WEDNESDAY | APRIL 10, 2024 | SHAWWAL 1, 1445 AH

VOL. 43 NO. 148 | PAGES 12 | BAISAS 200

OMAN عُمان DAILY

Observer



SUNRISE - **05:50 AM**
FAJR - **04:33 AM**
DHUHR - **12:13 PM**
ASR - **03:41 PM**
MAGHRIB - **06:31 PM**
ISHA - **07:43 PM**

Established **1981**. Editor-in-chief: **Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili**

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

HM to perform Eid prayers in Seeb



HIS MAJESTY GREETS CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will perform Eid al Fitr prayers at the Sayyida Fatima Bint Ali Mosque in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate, on Wednesday.

This came in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, which reads: "With the dawn of the first day of the month of Shawwal, signaling the blessed days of Eid al-Fitr 1445 AH, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may Allah protect him, will perform the Eid al Fitr prayer at the Mosque of Sayyida Fatima bint Ali in the Wilayat of Seeb in the Governorate of Muscat, by the will and grace of Allah Almighty."

His Majesty will perform the prayers in the company of some members of the Royal family, ministers, advisers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police, as well as some members of the State Council, Majlis Ash'shura, under-secretaries, officials, shaikhs, dignitaries of the Wilayat of Al Seeb and citizens.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has extended greetings to citizens, residents in Oman and the Islamic nation on the occasion of Eid al Fitr. The Diwan of Royal Court issued a statement to this effect reading as follows: "Upon the advent of the blessed Eid al Fitr for the year 1445 AH, and, as devout Muslims who observed fasting during the holy month of Ramadhan expressed joy at devotedly completing the ritual, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has extended greetings and congratulations to Omani citizens, residents in the land of Oman and the whole Islamic nation on this happy occasion.

HM wished citizens and residents a happy time. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to accept their good deeds, make them witness many happy comebacks of this blessed occasion and similar occasions and grant them well-being and prosperity. May the Almighty Allah bring back this auspicious occasion with abundant bounties and blessings for His Majesty the Sultan, many years ahead, and may all have peace and joy, each and every year." — **ONA**

HM PARDONS 154 PRISONERS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, has issued a special Royal pardon for 154 prison inmates, convicted in various cases. The Royal pardon coincides with the occasion of blessed Eid al Fitr 1445 AH. It has been issued out of consideration for the prisoners' families.

Eid Mubarak: Traditions passed from generation to generation



While parents continue to make plans for the activities of the Eid days, the children will also have busy schedules. The exciting first day of Eid begins by wearing new clothes and attending morning prayers.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The joy of children knows no limit during the three days of Eid with plenty of food, sweet treats, new clothes, gifts and Eidia. During Eid, especially on the first day, children receive Eidia or money from elders and they collect it together.

"As children, we looked forward with great anticipation the money we would be gifted on Eid," said Abdullah al Salmani.

Even with modern day malls, the traditional Eid markets, called Habtas, continue to have a special place. The joy of Eid is reflected in many ways as families and friends visit each other.

Ahmed al Kaabi said, "When you are a child it is exciting to go and shop with your own money. It could vary from candies to toys. And for the occasion of Eid, the small shop owners will bring new exceptional commodities that fit the children's budget of Eidia."

While parents continue to make plans for the activities of the Eid days, the children will also have busy schedules. The exciting first day of Eid begins by wearing new clothes and attending morning prayers.

"As children our ears were filled with greetings starting with Eid Mubarak! And then comes the coins and notes. It was extremely fun. These childhood memories make us feel obligated to continue the traditions and we collect the change from bank and be ready for the children on the Eid day," noted Abdullah.

He pointed out that it might be a small charity of 100 or 200 baisas but it makes people happy as we also distribute it in other places such as petrol stations.

"For us charity is not just about giving money, even making someone smile or laugh is charity. We like to help people with money but I feel we can go further and motivate and guide people to do better in life regardless of ethnicity and this is even better than just giving money," said Abdullah.

First day of Eid today in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The first day of Eid al Fitr in Oman will be on Wednesday, the Main Moon Sighting Committee announced on Tuesday.

The committee was headed by Dr Mohammed bin Said bin Khalfan al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The committee was comprised of Dr Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharusi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman; Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior; Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Mohammed bin Salem al Akhzami, Supreme Court Judge; Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Sattar al Kamali, Supreme Court Judge; and Mohammed bin Salem al Nahdi, Supreme Court Judge.

The committee received information confirming the sighting of the crescent. After studying these reports, the committee declared that Shawwal 1445 AH will begin on Wednesday.

"Accordingly, Wednesday will be the first day of the month of Shawwal for the year 1445 AH and the first day of Eid al Fitr, corresponding to April 10, 2024," the minister said in a statement.

On this auspicious occasion, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs extended its congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, ministers and the people of Oman.



The Main Moon Sighting Committee met on Tuesday to announce the sighting of the crescent

WEATHER MUSCAT: Max **34°C** Min **28°C** SALALAH: Max **32°C** Min **25°C** NIZWA: Max **37°C** Min **24°C**

THERE IS NO NEED TO RUSH DURING EID

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm



Even though there are not many cars on the road, Eid is usually a challenging time to remain safe on the road, more so when it falls along the weekend

There is a need for commuters to take extra care on the roads as tired drivers increase the risk of crashes during Eid. In the next four days of Eid al Fitr holidays, the roads are likely to witness rush as people move around the country to enjoy Eid holidays.

In Oman, like many other countries, authorities have made efforts to make roads safer by imposing strict penalties on offenders and enhancing driver training and road management, but there is still some way to go before we see road discipline. We as the public need to be more serious on that.

"Even though there are not many cars on the road, Eid is usually a challenging time to remain safe on the road, more so when it falls along the weekend. I believe rush drivers need to be given lessons on road etiquette. I have seen that people lack basic courtesy towards others on the road. There is no need to rush," Amer al Touqi, a concerned citizen said.

According to road safety experts, there are some accidents reported during this period. They call for speed management and advise people to drive slow and not be in a rush while enjoying Eid.

"During my many years of driving, I have noticed that people tend to be tired and still want to drive fast during Eid. There is need to plan our journey so that we reach home safely. Even if it is already late, we need to slow down," said road safety expert.

But the good news is that there has been a drop in accidents in the recent years in Oman. New laws have been introduced and the penalties are significant in ensuring safer roads for all in society.

The safety of children during car journeys is of utmost importance and placing children in the front seat of a vehicle is strongly discouraged due to safety considerations.

"It is highly recommended to use the rear seat and provide a dedicated child seat for optimal safety," ROP official said.

Studies have demonstrated that using the rear seat along with a dedicated child seat can reduce the risk of injuries by approximately 45 per cent compared to placing a child in the front seat without proper restraints.

This significant risk reduction highlights the importance of following these guidelines and prioritising children's safety during car trips.

By following these practices, pedestrians can minimise the risk of accidents and contribute to a safer road environment.

'Mind your children'



Monitoring children during the holidays is a priority

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has urged the public to take all cautions to be safe during Eid holidays.

It stated that people should avoid sudden run-over accidents by staying away from moving vehicles.

Monitoring children during the holidays is a priority especially while they are swimming in home pools to prevent cases of drowning.

To avoid fire hazards the authority stated, 'Avoid keeping flammable materials inside your vehicle.'

It added that it is important for family members to have complete awareness of home safety, providing safety and security items and tools along with following guidelines and instructions.

As part of safety procedures and means, the authority stated that it is important to equip homes with a suitable fire extinguisher, a first aid kit, a gas leakage sensor, and practice dealing with minor accidents when they occur. Also, it is advisable to instals smoke sensors and most importantly identify emergency exits.

For safety reasons the authority has requested the public to avoid exposure to direct sunlight as it may lead to heat stroke or heat exhaustion. The emergency numbers to call are 9999 or 24343666.

SOCIAL WELFARE WORKERS DISTIBUTE NEW EID CLOTHES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 9



Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari

A noble initiative was repeated this year by distributing new clothes to workers who could not afford to buy new clothes for Eid initiated by social welfare worker Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari last year.

Shaandar Bukhari said, "After our two food distribution drives this year in Ramadhan, I discussed with Mohammed Shah Shirani to conduct new dresses drive for the underprivileged and he showed interest and told me that he was also intending to repeat last year's drive and upon discussing the mechanics for this year he proposed that we should reach out to far flung areas from where the workers don't have daily commute to the city and are deserving candidates for this drive."

"So we chalked out a map of 100 kilometres around Al Buraimi Governorate en route Mahadha towards Kahl sands and mountainous areas of Al Heil where there are a lot of farms and then to Al Rawdha area," he added.

This campaign was completed in three days. "Later a good Samaritan friend of Shirani gave us boxes of new sandals to be distributed which was also included in our campaign," he added.

Shirani, a philanthropist from Al Buraimi, said, "We looped in community members to arrange for funds and successfully managed to get 141 new dresses at a price of RO 5 per piece. These clothe materials were both stitched and unstitched."

TEAM donates gifts to children of Dar Al Hanan

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef



The group named TEAM paid a visit to Dar Al Hanan recently

A group of expatriates came together to share the message of Ramadhan and presented gifts to children of Dar Al Hanan and their families recently.

The group named TEAM (Thiruvananthapuram Expat Association Muscat) in coordination with Oman Cancer Association paid a visit to Dar Al Hanan where children aging from 1 year to 16 years are undergoing cancer treatment at the Royal Hospital and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

They are from financially backward background and do not have the capabilities for spending money for their stay, and are accommodated in a villa in Al Ghubra managed by Dar Al Hanan.

These kids are from various parts of Oman and also from countries like Syria, Yemen, and the like. Their meals and accommodation and transportation are taken care of through contributions from various supporters.

"We are thankful to the Oman Cancer Association for providing us the opportunity to visit this humanitarian project and be a part of the noble causes being undertaken here," a member of the TEAM told the Observer.

'Adatee Hayatee' continues partnership with OABC

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef



Adattee Hayatee will continue to provide these artists with opportunities for recognition and empowerment

Adattee Hayatee, a group of people dedicated to promoting and showcasing the artwork of Omani artists with diverse disabilities, announced its seventh consecutive year of partnership with the Oman American Business Center (OABC) at an annual Suhoor Gathering recently.

Accordingly, Adattee Hayatee will continue to provide these artists with opportunities for recognition and empowerment supported by the OABC and through its initiatives, Adattee Hayatee will continue to raise awareness about the talents and capabilities of individuals with disabilities while fostering inclusivity and appreciation within the community.

Speaking to the Observer, Laila al Wahaibi, Founder at Adattee Hayatee said that the group is thrilled to have partnered with OABC for the seventh consecutive year at their annual Suhoor Gathering.

"This event provides a wonderful platform to showcase the exceptional talent and creativity of Omani artists, highlighting their contributions to the artistic landscape of Oman. We are grateful to OABC for their continued support and collaboration for the opportunity to participate in this esteemed event and look forward to many more years of partnership in promoting the artwork of Omani artists on the international stage," she said.

The Suhoor Gathering, hosted by OABC, is a prestigious event that brings together esteemed members and guests for an evening of cultural celebration and networking. Adattee Hayatee is honoured to have been invited once again to contribute to this remarkable occasion.

"Our members are CEO's, GM's and other professionals who come to OABC events to network and expand business connections. But once a year, each year, we get to connect with joyful, friendly, talented artists.

Israel blocks more food than aid in Gaza: UN



A United Nations team visits Gaza as Palestinian civil defence recover human remains from the grounds of Al Shifa hospital. – **AFP**

GENEVA: Israel is blocking far more convoys carrying food aid within Gaza, where famine is looming, than convoys carrying other kinds of aid, the UN said on Tuesday.

A spokesman for the United Nations' humanitarian agency pointed to statistics from March showing that it was much more difficult to get clearance for delivering food than other aid in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

"Food convoys that should be going particularly to the north, where 70 per cent of people face famine conditions, are... three times more likely to be denied than any other humanitarian convoys with other kinds of material," Jens Laerke told reporters in Geneva.

Israel is facing mounting international pressure to allow more aid into Gaza, which is facing a humanitarian catastrophe six months into the war that erupted after unprecedented October 7 attack inside Israel.

Israel meanwhile charges that the main problem is with UN aid distribution within Gaza.

A spokesman for the United Nations' humanitarian agency pointed to statistics from March showing that it was much more difficult to get clearance for delivering food

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body that manages the flow of aid, said on Tuesday on X, formerly Twitter, that "741 humanitarian aid trucks were inspected and transferred to the Gaza Strip over the last 2 days". "Only 267 aid trucks were distributed by UN aid agencies inside Gaza (out of which 146 carried food)," it said.

Laerke said such comparisons were "meaningless" for a number of reasons. He pointed out that the trucks screened by COGAT were "typically only half-full. That is a requirement that they have put in place for screening purposes".

The trucks are then reloaded, filling them up fully, before moving on to the warehouses. "Already there, the numbers will never match up," Laerke said.

He also insisted that "counting day to day and comparing makes little sense because it does not take into account the delays that happen at the crossing and the further movement to warehouses".

He pointed to delays linked to the crossing point opening hours and the fact that Israel has barred Egyptian drivers and trucks from being in the same area at the same time as Palestinian drivers and trucks.

The main problem though was then getting authorisation and assurances that aid distribution can go ahead unimpeded, he said.

While Israel complains about UN distribution, "half of the convoys that we were trying to send to the north with food (in March) were denied by the very same Israeli authorities".

Laerke stressed that "the obligation is on the warring parties, and in particular... on Israel as the occupying power of Gaza, to facilitate and ensure humanitarian access does not stop at the border". — **AFP**

War rages amid truce talks in Cairo

GAZA: Israel bombed targets in Gaza on Tuesday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted the army will destroy Palestinian groups despite ongoing Cairo talks towards a ceasefire and captives deal.

More than six months into the war, Palestinian groups Hamas said it was "studying" a new proposal for a temporary truce, submitted during the talks with US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators.

Under the plan, fighting would stop for six weeks, 40 women and child captives would be exchanged for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and up to 500 aid trucks would enter Gaza per day, a source said.

Hamas said it "appreciates" the mediators' latest efforts but accused Israel of failing to respond to its long-standing demands, including a full withdrawal of forces from Gaza.

Netanyahu stressed — despite growing pressure from top ally the United States — that Israel would pursue the twin goals of bringing home the captives and destroying Palestinian groups after October 7 attack.

"It will happen — there is a date," he vowed without saying when he plans to send troops into the last city in Gaza so far spared a ground invasion.



A Palestinian woman holding her children reacts outside a hospital where casualties are brought following Israeli bombardment in Bureij, central Gaza Strip. – **AFP**

US officials renewed their objections to a Rafah operation, following a phone call last week between President Joe Biden and Netanyahu.

"We have made clear to Israel that we think a full-scale military invasion of Rafah would have an enormously harmful effect on those civilians and that it would ultimately hurt Israel's security," said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller.

Israel has invited tenders for 40,000 large tents, part of its preparations to evacuate Rafah ahead of an offensive, a government source said on condition of anonymity.

The carnage left by the bloodiest ever Gaza war was on display in the southern city of Khan Yunis, a wasteland of shattered buildings and mountains of rubble after months of heavy bombardment and street fighting.

Displaced Palestinians returned on foot, in cars and on donkey-drawn carts after Israeli forces pulled out on Sunday in what the army said was a tactical and temporary withdrawal.

As Palestinians readied for Eid al Fitr holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadhan, they were stunned at the apocalyptic sight of hundreds of gutted or collapsed buildings, bomb craters and tank tracks in the sand.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 33,207 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry.

— **AFP**

Spanish PM to lobby EU partners for Palestinian state recognition

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will meet several of his European Union counterparts over the next week to try to garner support for the recognition of a Palestinian state, the government said on Tuesday.

Sanchez's agenda includes meetings with the prime ministers of Norway, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and Belgium focusing on the EU's position regarding the war in the Gaza Strip, government spokesperson Pilar Alegria told reporters.

"We want to stop the humanitarian disaster in Gaza and help kick-start a political peace process leading to the realisation of the two-state solution as early as possible," Alegria said.

Sanchez has previously said he expects Madrid to extend recognition to the Palestinians by July and that he believes there would soon be a "critical mass" within the EU to push several members to adopt the same position.

Spain, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia announced last month they would jointly work towards recognition of a Palestinian state.

Israeli forces launched a devastating air and ground offensive in Gaza in October after groups of the Palestinian enclave's ruling Palestinian movement Hamas went on an attack inside Israel.

The EU has had much less sway on the conflict than the United States, Israel's closest ally, which has said a peace deal and Palestinian statehood in territory Israel occupied in a 1967 war can be reached only through direct negotiations, which have been stalled by entrenched disputes for a decade.

Since 1988, 139 out of 193 United Nations member states have recognised Palestinian statehood. — **Reuters**



A child sits on a cart as Palestinians prepare for the upcoming holiday of Eid al Fitr, in northern Gaza Strip. – **Reuters**

China, Russia to strengthen strategic cooperation

BEIJING: China and Russia said on Tuesday they would strengthen strategic cooperation as Moscow's top diplomat met President Xi Jinping in Beijing, further deepening ties as the war in Ukraine grinds on.

The two countries have in recent years ramped up contacts, and their strategic partnership has only grown closer since Moscow's attack of neighbouring Ukraine.

On the tail-end of a two-day visit to China on Tuesday afternoon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks with Xi.

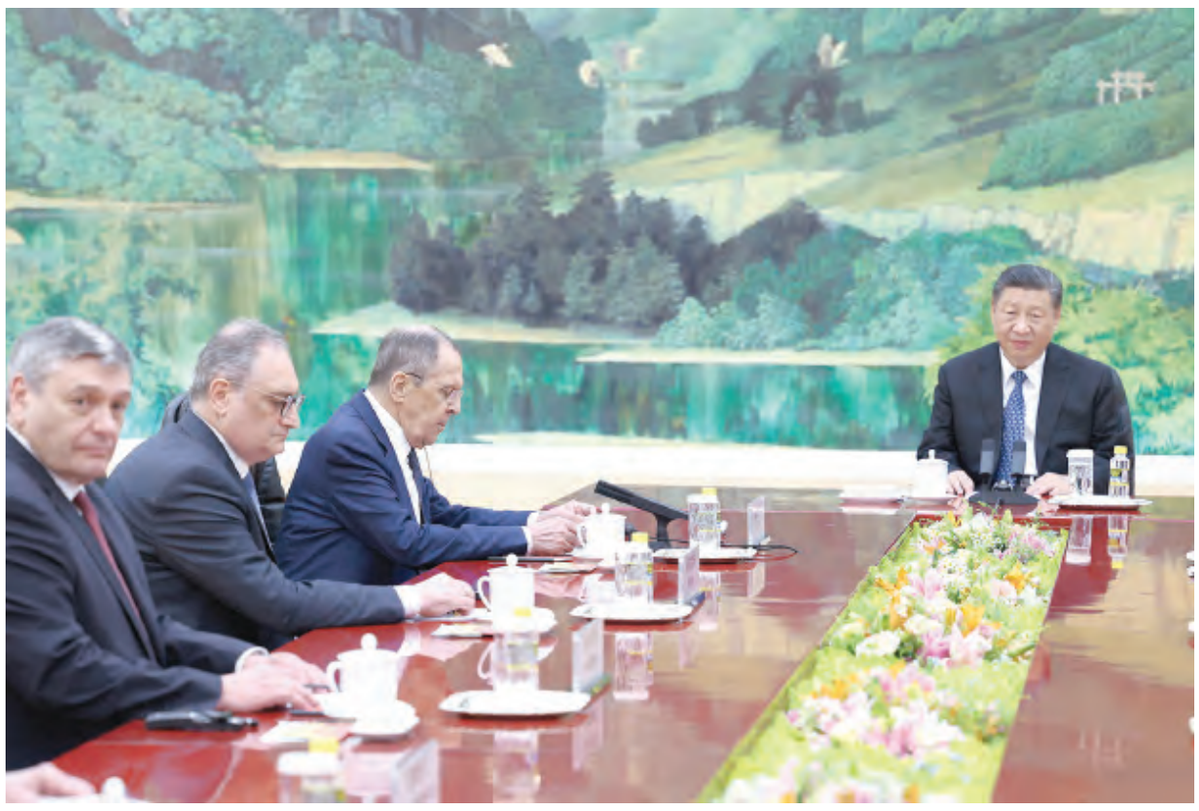
"We would like to express our highest appreciation and admiration for the successes you have achieved over the years and, above all, over the past decade under your leadership," Lavrov told Xi, according to Russian news agencies.

> **We would like to express our highest appreciation and admiration for the successes you have achieved over the years and over the past decade under your leadership**
>
> **SERGEI LAVROV**
> *Russia say to strengthen cooperation*

For his part, Xi told Lavrov that China attached "great importance" to relations with Moscow and "stands ready, with Russia, to strengthen bilateral communication, (and) strengthen multilateral strategic coordination", according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

Xi and President Vladimir Putin have agreed to maintain "close exchanges" to ensure the steady development of their ties, the readout said.

"China supports the Russian people to follow a development path that suits their national conditions, and supports Russia in combating terrorism and maintaining social security and stability," it added.


Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attends a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. – **Reuters**

Earlier Lavrov met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, where he thanked China for its "support" after Putin's recent re-election, in which he was unchallenged by any meaningful opposition.

The Russian minister noted that Xi was among the first to send congratulations.

"Beijing and Moscow will continue to strengthen strategic cooperation on the world stage and provide each other with strong support," Wang said, according to Russia's RIA Novosti news agency.

"Under the strong leadership of President Putin, the Russian people will have a bright future," he added.

Lavrov last visited Beijing in October for an international forum on Xi's flagship Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

That asymmetry is still "changing in China's favour" as it enables Moscow "to continue the war by providing very necessary materials for the Russian war machine", Alexander Gabuev said, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

"Integrating Russia's economy, brainpower, and military technology into... a Chinese-led order with Eurasia at its geographic heart, is the only way Russia can sustain its confrontation with the West," he wrote in Foreign Policy magazine this week.

At a press conference following bilateral talks, Lavrov accused the West of seeking to impede China's "economic, technological development opportunities, to put it simply in order to eliminate the competitors". Wang, in turn, declared that Russia and China "always stick to the correct path on great matters of principle". — **AFP**

Hundreds of doctors in Kenya join strike for better salary, working terms

NAIROBI: Hundreds of hospital doctors joined a demonstration in the streets of the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Tuesday as a nationwide strike by medics neared its fourth week.

About a dozen riot police in pickup trucks monitored the protest, which was not authorised by the authorities.

Members of the 7,000-strong Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) have been on strike since March 13 to demand better pay and working conditions, disrupting health care at the country's 57 public hospitals.



Kenyan doctors chant outside the health ministry headquarters protesting to demand better pay and working conditions in the capital, Nairobi. – **AFP**

Wearing white lab coats and blowing horns and whistles, the doctors chanted "solidarity forever" as they marched to the health ministry, where they blocked the entrance gates.

"We are more than willing to go back to the hospitals but the effort being put (in) by the government is not enough to end the human suffering," KMPDU deputy secretary general Dennis Miskellah said.

Miskellah said that they will continue to defy the protest ban as the "constitution gives us a right to picket, demonstrate and participate in a strike".

"We do not need anybody to give us permission," he said, threatening to shut all hospitals if any doctor was harmed in the strike.

"When the government... addresses the issues we had in the strike notice, we will go back to work." The procession was mostly peaceful but a group of men threw stones at the doctors, destroying a car parked near the health ministry.

The doctors then marched to parliament to present a petition highlighting their grievances.

The union last week rejected an offer by the government that included paying arrears under a 2017 collective bargaining agreement, and hiring trainee doctors on permanent contracts.

Kenyan President William Ruto, who has embarked on cost-cutting measures since taking office in 2022, on Sunday ruled out any further concessions.

"We cannot continue to spend the money we do not have," he said. "I am telling our friends the doctors that... we value the service they give to our nation but we must live within our means." Poor salaries and working conditions have led to an exodus of Kenyan medics to other African countries and further afield. — **AFP**

Drone strikes break calm in Sudan

KHARTOUM: At least three drones struck Sudanese army targets on Tuesday in the eastern state of Gedaref, which had previously been largely spared the country's devastating war, military and security sources said.

For almost a year, Sudan has been gripped by fighting between the regular army, which is backed by the government and state security apparatus, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

One drone "struck state security and intelligence headquarters, but did not cause significant damage," a security source said from Gedaref, more than 400 kilometres east of the capital Khartoum.

Witnesses in Gedaref reported "loud anti-aircraft fire" from the army. In Al-Faw, 150 kilometres to the west, a military source said "a drone had bombed" an army division.

Both officials requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media. Al Faw is only 25 kilometres east of the front line between the army and the paramilitaries.

Eastern Sudan had until now been considered a safe haven for millions of civilians displaced from Khartoum and other battlegrounds.

According to the latest figures from the United Nations, nearly half a million people are sheltering in Gedaref state alone.

North of Gedaref on the Red Sea, the city of Port Sudan has become a makeshift headquarters for government ministries loyal to the army command. The port city has also become the base for United Nations relief efforts.

Nearly all aid coming into Sudan — where famine has all but taken hold and disease outbreaks are on the increase — flows through the east.


People refill donkey-drawn water tanks during a water crisis in Port Sudan in the Red Sea State of Sudan. – **AFP**

In Al-Jazira state, Sudan's pre-war breadbasket where witnesses have reported increased clashes, the army has "made progress" towards state capital Wad Madani, a military source said early on Tuesday.

The RSF has had nearly uncontested control of the state since December, when the army withdrew in the face of advancing paramilitaries.

In the vast western region of Darfur, also nearly entirely controlled by the RSF, witnesses reported army air strikes on three state capitals —Nyala, Al-Daein and El Fasher.

Both sides have been accused of war crimes, including the indiscriminate shelling of residential areas.

A UN expert report released last year determined that the army in Darfur was "not only unable to protect civilians but also used aerial bombing and heavy shelling in urban areas," often resulting "in the heaviest losses of civilian life". — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

Zuma wins court approval to run in May election

A South African court on Tuesday allowed former president Jacob Zuma to run in May's general elections, overturning an earlier decision by electoral authorities barring him over a previous conviction.



The electoral court ruled in favour of Zuma, 81, who is fronting uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a new opposition party that has become a dark horse in the election race. "The decision of the Electoral Commission... is set aside," the electoral court wrote in its ruling. South Africa is to hold general elections on May 29 in what is expected to be the most competitive vote since the advent of democracy in 1994. — **AFP**

JAKARTA

6.6-magnitude quake hits eastern Indonesia

A magnitude-6.6 earthquake hit Indonesia's eastern region on Tuesday, the United States Geological Survey said, with no tsunami warning issued. The quake struck off Halmahera island in North Maluku province at 09:48 GMT at a depth of about 35 kilometres, the USGS said. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries after the earthquake. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said there was "no tsunami threat" from the quake in the Molucca Sea.



But Indonesia's geophysics agency (BMKG) advised residents in nearby areas of possible aftershocks. Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent earthquakes due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire". — **AFP**

TEHRAN

Iran shooting kills five police in southeast

At least five Iranian police officers were killed on Tuesday in an attack in the restive Sistan-Baluchistan province in the country's south-east, state TV reported. "A number of armed miscreants in the region attacked a police patrol," Alireza Marhamati, deputy governor of Sistan-Baluchistan province told state TV.

"Five of our dear policemen were martyred and one person was injured there," he said. Marhamati added that security forces were looking for the attackers. Ac-



cording to Iranian news agency Tasnim, 2 police vehicles came under fire along a road in Sistan-Baluchistan, long plagued by unrest involving drug-smuggling gangs, rebels from the Baluchi minority and Sunni extremists. — **AFP**

In brief

HANOI



VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTER IN VIETNAM AHEAD OF POPE TRIP

The Vatican's de facto foreign minister arrived in Vietnam on Tuesday hoping to ease strained ties between the communist Southeast Asian nation and the Holy See, and pave the way for a potential visit by Pope Francis. Gallagher has said the Pope is "keen to go" but no date has been set. He met Vietnamese counterpart Bui Thanh Son in the capital city and is scheduled to meet Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

In his meeting with Son, Gallagher said he wanted to "express gratitude and thankfulness for the progress that has been made in relations between Vietnam and the Holy See in the last year". **— AFP**

LONDON



FOREIGN SECRETARY CAMERON MEETS TRUMP DURING US VISIT

UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron met Donald Trump, British officials said, ahead of talks with senior members of President Joe Biden's administration. Cameron sat down with the former US president and Republican challenger to Biden in November's closely watched election, one month after the two Americans became their parties' presumptive White House nominees. "Ahead of his visit to Washington, the Foreign Secretary met former president Trump in Florida," said a UK Foreign Office spokesman.

"It is standard practice for ministers to meet with opposition candidates as part of their routine international engagement."

STRASBOURG



COURT CONDEMNS SWITZERLAND IN CLIMATE RULING

Europe's top rights court on Tuesday said Switzerland was not doing enough to tackle climate change in a historic decision that could force governments to adopt more ambitious climate policies.

The European Court of Human Rights, part of the 46-member Council of Europe, however threw out two other cases against European states on procedural grounds.

Hopes had been high for a legal turning point ahead of the rulings in the three cases, treated as a priority by the 17 judges of the court's Grand Chamber.

The court ordered the Swiss state to pay the association 80,000 euros (almost $87,000) within three months. **— AFP**

Zelensky inspects Kharkiv fortifications



A Ukrainian serviceman takes his hat off to pay tribute at a makeshift memorial for fallen Ukrainian soldiers at Independence Square in Kyiv. **– AFP**

KHARKIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky inspected defensive fortifications in the northeastern Kharkiv region on Tuesday and issued his latest call for military aid as Russia intensified its aerial attacks on the area.

In a sign of the pressure Moscow is exerting on the region, Russia fired a guided bomb at the city of Kharkiv just as Zelensky announced his visit. It injured at least three people, the mayor said.

"Kharkiv region is a very important area. We have to be prepared. And the Russians must see that we are ready to defend ourselves," Zelensky said on Telegram.

He posted a video showing him talking to troops and walking through a trench as excavators dug up land.

Russia has bombarded Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, since it first attack in February 2022, and has escalated its attacks in recent weeks.

Ukraine is struggling to protect its cities from incoming Russian missiles, drones and bombs amid shortages of crucial ammunition and air defence systems.

Zelensky has been demanding on an almost daily basis that Kyiv's Western backers increase their supplies of arms.

"Kharkiv needs robust defence. There is a solution to Russia's constant terror. We need air defence systems and missiles for them," Zelensky had said earlier on Tuesday.

"The world has no right to remain indifferent while Russia deliberately destroys the city day after day and kills people in their homes," he said.

A $60-billion aid package has been held up in the US Congress since last year amid domestic political wrangling.

Zelensky said on Sunday that Ukraine will lose the war if Washington does not deliver sufficient aid.

> **Kharkiv region is a very important area. We have to be prepared. And the Russians must see that we are ready to defend ourselves**
>
> **VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY**
> *Ukrainian President*

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Western backers are failing to give Ukraine the air defence systems it desperately needs to protect itself from Russian bombardments, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Tuesday. Borrell said Kyiv was asking its allies to urgently send seven Patriot missile systems to help counter Russian attacks.

"It would be inconceivable that we are not able to provide them given that the Western armies have about 100 batteries of Patriot. And still we are not able to provide the seven they are asking desperately," Borrell said.

Nato countries last week promised Kyiv they would look into their inventories for more air defence systems after Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, made a plea for Patriots.

Borrell said he would press European Union foreign and defence ministers again to come up with more air defences for Kyiv, when they meet in Luxembourg later this month. **— AFP**

Parliament votes Simon Harris as new Irish PM



Fine Gael leader and Ireland's incoming Prime Minster Simon Harris is reacts as he leaves the Dail, the lower house of the Irish parliament, in Dublin. **– AFP**

DUBLIN: Simon Harris became Ireland's youngest ever prime minister on Tuesday, pledging to bring new ideas and energy to the less than 12 months he has boost the coalition government's bid to halt a first electoral victory by left-wing Sinn Fein.

The 37-year-old former health and higher education minister, best known for helping steer the initial response to Covid-19, was elected unopposed as leader of Fine Gael last month, all but assuring he would succeed Leo Varadkar as the 16th person to lead the country following his predecessor's shock exit.

"As Taoiseach (prime minister), I want to bring new ideas, a new energy, and a new empathy to public life," Harris told lawmakers following a parliamentary vote, wiping a tear from his eye before he spoke.

"Now is an opportune time to build a new social contract - one which renews our promise as a Republic. To create equality of opportunity. To support those who need the state the most. To protect our hard-earned economic success."

Harris will face the same deep-rooted problems, most notably a severe shortage of affordable housing and unease at record numbers of asylum seekers, that led to Fine Gael's stagnation under Varadkar.

He is due to announce a reshuffle of his Fine Gael team - which makes up seven of the 18 seats in cabinet. It will not include the finance and foreign affairs portfolios, held by Fianna Fail's Michael McGrath and Micheal Martin.

"There are some small wins he can deliver on but ultimately Simon Harris is not going to be able to do anything substantial at this stage on the major challenge that this government has been grappling with for four years," said Theresa Reidy, senior lecturer in politics at University College Cork.

Harris was elected to parliament at 24 and appointed to cabinet before he turned 30, is a year younger than Varadkar was when he was first appointed prime minister in 2017.

Harris used a speech at Saturday's Fine Gael annual conference to spell out his focus on law and order, helping small business and reconnecting with rural voters.

He also pledged to fix the housing crisis "once and for all" proposing an extension to support for developers and first-time buyers, while acknowledging the required boost to supply would take years. **— Reuters**



Army soldiers guard the surroundings of the Naval Hospital, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. **– AFP**

ECUADOR'S EX-VP HOSPITALISED AFTER CAPTURE IN EMBASSY RAID

GUAYAQUIL: Ecuador's ex-vice president Jorge Glas, arrested in a raid on Mexico's embassy in Quito, has been hospitalised after refusing to eat, the prison authority announced as a diplomatic spat over his capture spiraled. Glas, 54, was in stable condition at a naval hospital in Guayaquil, the SNAI authority said in a statement late on Monday, and will be kept under observation.

Ecuador carried out a raid on Mexico's embassy on Friday to capture Glas, who sought refuge there last December pending a corruption investigation against him.

Mexico had granted him political refugee status just hours before. A Brussels-based lawyer for Glas said earlier on Monday that she feared for his life and pleaded for international help.

"I believe that Jorge Glas is at grave risk, at imminent risk, in the hands of the (Ecuadoran) government. It was a kidnapping, and I believe at any moment they could kill him," Sonia Vera said.

The SNAI statement said Glas had not responded during roll call at Guayas prison on Monday.

He appeared to have fallen ill after refusing to eat for 24 hours, it added, and was taken to hospital.

Local media, citing a police report, said Glas went into a "self-induced coma" after taking antidepressants.

Ecuadoran special forces equipped with a battering ram had surrounded the Mexican embassy late on Friday, and at least one agent scaled the walls, in an almost unheard-of raid on diplomatic premises, which are considered inviolable sovereign territory.

The intrusion triggered a political storm, with Mexico, several other Latin American states, Spain, the European Union and the UN chief condemning it as a violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention governing international relations.

Mexico, which cut diplomatic relations and pulled its diplomatic personnel from Ecuador, said it was filing a complaint at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Leaders of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) will discuss a proposal for "firm condemnation" and possible sanctions against Ecuador at a virtual summit on Friday, Honduran President Xiomara Castro, who chairs the bloc, said in a statement on Monday.

Former Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa, under whom Glas served as vice-president from 2013 to 2017, said on Tuesday that Ecuador had done "irreparable damage" to its global standing with the embassy raid. **— AFP**

Follow us on Youtube: omanobserver

Where Eid is greeted with hunger



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

It's a festive time for Muslims around the world as they bid farewell to the holy month of Ramadhan and start celebrating Eid al Fitr. The atmosphere is filled with joy, gratitude, and the spirit of sharing.

Also called the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," Eid al Fitr is an occasion to reflect on the blessings the faithful received during Ramadhan. It is also the time for them to reaffirm their faith and commitment to Islam.

In addition to its religious significance, Eid also represents unity and brotherhood and sends strong messages against violence and communal discord. It is all about compassion, empathy, and benevolence.

Notwithstanding the fact that Eid is a reminder of love prevailing over hatred, this year the festival is a sombre affair in some parts of the world, especially in Gaza, where Palestinians are in a crippling crisis due to the Israeli war on them. They will be greeting Eid with hunger, bombs, and bullets!

With over 33,000 Palestinians, including children, killed and nearly 75,900 injured amid mass destruction of homes and shortages of necessities, the devastation in the Palestinian enclave has taken a massive toll.

News agencies report that over 200 aid workers, including medics, have died. What is more pathetic is that parents were killed while trying to reach aid trucks to feed their children. Scores of children have died from malnutrition and dehydration.

These all happened despite the UN Security Council demanding an immediate ceasefire and the International Court of Justice ordering Israel to allow the entry of humanitarian aid and measures to prevent genocide. The bloodshed in the Gaza Strip has cast a shadow over the Eid celebrations.

A report released by Forensic Architecture revealed that the Israeli military has repeatedly abused the humanitarian measures of evacuation orders and failed to comply with the laws governing their application within a wartime context.

There is no excuse for this man-made disaster, as Israel continues to prevent sufficient humanitarian aid from entering Gaza.

Sadly, even as the bombs fall unabated and the cries of children resonate through the shattered streets of Gaza, several world leaders are keeping a deafening silence.

They are either complicit or fear the risk of being complicit in the suffering by not taking concrete steps to stop the genocide in Palestine. Inaction, silence, and moral failure will have repercussions.

The absence of action from those who could effect change is disheartening! The world is sending a very troubling message to future generations!

What Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Chris Hedges wrote in his letter to the children of Gaza is a reminder to the world: "We have failed you. This is the awful guilt we carry."

Amidst all these gloomy and painful moments, we pray and wish that children in Gaza hold onto hope and come out of this doomsday scenario.

So let's be optimistic as Chris wrote to the children, "I hope one day we will meet. You will be an adult.

I will be an old man, although to you I am already very old. In my dream for you, I will find you free, safe, and happy."

This Eid, when we celebrate it, let's remember these children and pray for their well-being and lasting peace in their homeland.

I wish all Observer readers a wonderful Eid al Fitr day filled with blessings, happiness, and good fortune!

NOTWITHSTANDING THE FACT THAT EID IS A REMINDER OF LOVE PREVAILING OVER HATRED, THIS YEAR THE FESTIVAL IS A SOMBER AFFAIR IN SOME PARTS OF THE WORLD, ESPECIALLY IN GAZA, WHERE PALESTINIANS ARE IN A CRIPPLING CRISIS DUE TO THE ISRAELI WAR ON THEM

WATCH OUT



A visitor with several watches strapped to his blazer is pictured at the Watches and Wonders fair in Geneva on Tuesday. – **Reuters**

Eid a celebration of unity and harmony



Dr SAJI UTHUPPAN

Lecturer of English

It has been the month of a spiritual rejuvenation and now the time has come to mark the culmination of the holy month of Ramadhan. Eid al Fitr is a joyous occasion that brings Muslims together in prayer, reflection, and communal festivities. This auspicious day holds deep spiritual and cultural importance, embodying values of unity, gratitude, and renewal.

It signifies the completion of a month-long practiced fasting, prayer, and self-discipline by Muslims worldwide. It is the time for spiritual reflection, as believers express gratitude for the strength and guidance received during Ramadhan. It is an opportunity to renew one's commitment to faith and righteousness, carrying forward the lessons learned during the month of fasting. One of the most remarkable aspects of Eid is its ability to foster unity and strengthen community bonds. The collective act of worship transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, symbolising the unity of the Muslims, and their community worldwide. Regardless of differences in language, ethnicity, or social status, everyone comes together to celebrate their shared faith and values.

As far as my experience is concerned, since 2002, during Ramadhan and Eid, as a police civilian officer in the Royal Oman Police has been quite enlightening. The experiences and knowledge gained from my teaching career in the Republic of Maldives has greatly assisted me during this period. During class time in Ramadhan, I, along with my students and colleagues, refrain from eating in order to foster a sense of unity and camaraderie. Then in the evenings, the experience of sharing Iftar meals together, regardless of rank or status, reinforces the belief that before God, we are all equal. These life examples, which promote empathy, cooperation, and compassion which serve as a powerful reminder during the holy month.

The fasting period initially poses a challenge to the students, but as the days pass they become more energetic and actively involve in all the activities with enthusiasm and satisfaction. Participating in Iftar parties and sharing the joy and peace with colleagues and students is a special experience during the month. The universal message of empathy and compassion conveyed during this time is a lesson for all humanity. Therefore, everyone is encouraged to give to those who are in need by providing food, or financial assistance to the less fortunate.

As we know, Zakat al Fitr is a form of charity given, which ensures that all members of the community should join in the festivities without facing hardships. Therefore, this spirit of generosity and solidarity exemplify the essence of Eid, emphasising on the importance of compassion and empathy towards others.

Moreover, it is a time for exuberant family gatherings and festive celebrations. After the Eid prayer, families come together to share meals, exchange gifts, and express love and affection towards one another. I have been to many of my students' Eid celebrations and during that time traditional dishes are prepared, and special sweets are enjoyed. I would say that beyond the celestial radiance and sacred symbolism, Eid celebrations embody the resplendent beauty of unity in diversity, weaving a magnificent mosaic of cultural vibrancy and spiritual fervour. The most exciting category, as I have noticed, is the children who receive new clothes and gifts which add to the festive atmosphere and create cherished memories that last a lifetime.

Most importantly, this celebration transcends religious boundaries, welcoming people of all backgrounds to join in the festivities. In multicultural societies, Eid serves as an opportunity for interfaith dialogues and cultural exchanges, promoting understanding and harmony among diverse communities. Indeed, by embracing the values of tolerance, respect, and acceptance, let us say that this festival also reflects the universal message of peace and unity. Undoubtedly, we can feel that it is more than just a religious holiday, but a symbol of hope and renewal. As Muslims around the world come together to celebrate this cheerful occasion, they reaffirm their commitment to faith, family, and community.

Therefore, Eid serves as a reminder of the importance of gratitude, compassion, and generosity in building a more harmonious and inclusive society. By embracing the spirit of Eid, we can strive towards a world where love, peace, and understanding prevail, transcending differences and fostering a sense of unity among all humanity.

THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF EMPATHY AND COMPASSION CONVEYED DURING THIS TIME IS A LESSON FOR ALL HUMANITY. THEREFORE, EVERYONE IS ENCOURAGED TO GIVE TO THOSE WHO ARE IN NEED BY PROVIDING FOOD, OR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE LESS FORTUNATE



A woman shops during Eid al Fitr, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadhan in the suburb of Lakemba in Sydney, Australia, on Tuesday. – **Reuters**

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.com

OMAN عمان DAILY Observer
ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Tel: 22651222
SECRETARY Tel: 22651200
DESK Tel: 22651209
LOCAL Tel: 22651221
BUSINESS Tel: 22651208
SPORTS Tel: 22651205
FEATURE Tel: 22651220
ONLINE Tel: 22651202
DESIGN Tel: 22651210
TRANSLATION Tel: 22651204
PROOFREADING Tel: 22651206

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

DISTRIBUTION AGENT
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:
Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974,
Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

Website: omanobserver.om
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili
e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

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

business

CRUDE OIL PRICE

Oman Crude $ 90.64
Brent Crude $ 90.66
Light Crude $ 86.67

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

ACME Group weighs innovative tech to ship Omani hydrogen to Europe

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

Boding well for Oman's efforts to secure safe and cost-competitive modes for the transportation of green hydrogen to overseas markets, India-based ACME Group — which is developing a large-scale green hydrogen project in Oman — has joined hands with prominent German firm Hydrogenious LOHC Technologies to explore the feasibility of utilising the latter's proprietary knowhow to ship Omani hydrogen to Europe.

Erlangen-headquartered Hydrogenious is credited with pioneering the Liquid Organic Hydrogen Carrier (LOHC) technology for the bulk transportation of green hydrogen at ambient pressure and temperature while using existing liquid fuel infrastructure.

The technology allows for hydrogen molecules to safely bind together with thermal oil benzyl toluene as a carrier medium. At the offtake-end, the hydrogen is released in a process known as dehydrogenation.

If found to be viable as a vector for the economical transportation of green hydrogen to international markets, the LOHC option will enjoy a significant edge over other technologies currently being explored by producers to get their green molecules to distant markets.



Rendering of Hydrogenious LOHC's plant.

For ACME Group, the MoU with Hydrogenious represents a further milestone in its bid to set up a green hydrogen project in Oman, spearheaded by its wholly-owned subsidiary Green Hydrogen and Chemicals Company SAOC (GHC).

Phase 1 of the project, planned for development in the Duqm SEZ, is slated to be operational by 2027. Total plant capacity is envisaged at 900,000 tonnes per annum, to be developed over multiple phases.

As part of the MoU, ACME Group and Hydrogenious will collaborate on a feasibility study to explore the joint development of large-scale hydrogen supply chains from ACME's Oman project to supply hubs in Europe using the innovative LOHC technology.

Transported in combination with LOHC, the green molecules can be distributed to industrial clusters around Europe by train, barge, tanker and truck, thereby contributing to the decarbonisation of key sections of the economy.

Besides being safe for handling at ports and urban environments, the LOHC medium is also billed as non-explosive and with a hazardous component similar to diesel. Furthermore, there are no hydrogen losses during storage or transportation, making this technology far more advantageous than other comparable alternatives.

The LOHC medium, once stripped of its green molecules during the dehydrogenation process, can be reused numerous times or recycled as well, according to Hydrogenious.

In a statement, following the signing of the MoU, Ashwani Dudeja, Group President and Director for ACME Group, commented: "Green Hydrogen is emerging as a real opportunity that can transform the global energy systems and meet the decarbonisation goals of industry and governments.

"While some will continue to challenge the economic and technical feasibility, we have taken conclusive decisions on our Oman project and partnering with Hydrogenious to develop efficient logistics using LOHC is the next step in delivering cost effective value proposition for our customers."

Significantly, ACME Group and Hydrogenious also intend to extend the partnership to evaluate the hydrogen value chain from the United States to Europe.

Last December, in a similar effort to establish a liquid hydrogen corridor to European markets, Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, together with Hydrom — the orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen industry — signed a Joint Study Agreement (JSA) with Port of Amsterdam of the Netherlands, Zenith Energy Terminals (a leading international energy and chemicals storage player) and GasLog (specialist in LNG logistics), to collaborate on the development of a liquid hydrogen route for the supply of green hydrogen to Europe.

Oil prices higher as Middle East ceasefire hopes wane


Miniatures of oil barrels and a rising stock graph are seen in this illustration. – **Reuters**

BEIJING: Oil prices rose on Tuesday after hopes diminished that negotiations between Israel and Hamas would lead to a ceasefire in Gaza amid concerns the lingering conflict could potentially disrupt supply from the key Middle East producing region.

Brent crude futures rose 14 cents to $90.52 a barrel by 0610 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was 10 cents higher at $86.53.

A fresh round of Israel-Hamas ceasefire discussions in Cairo had ended a multi-session rally on Monday, leading Brent to its first decline in five sessions and WTI to its first in seven on the prospect that geopolitical risks could ease.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday an unspecified date had been set for Israel's invasion of the Rafah enclave in Gaza.

That is "ending the hopes that briefly gripped the market yesterday that geopolitical tensions in the region might be easing," Tony Sycamore, a market analyst with IG, wrote in a note.

"The positive geopolitical risk premium is indeed supporting the current medium-term uptrend phase of oil," said Kelvin Wong, a senior market analyst at OANDA in Singapore.

India's fuel demand hit a record high in the 2024 fiscal year driven by higher gasoline and jet fuel consumption, data showed on Monday.

An improvement in Chinese manufacturing activity announced last week is also expected to boost fuel demand. This week, the market will be watching inflation data due from the US and China for further signals on the economic direction of the world's top two oil consumers.

In the Americas, Mexico's state oil company Pemex said it would reduce crude exports by 330,000 barrels per day so it can supply more to domestic refineries, cutting the supply available to the company's US, European and Asian buyers by one-third. **— Reuters**

Study shows German economy still dependent on China

BERLIN: The German economy is still highly dependent on China for a number of products and raw materials despite efforts to diversify to other markets, a study by the German Economic Institute showed on Tuesday.

While overall imports from China dropped by nearly a fifth between 2022 and 2023, the share of product groups for which Germany relies on China for more than half of its imports has barely changed, including chemicals, computers and solar cells.

For some categories, such as pharmaceuticals and rare earths such as scandium and yttrium, Germany's dependence has increased.

"A clear structural de-risking — in the sense of a continuing trend towards further significant declines in imports — is therefore not yet apparent," the study said.

Some 73 product groups were removed from the list of goods for which Germany relies heavily on China but a similar number was added in their place, meaning the total number fell only slightly to 200 from 213.

The study was published ahead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's trip to China this week, with companies pressing for what they characterise as fairer access to the Chinese market and Europe worried about Chinese excess capacity flooding its market.

The trip is Scholz's first to China since Berlin drew up a China strategy last year that urged a "de-risking" to reduce economic exposure to the world's second-largest economy, but was vague on specific measures or binding targets.

Scholz will take with him chief executives from the likes of Siemens and Mercedes, as well as cabinet ministers, underscoring Beijing's continued importance. **— Reuters**

Record £1.75 billion raised in minority fund push



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

THE MID-MARKET PRIVATE EQUITY FIRM HAS CLOSED PARTNERSHIP CAPITAL 111 AT THIS HARD CAP FIGURE, SURPASSING ITS £1BN PREDECESSOR FUND.

A leading fund raising and investment firm, Inflexion, has raised the largest ever dedicated minority fund in Europe, tapping investors for £1.75bn.

The mid-market private equity firm has closed Partnership Capital 111 at this hard cap figure, surpassing its £1bn predecessor fund.

Raised over the course of 12 months, the fund included £500m in capital from new investors, while 75 per cent of existing investors increased their commitments.

The London-based investment firm is looking to buy minority stakes in European companies with typical enterprise values from at least £200m up to more than £1bn across business services, technology, healthcare, industrials, consumer and financial services.

Leading the partnership capital team at Inflexion, David Whileman, said: "The idea of having something different resonated, particularly with new investors."

He said that the strategy has proved popular among limited partners (LP).

That was partly because it offers deal opportunities that private equity "traditionally struggles to reach."

Whileman added: "Invest in this fund and we'll put your money into not-for-sale companies you wouldn't normally get access to. There's a reason why they're not for sale, and it's because they're special and their shareholders don't want to sell because they know that as well.

"That's why our LPs (Limited Partner) love the fund and why we've hit our hard cap."

Whileman also said LP interest was driven by Inflexion's returns on its previous two partnership funds. He cited the acquisitions of two UK businesses: builders' merchant Huws Gray and pet care business Medivet, which were both sold in 2021 to private equity giants Blackstone and CVC (Corporate venture capital) respectively.

"When we invested, the combined value of those two businesses was £550. They were sold for a collective £2.5bn," Whileman said.

"What are the hot sectors that we just like to have capital in? Definitely data. There's a lot around AI, data and improving customer engagement, as well as businesses you can make more international," he added. "We are expanding intro Scandinavia now. We're seeing a lot more deal flow there."

He said that although minority investment often involves entrepreneurs and founders selling stakes in their firms, larger corporate organisations are increasingly looking at doing minority carve-out deals as well.

Inflexion has already invested from its partnership capital fund into Global Data, for example, taking a stake in the Aim-listed company's healthcare division in a deal that valued the business at £1.1bn, as mentioned in Equity News.

"For one reason or another, big corporates often need to raise capital. Often their debt is getting expensive and the general feeling among a lot of these companies is that they're not fairly valued by the market."

Whileman added: "The parent group is able to take money off the table, sort out their M&A strategy, de-lever and get a re-rating because the City is able to understand it better. And when the subsidiary is sold three or four years later for a lot more money, the chief executive of the parent company can claim credit for it, because they kept 60 per cent of it."

Partnership Capital is one of Inflexion's three core fund strategies. Its flagship buyout fund is focused on majority investment across Europe while its enterprise fund is focused on the lower mid-market. In 2022, the Inflexion Buyout V1 fund closed at its hard cap of £2.5bn.

New data from Bain and Company has revealed that the amount raised in 2023 was the least the industry has pulled in annually since 2018 – down 20 per cent from 2022 totals and almost 30 per cent off the all-time high in 2021.

The decline reflects the cash flow constraints LPs are facing due to the exit slowdown and accelerated draw-downs in recent fund-raising vintages, the consultancy firm said.

In total, Inflexion has more than £5bn of committed funds from which it can invest.

In brief

PARIS



CHINA UNCERTAINTY CLOUDS OUTLOOK FOR LUXURY SECTOR

Investors are bracing for a steep slowdown in luxury sales when luxury companies report their first quarter results, reflecting lacklustre Chinese demand and comparisons with last year when the lifting of Covid curbs in mainland China boosted sales.

LVMH, the world's biggest luxury group, is first to report on April 16, followed by rivals Kering, Prada and Hermes a week later. Burberry and Richemont follow in May.

A surprise warning from Kering last month that first quarter sales would be down by 10% rather than 3% expected by analysts has already cast a cloud over the reporting season.
The group blamed a slump in sales in Asia from its star label Gucci. — **Reuters**

MOSCOW



RUSSIAN ROUBLE FIRMS AGAINST THE US DOLLAR

The Russian rouble was slightly stronger against the US dollar on Tuesday. By 07:15 GMT, the rouble was 0.05% higher at 92.66 to the dollar after trading in a range of 92.500 to 92.768.

Against the euro, the rouble fell 0.01% to 100.62 and dropped 0.11% to 12.79 against the yuan . Brent crude oil, a global benchmark for Russia's main export, rose 0.1% to $90.50 a barrel.

Russian stock indexes rose. The dollar-denominated RTS index rose 0.13% to 1,163.78. The rouble-based MOEX Russian index gained 0.15% to 3,422.63. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON



TESLA SETTLES CASE OVER FATAL AUTOPILOT CRASH

Tesla has settled a lawsuit over a 2018 car crash that killed an Apple engineer after his Model X, operating on Autopilot, swerved off a highway near San Francisco, court documents showed on Monday.

The settlement was made on the eve of the trial over the high-profile accident involving Tesla's driver-assistant technology. Tesla faces a series of lawsuits over crashes related to the alleged use of Autopilot, putting the automaker at risk of large monetary judgments and reputational damage.

The settlement, the terms of which were not disclosed, came as CEO Elon Musk is making major promotions of self-driving technology, which he has touted as key to the financial future of the world's most valuable automaker. — **Reuters**

HSBC takes $1 bn hit from Argentina sale

LONDON: HSBC is selling its business in Argentina and booking a $1 billion loss on the deal, the bank said on Tuesday, as it continues to shrink its once globe-spanning empire to focus on Asia.

HSBC is selling the business, which covers banking, asset management and insurance, to Argentina's fifth largest bank Grupo Financiero Galicia for $550 million, the British bank said.

HSBC CEO Noel Quinn has sought to simplify the sprawling lender to improve performance by exiting several markets in which it has under-performed, including France and Canada.

The sale also fits with the bank's Asia pivot strategy as it shifts capital, especially to India and China. HSBC's shares were flat in trading in London, while its Hong Kong-listed shares gained 1.1%.

"Argentina has been a problematic market for HSBC in recent years given hyperinflation in the region and a sharp currency devaluation, which has resulted in significant earnings volatility for the business," said Gary Greenwood, analyst at Shore Capital.



Pedestrians walk past a closed HSBC branch in Buenos Aires, Argentina. – **Reuters**

"Exiting Argentina also represents a further step in management's strategy to simplify the Group and concentrate resources on areas of the business where greater shareholder value can be created," he said.

As well as booking a loss in the first quarter, HSBC said the deal would lead it to recognise $4.9 billion in historical currency translation reserve losses when the sale closes. The losses grew by $1.8 billion last year as a result of the devaluation of the Argentinian peso.

US stocks closed essentially unchanged on Monday, ahead of crucial inflation data and the kick-off of first-quarter earnings season. HSBC said those losses had already been recognised in its capital levels and would have no impact on its core capital or asset value levels.

"This transaction is another important step in the execution of our strategy and enables us to focus our resources on higher value opportunities across our international network," Quinn said in a statement.

"HSBC Argentina is largely a domestically focused business, with limited connectivity to the rest of our international network," he said. The Argentina business, given its size, creates substantial earnings volatility for the group when its results are translated into US dollars, according to HSBC.

HSBC has faced shareholder scrutiny in recent years over its geographic spread and overall strategy.

The bank defeated a resolution last year from Hong Kong-based shareholders, and backed by major Chinese investor Ping An, to potentially spin-off its Asia unit to try to fully realise the value of its most lucrative business.

The bank said it remained committed to the United States, where it exited retail banking in 2021, and to Mexico, a question mark for the bank ever since it paid $2 billion in 2012 to US regulators over lax money laundering controls. — **Reuters**

India's silver imports hit record and set to rise 66%



A silver trader weighs his silver ornaments inside his shop in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, India. –**Reuters**

MUMBAI: India's silver imports surged by 260% in February to a record high, as lower duties encouraged large purchases from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), government and industry officials said, adding they were on track to increase by 66% this year.

Higher demand in India, the world's biggest silver consumer, could support global prices trading near their highest in three years.

India imported a record 2,295 metric tonnes of silver in February, up from 637 tonnes in January, said a government official, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to talk to the media.

In February, India imported 939 tonnes from United Arab Emirates, as traders bought large volumes to benefit from a lower duty, the official said.

The country's silver imports surged to 2,932 tonnes in the first two months of 2024 compared to 3,625 tonnes for all of 2023, according to provisional data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The imports in the first two months of 2024 were much more than required and pushed Indian prices into a discount. — **Reuters**

Mexico to cut at least 330,000 bpd of crude exports in May

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's state energy company, Pemex, is planning to cut at least 330,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude exports in May, leaving customers in the United States, Europe and Asia with a third less supply, two sources said.

The plan follows the withdrawal of 436,000 bpd of Maya, Isthmus and Olmeca crudes this month, ordered by Pemex to its trading arm PMI Comercio Internacional because it needs to supply more to its domestic refineries as it targets energy self-sufficiency.

Pemex has no option other than applying monthly cuts to exports after its crude production in February fell to the lowest level in 45 years and the country's refineries, including a new facility in the port of Dos Bocas, began taking in more crude oil.

Dos Bocas alone is expected to need an average of some 179,000 bpd of crude this year, according to official figures.

Over the weekend, a deadly fire at a key offshore platform in the Gulf of Mexico also meant Pemex had to halt production at several wells, one of the sources said. It is not clear how many barrels would be cut as a result.



The Dos Bocas refinery from the Mexican state-run oil producer Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) is pictured in Paraiso, Tabasco state, Mexico. – **Reuters**

Pemex exported 1.03 million bpd of crude last year, and 945,000 bpd in January-February. Mexico's energy ministry expects domestic processing to increase to an average of 1.04 million bpd this year from 713,300 bpd in 2023, leaving fewer barrels available for exports in the remainder of the year.

"May cuts are expected to be between 10 million and 14 million barrels (in total)," another source said. Even though the cuts are significant and expected to be applied on a monthly basis from April onward, Pemex's trading arm has not declared force majeure over supply contracts, the sources, who are traders, said.

Most of the contracts include provisions to allocate monthly volumes of specific crudes depending on availability, the sources added.

The volumes are agreed mid-month. Pemex and the government of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said earlier this year that the Dos Bocas refinery, in Mexico's Tabasco state, would start producing gasoline and diesel in the first quarter.

While the refinery has begun processing crude in recent months, it has yet to contribute to the domestic market with finished motor fuels.

Apart from the increased local demand, dwindling reserves — especially at old Gulf of Mexico fields — is another challenge, a separate source, at the energy ministry, said.

There have been "discrepancies" in Mexico's data on reserves, the source said, adding that these currently overestimate both the amount of crude oil Pemex can technically recover at a cost that is financially feasible, and the quality of the crude oil itself.

— **Reuters**

BP issues upbeat quarterly outlook



3D printed windmill is seen in front of displayed BP logo in this illustration picture. – **Reuters**

LONDON: British energy major BP said on Tuesday that it expects rising oil and gas production and solid trading in the first quarter.

"Upstream production in the first quarter is expected to be higher compared to the prior quarter, with production higher in oil production and operations, and slightly higher in gas and low carbon energy," BP said in a brief statement.

Gas sales are "expected to be strong" after a solid performance in the fourth quarter of 2023, while oil sales have regained strength after a weak performance in the prior period.
In response, BP's share price gained almost two per cent in late morning deals on London's flat stock market.
Tuesday's earnings update was published ahead of first-quarter results due on May 7.

"It looks like BP is poised for another strong quarterly scorecard after results in the final three months of 2023 outpaced expectations," commented Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

She noted that BP and the broader energy sector have also been supported by "underlying oil prices with geopolitical supply shocks and improving global demand".

The price of Brent crude topped $91 a barrel on Friday as worries intensified that the Gaza war could spiral into a broader conflict involving major crude producer Iran.
Higher oil prices tend to boost profits and revenues across the energy industry.

BP's main British rival, Shell, revealed last week that it expects solid but lower natural gas sales in the first quarter, after a particularly strong performance in the final three months of last year. — **AFP**

sport

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

SEEB SOAR, AL NAHDA MAINTAIN CHASE

RACE TIGHTENS FOR TOP SPOTS; BAHLA MOVE UP FROM BOTTOM



Al Shabab drew with Al Rustaq.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

Round 16 of the Omantel Football League saw Seeb continue their impressive form and move a step closer to snatching the league title from current second-placed Al Nahda, after maintaining their 11-point lead.

Seeb defeated Dhofar 2-1 on Monday evening in a match played at Al Saada Sports Complex as part of the 16th round of the Omantel League.

Hamad al Habsi scored Seeb's goal in the 17th minute and Eid al Farsi netted in the 53rd minute, while Qasim Saeed scored Dhofar's goal in the 32nd minute.

With this win, Seeb raised their points tally to 44, flying solo at the top of the table with an 11-point lead over second-placed Al Nahda. Dhofar's points tally remained at 19, dropping to seventh place on goal difference behind Al Shabab.

In another match, Al Shabab and Al Rustaq drew 1-1 on Monday at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

Al Rustaq's goal was scored by Mohammed al Ghafri in the 44th minute, while Al Shabab's goal was scored by Khalid al Buraiki in the 83rd minute.

With this draw, Al Shabab's points tally rose to 19, level with Dhofar on points, but ahead on goal difference in seventh place. While Al Rustaq's points tally rose to 18, occupying ninth place, 4 points behind Sur, the tenth-placed team.



Dhofar and Seeb players in action.

AL NAHDA EDGE AL NASR

Al Nahda defeated Al Nasr 2-1 at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

Al Nahda's goals were scored by Abdulaziz al Shamsi and Ali al Rashidi, raising their points tally to 33, in second place, 11 points behind leaders Seeb.

Al Nasr's points tally remained at 22, in fifth place, hampering their ambitions to compete with Oman Club for fourth place despite the latter's defeat to Sohar.

IBRI UPSET OMAN CLUB

Ibri defeated Oman Club 4-3 at the Ibri Sports Complex.

With this win, Ibri raised their points tally to 21 and snatched sixth place in the overall league standings, after Dhofar's defeat to Seeb and Al Shabab's draw with Al Rustaq.

Oman Club's points tally remained at 26, dropping to fourth place, two points behind Sohar.

At the Sur Sports Complex, Sohar beat Sur 2-1 to take the third spot.

With this win, Sohar raised their points to 28 and snatched third place from Oman Club. Sur's points tally remained at 14 and retained 10th place, their position worsened after Bahla defeated Al Wahda and raised their points tally to 12, just two points away from the first relegation place.

Meanwhile, Bahla left the last place after beating Al Wahda 1-0 at the Ibra Sports Complex.

Bahla's goal was scored by Junior in the 30th minute.

With this win, Bahla reached 12 points in 11th place and left the last place they have been in since the seventh round, while Al Wahda dropped to the bottom place with 10 points.

Al Soor emerge champions in Al Shabab Cup tourney



Al Soor team players and supporters celebrate with the trophy.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 9

Al Soor team emerged victorious in Al Shabab Cup football tournament hosted by Al Shabab club. Al Soor team won the cup after defeating Al Jenanh team 1-0 in the final clash on Monday. The only goal in the match played at Al Shabab club was scored by Al Mutasim al Malki who managed to deliver a crucial win for Al Soor.

The first half ended in a goalless draw after tight competition between both sides. Also, the defenders from both teams showed top performance to break all the scoring attempts in the opening half.



Ali al Habsi receives a memento.

In the deciding half, Al Soor managed to break the deadlock in the 63rd minute as Al Mutasim al Malki netted after he received a perfect assistance from Mahmood al Wahaibi to put the ball on target. With this significant victory, Al Soor were crowned champions of Al Shabab Cup.



An individual award being presented.

Sayyid Tariq bin Mahmood al Busaidi, Wali of Barka, was the chief guest for the final in presence of Ahmed bin Abdullah al Owaisi, Chairman of Al Shabab club, and Oman's former goalkeeper icon Ali al Habsi and big crowd of fans from both teams. After the completion of the final match, the chief guest gave away the trophies and medals to Al Soor team players.

The players from Al Jenanh team received the silver medals from the chief guest. Mahmood al Subhi from Al Soor was named as the most valuable player in the tournament while goalie of Al Jenanh team won the best goalkeeper award. Al Mutasim al Malki from Al Soor claimed the top scorer award in the tournament. At the end of the awards ceremony, Ahmed al Owaisi presented a memento to the chief guest.



Inter Milan's Davide Frattesi celebrates scoring their second goal. – **Reuters**

Frattesi late show pushes Inter close to title glory

UDINE, Italy: Davide Frattesi fired Inter Milan one step closer to the Serie A title with his last-gasp winner in Monday's comeback 2-1 victory at struggling Udinese.

Italy midfielder Frattesi poked home the decisive goal in the fifth minute of stoppage time in Udine to maintain Inter's 14-point lead at the top of the table with seven matches left in the season.

Inter looked to be heading for a draw as they toiled to add to Hakan Calhanoglu's penalty, scored nine minutes after half-time, which levelled Lazar Samardzic's freak deflected opener for Udinese.

"We absolutely don't think we've won it yet. We have other matches to play and we need to go out and get it," said Frattesi to Sky Sport.

"I'm really happy, it's a really big win towards we need to do. You can't win every match 4-0, it's important that you also manage to win the tough matches."

AC Milan are Inter's closest challengers and Monday's win ensured that the champions-elect could seal their 20th Scudetto in a hotly-anticipated derby with their local rivals in a fortnight's time.

Claiming the league crown with a sixth straight derby win would be some revenge for Calhanoglu who is detested by Milan supporters after switching sides of the northern Italian city three years ago.

"In all honesty I don't like talking about the other side from where I came," said Calhanoglu.

"I respect them and I have a good relationship with the players. What happened in my first year here is history.

"I'm concentrated on my teammates because they're fantastic... That's what matters."

Udinese meanwhile are in a desperate fight for survival as they are two points above the relegation zone and have to face Napoli, Roma and Bologna before the end of the season.

INTER NEAR GLORY

Inter are not playing with the same flair as they did before being knocked out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid but they gritted their teeth to come from behind at the Bluenergy Stadium.

Simone Inzaghi's side not only have the chance to win the title in the Milan derby but can also beat the single-season points record of 102 set by Juventus in 2014.

On 82 points, Inter need to win all of their remaining seven matches to take their total for this campaign to 103. — **AFP**

Jadeja helps Chennai end Kolkata's winning run

CHENNAI: Ravindra Jadeja returned bowling figures of 3-18 as holders Chennai Super Kings handed Kolkata Knight Riders their first loss of this Indian Premier League season with a seven-wicket hammering on Monday.

Jadeja's disciplined left-arm spin led Chennai's bowling charge to restrict Kolkata to 137-9, a total the home team overhauled with 14 balls to spare at MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Two-time winners Kolkata suffered defeat after three straight victories.

Skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad led the chase with an unbeaten 67 and a 70-run second-wicket partnership with Daryl Mitchell, who made 25, to make Chennai bounce back from two losses.

"Jaddu (Jadeja) always comes in after the power play with momentum in the spin department," Gaikwad said of his man of the match performer.

"With this team, I don't really need to tell things to anyone. Everyone's in a great head space, Mahi (MS Dhoni) bhai and (Stephen) Fleming are still around to take those calls," Gaikwad added.



Gaikwad, who was handed the captaincy by veteran Dhoni ahead of the season, hammered nine boundaries including the winning hit to make it three in three at home this season.

Shivam Dube hit 28 off 18 balls before departing with Chennai needing three for victory and the crowd erupted at the sight of Dhoni, who led the team to five IPL titles, walking out to bat.

The 42-year-old, who is likely playing his last season as player, made one off three balls amid loud cheers from the fans dressed in the Chennai's yellow.

Kolkata had a horror start to their innings after they lost England's Phil Salt on the first ball off fast bowler Tushar Dehspande.

Jadeja remained the hero as he struck on the first ball of his opening over and sent back the in-form Sunil Narine (27) four balls later to put Kolkata in trouble at 60-3 inside seven overs.

Wickets kept tumbling as Jadeja, who reached 100 catches in the IPL, took one more and fellow spinner Maheesh Theekshana reduced the opposition to 85-5 in 11.5 overs.

The innings never took off with skipper Shreyas Iyer adding some respect with his 34 in 32 balls.

"W have to go back to our drawing board and learn, just a matter of one match and one innings, glad it happened at the start of the tournament," said Iyer.

Deshpande claimed three wickets and Bangladesh left-arm quick Mustafizur Rahman took two for Chennai. — **AFP**



Enrique wants PSG ambition to overcome pressure against Barca

PARIS: Paris St Germain are still seeking their first Champions League trophy but they need ambition rather than pressure in the first leg of their quarterfinal against Barcelona, manager Luis Enrique said on Tuesday.

PSG last reached the semi-final stage in 2021, and with the Ligue 1 title more or less wrapped up along with a place in the Coupe de France final, focus now turns to the competition which the club wants to win more than any other.

"I hope that our ambition overcomes the pressure," Luis Enrique told a press conference before Wednesday's game.

"We aren't feeling pressure at the moment, we are very excited to play at this level and we are trying to qualify for the next round.

"During the group stage I could see that the players were taking responsibility, and now that has got us here."



Paris St Germain coach Luis Enrique after the press conference. – **Reuters**

Luis Enrique has already won the Champions League when managing Barcelona, a club where he also spent eight seasons as a player, but he doesn't see his knowledge of the club or their manager Xavi Hernandez as an advantage.

"I don't know Xavi at all as a coach. I know about him as a player, he was my teammate," Enrique said.



> **I know the club very well, I know Barcelona and the players but I don't know if that could be an advantage, maybe it could be the opposite**
>
> **LUIS ENRIQUE**
> *Paris St Germain coach*

"I know the club very well, I know Barcelona and the players but I don't know if that could be an advantage, maybe it could be the opposite.

"It's an important team for me on an emotional level because of my experiences there. But this is a job and I need to be professional."

The PSG manager's dislike of questions regarding Kylian Mbappe continued, when he was asked about the French forward's mindset before the game, having been rested recently.

"I think you are asking about one player but I want to talk about the team because I think that's more interesting," Enrique said.

"We are in a good situation this season. The mindset is very strong collectively."

Security will be reinforced for the game at Parc des Princes, after what the Interior Minister for France Gerald Darmanin called a "clear threat publicly mentioned by the Islamic State that particularly targets stadiums".

"I think everyone is worried about terrorist threats. I hope it can be controlled," Enrique said.

"And I hope it's just a threat."

— **Reuters**

art & life

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 10, 2024 | SHAWWAL 1, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



OMAN'S LARGEST ZOO IN IBRA READY TO WELCOME VISITORS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

WITH MORE THAN 350 animals from across the globe and with a plethora of activities, Oman's largest Zoo in Ibra will open its doors to public on Thursday, the second day of Eid.

Named the 'Safari World', the zoo features animals of various nature including lions, tigers, deers, gazelles, reptiles and birds from different continents of the world.

Speaking to the Observer, Khalfan bin Saeed al Maamari, the chief promoter of the zoo said the entry fee has been fixed at RO 5 for adults and children below 12 will only be charged RO 3 while kids below 4 will enter free. The Zoo is open from 8 am to 10 pm everyday.

Spread over an area of 286,000 square metres, the ambitious zoo will also have a water theme park and a compete family entertainment avenue, animal feeding area, family boating facility and the like, part of offering a complete day full of entertainments.

"We will also have family packages and group packages where they will pay less for the entertainment and we will also have days dedicated to school children," Al Maamari said.

"We are happy to announce the opening of the zoo which will house animals, reptiles, birds and the like in Ibra which has ambitious growth plans to mark Oman in the global tourism map," he said.

Most of the animals are locally sourced while many are from the GCC and other Asian countries and some others are from Africa and other European countries and Asia.

Al Maamari believes that Safari World is going to be a major attraction for tourists visiting the Sultanate as a large line up of animals, alligators, birds and the like are all set to enthral the visitors and will be a sureshot to bring in more tourists to the country.



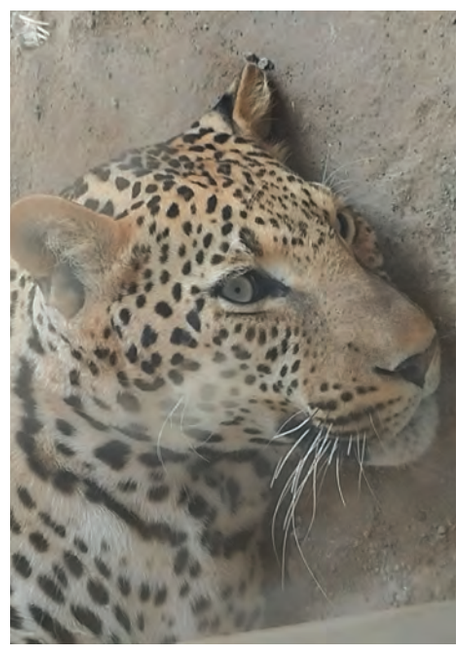


Small scale zoos are already in operation in the country with a wide range of animals with the one of its kind habitat, thanks to the individual efforts in maintaining such havens for wild animals. However, Safari World will be the largest of its kind by far.

Al Maamari said nearly 30 members of the Oman Bikers will visit the zoo on April 19 at 11 am which is open to all.

"In addition, we will have an exclusive Birds show 10 am on April 20 where exclusive birds will go on display for the spectators throughout the day," he added.





SAGA

'Mad Max' director readies for fifth instalment in 'addictive' series

AUSTRALIAN DIRECTOR GEORGE MILLER described his "Mad Max" series as "addictive" on Monday as he prepares to premiere the fifth film set in its high-octane, post-apocalyptic world with the highly anticipated "Furiosa." "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga," is an origin story for the tough female warrior first played by Charlize Theron in 2015's Oscar-winning blockbuster "Mad Max: Fury Road." The younger Furiosa will be portrayed by Anya Taylor-Joy, best known to wider audiences from the hit Netflix series "The Queen's Gambit." The movie will receive a glitzy world premiere at the Cannes film festival early next month, but Miller shared a few early details about the prequel at the CinemaCon movie theatre convention in Las Vegas on Monday.

Miller said the idea stemmed from the intense preparations that went into "Fury Road," for which he sketched out detailed childhoods and journeys for each character in order to help actors and crew navigate the world.

"We had to understand everything about what we see on the screen -- not only the backstory of every character, but every prop, every vehicle, every gesture," said Miller.

When "Fury Road" was a hit, grossing $380 million and winning six Oscars, Miller realised that the movie's backstory was "a rich story to tell" in its own right.



George Miller

In the new plot, young Furiosa has been kidnapped from her home, and gets caught up in a battle between Immortan Joe — the villain of "Fury Road" — and his rival Dementus, played by Chris Hemsworth, of "Thor" fame.

It is the latest twist in a long road for a franchise that began with 1979's "Mad Max" starring a young, leather-clad Mel Gibson, who does battle with vicious biker gangs.

Miller was working as a medical doctor in his native Australia at the time, and the young cinephile was deeply affected by the many road accident victims he encountered in the hospital.

With an ultra-low budget, Miller could not afford to shoot in major cities, and was forced to improvise a deserted, post-societal collapse landscape.

"That was a really lucky thing, but because accidentally, the film -- which otherwise would have been present-day, naturalistic -- turned out to be more allegorical, unwittingly," recalled Miller, now 79.

"And that's sort of what led to 'Mad Max,' and that's why we're still doing them. Because they're very addictive." **— AFP**



A picture shows a view of a building with distinguished architecture in the city of Casablanca. **— AFP**

NIGHT TOURS SPOTLIGHT CASABLANCA ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

For architecture fans, Casablanca offers a visual feast of Moorish tiles, ancient minarets and French colonial facades with Art Deco touches, but much still faces dereliction or is falling apart

FOR ARCHITECTURE FANS, Casablanca offers a visual feast of Moorish tiles, ancient minarets and French colonial facades with Art Deco touches, but much still faces dereliction or is falling apart.

To highlight the rich heritage of the Moroccan economic capital and encourage its preservation, guided walking tours have taken thousands of people on urban explorations on Ramadhan evenings.

Normally, "the pace of life in Casablanca is so hectic that we don't take the time to appreciate" the landmarks, said Mehdi Ksikes, 51, a company manager joining one of the "Heritage Nights" tours.

Ksikes said on a tour during the holy month of fasting that he was seeing the city of his birth with new eyes.

"I live here, but that doesn't stop me from discovering things about my city." The visitors gazed intently at a facade in central Casablanca as Leila, a volunteer guide with heritage association Casamemoire, pointed out details most of them had missed.

Casablanca's architectural heritage is not limited to its 18th-century walled city, but also includes structures from its urban expansion during the French colonial period from 1912 to 1956.

From the early 20th century, European architects "worked to adapt progressive urban visions to Moroccan particularities", said architect Karim Rouissi, who heads Casamemoire.

They brought the city to "the avant-garde of exploring 20th-century architectural and urban theories".

Architects drew inspiration from different styles, such as "colonial architecture in Algeria and Tunisia" and "new Moroccan architecture", a fusion of classic European architecture and elements of Moroccan craftsmanship, Rouissi said.

Casamemoire was founded in 1995 with the aim of promoting the city's "unique" heritage and preserving it, after the demolition of several historic buildings.

Many of Casablanca's historical buildings, such as the Wilaya (province) hall, the court of first instance,



the central bank building, and others, are in the old administrative district in the city centre.

But traffic and noise there "makes us not usually think about wandering around here", said Bouthaina, a tour participant snapping pictures inside a building open to visitors for the night tours.

"I can now see the city from a different perspective with influences of European architecture mixing with Moroccan techniques," said Bouthaina, who settled in Casablanca because of her work.

The Wilaya hall is an example of this blend, inspired by designs from Siena municipal palace in Italy, with balconies overlooking the exterior — an uncommon feature in traditional Moroccan architecture.

Inside the building, a small garden sits in the middle of a spacious patio, allowing for natural ventilation, its columns and floors coated with hand-shaped glazed Zellige tiles.

At the central bank building, tour guide Leila pointed to polished stones clinging to the outside windows of the upper floor.

She noted the influence of the minarets of the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakesh and its twin, the Giralda Mosque in Seville which was built during the 12th century Almohad era, and later converted to a cathedral.

The bank building also bears Art Deco features, with a beehive-like glass roof inside and a wide gate resembling the door of a safe.

While some of Casablanca's architectural gems are well-preserved, others have fallen into disrepair or have been demolished, sparking public outrage.

A total of 483 buildings in the city have been listed as national heritage, and 100 others are expected to be added soon, according to culture ministry official Hassan Zohal.

The owners of national heritage buildings are required to preserve the original architecture of the facades when carrying out renovations or other work.

Wearing a yellow T-shirt with the slogan "Volunteer for my heritage" on the back, Yacine Benzriouil, a Casamemoire volunteer, said that despite official efforts, some buildings remain abandoned or closed.

"The fight today is to show the value of this heritage," said Benzriouil.

"We need to think about how to keep these buildings alive before they are doomed to disappear." Benzriouil is one of almost 200 volunteer guides leading the "heritage nights".

Near the end of the visit in the administrative district, participants joined Benzriouil's group in Mohammed VI Boulevard, where buildings blend Moorish tilework and arches with Art Nouveau.

Nature or mythological figures are showcased on the buildings' ornate facades.

During the walk, Benzriouil pointed to a statue of the head of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, sitting atop a building facing one of Casablanca's historic bars.

Further down the boulevard, the Lincoln Hotel is undergoing reconstruction, restoring its original 1917 facade after decades of dereliction.

"The conservation battle is half won," he said. **— AFP**

'Market of Fakes' in Naples, capital of counterfeits and Camorra



AS TOP BRANDS LIKE Gucci and Prada prepare to report billions in sales this month, luxury fakes on the streets of Naples are also yielding a jaw-dropping cash stream — for the mafia.

The teeming southern metropolis is ground zero for Italy's estimated 6-7 billion euro ($6.5-7.5 billion) counterfeit market, where fake handbags, sunglasses, clothing and shoes flourish, hawked in plain sight to buyers willing to score a knockoff bargain.

"Which brand do you like? What colour, what model?" asks a persistent seller at the "Market of Fakes" spread out over back alleys near the gritty city's central train station.

Men arrive hauling overstuffed blue plastic bags, from which emerge Gucci baseball hats, Fendi wallets, Hermes belts and bright orange Louis Vuitton shoeboxes, sold from rickety tables at a fraction of the price of their originals.

Counterfeits are a global phenomenon, whether fake fashion, toys, electronics, food or pharmaceuticals, estimated by the OECD to represent 2.5 per cent of world trade.

But Italy — home of the most luxury fashion brands — is the clear leader in counterfeit seizures within the European Union, accounting for 63 per cent of detained items in 2022, according to a November EU report. And it's in Naples where counterfeits find a unique breeding ground, giving it the dubious distinction of being the undisputed European capital of fakes.

The city is home to every phase of the counterfeit fashion supply chain from manufacturing and warehousing to distribution and sales — all dominated by the region's homegrown Camorra mafia.

EASY MONEY

While many consumers are unconcerned about counterfeits, the mafia's handprint has increasingly made them a law enforcement priority.

"Counterfeiting is very important because it's a warning bell," signalling more dangerous crimes, said Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Evangelista, head of operations in Naples for the Guardia di Finanza, Italy's financial crimes police.

While less lucrative than selling drugs, counterfeiting generates cash, helps launder drug money and is relatively low-risk, with jail sentences far below those for more violent crimes.

"They've already got the clientele... the tourists go by on the street, the bag is bought and it generates profits for the criminal organisation," Evangelista said. Police seizures are frequent and on the rise, including the discovery of a factory producing thousands of counterfeit Napoli banners, jerseys and caps in February.

Interior ministry data shows that between 2018 and 2022, Naples police seized nearly 100 million items worth over 470 million euros — some 14 per cent of the value of all counterfeit goods seized in Italy.

"In Naples, counterfeiting represents a real parallel economic sector," run by local and foreign mafias, wrote a 2021 government report. It called the city a "centre of excellence" for fakes.

An artisanal heritage in tailoring and leather, an international port, high unemployment and an influx of cheap foreign labour have all helped counterfeiting flourish — as has the local population's long-standing tolerance of bending the rules.



CAMORRA AND CHINA

Collaboration between the Camorra and Chinese criminal groups fuels the rigorously controlled system.

While higher quality goods are produced locally, most imported goods come from China and Turkey.

Counterfeiters choose busy EU ports, such as Rotterdam, or those with less stringent control like in Greece or Bulgaria, before reaching Italy by truck.

Once in the Campania region, final finishing takes place in workshops using cheap illegal labour. Labels are frequently shipped separately and sewn on last, making it more difficult for customs to spot fakes.

The mafia also controls distribution, either through its own sales channels or pressuring shop owners to sell fake goods among their genuine items.

A 2022 police investigation found Naples street market sellers paid the mafia up to 200 euros weekly to operate their stands, or were forced to buy their merchandise.

CANCER' IN MARKET

Counterfeiting exerts a significant toll on the economy, resulting in substantial losses in demand, employment, and tax revenue. In 2020, the Italian government estimated these losses at 17 billion euros, exacerbated by the economic downturn induced by Covid-19 lockdowns.

Beyond financial implications, counterfeit practices contribute to environmental hazards, such as the disposal of hazardous materials from fake garments and shoes, fuelling hundreds of toxic fires in Naples annually. Major brands allocate substantial resources to combat counterfeiting, with Louis Vuitton alone initiating over 38,000 anti-counterfeiting actions globally in 2017. **— AFP**