flock to Logos Hope at Salalah Port

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

Logos Hope, the world's largest floating book fair, began a weeklong port call at the Port of Salalah on Friday. Its landmark visit coincided with the Khareef season underway in Dhofar Governorate.

Thousands of visitors and book lovers have been flocking to the vessel, which will remain in the harbour until August 4, 2023.

Speaking at the celebrated ship's arrival at the port on Friday, His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, hailed the visit as an added "cultural" dimension to the Khareef season currently enjoyed by thousands of tourists and residents.

Speaking about the Logos Hope, the Governor said the book collection on board the



PHOTO BY **ALMUHALLAB MOHAMMED AL MAAMARI**

ship is varied and covers a wide range of scientific and cultural topics. He said the library is an opportunity for young people, families and researchers to learn about different cultures.

HH Sayyid Marwan also noted that the library contains books in Arabic and many other languages. He said that this is important because it allows people from all over the world to

access the library's resources.

He concluded by thanking the organisers of the floating library for bringing this valuable resource to Dhofar. He said that he hopes that the library will continue to be a popular destination for visitors to the region.

The Logos Hope's port call at Salalah is the latest in a wider tour that has taken the ship to



a number of Arab, Gulf and African ports, as well as stops in various international ports according to a two-year sailing schedule. The ship had previously visited Oman in 2011 and 2013.

There was a great demand to visit the ship, whether from residents of different nationalities or Omani citizens. In the early hours of opening, the number of people reached more than 1,000.

The ship was built in 1973 and has been renovated, transferred and operated at various intervals since 1983. It was launched in its current form in 2009 and is operated by a German charity within the (Books for All) initiative. The ship is one of the largest floating book fairs in the world and has visited over 160 countries. One visitor to the ship said, "Most of the books

on display cater to readers of different ages and are offered at low prices compared to the prices in book fairs. I particularly liked the encyclopedias, although most of them are in English." Another visitor said, "Many of the publications that concern children are educational, especially in learning English, as well as valuable educational books in various sciences, arts and literature, including world-famous stories." He added: "The Logos Hope ship is a unique and valuable resource for people of all ages and nationalities. It is a great place to find books on a wide range of topics, and the prices are very reasonable. I highly recommend visiting the ship if you have the opportunity." Logos Hope is open to the public from 1600 to 2200 hrs, Mondays to Saturdays. The ship is closed to visitors on Sundays.

Oman has 66 open skies agreements: CAA

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Saturday said that the Sultanate of Oman has bilateral agreements in the field of air transport with many countries, aimed at regulating air transport services, including the technical and operational aspects, and strengthening relations in the field of civil aviation. Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman, CAA, said that the authority will sign three new agreements in the coming months. Currently, the Sultanate has 122



agreements, of which 66 are open skies agreements.

He said the authority seeks to invest in these agreements and open windows for national carriers to link the Sultanate of Oman with other countries of the world. He said there are 40 companies serving the airports of the Sultanate of Oman in total



between Muscat, Salalah and Suhar. Al Abri said there has been a continuous growth in air traffic at the airports of the Sultanate of Oman compared to the past months and "We hope to reach the 2019-levels with the national carriers launching new destinations, introducing new aircraft and attracting other airlines

to the country." He said the airports of the Sultanate of Oman are currently operating at 70 per cent of the 2019 levels and will soon exceed the pre-pandemic levels. Statistics issued by the Civil Aviation Authority said that the number of passengers using airports of the Sultanate of Oman increased by 30.3 per cent in the first six months of this year, compared to the figures for 2022. Aircraft traffic witnessed an increase of 28.4 per cent by the end of June 2023 to reach 9,784 flights, compared to 7,622 flights by the end of June 2022.

Preserving the past in Muttrah Souq

MOHAMMED ANWAR AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

Once again, I found myself irresistibly drawn to spending a day in Muttrah, one of the signature places in Muscat for a visitor.

I was about to leave a shop and its owner kindly requested, "Take a photo of the khanjar first and then of me." He sat proudly at the counter, dressed impeccably in a splendid dishdasha, adorned with an Omani khanjar and turban, emanating a warm and welcoming demeanour to his customers.

Intrigued by the shop's history, I engaged in conversation with Akhter Rasoul, the owner, who revealed that it had been in existence for an impressive 137 years. He had been involved in running the shop since the tender age of seven, assisting his father. When I asked if I could capture some pictures of his products, he responded with enthusiasm, "Of course, you are welcome to do so!" As I explored the shop, I was captivated by the array of antique silver rings and earrings, and I eagerly used my mobile to capture the beauty of these intricate pieces.

The shop itself was a



vibrant display of exquisite silver jewellery, resembling a groom adorned in vibrant colours. It was truly a sight to behold.

Intrigued by Akhter Rasoul's traditional attire, I asked about its significance. He explained that in a historical place like Muttrah, a bustling bazaar, he felt a deep sense of pride and obligation to wear his traditional dress.

"I not only represent the shop, but I represent Oman itself," he passionately shared. "Many foreigners visit Muttrah daily, eager to learn about Omani culture and its



people. I believe I am in the right place at the right time to showcase my heritage." His words filled me with immense joy.

As I explored further, I noticed a fascinating array of photographs adorning the shop's walls. These pictures featured Akhter Rasoul standing beside various prominent personalities who had visited Oman, including the sons of the President of Zanzibar; John Kerry, who ran for the United States presidential election in 2004; Abdullah Rowaishad, a famous Kuwaiti singer;

and many others. Intrigued, I asked for permission to photograph these pictures, which he warmly granted.

Akhter Rasoul then extended a kind invitation to join him for lunch at his house, but unfortunately, time constraints compelled me to regretfully decline, promising to do so another time.

The journey to Muttrah from Ruwi was enchanting, with picturesque surroundings nestled amidst mountains and adorned with small forts atop the peaks. Driving along the winding road, the sight of the "Bait Oman" building filled me with a sense of warmth and joy, adding to the delightful experience of the day.

Overall, my day in Muttrah, surrounded by the rich culture and the gracious hospitality of Akhter Rasoul, was truly unforgettable.

OMANI STUDENT WINS NOTTINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL AWARD

LONDON: Nottingham Trent University recognised the academic excellence of Maryam bint Said al Maawali by granting her the Nottingham Business School Award for Best Overall Performance by a BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance Final Year Student.

Maryam deservedly won this award after passing all her modules and graduating with an Exceptional First Class as a valedictorian of her cohort with an overall GPA of 4 out of 4. The Omani student was also nominated to deliver the alumni's Vote of Thanks Speech as a recognition for her academic excellence.

Maryam expressed her gratitude for this recognition and said, "I dedicate this excellence to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the attention he pays to the Omani youth and their education. I would also like to dedicate the award to my family, which gave me the due attention, care and trust during my education journey."

"I am proud of the academic excellence I achieved at the university level in the finance and accounting programme, which is one of the most difficult academic programmes. Through this excellence, I tried to pay back to the government of my country and my family. I will continue my



academic journey in a way that achieves my aspirations and serves my country in the next years in an attempt to contribute to its renewed renaissance," she added.

Amy Johnson, Senior Lecturer at the Accounting and Finance Department, said: "Maryam was an inspiration for all students and lecturers thanks to her academic excellence. The exam board commended her performance in the final exams. I congratulate her for receiving the Nottingham Business School Award for Best Overall Performance by a BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance Final Year Student."

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTRONIC AUCTION

The Ministry of Information announces an electronic auction for discarded furniture and technical equipment and hardware will be held through Mazad Oman (www.mazad.om) in accordance with the following statement:

Statement	Location of Inspection	Date and Time of Inspection	Date of Electronic Bidding
Discarded Furniture and Technical Equipment and Hardware	Stores of Information Ministry 1) Madinat Al Ilam 2) As'Seeb 3) Ruwi	Wednesday 2/8/2023 Thursday 3/8/2023 From 8:00 am to 01:00 pm	From Sunday 6/8/2023 to Monday 7/8/2023

- Entry of persons shall be organized as per regulations to avoid crowdedness so that safety is secured for all.
- Requirements and registration can be viewed through www.mazad.om
- For further details, kindly communicate with us through info@mazad.om



Residents transport a motorcycle on a boat to avoid floodwaters left by torrential rains of Typhoon Doksuri in Calumpit, Bulacan province, Philippines, on Saturday. – AFP

Beijing on high alert as Typhoon Doksuri sweeps northwards

BEIJING: A swathe of northern China, including the capital Beijing, was put under alert on Saturday as Typhoon Doksuri swept inland, bringing high winds and torrential rain.

Doksuri, which smashed into Fujian province on Friday morning with gusts of up to 175 kilometres per hour (110 miles per hour), is already being felt further north, according to China's meteorological services.

Anticipating flooding, Beijing has issued an orange alert, the second-highest in the four-tier system.

Several of the city's parks, lakes

and riverside roads have been closed out of precaution, the municipal authorities announced on Saturday.

They warned the downpour could prompt even worse flooding than in July 2012, when 79 people died and tens of thousands were evacuated.

Heavy showers were reported in the capital on Saturday afternoon and are expected to last through Tuesday.

Neighbouring Hebei province, which is expecting torrential rain and gusty wind, has issued the highest level of alert in some areas.

The weather service warned

that rainfall there could exceed 60 centimetres (24 inches).

In Fujian's capital Fuzhou, authorities ordered residents not to leave their homes unless necessary on Saturday.

The coastal province of Shandong and the megacity Tianjin also felt the deluge.

Doksuri had been a super typhoon as it tore across the Pacific Ocean earlier this week, but lost some intensity as it neared the Philippines.

The typhoon killed at least 13 people in the Philippines, where it caused landslides and floods before

tracking northwest to China and gradually weakening.

It still brought colossal waves and howling winds to the country's southeast.

China has been experiencing extreme weather conditions and posting recording temperatures this summer, events that scientists say are being exacerbated by climate change.

At the beginning of July, Beijing and the surrounding region broke temperature records, with local temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). — **AFP**

Niger loses aid as Western countries condemn coup

NIAMEY: The European Union has cut off financial support to Niger and the United States has threatened to do the same after military leaders this week announced they had overthrown the democratically elected president, Mohammed Bazoum.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, receiving close to \$2 billion a year in official development assistance, according to the World Bank.

It is also a key security partner of Western countries such as France and the United States, which use it as a base for their efforts to contain an Islamist insurgency in West and Central Africa's Sahel region. Previously seen the most stable country among several unstable neighbours, Niger is the world's seventh-biggest producer of uranium.

Niger's foreign allies so far have refused to recognise the new military government led by General Abdourahmane Tiani, previously head of the presidential guard, who officers declared head of state on Friday.

Bazoum has not been heard from since early on Thursday when he was confined within the presidential palace, although the European Union, France and others say they still recognise him as the legitimate president.

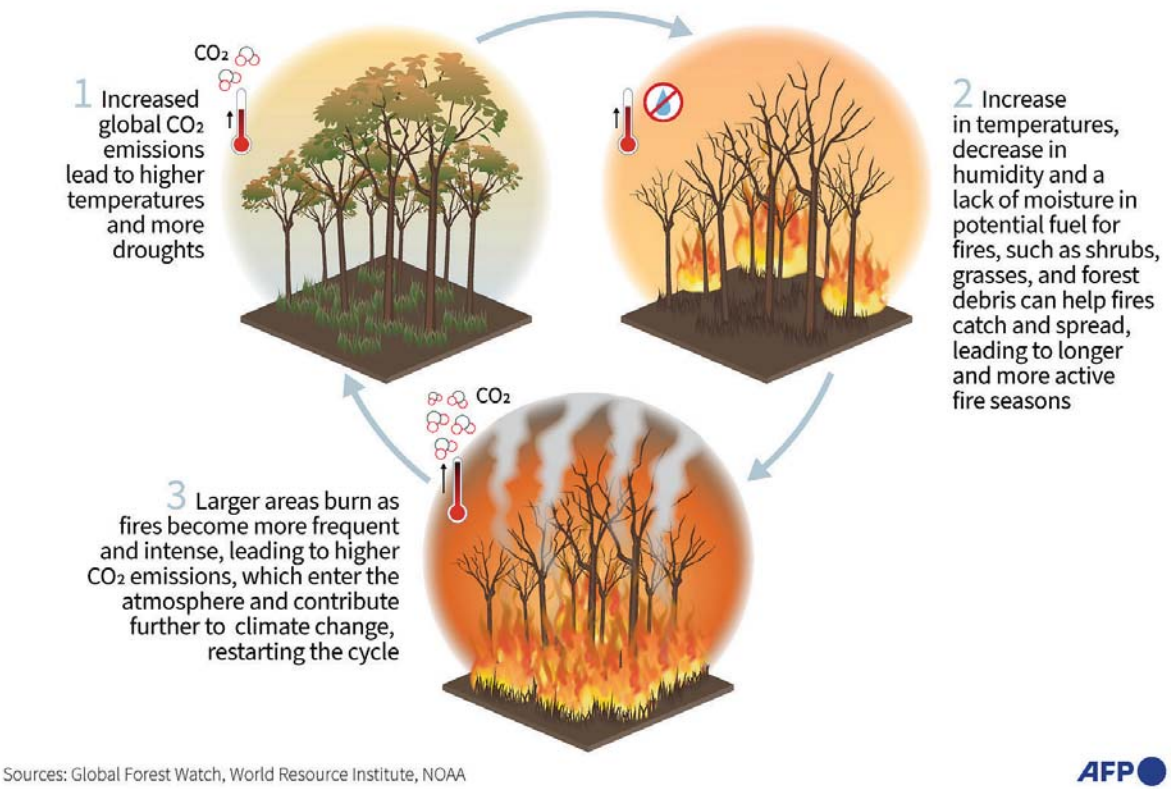
"In addition to the immediate cessation of budget support, all cooperation actions in the domain of security are suspended indefinitely with immediate effect," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

Niger is a key partner of the European Union in helping curb the flow of irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. — **Reuters**



General Abdourahmane Tiani, who was declared as the new head of state of Niger by leaders of a coup, meets ministers in Niamey on Friday. – Reuters

Climate change - forest fire feedback loop



ESA performs unique burn-up of satellite in Earth's atmosphere

BERLIN: The European Space Agency (ESA) has for the first time successfully incinerated a satellite in the Earth's atmosphere despite it not being designed for this means of disposal.

The Aeolus re-entered the atmosphere above Antarctica on Friday evening at 1900 GMT, burned up and scattered some remnants into the Atlantic Ocean as planned, the ESA reported, citing US Space Command.

During the operation, controllers at the German space centre in Darmstadt had to minimise the risk of debris falling onto land, as well as avoid a collision with other objects orbiting the Earth.



The Aeolus re-entered the atmosphere above Antarctica on Friday, burned up and scattered some remnants into the Atlantic Ocean as planned, the ESA reported, citing US Space Command.

After 16 months of preparation, the Aeolus mission was launched in 2018 to create wind profiles for improving weather forecasts. The scientific operations ended two months ago and plans were made

to dispose of the probe with the remaining fuel on board.

According to the German experts, such a manoeuvre only works for satellites with a low Earth orbit of a few hundred kilometres. Aeolus had a mission altitude of 320 kilometres and was already being pulled towards Earth by gravity. It was then supposed to start burning up at an altitude of 80 kilometres.

By contrast, satellites designed after 2018 were equipped for such a manoeuvre or built from materials that burn up completely in the atmosphere, said Tim Flohrer, head of ESA's space debris department: "This is standard for today's missions." — **dpa**

BOGOTA

President's son arrested in money laundering case

Nicolas Petro, son of Colombian President Gustavo Petro, has been arrested as part of an investigation into money laundering and illicit enrichment.

The younger Petro, a politician in Atlantico province, had welcomed the investigation when it began in March and has previously called accusations that he took money from drug traffickers in exchange for including them in his father's peace efforts unfounded. Also arrested was Nicolas' ex-wife



Daysuris del Carmen Vasquez, who earlier this year told local media that two people accused of involvement with drug trafficking had given Nicolas money for his father's campaign.

COLOMBO

Japan presses Sri Lanka to secure China debt deal

Japan pressed bankrupt Sri Lanka on Saturday to expedite its debt restructuring, including with its biggest creditor China, to stabilise the island nation's economy after an unprecedented crisis.

Tokyo's foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi welcomed economic reforms under the auspices of an International Monetary Fund bailout but said Sri Lanka needed to pick up the pace in its negotiations with creditors.

"I conveyed my expectations for further progress in the debt



restructuring process," Hayashi told reporters after his one-day visit. China holds about 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's bilateral credit, with Japan and India the next biggest lenders.

ROME

Pope to travel to Marseille for two days in Sept.

Pope Francis plans to fly to Marseille for two days in September for an ecumenical and inter-religious meeting of Mediterranean countries.

The head of the Catholic Church will travel to the southern French port city from September 22 to 23, a spokesman for the Holy See announced on Saturday.

There had already been speculation about the pontiff's participation in the event, known in English as the Mediterranean



Meetings. Now the Vatican has made the trip official. According to the programme now published, Francis will be received by President Emmanuel Macron after landing at Marseille airport.

Oman makes remarkable strides in curbing human trafficking

Human trafficking remains one of the most egregious violations of human dignity and rights guaranteed by the law. This heinous crime is broadly defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of individuals through coercion, deception, or abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation.

While the world is going to mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on July 30, it is necessary to shed light on the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to combat this crime.

A pivotal step in addressing human trafficking was taken by Oman with the enactment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law promulgated by the Royal Decree No 126/2008, which firmly criminalises such practices. Under the bylaw, any person found intentionally engaging in trafficking in persons, either through coercion, deception, or any other unlawful means, is deemed guilty and punishable by law.

Meanwhile, Article (2) of the bylaw states that ‘Any person who intentionally engages in trafficking in persons for the purpose of exploitation, either by transporting, harbouring, receiving, or recruiting them through coercion, threat, trickery, abuse of authority, exploitation of vulnerability, or by any other unlawful means, whether directly or indirectly, shall be deemed to have committed the crime of trafficking in persons’. Additionally, Article (4) stipulates that ‘Anyone who participates in incitement, assistance, or agreement to commit the crime of trafficking in persons shall be considered an offender’.

Furthermore, the Sultanate of Oman has joined the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its three Protocols in 2005, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts, and Components and Ammunition.

Oman is making extensive efforts to enhance working conditions and safeguard the rights of workers, both concerning their occupational safety and health, as well as their legal



Dr Mohammed Al Hinai

The author is DG of the Directorate-General of Press and Publication

WHILE THE WORLD IS GOING TO MARK THE WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ON JULY 30, IT IS NECESSARY TO SHED LIGHT ON THE EFFORTS MADE BY THE SULTANATE OF OMAN TO COMBAT THIS CRIME

entitlements. One of these endeavours is the introduction of a new labour law, officially issued through Royal Decree No 53/2023 on July 25, 2023. According to Article (5) of this law, employers are strictly prohibited from subjecting workers to any form of forced or compulsory labour. Additionally, the law explicitly states that employers cannot hold workers’ passports or personal documents unless they have obtained written consent from the workers.

The new labour law comprehensively addresses a wide range of labour-related matters, encompassing employment contracts, the responsibilities of both employers and workers, working hours, leave policies, wage regulations, the employment of minors, occupational safety and health standards, mechanisms for resolving labour disputes, penalties, and various other issues.

In a step to enhance Arab cooperation in preventing and combating organised crimes across national borders in both the judicial and security domains, the Sultanate of Oman has endorsed the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and its Protocols.

In the wake of the country’s commitment to tackle unethical practices, a national committee, operating under a national action plan that includes policies, programmes, research, database, media campaigns, and social and economic initiatives, was set to combat human trafficking.

The committee consistently conducts an annual media plan, utilising various media channels to disseminate awareness of human trafficking crimes and indicators. It also educates the public on reporting human trafficking-related practices. Those campaigns reach a diverse audience through multilingual awareness messages, specialised training courses and workshops on combating human trafficking.

It is worth mentioning that national institutions play a vital role in beating the menace by promptly responding to all reports concerning alleged human trafficking. In the event someone has fallen victim to human trafficking or if anyone observes a victim, they should contact the hotlines of the Royal Oman Police, or through the website of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.

NAJWA ADDS SIZZLE TO JERASH FEST



Lebanese singer Najwa Karam performs during Jordan's Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts in the ancient Roman city of Jerash, on Friday. – AFP

Words are all I have... to take your heart away

Although penned by Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb, the Bee Gees, in 1968, somehow those words came into my head as I read of the passing of Omani poet Hilalah al Hamadani, earlier this week. “Words” said Robin Gibb, “reflect moods, and was written after an argument about nothing. They can make you happy, or sad...”

So, it was with the sadness we learn of any passing, the even greater sadness when it is those of younger generations called before their time, and the deepest, most infinite distress when we learn of the circumstances. Without lingering too much, we can only trust, and have faith, that she remains eternally young in paradise. We cannot know God’s plan, and so it falls to us to be there for those of the family whose need is now greatest. For myself, I can only offer inspiration, from another iconic poet... another enchanter... another for whom words were a magic wand.

Emily Dickinson, the reclusive



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The writer is a media consultant

WITHOUT LINGERING TOO MUCH, WE CAN ONLY TRUST, AND HAVE FAITH, THAT SHE REMAINS ETERNALLY YOUNG IN PARADISE

romanticist of the late 19th century wrote some 1,800 poems, published after her passing, things of beauty, the artistry of the silent thespian, yet some of her most meticulous words can be drawn from her conversations, and her letters. We know, for instance, that she was inspired in her youth, by a close acquaintance, Benjamin Newton, introducing her to the collected works of fellow American, Ralph Waldo Emerson, writing that she had been “touched by the secret spring,” and being poetically liberated by his words.

Of Newton himself, she wrote, “I had a friend, who taught me of immortality — but venturing too near himself — he never returned.” Of herself, she had a reluctant, self-deprecating awareness, saying, “I am small, like the wren, and my hair is bold, like the chestnut bur, and my eyes like the sherry in the glass that the guest leaves,” leaving so much unsaid, so much to the

imagination.

Yet, in that same wren-like form, she held such passion and compassion, and of a forbidden love, she wrote... “will you indeed come home next Saturday, and be my own again, and kiss me... I hope for you so much, and feel so eager for you, feel that I cannot wait, feel that now I must have you — that the expectation once more to see your face again, makes

me feel hot and feverish, and my heart beats so fast... my darling, so near I seem to you, that I disdain this pen, and wait for a warmer language.” Can you feel it? Even though not poetry, it is purely poetic.

The history-making, first ever female participant in the ‘Millions Poet’ competition in 2007 in Abu Dhabi, Al Hamadani clearly featured prominently, and

carving significant respect with her compassionate expositions of traditional Arabic, and the more spontaneous Nabati poetry.

Also, a prominent radio and television media personality, social media was soon awash with tributes from her peers and colleagues this week. One commentator noted that she was inspired by her family, and her achievement in reaching the advanced stages of the ‘Millions Poet’, when she demonstrated “talent and passion... leaving an indelible mark on the audience,” and “with her captivating poetry readings solidified her esteemed position, and now leaving a void in the literary world.”

Maybe then, we will consider Al Hamadani’s passing, in a classic, elegant, and beautiful, and romantic sense, celebrating her life, as clearly, in Dickinson’s immortal words... “Because I could not stop for death – he kindly stopped for me.”



HILALAH AL HAMADANI

sport

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Oman grouped with Russia, Uzbekistan and Egypt in CIS Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

Oman will join Russia, Uzbekistan and Egypt in Group B for the second CIS Games for beach football competitions, which will be held in Belarus from August 4 to 14.

Group A comprises Belarus, Azerbaijan, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. The draw was held at the House of Football in Belarus recently.

Oman's team will begin their campaign in the competitions on Saturday when they take on Uzbekistan. They meet Egypt on Sunday and Russia on Monday.

SEMI-FINALS

The two toppers from each group will advance to the semifinals

of the event and the winner will move to the final.

Oman beach soccer players will utilise their attendance in this meet ahead of the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in UAE to meet top teams like Egypt and the UAE.

Oman's beach soccer team delegation arrived on Thursday in Belarus and the players commenced their training sessions.

Taking part in this international event is in line with the team's preparation for the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup which will be held in Dubai from February 15 to 25, 2024.

Before travelling to Belarus, Coach Talib Hilal's men gathered in a domestic preparatory camp at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.



The coaching staff focused on fitness as the players reported to training sessions after a long gap.

The national experienced coach Talib Hilal opted for 12 players for the camp including Khaid al

Araimi, Munthir al Araimi, Yahya al Murikhi, Amjad al Hamdani, Abdullah al Souti, Sami al Balushi, Nouh al Zadjali, Younis al Owaisi, Mishaal al Araimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Ahmed al Owaisi and

Nouh al Battashi.

The majority of the players took part in the last Arab Beach Soccer Championship and ANOC Asian qualifiers. The team finished runners-up in the event after they

lost to Egypt 4-2 in the finals.

In another key event at ANOC World Beach Games, Oman's beach soccer men lost to the UAE 3-2 in a tight clash in the Asian qualifiers.

Renard header earns France late victory over Brazil



Wendie Renard and team-mates celebrate after the match. – REUTERS

BRISBANE: Captain Wendie Renard's header seven minutes from time earned France a dramatic 2-1 win over Brazil at Brisbane's Lang Park on Saturday as Herve Renard's side picked up their first win in Group F of the Women's World Cup.

The defender met Selma Bacha's corner with a firm downward header that bounced back up off the turf and beyond goalkeeper Leticia to give the French all three points after opening their campaign with a 0-0 draw against Jamaica last Sunday.

"We're delighted with the win today," said Eugenie Le Sommer, who scored France's opener in the first half. "We were up against a brick wall after the draw against Jamaica.

"What for us is the most important was to take the three points today.

"Nothing was perfect, however I think that the game plan was stuck to and the most important thing for us was to come away with the win."

France move onto four points from their first two games, one point ahead of a Brazilian side who had kicked off the tournament with a comfortable 4-0 victory over Panama.

Le Sommer, France's all-time leading scorer, gave her side the perfect start in the 17th minute, moments after seeing Leticia keep out her first effort at full stretch.

But here was little the Brazilian goalkeeper could do about Le Sommer's opener as she steered her header in after Sakina Karchaoui's arcing ball from deep on the left was headed back across goal by Kadidiatou Diani.

The Brazilians squandered the opportunity to level midway through the first half when Adriana shot wildly off target having set her sights on the top corner following Debinha's layoff.

It took until the 58th minute for Pia Sundhage's side to equalise, with Debinha pouncing to calmly slot beyond Pauline Peyraud-Magnin after Kerolin's initial attempt was deflected into the striker's path by Le Sommer.

But with seven minutes remaining France's increased pressure paid off when Renard thumped her header into the Lang Park turf and the ball bounced beyond Leticia to earn her team a much-needed victory.

"I'm disappointed in our first half," said Sundhage. "I think we were well prepared, everything up to then had been good but I could not make them play the way they played in the practice before or get connected.

"One of our strengths is to get connected and we could not. Second balls, loose balls the France players they were so much faster and quicker to get there."

— Reuters

Ashes final Test finely poised after second day

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JULY 28

The fifth Test remains in the balance with Australia taking a narrow first innings lead of 12 with the help of a cameo tail-end partnership. In response to England, Australia were dismissed for 295 in which Steve Smith played an excellent innings of 71 and Usman Khawaja's patient 41 runs spanned four hours.

Resuming their first innings on 61 for one and with the obvious task of building a considerable lead to England's total of 283, both overnight batsmen Khawaja with 26 and Marnus Labuschagne on 2, played with caution.

None of the four pace bowlers that England used were able to get a breakthrough for nearly an hour-and-a-half during which they bowled 18 overs. Labuschagne scored 7 from 59 balls during that period while Khawaja had moved to 37, having scored 11 from 75 balls, when Joe Root, at first slip, held a marvellous left-handed diving catch to dismiss Labuschagne off Mark Wood.

At Lunch Australia were 115 for two, Khawaja 47 and Smith on 13. But the start of the second session saw the picture change rapidly. Stuart Broad, in an excellent burst of fast bowling removed Khawaja in the first over. The batsman was still three short of what would have been his 24th Test half century when he was trapped lbw.

He played the wrong line to a ball that moved away very slightly from the left hander. But it had been a marathon effort from Khawaja during which he faced 157 balls. Broad then, in his next over claimed the Australia wicket.

Travis Head was held behind from a ball that moved away taking the outside edge. Broad had taken two in six balls conceding 4 runs to reduce Australia to 127 for four from 91 for one at one stage.

Mitch Marsh has been in fine batting form since the third Test when he hit a fine century. He started with confidence lifting Broad for six over long off and then a lovely straight drive off Chris Woakes took him to 15 but a run later he played-on to James Anderson to give the 41-year-old pace bowler his only wicket of the innings.

Joe Root with his occasional

off-spin was brought into the attack and after he was hit for a huge six over deep mid-wicket by Alex Carey, he dismissed the Australia wicketkeeper a with a slower, slightly wider ball that Carey seemed to hit casually to short cover where Ben Stokes held his hundredth catch in Tests.

Smith meanwhile had been steadily picking up runs and on 40 he lost another partner when Mitchell Starc, on 7, pulled Wood for a catch at square leg. But Smith went on to form a good stand with Pat Cummins during which they brought up the two hundred of the innings and Smith reached his 38th Test half century from 98 balls with a superb on-drive for four off Broad. He followed that with the same shot to the boundary from the next ball.

They took the total to 239 from 90 overs when Smith's innings ended. Surprisingly, he played a poor shot attempting to pull a fairly straight ball towards midwicket and got a top edge which went over the wicketkeeper. Bairstow judged well in running back, making good ground to complete the catch.

An entertaining stand followed for the ninth wicket between Cummins and Todd Murphy during which Murphy hit Wood for three sixes and a four in two consecutive overs.

That valuable tail-end partnership, which may well have some bearing on the outcome, ended just one short of a half-century when Cummins hit Root to long-on and was held at the boundary rope by Stokes who had the presence of mind not to go over the boundary but to throw the ball back in and complete the catch in side after stepping back in.



Australia's Mitchell Starc appeals unsuccessfully for the lbw wicket of England's Ben Duckett – Reuters



Five-star Sarah sets worlds alight, Ledecky and McKeown win

FUKUOKA: Sarah Sjoestroem cruised to her fifth consecutive World Aquatics Championships title in the women's 50 metres butterfly event on Saturday, before the evergreen Swede broke the world record in the semifinals of the 50m freestyle race.

The 29-year-old finished the day's opening event in 24.77 seconds to deny China's Zhang Yufei, who was 0.28 seconds behind while Gretchen Walsh of the United States took bronze.

"That was amazing, I'm very proud of this gold which is the fifth one, it's amazing," said Sjoestroem, who also went level with American great Michael Phelps on 20 individual medals at the world championships.

"I feel like I enjoy it more than ever at the moment."

Sjoestroem then produced a superb effort of 23.61 seconds in the freestyle 20 minutes later to eclipse her own mark of 23.67 seconds which she had set in the 2017 worlds in Budapest.

American Katie Ledecky showed she was also at the peak of her powers at the age of 26, going quickest in the women's 800m to retain her title and bag a 21st worlds gold overall having also won the 1,500m race this week.

"I've never even dreamt of even



Gold medallist Sweden's Sarah Sjoestroem celebrates on the podium during the women's 50m butterfly final. – REUTERS

coming to meets like this, so to be here and to have been to a bunch of world championships is amazing," Ledecky said.

"I'm loving every second and trying to enjoy each moment. There are some really great competitors in there in all of my events. Kudos to them for pushing me all the way.

"It's always a battle, it's always a great race. So I know I have to bring my best every single time."

Ledecky led from start to finish and touched the wall in 8:08.87, four seconds outside of her 2016 world record. She went 4.44 seconds faster than silver medallist Li Bingjie of China, with Australia's Ariarne Titmus collecting bronze.

Victory also meant Ledecky surpassed Phelps' record tally of 15 individual gold at the worlds. Her sixth 800m freestyle gold was another new mark, with no swimmer achieving the feat in a single event at the worlds.

MEMORABLE TREBLE

Australia's Olympic and world champion Kaylee McKeown sealed a memorable treble at the meet as she roared to the women's 200m backstroke title after the 22-year-old had prevailed over 50m and 100m earlier in the week.

McKeown, who also holds the 200m world record, finished in 2:03.85 to beat American Regan

Smith who finished more than a second behind despite leading early on in the race.

"That means a lot. I didn't think I'd be able to do that tonight, especially after a long week," an exhausted McKeown said of her treble.

"That's the best thing about sport, you have to focus on your own race, and that is exactly what I did tonight."

China continued their good showing at the worlds as Peng Xuwei took bronze at the Marine Messe Hall.

The absence of 2022 men's 100m butterfly champion Kristof Milak and Olympic gold medallist and world record holder Caeleb Dressel added a dash of uncertainty to the final as American Dara Rose dominated the semi-finals.

But it was Frenchman Maxime Grousset who came home in 50.14 seconds to take the gold ahead of Canada's Josh Liendo and Rose. It was France's fourth gold of the meet, with Leon Marchand grabbing the other three.

Australia's Cameron McEvoy won the men's 50m freestyle gold in 21.06 seconds, outclassing silver medallist Jack Alexy of the US by 0.51 seconds. Briton Benjamin Proud settled for bronze. — Reuters

Fritz flies past Nishikori into ATP Atlanta semifinals

WASHINGTON: Top-seeded Taylor Fritz powered past former world number four Kei Nishikori 6-4, 6-2 on Friday to reach the semifinals of the ATP Atlanta Open.

Fritz, ranked ninth in the world, reached his seventh tour-level semifinal of the season with his first career win in four meetings with Nishikori.

Nishikori was playing his first ATP event since 2021 as he returns from left hip surgery in January 2022.

"I'm super happy how I played today, getting better and better each day I feel like," Fritz said in his post-match on-court

interview.

"A lot of positives I can take into the next match. Kei has been around since I first started. He's an incredible player and a great guy.

"I'm just happy to see him back playing again, having good results and hitting the ball well after being injured for so long," added Fritz, who had lost three prior meetings with Nishikori but hadn't played him since 2019.

Nishikori, owner of 12 ATP titles and runner-up at the US Open in 2014, launched his comeback this season on the lower tier Challenger Tour, capturing the title at the Caribbean Open Challenger in Puerto Rico in June.



He arrived in Atlanta ranked 439th in the world and posted victories over Australian Jordan Thompson and China's Shang Juncheng to reach the quarterfinals.

But he and Fritz held serve with ease through the first five games, Fritz finally pouncing on the first break point of the match to pocket the first set after 34 minutes.

Nishikori, who appeared to be struggling somewhat with his movement around court, received treatment on his left knee during a medical time out between sets, and after dropping serve in the second game could never get back on terms.

Fritz, who is seeking a second title of the season after winning the fifth of his career at Delray Beach in February, will face eighth-seeded American J.J. Wolf for a place in the final.

Wolf beat Germany's Dominik Koepfer 6-2, 6-3.

There was a blow to local favourite Christopher Eubanks who, after a two-hour rain delay, lost 6-4, 6-4 to Australia's Aleksandar Vukic.

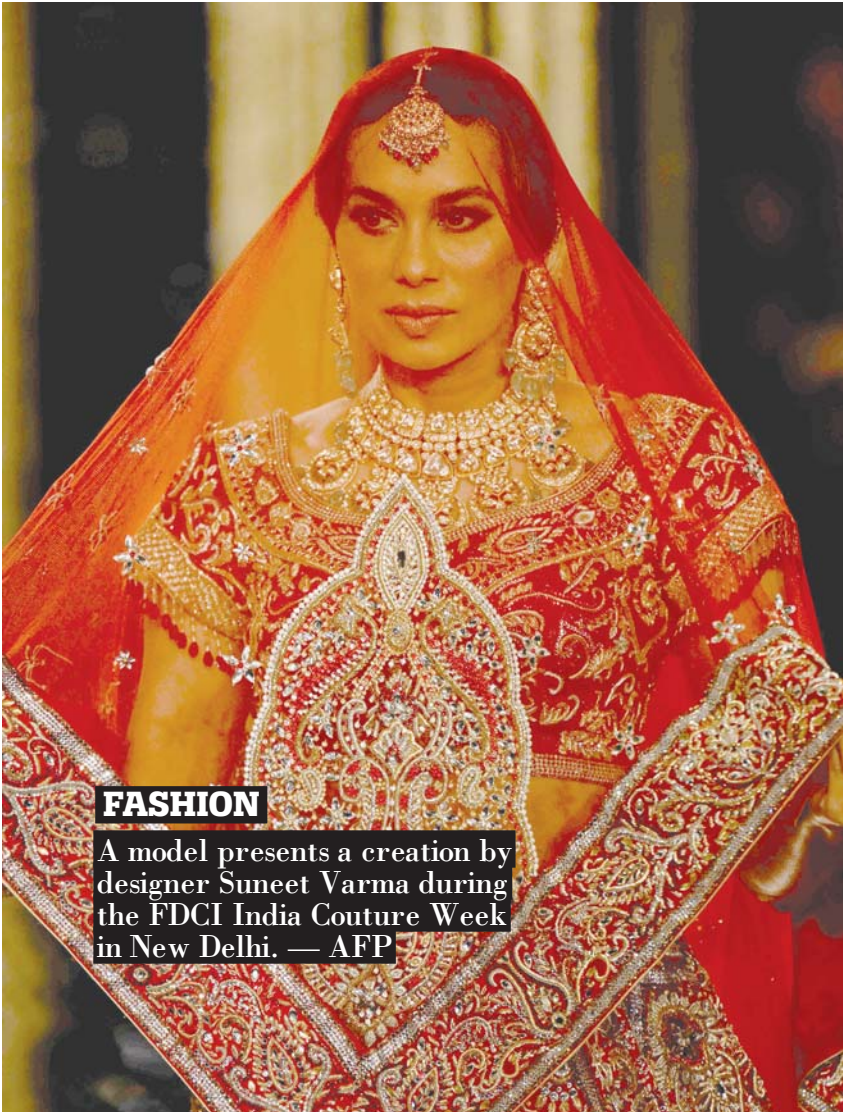
The 27-year-old Vukic reaches an ATP Tour semifinal for the first time after punishing the unforced errors from Wimbledon quarterfinalist Eubanks, who was born in Atlanta. — AFP



FARMING
Tomato plants are seen under a photovoltaic system at the SUNfarming Research and Innovation Center during a visit of the German Minister of Economics and Climate Protection in Rathenow, eastern Germany. — AFP



CULTURE
A dancer performs on stage during the Korean Culture Festival in Arbil, the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq. — AFP



FASHION
A model presents a creation by designer Suneet Varma during the FDCI India Couture Week in New Delhi. — AFP



AUCTION
A gold, ruby and diamond crown ring, designed and worn by the late US rapper Tupac Shakur during his last public appearance in 1996, is displayed during a press preview at Sotheby's in New York City. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Belarussian baritone Vladislav Sulimsky as Macbeth (L) and Lithuanian soprano Asmik Grigorian as Lady Macbeth perform in Salzburg, Austria. — AFP

art & life

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A true inspiration to future Omani film-makers

Omani director Fahd al Maimani has always been fascinated with film making saying that he is inspired every day to be able to focus on the smallest details and tell touching stories at the same time.

By Balqees al Oirami

In the bustling theatre of the 12th edition of the Chefchaouen International Environmental Film Festival, film enthusiasts from around the globe were treated to a transcendent experience as they immersed themselves in the world of "You Will Not Dive Alone," an extraordinary entry by Omani director Fahd al Maimani. This festival is one of the most prominent cinematic platforms that sheds light on global environmental issues and promotes community awareness of the importance of environmental protection. The award-winning documentary has been shown in different festivals including the International Environment Film Festival in the Federal Republic of Russia and other notable film festivals in the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia. "The film tells the story of Omani sailors Faisal al Yazidi and Ahmed al Balushi and their close relationship with the sea. It demystifies this enchanting world and showcases the beauty below including the beautiful adventures from land to the ocean," Al Maimani said. "We hope to take the audience on this exploratory journey and

discover the hidden riches of our waters," he added. Al Maimani has always been fascinated with film making saying that he is inspired every day to be able to focus on the smallest details and tell touching stories at the same time. "My personal journey includes going through a lot of documentaries and beautiful films learning from these amazing storytellers how to captivate an audience. I love how film-makers are able to capture and have films express deep thoughts and feelings," he said. Filmmaking in general, he shared, does not become successful just because of the effort of one person. It's a collective effort where visual arts, music and literature come together to tell a story. "The inspiration can come from different sources but it takes curiosity and openness to explore new worlds and turn them into exciting cinematic stories," he said. Al Maimani's directing style is characterised by dynamism and enthusiasm and relies on the use of quick shots and quick editing to find and enhance the rhythm and tempo of the films. The films he enjoys directing most are documentaries. He finds that this type of film allows him to express stories in a strong and exciting way, and can highlight key

scenes, and deliver information quickly and effectively. "Of course, even this journey, I didn't do just on my own. I am grateful for the support of my family and friends who had always encouraged and supported me all throughout my career. It's refreshing to have people rallying behind you helping you achieve your visions and overcome challenges," he said. "I am also thankful to my employer for allowing me the freedom to pursue this passion," he shared referring to the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat where he works as a lecturer in the photography department. "The university's support has been instrumental for me to be able to participate in festivals especially those outside of Oman," he said. Al Maimani said that he is happy that there is growing support for film-makers in Oman. For instance, the Omani Film Society has been very helpful to allow film-makers like him to find different platforms to showcase their work. "They are instrumental in encouraging the private and government sectors to provide financial and psychological assistance and selling the idea that filmmaking helps promote culture and tourism," he said.

While Oman is developing in a lot of areas of filmmaking, he said several challenges remain including limited resources as well as finding the right actors and technical teams for a full film production. Asked what he can advise the new film-makers, Al Maimani said to keep the passion for finding great stories alive. He also shared that learning from other film-makers goes a long way in improving one's craft. "Pay attention to the cinematic styles and techniques you use and how you tell stories effectively. Invest in continuing education: exploring different branches of filmmaking. It also urges them to communicate with professionals and creators in the film industry, attend film events and festivals, and participate in discussions and workshops," he said. "It's not going to be a smooth ride but learn from your failures. Persistence, perseverance, and most important thing is to enjoy the work you do and be committed to continuous learning and



improving your skills," he added. Al Maimani looks forward to directing feature films and participating in international film festivals. He also seeks to guide and influence the new generation of film-makers by providing lectures, workshops and training. "Oman has a treasure trove of untold stories and unexplored landscapes. "My goal is to inspire the next generation of Omani film-makers to unearth these hidden gems and present them to the world," Al Maimani said.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

sajeer__k
Salalah, Oman

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THEATER



'New York, New York' will end its abbreviated run on Broadway

'NEW YORK, NEW YORK,' a big-budget musical that tried to position itself as a nostalgic love letter to the city, will close on July 30 after underwhelming critics and failing to find a sufficient audience to sustain a Broadway run.

The musical was the costliest swing of the past theater season, with a \$25

million capitalisation, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission; that money has not been recouped. The show's budget was bigger than that of other musicals currently arriving on Broadway, although costs have been rising, and the musicals with the largest

companies and the most stage spectacle are increasingly costing more than \$20 million.

"New York, New York" started off respectably at the box office, with weekly grosses initially hovering around \$1 million. But the musical has been expensive to run, with a large cast and a sizable orchestra, and its sales have been dropping problematically this summer. During the week that ended July 16, "New York, New York" grossed \$692,051 and played to houses that were just 68% full, according to the most recent figures released by the Broadway League.

At the time of its closing, "New York, New York" will have played 33 preview and 110 regular performances.

Very loosely based on Martin Scorsese's 1977 film of the same title, the musical tells the story of a young couple —

he a musician, and she a singer — trying to find work and love in the city just after World War II. The book is by David Thompson and Sharon Washington.

The show features songs by John Kander and Fred Ebb, some of which also appeared in the film. The title song, which is the musical's closing number, has become a standard. Ebb died in 2004; for the stage musical, Lin-Manuel Miranda contributed lyrics, working with Kander, who is now 96 and who won this year's Tony Award for lifetime achievement.

The musical, directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, opened April 26 and faced mixed to negative reviews. In *The New York Times*, critic Elisabeth Vincentelli called it "sprawling, unwieldy, surprisingly dull."

The show was nominated for nine

Tony Awards, and it won one, for Beowulf Boritt's scenic design.

Sonia Friedman and Tom Kirdahy are the musical's lead producers. In May they announced plans for a national tour of the musical starting in January 2025, but on Sunday evening, when they announced the closing date, they said only that "discussions are under way for a North American tour."

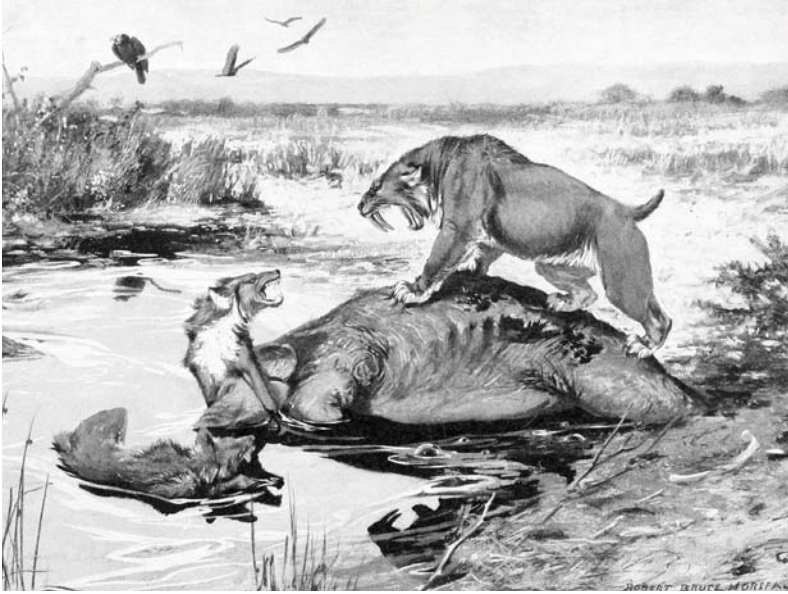
The closing announcement comes amid a tough stretch for Broadway shows, many of which have struggled as the industry rebuilds following the lengthy closing of theaters at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. On Sunday, three shows played their final performances: a musical revival of "Camelot," a stage adaptation of "Life of Pi" and the comedy "Peter Pan Goes Wrong." — **NYT**

DISCOVERY

Saber-Tooth Cats and Dire Wolves Carried a Terrible Disease in Their Bones

SOME 50,000 TO 10,000 years ago as ice sheets melted and the planet warmed, around 100 species of gigantic animals started to disappear without a trace.

Paleontologists have sought to understand exactly how these animals died off, including iconic predators like the saber-tooth cat and the dire wolf. Some hypotheses suggest stiff competition for limited food aggravated by the arrival of humans and gray wolves. But new evidence suggests a bone disease that can debilitate modern cats and dogs, and even some of their humans, may have also played a role.



In a new paper, researchers report that as the climate shifted, the bones of saber-tooth cats and dire wolves became riddled with defects associated with osteochondritis dissecans, or OCD, a disease where holes form in bone caused by developing tissue that never hardened. In a live animal, the hole is filled with a cartilage flap that can lead to painful inflammation. It is

commonly referred to as osteochondritis dissecans.

These findings reveal a fossilised snapshot of how the physiologies of prominent Pleistocene epoch predators most likely faltered under environmental pressures, said Mairin Balisi, curator of the Raymond M. Alf Museum of Paleontology in Claremont, California, and an author of the paper. — **MIRIAM FAUZIA**

FILM

Venice Film Festival Lineup Largely Unscathed by Hollywood Strikes

THE HOLLYWOOD STRIKES have halted production on major movies, pushed back release dates and stopped actors appearing on red carpets. But on Tuesday, the organisers of the Venice Film Festival said this year's event would be relatively unscathed by the turmoil, and announced a star-studded lineup.

Alberto Barbera, the festival's artistic director, said in a news conference that the impact of the strike was "modest," despite the loss of Venice's planned opener, Luca Guadagnino's "Challengers," a tennis drama starring Zendaya. Last week, MGM pushed the movie's release date to next year in light of the actors strike.

Otherwise, Barbera said, the planned lineup for the event, scheduled to run on August 30 to September 9, was unchanged.



Bradley Cooper's "Maestro," a drama about composer Leonard Bernstein, and Sofia Coppola's "Priscilla," about Elvis Presley's wife, will be among the

23 movies competing for the Golden Lion, the festival's main prize.

They will compete alongside Ava DuVernay's "Origin," inspired by the nonfiction book "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents"; Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things," a sci-fi film featuring Emma Stone; Michael Mann's motor racing drama "Ferrari," which stars Adam Driver and Penélope Cruz; and David Fincher's "The Killer," about a conflicted assassin, starring Michael Fassbender and Tilda Swinton.

How many American stars will appear on the red carpet, though, is unclear. Under the terms of the actors strike, union members are prohibited from doing promotional work including interviews, photo calls and attending premieres. On Tuesday, Barbera said that "a few stars will not be with us," but added that he hoped to welcome many actors on the red carpet who had worked in independent films showing at the festival.

SAG-AFTRA, the actors union, allows independent films to secure interim agreements, exempting them from the ban on promotional work. These movies cannot have ties to the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which is locked in negotiations with the guild over issues including actor pay and protections. — **NYT**



EV charging infrastructure rolled out in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

The journey towards carbon reduction and sustainability in Oman’s Dhofar Governorate took a major leap with the rollout of Oman Oil Marketing Company’s Green Mobility Strategy in conjunction with the ongoing khareef season.

This ambitious initiative aimed to establish a network of electric chargers along the entire north-to-south route of the Sultanate of Oman, enabling electric car owners to travel with confidence and promote eco-friendly transportation options.

TURN TO P16

Saudi PIF’s \$5 billion investment pledge to strengthen partnerships with Oman: OIA

MUSCAT: The memorandum of understanding signed over the weekend by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) with the Public Investment Fund (PIF) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aims to frame cooperation in the investment field between the two brotherly countries, said Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman — OIA.

“The memorandum confirms the commitment of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to strengthening strategic partnerships between them, and their endeavour to enhance economic integration, achieve sustainable development and advance economic investments in the region,” Al Murshidi added.



The MoU confirms the commitment to strengthening strategic partnerships, endeavour to enhance economic integration, achieve sustainable development and advance economic investments in the region

ABDULSALAM AL MURSHIDI
Chairman
Oman Investment Authority

He pointed out that OIA will work to identify a set of promising investment opportunities in the targeted economic sectors in Oman and present them to the Saudi Omani Investment Company, which will invest \$5 billion in a variety of projects, thereby contributing to economic diversification efforts, and creating partnerships with the Omani private sector, in addition to business opportunities for small and medium enterprises, and job opportunities for youth.

Noting that Omani-Saudi economic and investment cooperation and integration is a model for the Middle East region, Al Murshidi said the OIA is working to build on these ties

via several initiatives. It recently participated in the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council, which was established on July 11, 2021 to be a link with the parties in the two countries.

OIA, in addition to its subsidiaries, have also signed a number of MoUs with their counterparts in Saudi Arabia to explore joint opportunities in promising economic sectors.

The Authority is inspired by the role played by Omani economic diplomacy in strengthening strategic partnerships with brotherly and friendly countries with the goal of achieving various national objectives enshrined in Oman’s Vision 2040 strategy, he added. — ONA



Insurance sector contributes 1.23% to Oman’s GDP

MUSCAT: The insurance sector in the Sultanate of Oman is one of the fastest growing as a result of developments during the previous period. The sector’s growth rate for insurance premiums in 2022 was about 13 per cent.

Abdullah bin Salim Al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said the contribution of the insurance sector to Oman’s GDP was 1.23%. The total direct premiums of the insurance sector increased by 12.8%, to RO 541.3 million by the end of 2022.

In his introduction to the annual statistical book of insurance market indicators in Oman for 2022, he added: “Premium data indicate that health insurance accounted for 35 per cent of the total direct premiums written, while the vehicle insurance made up 68.19 per cent of the total premium volume.

The audited financial statements for 2022 indicated that the integration insurance premiums had increased by 7.7 per cent. Total direct premiums for Takaful Insurance amounted to RO 76.3 million, which accounted for 14 per cent of total direct premiums for 2022 and 13 per cent of total compensation paid during the same year insurance brokers, and premiums collected from insurance brokers amounted to 46.8 per cent.

Insurance companies’ capital was about RO 297.90 million in 2022, compared to RO 274.66 million in 2021, a rise of 8.46

per RO 145.69 million in 2022, compared to RO 125.36 million in 2021, a rise of 16.22 per cent.

Foreign insurers’ capital was about RO 152.20 million in 2022, compared to RO 149.31 million in 2021, up 1.94 per cent.

The total assets of the insurers in 2022 increased by 11.6 per cent RO 875 million related to public insurance, RO 228 million related to life/family insurance and RO 233.10 million related to health insurance.

The total assets for 2021 amounted to approximately RO 1.197 billion. Of these, RO 767.64 million related to public insurance, RO 219.97 million related to life/family insurance and RO 209.95 million related to health insurance.

The total investments of insurance companies at end 2022 year amounted to about RO 831.920 million. RO 563.860 are investments of national insurance companies, RO 268.060 are investments of foreign insurance companies.

In 2021, total investment amounted to RO 681.960 million. Of these, RO 426.460 million are investments of national insurance companies, RO 255.500 million are investments of foreign insurance companies.

The total direct premiums of Takaful insurers operating in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 7.7 per cent, to about RO 76.256 million in 2022, compared to RO 70.779 million in 2021, which represents 14 per cent of the insurance companies’ total direct premiums. — ONA

CMA launches public consultation on Virtual Assets regulation in Oman



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has formally launched a public consultation to elicit industry feedback on its intention to establish a new regulatory framework governing transactions involving Virtual Assets (VA) and the operations of Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP) in the Sultanate of Oman.

The regulatory framework is proposed to cover activities and transactions involving crypto assets, tokens, crypto exchanges, and initial coin offerings, among other products and services that fall within the realm of virtual assets.

“The aim of this new framework is to establish a comprehensive yet adaptable regime for the rapidly evolving VA sector, that includes prudential and conduct of business requirements, as well as rules to prevent market abuse, including through surveillance and enforcement mechanisms, and around the issuance of virtual assets.

NOT INCLUDED IN THE CATEGORY OF VAS ARE DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF FIAT CURRENCIES, SECURITIES, AND OTHER FINANCIAL ASSETS THAT ARE ALREADY COVERED BY OTHER REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

The CMA is seeking to provide an alternative financing and investment platform for issuers and investors, while mitigating the risks associated with this VA class,” the market regulator set in an introduction to the initiative.

Encouraged to participate in the three-week-long public consultation are all relevant stakeholders, including VASPs, financial institutions, academics, legal firms, consumer groups and other businesses that may be impacted by the VA and VASP frameworks.

The consultation paper can be downloaded from the Authority’s website (www.cma.gov.om), with responses emailed to: kemal.rizadi@cma.gov.om before August 17, 2023.

According to the CMA,

Virtual Assets (also known as crypto assets) refer to any digital representation of value that can be digitally traded, transferred or used for payment.

Not included in the category of VAs are digital representation of fiat currencies, securities, and other financial assets that are already covered by other regulatory frameworks.

Significantly, Oman joins a growing list of jurisdictions globally that are moving to regulate crypto asset-based activities.

According to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global agency tasked with fighting money laundering and terrorist financing, Virtual Assets are vulnerable to cyberattacks and scams if unregulated.

They also risk become a safe haven for the financial transactions of criminals and terrorists.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), citing the findings of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), warned earlier this year that crypto assets have lost trillions of dollars in market value during periods of extreme volatility. Bitcoin, the biggest of cryptocurrencies, is down by two-thirds from its late 2021 peak, with about 75 per cent of investors having lost money on it.

Importantly, the CMA says it also intends to strictly prohibit the issuance of ‘privacy coins’ — also known as anonymity-enhanced cryptocurrency. “Privacy coins are VAs that allow for reduced transparency and increased obfuscation of financial flows and have been linked to illicit activity such as money laundering and organised crime,” the Authority warned.

Also slated to be outlawed are activities linked to ‘privacy coins’, such as the use of tumblers, mixers, privacy-enhanced wallets and other technologies that obscure the identity of the sender, recipient, holder, or beneficial owner of a VA, it noted.

Furthermore, Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP) operating in Oman will be required to have a local presence in the jurisdiction through a legally established entity and a physical place of work, the Authority added.

DoubleTree by Hilton brand debuts in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 29

A new hotel brand from the Hilton hospitality portfolio has announced the launch of its first property at Qurum in Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum opened its doors to guests on July 28, marking the debut of the DoubleTree by Hilton brand in Oman.

The property is conveniently located in Qurum, the upscale district of Muscat known for its sought-after lifestyle amenities.

The hotel consists of 122 one-two- and three-bedroom suites ranging between 78 to 141 square metres — all flowing with natural daylight and offering a balcony



with beautiful mountain views. All suites feature upscale interiors

finished with high-end tiles, kitchen cabinets, and wardrobes.

The hotel provides convenience and comfort across all its suites,

including a fully equipped kitchen with everyday cooking facilities, washing facilities, as well as access to a fully equipped gym, laundry valet, and extensive parking spaces including an underground parking area.

DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum also provides an outdoor rooftop swimming pool where guests can dive-in and enjoy the beautiful views of Muscat city, as well as providing a jacuzzi, sauna and steam room for relaxation.

The hotel also houses an Alliance Business Center, the largest global network of serviced offices in the world.

The centre is conveniently located at Basement 1 with meeting rooms and high-speed Internet access — perfect for

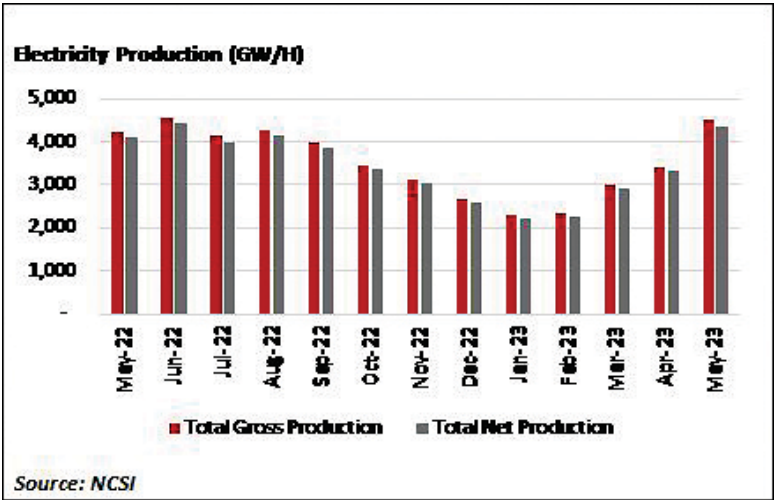
business guests.

Rami Farhat, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum, said, “We are thrilled to announce the opening of the first DoubleTree by Hilton hotel in the Sultanate of Oman.

Conveniently located in the Omani capital in the upscale district of Qurum, DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum offers a contemporary retreat with world-class amenities, backed by DoubleTree’s renowned warm and friendly service. We look forward to welcoming guests to our outstanding property.”

Dining-in options include The Collective, a café specialising in Italian coffee, but also offering light breakfast dishes and a la carte options; and Rooftop Lounge.

MSX 30 Index closes the week lower by 25 points



MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX30) index closed last week at 4780.02 points, down by 25 points and 0.52% low from the previous trading session, which stood at 4,805.07 points. All major sector indices declined, Sharia index low by 0.74 %. The Financial sector decreased by 0.43%, The Industry Sector Index was down by 0.62%, and the Service Industry Index fell by 1.03%.

Ahli Bank has obtained the required regulatory approvals from the CMA and CBO for the Rights Issue of an amount of RO 50 million equal to 400 million shares at a price of RO 0.126 (including 1 baisa issue expense) per share.

Dhofar Foods & Investment, A'Saffa Foods and Salalah Mills Company have reported receiving a letter from the Director General Director of Food Security at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, extending the government subsidy towards four main raw materials animal feed ingredients for another six months starting from January 1, 2023.

This subsidy will reduce the company's losses in feed production, the companies said.

Oman REIT Fund Board of Directors disclosed to the CMA, MSX and all investors the following: The meeting of the Fund Board of Directors took place on Tuesday, July 25, 2023, in the meeting room of the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund. The Board approved an interim cash dividend of (1.2 Baisa) per unit to all unit holders, for the second quarter for the period ending on June 30, 2023, with record date August 8, 2023.

Sohar International announced that as per Article 37 of the Commercial Companies Law, the 30-day statutory

timeframe for any creditor of Sohar International to raise any objections in connection with the Merger has lapsed. Based on a written confirmation given by the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sohar International hereby confirms that no creditor objections were submitted to the Commercial Registry Secretariat in connection with the Merger.

Sohar International further confirms it has not received any creditor objections, accordance with Sohar International's disclosure dated June 25, 2023.

The consortium led by Ominvest has announced its decision to withdraw its offer for Ahli Bank. It follows the disclosure made by Ahli Bank regarding its Rights Issue of RO 50 million.

The Central Bank of Oman had also warned that it was not in a position to grant exceptions to the Consortium for the Offer under Article (57) of the Banking Law 114/2000 and the provisions of Banking Regulation No. 40/96.

The total production of electricity in Oman increased by 6.02% in May 2023 to reach 4,500 GW per hour compared to 4,245 GW during the corresponding period in 2022, according to the latest data issued NCSI.

Oman's net production of electricity in May 2023 reached 4,356 GW per hour. The net figures are inclusive of purchases by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC).

On the other hand, water production in Oman recorded a rise of 1.77% to reach 45,843 million cubic metres in May 2023 compared to 45,045 million cubic metres during the corresponding period in 2022.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Own a Lincoln Navigator with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Lincoln's family-size luxury SUV is now even more attractive to own with exclusive benefits. The benefits include service 5 years / 100,000 kms and 1 year registration. The campaign will end on August 9, 2023. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom Al Wattayah.)

The Navigator is equipped with a twin-turbo V6, 3.5L engine with auto start-stop technology, that produces 440 horsepower delivered through a 10-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift paddle activation.

Giving the Navigator a bold look are adaptive pixel projector LED headlamps with signature lighting, predictive curve lighting and sign-based lighting. Increasing its appeal is a panoramic vista roof with power sunshade and Lincoln Embrace: LED-illuminated exterior door handle pockets, Lincoln approach detection system, Lincoln logo



illuminated mats and Lincoln signature lighting with fade on/off.

The Navigator is equipped with 1st-row passenger seat memory, 3rd-row PowerFold 60/40 split bench seat with power recline, 12" configurable LCD instrument cluster, Head-up Display, ambient lighting-LED, enhanced active noise control, wireless charging pad and more.

Occupants can enjoy available

Revel Ultima 3D audio system with 28 speakers that work in concert with Navigator's interior design and acoustics.

Standard SYNC 4 enables clients to manage audio, phone, navigation and more from the vehicle touch screen or steering wheel-mounted controls.

To navigate your drives safely, the Navigator easily adapts to changing conditions with adaptive cruise control with stop-and-

go and lane centring assist, auto high-beam headlamps, blind spot information system with cross-traffic alert and trailer coverage, evasive steering assist, lane-keeping system with blind-spot assist which includes lane-keeping aid, lane-keeping alert, driver alert system and a pre-collision assist.

The Navigator is also equipped with driver and front passenger-dual-stage front airbags, front-seat side airbags, safety canopy side-curtain airbags with rollover sensor, AdvanceTrac with RSC (Roll Stability Control), MyKey technology and SecuriCode invisible keypad.

In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Please log on to www.lincolnoman.com, or www.facebook.com/lincolnoman or www.instagram.com/lincoln_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Survey reveals snorkelling trips a huge draw for European visitors

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Marina, the 5 Gold Anchor harbour at the heart of premier leisure destination Al Mouj Muscat, has welcomed 20,000 people so far this year and new research provides insight into the profile of tourists visiting from overseas and the activities that are most in demand.

Europeans aged between 25 and 55 make up the majority of visitors according to Mola Mola, Daymaniat Shells and Oman Sea Tours with snorkelling and a trip to the Daymaniat Islands by far the most popular of the many sea going adventures offered.

The three operators are among 13 located at the world-class marina and the findings in the survey give them a clearer understanding of the appeal of different trips, helping them to tailor their services to keep pace with demand and ensure visitors always enjoy truly memorable experiences.

Both Daymaniat Shells and Mola Mola have won a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award, international recognition which puts them in the top 10% of tourist attractions worldwide and, along with Oman Sea Tours, they all reported that their most frequently booked activity is snorkelling with a trip to the Daymaniat Islands the most popular destination.

Snorkellers are drawn to the incredibly clear and warm sea which has an abundance of underwater marine life hugely enhanced by new species found around the artificial reef, a joint venture between Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water



Resources and Al Mouj Muscat in place since 2014.

The most popular destination is to the Daymaniat Islands, a location of such outstanding natural beauty that it is becoming known as the Maldives of the Middle East.

An archipelago of nine islands with exceptional beaches located around 18km off the coast of Barka is a protected Nature Reserve which can be reached by boat in under an hour from Al Mouj Marina, the closest and best placed departure point in Oman.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, comments: “We are delighted that our superb marina is attracting visitors from across the region and the world. It has set

a new standard in excellence, with people able to enjoy its waterside restaurants and cafes as well as exceptional maritime experiences.

“Welcoming more than 20,000 visitors to date in 2023, Al Mouj Marina is an asset which continues to have a positive impact for Oman, helping to drive tourism and economic diversification, with a variety of fantastic marine tour operators now based at, and enjoying support from our marina.”

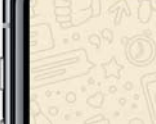
In addition to snorkelling and boat excursions to the Daymaniat, Al Mouj Marina's sea tour operators offer a variety of fun activities and ocean-going adventures from wake boarding, jet-skiing and paddle-boarding to fishing charters, diving courses and sailing lessons.

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The rise of EdTech in Oman



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In the digital age, technology continues to revolutionise various aspects of our lives, and education is no exception. Educational Technology, or EdTech, has emerged as a powerful tool that is reshaping traditional teaching methods and learning experiences.

In Oman, a nation that values knowledge and innovation, EdTech holds the promise of unlocking new avenues of learning, empowering educators, and preparing students for the challenges of the future.

EdTech encompasses a wide range of digital tools and platforms that enhance and support the learning process.

From interactive learning applications and online educational content to virtual classrooms and AI-powered adaptive learning systems, technology has paved the way for a more personalised and engaging educational experience.

In Oman, the Ministry of Education's vision to embrace technology in education has led to significant progress. Over the past three years, the integration of EdTech in classrooms has seen a remarkable 40% increase.

Virtual learning platforms and educational apps have become increasingly prevalent, allowing students to access educational resources anytime, anywhere. This seamless blend of technology and education is fostering a generation of tech-savvy learners prepared to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

The adoption of EdTech in Oman's educational landscape brings forth a myriad of advantages.

Firstly, it allows teachers and educators to tailor their teaching methods to cater to diverse learning styles, promoting greater student engagement and understanding. Interactive digital content, such as educational games and multimedia resources, not only makes learning enjoyable but also reinforces core concepts effectively.

Moreover, EdTech facilitates remote learning, ensuring continuity in education during challenging times, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

This flexibility empowers students and educators to overcome geographical barriers, and it is worth noting that during the pandemic, the usage of EdTech for remote learning increased by a staggering 75% across schools in Oman.

EdTech plays a vital role in equipping students with essential skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy.

The integration of coding and robotics in the curriculum empowers students to understand technology, promoting creativity and innovation.

According to a recent study by Oman's National Center for Education, the integration

of EdTech in schools has resulted in a 20% increase in student motivation and interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects. This surge in interest is instrumental in nurturing a generation of skilled professionals capable of contributing to Oman's digital economy.

In addition to fostering future-ready skills, EdTech has also shown promise in enhancing students' performance in standardised tests.

Personalised learning experiences offered by technology can address individual learning needs, leading to better test preparation and outcomes.

To fully harness the potential of EdTech in optimising test performance, educators must receive adequate training and professional development.

In response, the Omani government has initiated comprehensive teacher training programmes focused on integrating technology into the classroom effectively.

While EdTech holds tremendous promise, it also poses certain challenges that must be addressed. The digital divide, characterised by unequal access to technology, is a pressing concern, especially in remote areas. Collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and communities are vital to bridge this gap and ensure equitable access to technology-enhanced education.

As Oman continues to invest in EdTech, it not only advances its education sector but also secures a brighter future for the Sultanate of Oman, driven by knowledge, innovation, and the power of technology.

Effective exchange rate of Omani rial rises 3.8%

MUSCAT: The actual exchange rate index for the Omani rial increased by 3.8 per cent at end-May 2023, recording 115.2 points, compared to 111 points at the end of May 2022, according to statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman increased by 0.9 per cent, recording at the end of May 2023 a value of RO 6.767 billion, compared to the end of May 2022, with total foreign assets amounted to RO 6.705 billion

The preliminary data issued by NCSI indicated that the local liquidity amounted to RO 21.287 billion, an increase of 4.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

The total cash issued decreased by 3.7 per cent, registering RO 1.657 billion at the end of May 2023, compared to RO 1.721 billion at the end of May 2022.



The narrow money supply (M1), which consists of total cash outside the banking system, in addition to current accounts and demand deposits in local currency, increased by 1.1 per cent, recording RO 5.848 billion compared to RO 5.783 billion at the end of May 2022.

On the other hand, private sector deposits in commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of May 2023 amounted to about RO 17.897 billion, an

increase of 4.3 per cent over the same period in 2022, which saw deposits of the private sector amounting to RO 17.155 billion.

Total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows increased by the end of May 2023 by 6.4 per cent to reach RO 30.116 billion compared to RO 28.299 billion, while the average interest rate on total loans decreased by 0.9 per cent at the end of May 2023, when it recorded a rate of 5.444 per cent. — **ONA**

EV charging infrastructure rolled out in Dhofar

FROM PAGE 13

Starting from the northern borders of Oman with the United Arab Emirates, the project witnessed the installation of electric chargers at strategic locations to cover the entire journey from north to south.

These charging stations were placed at key points, including at the border between Oman and the UAE, Suhar, Halban, Al Khoudh, Haima, Al Ghaba and Manah.

This extensive coverage ensures that electric car owners can undertake their journeys seamlessly, knowing that charging facilities were readily available along the way.

Recently, the scope of the Green Mobility Strategy was extended



throughout Dhofar Governorate, with the introduction of quick chargers in Maqshan and Saih Al-Khairat, and omanoil's filling station at Saada (Salalah).

The charging infrastructure provides options for all types of electric cars, with one fast

charger at 180 kW and two fast chargers at 120 kW, alongside three medium-speed chargers. Building on its plan to expand the EV charging infrastructure in Oman, Oman Oil Marketing Company recently announced the signing of a binding Heads of Terms with Synergy Investments LLC to establish Electric Vehicles One (EVO) tasked with developing Oman's electric vehicle infrastructure.

The pact establishes EVO's business activities primarily in trading, installation, operation and maintenance of electric vehicle charging stations as well as other services and products that complement Oman's electric vehicles' ecosystem.



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Instalment starting from **RO 116***



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