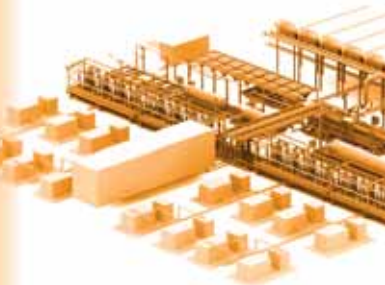


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US GREEN HYDROGEN SYSTEMS MAKER RECEIVES OMAN FUNDING SUPPORT



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CHEF FAISAL ELEVATES OMANI CUISINE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE



P12

INDIA'S CHOPRA TAKES JAVELIN GOLD



MUSCAT

TAXI FARES FROM AIRPORT SLASHED

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has slashed the airport taxi fares by nearly 45 per cent. As per the latest announcement, fares on the mobile application of two licensed companies will start at RO 1.5, followed by 250 baisas for every kilometre. With new fares, commuters from Muscat International Airport to Ruwi will pay around RO 9.2 to RO 9.5 from around RO 15 previously. The ministry said that it issued licenses to manage the taxi service at Muscat International Airport to O'Taxi and OmanTaxi applications after they met the requirements and provisions of the regulatory regulations of the Land Transport Law. **DETAILS ON P2**

MASIRAH-OETC NETWORK LINK

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) is set to embark on a strategic project to link the Island of Masirah to OETC's Transmission Network through a 35-km submarine cable with a voltage of 132 kilovolts and 60 km of overhead power transmission lines. The project aligns with Oman Vision 2040 that aims to achieve carbon neutrality by marking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions. The connection will extend from the Mahout substation of 400/33 kilovolts to the Masirah substation. **DETAILS ON P15**

OPINION

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Dr Nisma Haris

The perils of sleep deprivation

P16



Paul Krugman

Will AI transform the economy, and if so, how?

FIRST PHASE OF SOROUH PROJECT READY



The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced the completion of the first phase of Sorouh project, named 'Al Naseem', in the Wilayat of Barka, Governorate of Al Batinah South. Al Naseem neighbourhood covers an area of 350,000 sqm. Ten per cent of the first phase of Al Naseem was sold out, with 10 title deeds handed over to those eligible to the properties. **DETAILS ON P3**

Nizwa Hospital expansion boosts capacity to 555 beds

RO 30 MILLION PROJECT TO SERVE 4 GOVERNORATES

NIZWA: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday celebrated the opening of Nizwa Reference Hospital's expansion project carried out at a cost of RO 30 million.

The expansion takes up the hospital's capacity to more than 555 beds — adding 245 new beds and 8 buildings on a total area of 45,000 sqm. The first phase of the project was implemented under the supervision of the Royal Court Affairs.

The project reflects the government's sincere efforts to meet the needs of citizen and enhance decentralisation in accordance with the national strategy endorsed by Oman Vision 2040.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Finance Minister Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, and attended by Health Minister Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, among other officials.

Highlighting the facilities in the first phase of expansion, Dr Ali bin Zayid al Busaidy, Director of Nizwa Hospital, said this phase included cardiac catheterisation unit, cardiac care unit (CCU), neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), adult ICU, endoscopy unit, day care unit, additional operation theatres,



The project is in line with national strategy endorsed by Oman Vision 2040.

expansion of emergency department (first phase), and outpatient clinics.

He added that the expansion also included radiology department by the addition of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) unit, bone-density test, and CT for emergency cases, along with admission wards and a full-fledged centre for training and studies.

Dr Al Busaidy said that waiting lists for outpatient clinics and surgeries are shortened with the new expansion.

He emphasised that this expansion will not only serve the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, but also other neighbouring governorates such as Al Wusta, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dhahirah.

The chief guest and others toured the new facilities where the project manager from the Royal Court Affairs Eng Yousuf bin Yaqoob Ambo Ali explained the details of the project, new buildings and the new additions. — **ONA**

Registration for Haj begins from Oct 23

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has announced the opening of electronic registration for Haj from October 23 and continues until Sunday (November 5, 2023).

The website [www.hajj.om](#) will accept applications until November 5. Both citizens and expatriates can register to perform Haj in 2024. During the last Haj in July 2023, Oman has sent 14,000 pilgrims.

Speaking to the Observer, Ali al Hattali, ministry spokesperson, said the online portal received as many as 33,536 applications, including 29,930 requests from Omanis, and 3,606 from residents for this year's Haj, which was held in the first week of June this year. Registration was closed on March 5.

"However, only 14,000 pilgrims from Oman were able to perform Haj in 2023 through the ministry as the agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of Saudi Arabia stipulated the allowed quota for the same," he added.

Less than 50 per cent of the total registered for Haj were able to fulfil religious rituals last year through Awqaf, as 33,536 people had registered when the online portal closed the registration process.

Eligible people, sorted electronically to perform Haj this year, will be contacted directly. They will have five days to contract through the electronic system with Haj companies.

Priority will be given to elderly, cancer patients and disabled people who wish to perform Haj this year.

"Preference will be given to first-timers also, and the Ministry will contact selected people," he added.

Trio win chemistry Nobel for 'quantum dots' after leak

STOCKHOLM: A trio of US-based researchers on Wednesday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for developing tiny "quantum dots" used to illuminate TVs and lamps, hours after a prematurely sent statement revealed their names.

French-born Moungi Bawendi, Louis Brus of the United States and Russian-born Alexei Ekimov brought advances on tiny particles that "now spread their light from televisions and LED lamps, and can also guide surgeons when they remove tumour tissue," the jury said.

But a rare leak led to the winners' names being mistakenly sent to media outlets hours before they were officially announced, prompting an apology from the awards' overseers. Hans Ellegren, Secretary-General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, said a press release went out for "still unknown reasons."

"We deeply regret that this happened. The important thing is that it did not affect the awarding of the prize recipients in any way," Ellegren said during a press conference.

Bawendi told reporters he had not heard the news before



A screen shows this year's laureates during the announcement of the winners of the 2023 Nobel Prize in chemistry at Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm on Wednesday. — **AFP**

receiving the call from the Nobel Committee.

"I didn't know, I was awakened by the Swedish Academy. I was sound asleep," he said via telephone during a press conference, adding he had not expected the call.

Bawendi listed his feelings as "very surprised. Sleepy, shocked. Unexpected and very honoured."

Nobel leaks are rare, with the various prize-awarding academies going to great lengths to keep the winners' names under wraps until the announcements. Bawendi, 62, born in Paris to French and Tunisian parents, is a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States.

Brus, 80, is a professor at Columbia in New York, while Russian-born Ekimov, 78, was formerly chief scientist at Nanocrystals Technology in the US. Swedish Radio managed to get a hold of Brus, who lives in New York, before the Academy reached him to give him the news.

"I'm extremely happy, assuming it's real," Brus told the broadcaster, saying he was still "groggy" from having just woken up. — **AFP**



SITUATION IN YEMEN REVIEWED



MUSCAT: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy received in Muscat on Wednesday Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy to Yemen. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the situations in Yemen and the efforts exerted to reach a peaceful solution that serves the Yemeni people and establishes security and stability. – ONA

Taxi fares from Muscat Airport slashed by nearly 45 per cent

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has slashed the airport taxi fares by nearly 45 per cent. As per the latest announcement, fares on the mobile application of two licensed companies will start at RO 1.5, followed by 250 baisas for every kilometre. With new fares, commuters from Muscat International Airport to Ruwi will shell out around RO 9.2 to RO 9.5 from around RO 15 previously. MoTCIT said that it issued licenses to manage the taxi service at Muscat International Airport to

O’Taxi and OmanTaxi applications after they met the requirements and provisions of the regulatory regulations of the Land Transport Law. The high airport taxi fares forced users to resort to illegal transportation, which is banned under the Land Transportation Law. Taxis will be also equipped with route tracking and monitoring systems to ensure the privacy and security of the user. Speaking to the *Observer*, officials of both companies said the decision is highly welcome and it will be more than the on-demand rates but will be less than the current airport taxi fares.



Commuters from Muscat International Airport to Ruwi will shell out around RO 9.2 to RO 9.5

The ministry stated that the first phase includes taxi drivers operating at the airports of the

Sultanate of Oman, while the second phase will cover tourist complexes, hotels, commercial centres, and ports beginning from November 1. The third phase will cover white and orange street taxis from January 1, which are currently mandated to operate as per a mobile-based meter called Aber. With the Aber programme, the ministry seeks to improve the taxi sector by using advanced technologies. An airport taxi operator told the *Observer*, “We get few passengers from the airport due to illegal services. We are paying fees for the operating card, insurance, parking, and fuel.”

Oman chairs Cairo human rights meeting

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday chaired a meeting of states that are parties to the “Arab Charter on Human Rights”. Held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo, the meeting was dedicated to electing three members to the Arab Human Rights Committee, known as “The Charter Committee.” In the meeting, which saw

the participation of 18 member states, Oman was represented by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League. Oman attended the meeting for the first time, after depositing the document of accession to the Arab Charter on Human Rights on April 9, 2023. — ONA



Oman attended the meeting for the first time. – ONA

Avionics discussed at global conference

MUSCAT: The Military Technological College (MTC) on Tuesday organised the first international conference for aerospace sciences, engineering and technology. Speakers from 16 countries participated in the three-day conference, held under the auspices of Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The participants discussed various research papers and studied experiments and scholarly deliberations about aerodynamics, the development of avionics systems and innovations in emerging technologies. On the sidelines of the conference, an exhibition was held on innovations in the



field of aviation, engineering, technology and electronic applications. The event seeks to highlight technological updates and innovation. It serves as a platform for displaying new technologies and enhancing interaction between researchers, academics and other parties operating in the aviation sector. — ONA

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Celebration marks Women’s Day with focus on mental health

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

October is the month of Omani Women’s Day and World Mental Health Day. A celebration marking the days kicked off with an event titled “Circle of Hope and Love” organised by Whispers of Serenity at Al Bustan Palace Hotel’s a Ritz Carlton Hotel. HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, Founder of Whispers of Serenity, facilitated The event. She presented the storytellers of the evening with HH Sayyidah Dr Taghreed al Said speaking on the importance of emotional intelligence; Sayyidah Dr Zakiya al Busaidy on mindfulness for well-being, Lawyer Reem al Zadjali on navigating the legal world, HH Sayyidah Alya bint Bargash al Said on etiquette and grace. Vanessa Loy-Mehri looked at nourishing the body and soul with food; psychologist Nora al Akhzami spoke on parenting with purpose, and clinical counsellor Sahar Salmanian gave perspective on building solid relationships.



A celebration marking Omani Women’s Day and World Mental Health Day kicked off with an event titled ‘Circle of Hope and Love’ organised by Whispers of Serenity at Al Bustan Palace Hotel’s a Ritz Carlton Hotel

Sayyidah Basma said as we prepare to celebrate Omani Women’s Day on October 17. “It is important to know the pioneers who achieved success stories. Let’s find out who was the first Omani woman graduate, the first woman Omani lawyer, the first ambassador, etc.” She noted, “We have the power to convince, but we do not use it positively. We can progress by supporting other women and making a difference.” Sayyidah Dr Taghreed expanded on the importance of connecting and knowing one’s emotions. She said, “Ask yourself -

What specific emotion am I feeling now? Practice self-registration- how can we be in control? Motivation is a key element. How do I perceive this particular task? What emotion is the other person feeling? How can I be genuine to the other person?” Developing interpersonal skills and being aware of your feelings can all make the difference in moving forward, handling stress and achieving what one needs in life.” Dr Zakiya said it is okay to ask for help if need be. “One can achieve wellness by practising mindfulness. But to be in the present moment, it has to be simple.



HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, Founder of Whispers of Serenity

Practising mindfulness is not easy, and it is not enough to read about it. You have to bring your mind back to the moment intentionally. It has been said that we think one thought each second, so in other words, 60 thoughts per minute,” she noted. She added that practising mindfulness makes our mind calm and even our health improves. To achieve that is to think of something other than the past and of the future, pointing out that one of the best ways to practice mindfulness is meditation, and there is no one set recipe for everyone.



Serb Festival in Rakhyout begins



Dhofar Serb Festival creates a vibrant space for cultural exchange and entertainment

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

Dhofar Serb Festival opens in the Wilayat of Rakhyout today. The grand event, organised by the Dhofar Municipality in collaboration with the Rakhyout Wali Office, sees the participation of various governmental and private entities.

The event is designed to cater to the diverse interests of the public and visitors alike and is set to captivate audiences throughout the entire month of October.

This year's Dhofar Serb Festival reflects the ongoing commitment of the Dhofar Municipality to stimulate economic growth and promote tourism. It creates a vibrant space for cultural exchange and entertainment. The festival

Dhofar Serb Festival reflects the ongoing commitment of Dhofar Municipality to stimulate economic growth and promote tourism

will take place every Thursday and Friday evening, from 5 pm to 11 pm, at a central place in Rakhyout.

Attendees can immerse in the enchanting Serb atmosphere while participating in various activities. The festival's offerings encompass traditional experiences that showcase the region's rich heritage, along with cutting-edge dazzle and laser shows.

Special evenings and competitions like the Education City event, water flying displays, pleasure boat rides, and a carnival will blend excitement and cultural immersion.

For adventure seekers, the

'World of Adventures' event promises thrilling experiences inspired by the local community's tastes and preferences. Additionally, the festival serves as a platform to celebrate Oman's cultural heritage and promote small and medium-sized enterprises.

It features a productive family exhibition, an array of restaurants and cafes, an open-air cinema, and a crafts exhibition. Sporting enthusiasts will find their fix through various competitions, and the Rakhyout Garden Theatre will stage captivating performances.

The Dhofar Serb Festival kicked off in early September with notable

events such as the Salalah Tour cycling race, Dhofar Municipality Ironman Championship, and the Spartan endurance race. These activities are part of a larger plan aimed at expanding the festival's scope to encompass all of the governorate's regions, tailoring events to suit each season in Dhofar Governorate.

The festival is a testament to Oman's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage, promoting economic growth, and fostering a sense of community among its residents and visitors.

This annual celebration promises an unforgettable experience for all who attend and demonstrates the region's dedication to providing diverse entertainment and cultural opportunities.

UAE AIR FORCE CHIEF LEAVES OMAN



Air Vice Marshal Ibrahim bin Nasser al Alawi, Commander of the Air Force and Air Defence of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), left Oman after an official visit which lasted several days. He was seen off at Al Seeb Air Base by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), as well as the ambassador of the UAE to Oman and several senior officers of RAFO. — ONA

NCSI takes part in Jeddah statistics meeting

JEDDAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), took part on Wednesday in the 48th meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), held in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The meeting reviewed a range of topics, including the action plans for 2024 and 2025 as per the needs of statistics departments and the initiatives of partnered organisations. It also highlighted the experiences of various Arab statistics departments in the field of sustainable development



Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of NCSI, represented Oman at the AITRS meeting in Jeddah. — ONA

indicators, among other topics.

Oman's delegation in the meeting was headed by Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of NCSI. — ONA



GCC tourism undersecretaries on Wednesday discussed the GCC tourism strategy, the unified GCC tourist visa, tourism guidebook and one-stop platform. — ONA

Unified visa on agenda at GCC tourism ministers meet

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The GCC Tourism Ministers will meet at the Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah and discuss various topics including the Gulf Tourism Strategy, the unified Gulf tourist visa, and a common tourism platform.

Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said on Wednesday that a lot depends on Thursday's meeting in achieving aspirations that will contribute to the growth of tourism capabilities enjoyed by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in line with the studies that were approved at the meeting held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Al Ula in 2022.

He emphasised the importance of preparing an executive framework to follow up on what will be agreed upon on the ground to make the Arabian Gulf region a tourist destination with a competitive advantage in the tourism industry worldwide, given the sector's ability to provide broad job opportunities and promote economic growth.

The Sultanate of Oman hopes the GCC will support nominating the Wilayat of Sur as the "Capital of Arab Tourism" for the year 2024 which will host many events to attract Gulf tourism throughout the year.

2022 witnessed an increase estimated at 57.5 per cent in the total value added of the travel and tourism sector in the gross domestic product of the GCC countries compared to the year 2021.

The total number of visitors to the Sultanate of Oman during the period

from January to August 2023 was 2.6 million visitors, an increase of 48.1 per cent compared to the period in 2022, of which 1.1 million visitors were from the GCC states.

Between October 1 and 5, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is conducting promotional roadshows in different GCC states with the participation of 15 local companies.

It may be noted that winter is a special season for tourism in the Sultanate of Oman as it is ideal for outdoor activities such as visiting coasts, deserts, mountains, and wadis among others.

On Wednesday, GCC tourism undersecretaries held their 7th meeting of 2023 at Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The officials discussed the GCC tourism strategy, the unified GCC tourist visa, tourism guidebook and one-stop platform.

Khalid Ali al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Development Affairs at the GCC Secretariat General, said that the meeting was in pursuance of efforts made to improve the tourism sector in member states.

He pointed out that 2022 saw a 57.5 per cent rise in the GCC travel and tourism sector's total added value within the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021.

Al Sunaidi pointed out that the GCC Supreme Council, during its 43rd session, approved the general framework of the GCC Tourism Strategy (2023-2030), which sets out ambitious goals to meet the aspirations of GCC states.

First phase of Sorouh project completed

BARKA: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Wednesday announced the completion of the first phase of Sorouh project (Hai al Naseem project) in the Wilayat of Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate on a 350,000-sq-metre land plot.

Engineer Wisama al Harbi, Director, Department of Integrated Residential Quarters at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, stated that 10 per cent of the first phase of the project has been sold out and that 10 residential units handed over to eligible citizens.

Al Harbi said that Hai al Naseem project is the first of Sorouh projects, adding that 220 residential units have already been completed by the end of September.



First phase of Sorouh project in the Wilayat of Barka

The project will provide multiple residential solutions of more than 1,000 residential units including 320 flats (3 to 4 rooms), 120 villas consisting of 3 to 5 rooms, 132 semi-detached villas comprising 3 to 5 rooms and 479 town houses with 3 to 4 rooms.

Citizens who are eligible for

residential land grants and were not formerly granted a land plot can submit an application to buy a residential unit at the project.

Citizens who have previously obtained a land plot are allowed to replace that land with a residential unit at the project, the official explained. — ONA

GROWTH THROUGH TOURISM

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender No.	38/2023
Tender Title	Provision of Integrated Marketing Campaign for OMRAN Group's Hospitality Assets
Tender Submission Closing Date	26.10.2023
Tender Process Details	Please visit: www.omran.om/tenders/



omran.om/tenders/

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Tel: +968 24 39 11 11
info@omran.om
@omrangroupom





AI GENERATED

REVITALISING CITY PARKS

A call for commercialisation

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Though surrounded by mountains, water, and deserts, capital Muscat is known for its fine public parks in and around the city, which are often visited by more than half of the city population.

While parks are developed as part of the government's obligation towards society, they also financially drain the exchequer, making its commercial exploitation an absolute necessity.

The Al Sahwa Park in Al Mawaleh is one of the finest parks in the city and the country. According to frequent visitors, the park is undoubtedly well-designed and well-maintained. Still, it should be allowed to be privately managed so that facilities can be upgraded to the highest levels without costing a penny to the authorities.

"Right now, we have a couple of coffee shops, which are essentially important for the visitors. But I suggest they add more recreational facilities and food and beverage (F&B) outlets that can benefit the visitors and bring in more revenues to the local authorities and businesses to the youth," said Richard Gray, who resides at Al Mouj.

He added, "I agree people expect the



Add more recreational facilities and F&B outlets that can benefit the visitors and bring in more revenues to the local authorities and businesses to the youth

RICHARD GRAY
A resident of Al Mouj

government to provide most services at no cost to them, but things have changed and people are ready to open their wallets for some extra benefits.

Maintaining such parks is expensive and needs a team of manpower, so the government should suddenly follow examples of similarly commercially exploited parks in other cities of the world and region.

Another landmark park in the city is Al Qurm Park, which has a few commercial outlets, but still a lot can be done, especially the huge lake in the central part of the park, which can be used for light and sound shows that were successfully organised during the last season's Muscat Nights festival.

"It may not be feasible to organise such events daily, but certainly, the authorities can plan a few events during the weekends of winter and tourism seasons. Tourists who visit the Sultanate of Oman certainly need leisure activities, and Qurum Park is an ideal destination. The lake is currently a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and we can also find a solution to that issue," Salem, a regular visitor with families. "The Muttrah Waterfront is another area that can be developed for busy evening programmes, as Kalbough Park is virtually abandoned," views that were echoed by many foreign tourists who visit the place.



1,000 migrants dream of US on train through Mexico

CIUDAD JUAREZ: More than a thousand migrants rode atop a freight train to the edge of the US border after dodging authorities on a 10-day journey through Mexico. Their trip had been beset by migration agencies' efforts to get them off the train, said Daiverson Munoz, a 20-year-old from Venezuela.

"And we're stuck in the middle of the desert. But it's nothing, we're here and we feel super happy because we're about to realise our dream. It's been hard but not impossible."

As soon as they arrived in Ciudad Juarez, the group of mainly Venezuelan migrants threw their belongings on the ground and jumped off the top of the train.

Their journey started in the central State of Mexico, pitting them against fatal accidents and injuries that are common on similar journeys.



Migrant people, mostly from Venezuela, travel on the wagons of a goods train to Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico. – AFP

"The hardest part was seeing how many people were injured" during the journey, said Munoz, a law student in his native country. The final 370 kilometres of the trip took 17 hours due to the number of stops, he said. The risky trip has become virtually the only option for

The risky trip has become virtually the only option for migrants to reach the border, due to restrictions on the purchase of coach tickets

migrants to reach the border, due to restrictions on the purchase of coach tickets.

The crowds have forced Mexico's main rail operator to cut its traffic by 30 per cent in mid-September, as the government tightened security measures to prevent such journeys.

Migration agencies "always get us off and we always lose money," said Jeffri Gomez, a 24-year-old Venezuelan woman travelling with her husband and one-year-old baby. As soon as they arrived, they came across an official from the

Mexican National Institute of Migration and a barbed-wire wall from the Texas National Guard on the banks of the Rio Bravo, a natural border with the United States.

Some migrants waited for an appointment made through the US Customs and Border Protection's mobile app in an effort to enter the United States legally. Others tried to cross the border on foot to surrender to police.

After a three-hour walk, hundreds of migrants arrived at one of the gates of the border wall, where about 50 officials and dozens of police officers were waiting to prevent them from crossing. Arms folded, the migrants advanced, chanting "the united people will never be defeated," until officials asked them to back off.

The migrants then set up camp near a fence designed to prevent them from crossing. — AFP

Australians warned of 'horror' bushfire season

SYDNEY: Warm winds fanned multiple blazes on Wednesday in an unusually early start to Australia's annual fire season, prompting a state leader to warn of a "horror" summer of bushfires ahead.

Firefighters said they had been fighting 18 out-of-control bushfires in the morning in the eastern state of New South Wales, some in the Bega Valley region of the state's southeastern coast.

At least three homes were lost in the flames, said New South Wales firefighters. One person was taken to hospital after a tree fell on a car, the state's police said.

"Be prepared for a horror summer," New South Wales Premier Chris Minns told a news conference in Bega.

"We are one week into October and we are experiencing mid-summer conditions," he said, citing various hot days above 30 degrees Celsius.

"Bushfires love this environment and it is devastating for regional communities in particular."

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese echoed the sentiment that the fire season had started early — just one month into the Australian spring.

"We are standing here. We can see, we can smell the impact that these fires are having," he told the news conference.



New South Wales Rural Fire Service firetruck is seen at a hazard reduction burn site in Sydney, Australia. – Reuters file photo

Firefighters have been saying for some time that they are worried about dry conditions making the season more dangerous, said NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner Rob Rogers. "The fire season is absolutely here. And we need to take this seriously," he said.

Scattered fires have swept rural neighbourhoods around the country over the past few weeks.

On Tuesday, people in various rural areas of Victoria were told to evacuate or take shelter as gusty winds fanned "very challenging" bushfires.

About 650 firefighters battled fires across 17,000 hectares, officials in Victoria said, although rains later in the day dampened the flames.

The wet weather led to a flood evacuation warning on Wednesday for parts of several rural neighbourhoods about 160 kilometres east of Melbourne.

After several wet years, experts are expecting the coming Australian summer to bring the most intense bushfire season since 2019-2020. — AFP

France's Macron promises more referendums

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday vowed to broaden the range of topics that can be voted on in a referendum and ease thresholds for calling a popular vote in a significant constitutional shake-up.

Constitutional rules on the ballots should cover more "important areas of national life", Macron said — without mentioning immigration, which conservatives and the far-right want to put to the people.

Macron did insist referendums cannot "get out of the rule of law" — as right-wingers hope to ditch European rules on migration and refugees — and insisted that the right to asylum remains inviolable.

"The constitution should not be revised in the grip of emotion", he added in a speech to the Constitutional Council on the 65th anniversary of France's 1958 founding document.

Hoping to calm a febrile political situation stoked by his failure to secure a majority at last year's parliamentary elections,



France's President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during a ceremony to mark the 65th anniversary of the 1958 French Constitution at the Conseil Constitutionnel (Constitutional Council) in Paris. – AFP

Macron also promised the thresholds would be "revised" to call so-called shared initiative referendums (RIP).

The grassroots ballots currently require at least 185 MPs or senators and one-tenth of registered voters to back them before they can go ahead — conditions so onerous that not one has been held since their introduction in 2008.

Organising an RIP "must be made simpler", Macron said.

But he added that he would not overturn a rule that means referendums cannot be called on a question decided on by parliament in the previous year.

That has prevented left-wing parties from forcing a popular vote on his widely-disliked pension reform.

There should be no "contest of legitimacy" between representative democracy in parliament and the direct democracy of a referendum, Macron said — warning that otherwise, parliament too could overturn a referendum result.

He cited the example of France's rejection of the planned European constitution in 2005, many of whose elements found their way into the later Treaty of Lisbon adopted by parliament in 2007.

Macron reiterated his objective to secure abortion rights in France's constitution, which he made a priority after the US Supreme Court last year overturned protections for women seeking the procedures. — AFP

Pope warns of 'irreversible' climate change, urges UN action

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis warned on Wednesday the world "is collapsing" due to global warming, urging participants of the upcoming COP28 climate talks to agree to binding policies on phasing out fossil fuels.

Eight years after his landmark thesis outlined the devastation of manmade climate change, the 86-year-old pontiff published a follow-up that warned that some damage was "already irreversible".

"With the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point," he wrote in the 12-page letter.

But he said the next round of UN climate talks opening in Dubai on November 30 "can represent a change of direction", if participants make binding agreements on moving from fossil fuels to clean

I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point

POPE FRANCIS

energy sources such as wind and solar.

Only a real commitment to change "can enable international politics to recover its credibility", he wrote.

With his 2015 text, the pope had put himself firmly behind the science on blaming human behaviour for climate change.

But he acknowledged on



Pope Francis leads a mass on the opening day of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, at St Peter's square in The Vatican. – AFP

Wednesday that there were still those, including inside the Church, who had "certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions".

"Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident," wrote Francis.

In his 2015 text, the pope

In Wednesday's text, he said that "regrettably, the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit".

He also repeated a call for changes in the "irresponsible lifestyle" of rich countries.

He noted that "emissions per individual in the United States are about two times greater than those of individuals living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries".

Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org, an international environmental organisation, said: "The work of spiritual leaders around the world may be our best chance of getting hold of things."

"Yes, the engineers have done their job. Yes, the scientists have done their job. But it's high time for the human heart to do its job. That's what we need this leadership for." — AFP



China opposes sanctions, fentanyl crisis ‘rooted in’ US

BEIJING: Beijing lashed out on Wednesday at Washington following US sanctions on a China-based drug network over the production of chemicals believed to fuel the fentanyl crisis, saying the opioid problem was “rooted in” the United States.

The US administration of President Joe Biden announced sanctions on Tuesday against 25 individuals and entities based in China, alongside three other parties in Canada.

Eight indictments charging China-based chemical manufacturing firms and staff were also issued, with Attorney General Merrick Garland saying the global supply chain of fentanyl “often starts... in China”.

Beijing hit back at Washington on Wednesday, saying the Chinese government is “among the first around the world to regulate substances like fentanyl”.

“We firmly oppose the United States’ sanction and prosecution against Chinese entities and

Imposing pressure and sanctions cannot solve the United States’ own problems. It will only create obstacles in the China-US cooperation on drug control

individuals, and the severe infringement of the lawful rights and interests of the relevant enterprises and persons,” Beijing’s foreign ministry said.

“The Chinese government has been strictly cracking down on drug crimes... and we deploy the harshest control on precursor chemicals,” it said.

“The fentanyl crisis in the United States is rooted in the country itself.”

The ministry added that “solemn representations” have been lodged against the United States.



The People’s Republic of China flag and the US Stars and Stripes fly along Pennsylvania Avenue near the US Capitol in Washington. – Reuters file photo

“Imposing pressure and sanctions cannot solve the United States’ own problems. It will only create obstacles in the China-US cooperation on drug control,” it said.

Biden’s administration has

made the fight against fentanyl a priority, with the synthetic opioid blamed for tens of thousands of deaths in recent years.

Tuesday’s actions are aimed at exposing and disrupting a network “responsible for manufacturing

and distributing illicit drugs”, according to Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo.

The China-based network is “responsible for the manufacturing and distribution of ton quantities of fentanyl, methamphetamine,

and MDMA precursors”, said Treasury.

It is the “source of supply” for many US-based narcotics traffickers, dark web vendors, virtual currency money launderers and Mexico-based criminal organisations, it added.

The parties designated are also allegedly involved in trafficking xylazine — a veterinary sedative known as “tranq” — and nitazenes, which are often mixed with fentanyl or other drugs and pose a higher risk of fatal overdoses.

Among the individuals designated on Tuesday by the Treasury are Wang Shucheng and Du Changgen — members of a Chinese “syndicate” — as well as their affiliates.

Wang was said to have directed others to establish companies used as cover to move pharmaceutical goods globally, while Du maintains the most influence over the organisation.

— AFP

Thai police target online gun sales after deadly mall shooting

BANGKOK: Thailand will close legal loopholes relating to firearm classification and online sales in its gun control efforts, its police chief said on Wednesday, a day after a teenager was arrested following a deadly shooting at a mall that left two people dead.

The gun used by the alleged 14-year-old shooter was modified and originally designed to fire blank rounds, meaning it wasn’t classified as a lethal weapon, and it was likely purchased online, Torsak Sukvimol said in a television interview.

Authorities were preparing to charge the teenage boy with premeditated murder on Wednesday.

There are more than 10,000 such legally imported guns in circulation in Thailand, and police will work with other government agencies to reclassify them as deadly firearms to block their import, Torsak said

“We want to make sure these guns are a controlled firearm because their modification makes them a deadly weapon,” he said.

Krisanaphong Poothakool, a criminologist at Rangsit University, said modifying a blank gun is illegal but perpetrators could easily learn how to make modifications and there were criminal services offering this.

Authorities can boost gun control by improving



Thailand’s PM Srettha Thavisin speaks to members of media inside the luxury Siam Paragon shopping mall after Thai police arrested a teenage gunman in Bangkok, Thailand. – Reuters

enforcement, including creating a faster mechanism to block websites and online services that offer to sell or modify firearms, said Krisanaphong.

Torsak, who took over as the country’s top police official earlier this week, said police will form a team to tackle the illegal sale of firearms on the internet.

Existing Thai laws on the possession of illegal firearms carry a prison sentence of up to 10 years and a fine of up to \$539.67.

Laws have tightened after mass shootings in recent years in Thailand, including a requirement for a medical evaluation for those who want to buy a gun or renew their gun license.

Last October, a former

policeman killed 35 people, including 22 children, at a nursery in northeastern Thailand. And in 2020, a soldier shot and killed at least 29 people in another northeastern Thai city.

Thailand’s previous administration drafted a gun amnesty bill allowing those with unregistered weapons to register them or hand them over to authorities during a grace period. The bill, however, did not make it through parliament ahead of a May general election.

“The government should learn the lessons from past mass shooting incidents, review the proposed solutions and quickly implement them,” Krisanaphong said. — Reuters

At least 23 Indian soldiers missing in flash flood

GUWAHATI: The Indian army said on Wednesday that 23 soldiers were missing after a flash flood caused by intense rainfall tore through a valley in the mountainous northeast Sikkim state.

A video released by an Indian army spokesman showed a thick torrent of raging brown water sweeping down a thickly forested valley, with roads washed away and power lines ripped down.

“Due to sudden cloud burst over Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim, a flash flood occurred in the Teesta River... 23 personnel have been reported missing and some vehicles are reported submerged under the slush,” the army said in a statement. “Search operations are underway.”

Lhonak Lake sits at the base of a glacier in the peaks that surround Kangchenjunga, the world’s third-highest mountain.

The army said water released upstream from the Chungthang dam meant the river was already more than 4.5 metres higher than usual.

Local media reported that three civilians had died after water smashed into homes overnight, with their bodies recovered from the town of Singtam on Wednesday.



A powerful flood caused by intense rainfall tore through a valley in the mountainous northeast Sikkim state, India. – AFP

Sikkim is close to India’s border with Nepal and China and boasts a sizeable military presence.

Flash floods are common during the monsoon season, which begins in June and normally withdraws from the Indian subcontinent by the end of September. By October, the heaviest of the monsoon rains are usually over.

Experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

Other photographs shared by the army showed water submerging the first floor of buildings, and flowing down a street in a town with only the tip of a small construction crane

visible.

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said emergency services were working to support those impacted by the ferocious floods and urged people to “remain vigilant”.

Six bridges were washed away and the national highway that connects Sikkim with the rest of the country was badly damaged, state disaster management chief Prabhakar Rai said.

The monsoon occurs when summer heat warms the landmass of the subcontinent, causing the air to rise and suck in cooler Indian Ocean winds, which then produce enormous volumes of rain. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TAITUNG

Taiwan cancels flights ahead of typhoon

Taiwan cancelled flights and closed schools in parts of its southern region on Wednesday ahead of the expected landfall of Typhoon Koinu, the second major storm in a month to hit the island directly.

Ahead of Thursday’s storm, more than 100 international and domestic flights were cancelled, and ferry services to Taiwan’s outlying islands were halted.

About 200 people were evacuated for fear of landslides in the south of the island, while



waves lashing the coast could reach up to seven metres high.

Fishing boats were crammed into a harbour in Pingtung county to shelter ahead of the typhoon, and primary schools in the agricultural region of Taitung allowed children to go home early. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkiye says attackers trained in Syria

Turkiye said on Wednesday that two suspected Kurdish group who died while staging a weekend attack in Ankara had been trained in Syria. Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Türkiye now reserved the right to strike a broader range of Kurdish targets in retaliation for Sunday’s attack.

Turkish police shot dead one of the assailants while the other died in an apparent suicide blast outside Türkiye’s interior ministry.

“As a result of the work of our security forces, it has become



clear that the two terrorists came from Syria and were trained there,” Fidan said.

“From now on, all infrastructure, large facilities and energy facilities belonging to armed Kurdish groups are legitimate targets for our security forces.” — AFP

MANILA

Marcos lifts cap on Philippines’ rice prices

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos lifted a price ceiling on rice on Wednesday, weeks after capping the cost of the staple to support poor households.

In early September, Marcos set the maximum retail price of regular milled rice at \$0.72 per kilogramme and 45 pesos for the higher-quality “well-milled” rice.

The measure was criticised by some economists, who warned it could distort the market and lead to shortages.

A member of Marcos’s



economic team was sacked after she appeared to mock the plan on social media.

“As of today, we are lifting the price caps on rice, both for the regular milled rice and for the well-milled rice,” Marcos said, at an event in Manila.

— AFP



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In brief

■ BISHKEK



PUTIN'S KYRGYZSTAN VISIT TO BE FIRST ABROAD

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Kyrgyzstan next week, authorities in the Central Asian country said on Wednesday, in his first trip abroad since the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant.

Putin has not left Russia since The Hague-based court issued the warrant in March over the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. "By the invitation of the president of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov on October 12 the president of the Russian Federation will pay an official visit to our country," the Kyrgyz news agency Kabar reported. — AFP

■ BELGRADE



SERBIA ALLOWS RELEASE OF COMMANDO LEADER

A Belgrade court ordered on Wednesday the conditional release of Milan Radoicic, the suspected leader of a commando that killed a Kosovo police officer last month.

Around 30 gunmen ambushed a police patrol in the village of Banjska, killing the officer.

They retreated and barricaded themselves in an Orthodox monastery near the northern border with Serbia, where they were involved in an hours-long shootout.

On Wednesday, a day after Radoicic's arrest, a judge deprived him of his passport and from travelling to Kosovo. — AFP

■ VENICE



VENICE MOURNS AFTER 21 KILLED IN BUS ACCIDENT

Flags flew at half-mast over Venice on Wednesday after 21 people including a toddler were killed when a bus careered off an overpass and caught fire.

"The impact was terrible because it fell from over 10 metres landing next to railway tracks below, said Mauro Luongo, Venice's fire brigade commander.

The dead are thought to be mostly tourists returned from Venice's historic centre to a camping site on Tuesday evening. Fifteen others were injured in what Venice Mayor Luigi Brugnaro described as "an apocalyptic scene".

Firefighters said the bus was electric, despite the Italian interior minister earlier saying it ran on methane. — AFP

EU states agree 'missing link' of migration reform package



European flags fly outside the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters file photo

BRUSSELS: EU states on Wednesday agreed to the final part of an overhaul for rules on how they handle asylum seekers and irregular migrants, setting up a push to make it law by elections next year.

Ambassadors from the 27 countries struck the deal in Brussels after Italy and Germany ironed out a last-minute row over charities rescuing migrants stranded in the Mediterranean.

The goal of the EU is to have the long-stalled reforms made law before European elections next June that will usher in a new European parliament and commission.

"Today we have achieved a huge step forward on a critical issue for the future of the EU," Spain's interior minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, said.

"With today's agreement we are now in a better position to reach an agreement on the entire asylum and migration pact with the European Parliament by the end of this semester."

European Commission vice-

“
With today's agreement we are now in a better position to reach an agreement on the entire asylum and migration pact with the European Parliament by the end of this semester

MARGARITIS SCHINAS

European Commission Vice-President

president Margaritis Schinas called the text the "last missing link of the package" and urged EU states and parliament to now forge ahead with the protracted negotiations to make it law.

The next cycle in EU politics could see a political shift in the parliament, given the rise of right-wing parties in several EU countries, and would see Hungary and Poland take turns holding the rotating EU presidency.

Once implemented, the new Pact on Migration and Asylum would seek to relieve the pressure on so-called frontline countries such as Italy and Greece by relocating some arrivals to other EU states.

At the same time, the European Union will seek to speed up processing of asylum applications so that migrants deemed inadmissible are returned to their country of origin or of transit, and maximum detention times for migrants in border centres would be lengthened from the current 12 weeks.

Paralysis on the issue had caused growing frustration in the bloc as it faces a rise in irregular migration.

Part of the aim of the revised policy is for EU countries to act together should they be faced with a sudden large inflow of asylum seekers, as happened in 2015-2016 when hundreds of thousands of migrants arrived.

Agreement among EU member states only needed a weighted majority of countries, meaning opposition from Poland and Hungary did not derail the agreement. — AFP

Azerbaijan leader turns down meeting with Armenia PM

BAKU: Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev has turned down an EU-hosted meeting with Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan planned this week due to European support for Yerevan, a government official said on Wednesday.

Two weeks ago, Aliyev launched a one-day offensive that saw his country regain control of the pro-Armenian separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The talks would have brought together the leaders of the two Caucasus arch-foes on the sidelines of an EU summit in Spain, under the mediation of France, Germany and the European Council.

"Azerbaijan did not consider it necessary to participate in negotiations in this format," an Azerbaijani government official said.

Aliyev would not attend due to "pro-Armenian statements by French officials... and statements on the supply of weapons and ammunition (to Yerevan) on military cooperation", the official added.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on a visit to Armenia on Tuesday that Paris had agreed to deliver military equipment to the small South Caucasus nation, without elaborating.

Aliyev decision was also because of "accusations made yesterday by EU Council President Charles Michel", the official added.

He cited an "anti-Azerbaijani atmosphere" and said Baku had wanted the meeting to take place in Turkiye, its ally. Ankara has praised Azerbaijan's one-day offensive.

Michel — who has mediated several meetings between the foes in recent years — criticised Baku's offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

After a lightning offensive by Azerbaijani forces in September 2023, most of the Armenian population fled the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The separatist authorities there announced that it would be dissolved on 1 January 2024. —AFP



A general view of the city of Stepanakert taken from a former Armenian separatists military position in the village of Mukhtar (Muxtar) in Azerbaijan's controlled region of Nagorno-Karabakh. — AFP

Sunak starts campaign with promise of 'change'

MANCHESTER: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday rallied his ruling Conservatives for the next general election, positioning them as a force for change, even after 13 years in power and increasing disaffection among voters.

In a speech lasting more than an hour to the party's annual conference, he promised that the Tories would break the mould of the last 30 years of government.

"We will be bold, we will be radical. We will face resistance and we will meet it," he told delegates.

"We will give the country what it sorely needs and yet too often has been denied."

He added: "It's time for change and we are it."

Sunak's speech — peppered with major policy announcements including the widely expected scrapping of part of a high-speed rail project — effectively fires the starting gun on the election campaign.

The conference, which began on Sunday, has seen the Conservatives try to put clear water between themselves and the main opposition Labour party. That has included stoking "culture war" issues such as the environment and trans rights.

But the latest opinion polls indicate that the Tories have a mountain to climb if they are to



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak addresses delegates at the annual Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, northern England. — AFP

secure a sixth term of office.

A new Savanta poll published before Sunak took to the stage put Labour out in front by 20 percentage points, with Sunak trailing Labour's Keir Starmer in the personal popularity stakes by 12 points.

Sunak, a former finance minister who was only voted in as

Tory leader last October by party members, has to call an election by January 2025 at the latest.

Speculation is rife about when he might seek to confirm his party's mandate with the wider electorate, as he tries to bring down sky-high inflation that has caused a cost-of-living crisis and industrial unrest.

As expected, Sunak confirmed

rumours that he would scrap the second leg of the HS2 rail project between Birmingham in central England and Manchester.

"I'm cancelling the rest of the HS2 project and in its place we will reinvest every single penny, £36 billion, in hundreds of new transport projects in the north, in the Midlands, across the country,"

he said.

The decision has angered local politicians in the north of England, many areas of which switched from Labour to the Conservatives at the last election in 2019 on a promise that long-standing regional economic inequalities would be addressed.

— AFP

The perils of sleep deprivation



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician and content creator

It is not unusual to find someone around the corner who boasts of sleeping a few hours a day leaving the rest of the others in awe. Little we do fathom; sleeping less than required will not guarantee productivity or bring some supersonic transformations in life.

In a digital world where it is much easier to stay up with online and social media distractions, bit by bit, we are bartering with our quality and quantity of sleep and to worsen it, we are normalising this lack of sleep behaviour.

A popular custom of keeping a ‘sleep debt’ is maintained on an everyday basis; later to be compensated with a weekend sleep. However, this weekend’s sleep won’t cover up for an individual night’s sleep and the debt keeps on piling. Hence, it is this sleep deprivation that we carry along which is sometimes mistaken for tiredness or exhaustion.

According to the International Classification of Sleep Disorders (ICSD-3), insufficient sleep is defined as a curtailed sleep pattern that has persisted for at least three months for most days of the week,

along with complaints of sleepiness during the day.

Even more, the alarming concern is rising sleep deprivation among adolescents and women.

While children are made to follow a certain bedtime by parents when adolescence peeks in, teenagers need more of their charge over deciding their sleep timings and periods.

Combined with school assignments, activities, and projects that keep them up for late hours of the night the loop of sleep deprivation keeps going.

Likewise, women are unable to get quality sleep due to household chores, work-home balance taking care of kids, or when nannies go off duty.

Napping frequently in the day hours or not being active throughout the day also hinders the quality of night sleep. Up till now, it might be ticking within you how to determine the amount of sleep one needs on an everyday basis so that he or she is not counted as a sleep-deprived being.

Well, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend, “The right amount of sleep can vary from person to person, but that

CHRONIC SLEEP INSUFFICIENCY TERRIBLY AFFECTS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM, CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM, HORMONE LEVELS, FERTILITY, AND BRAIN FUNCTIONING

adults get at least 7 hours each night. They also estimate that 1 in 3 adults do not get enough sleep”.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and the Sleep Research Society (SRS) have recommended that adults aged 18 to 60 years should sleep seven or more hours per night regularly for ideal sleep health.

Additionally, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) consensus report has stated that seven to nine hours is recommended for adults aged 18 to 64 years, while seven to eight hours is suggested for those 65 years of age and older.

Moreover, it goes without saying that chronic sleep insufficiency terribly affects your immune system, cardiovascular system, hormone levels, fertility, and brain functioning.

Sleep is also a congruent factor in maintaining your metabolic health, thereby influencing weight gain, obesity, and diabetes.

Wherefore along these lines, while taking care of your health and lifestyle, make sure you are not being sleep deprived.

Liberia’s young voters engage for peaceful polls

ADRIEN MAROTTE

In a schoolroom, young Liberians take it in turns to draw an image expressing what they fear most as they become eligible to vote for the first time. One of the 18- to 25-year-olds depicts a man on the ground, tears rolling down his face, as his neighbour stands over him holding the crime weapon.

Entitled “war”, the image sums up what many worry about most: a return to violence. The fear is never far from the surface in a country scarred by back-to-back civil wars. Between 1989 and 2003, the conflicts in the West Africa nation left more than 250,000 people dead.

Liberians will vote in presidential and parliamentary elections on Tuesday, in what the main political parties have pledged will be a peaceful process.

But the killing of three people on Friday in clashes between supporters of the two main political parties have fuelled fears.

“What is violence?” asks Nehemiah Jallah, 24, who is behind the initiative aimed at promoting peace.

He is leading the workshop being held at a school in the city of Buchanan, about 150 kilometres east of the capital Monrovia.

“Violence is when you force somebody to do something,” one of those listening responds.

“It’s when you are seeking to do harm,” suggests another.

Jallah pulls no punches in telling his young audience seated at wooden desks to stay clear of any form of violence.

“Know that when violence escalates, buildings will be destroyed, innocent people will be killed,” he said.

“I don’t know which political party you are from, but make sure to vote peacefully and do not do it with violence.

“As Liberia is peaceful, so let us hold the peace of Liberia during and after the election.”

Some of the first-time voters wonder how they should behave in the event of claims of cheating during the election.

The discussion is lively.

On the walls of the room, posters advocate non-violence with messages such as “Liberia needs me so I must keep her safe from violence”.

“The court is the best place to solve election disputes”, reads another.

More than 60 per cent of Liberians are under 25 years old.

“Politicians are trying to use you because they know that you are more vulnerable,” said Lawrence Sergbou, who introduces himself as a youth activist to the audience. — AFP



Luke Broadwater

The writer is a congressional reporter in the Washington bureau of NYT

Gaetz’s challenge to McCarthy draws attention to his ethics issues

Rep Matt Gaetz’s successful push to oust Speaker Kevin McCarthy has cemented his status as one of the most reviled members of the House of Representatives — including among many of his fellow Republicans — and drawn attention to a long-running investigation by the House Ethics Committee into Gaetz’s conduct.

McCarthy has argued that Gaetz’s motion to remove him as speaker is little more than personal payback for McCarthy’s failure to interfere with the inquiry, which is looking into allegations of misconduct and misuse of funds by Gaetz, R-Fla.

Gaetz has asserted that the more than two-year, wide-ranging inquiry into his conduct is the work of McCarthy and his allies, who he argues are bent on smearing him.



Rep. Kevin McCarthy speaks in the Rayburn Room at the Capitol after he was ousted as Speaker of the House in Washington.



Rep Matt Gaetz speaks with reporters after a voting in Washington.

“I am the most investigated man in the United States Congress,” Gaetz said Monday night of the ethics inquiry, adding: “It seems that the Ethics Committee’s interest in me waxes and wanes based on my relationship with the speaker.”

He posted a picture on social media of himself glowering as more than a dozen guns were being pointed at his head.

Since spring 2021, Gaetz has been under investigation over allegations he engaged in misconduct and illicit drug use, shared inappropriate images or videos on the House floor, misused state identification records, converted campaign funds to personal use and accepted impermissible gifts under House rules, among other allegations.

The secretive congressional investigation was paused while the Justice Department carried out a related investigation of Gaetz’s conduct, including several allegations. In February, the Justice Department decided not to bring charges against Gaetz after concluding they could not make a strong enough case in court.

Once the Justice Department inquiry ended, the Ethics Committee resumed its work, according to people familiar with the matter, reaching out to witnesses for interviews.

However, a person familiar with the matter said the committee, which

is made up of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, has not yet reached out to a key witness at the center of the most serious allegations against Gaetz.

The people familiar with the situation spoke about the investigation

GAETZ HAS ASSERTED THAT THE MORE THAN TWO-YEAR, WIDE-RANGING INQUIRY INTO HIS CONDUCT IS THE WORK OF MCCARTHY AND HIS ALLIES, WHO HE ARGUES ARE BENT ON SMEARING HIM

on the condition of anonymity because it is confidential. Once he learned of the resumed investigation, Gaetz began complaining to some Republican colleagues about it, according to people familiar with the matter.

McCarthy has repeatedly suggested the Ethics Committee investigation prompted Gaetz to lash out at him, blaming him for the inquiry.

“The Ethics complaint against Matt happened in the last Congress,” McCarthy said on Fox News on

Monday, adding: “It would be illegal for me to do anything in that committee.”

Even so, McCarthy said he knew of emails in which Gaetz stated that he believed the speaker was behind the inquiry.

“Legally, I can’t do anything and I’m not going to do anything,” McCarthy said.

Whatever the outcome of the investigation, as Gaetz pressed his challenge to McCarthy in recent days, many Republican allies of the speaker have vented their frustration publicly with his most outspoken tormentor.

“I think he’s a petulant child,” Rep Mike Lawler, R-NY, said on CNN, adding: “He doesn’t care about governing. He cares about getting attention.”

In an interview, Rep Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis, referred to Gaetz as “some guy from Florida” and questioned why anyone would listen to him.

“This is just foolishness, and I’ll have no part in it,” he said of Gaetz’s actions.

The Ethics Committee is likely to write a report detailing its findings against Gaetz, but it was unclear how long that would take. The panel could recommend a range of punishments depending on what facts its investigators uncover.

Gaetz said this week he would not back down. — **The New York Times**

Navigating life’s twists and turns

Life often unfolds in unpredictable ways, revealing a captivating paradox — the delicate equilibrium between trying and not trying. In the grand puzzle of existence, we often discover that the pieces fall into place when we least anticipate them, even as our intense efforts sometimes yield no results. This intriguing phenomenon is the essence of the paradox of trying and not trying.

Imagine grappling with a complex puzzle, your focus laser-sharp, and your determination unwavering. Hours pass, but the solution remains elusive, and your mind grows weary. Then, in a moment of respite, when you choose to relax, an epiphany arrives like a flash of lightning, and you crack the puzzle. This is the paradox at play — a testament to the delicate interplay between exertion and release.

The paradox of trying and not trying underscores the importance of finding equilibrium between striving and surrender. Excessive pressure and relentless effort can leave our minds tense and overburdened, stifling creativity and problem solving. Conversely, complacency and lack of effort can result in missed opportunities for growth and learning.

Consider it akin to riding a bicycle: gripping the handlebars too tightly makes steering difficult, while holding on too loosely leads to a loss of control. The key is to strike a balance — a firm yet relaxed grip — to ride comfortably and effectively through life’s journey.

There are some examples for a better understanding of the topic. While studying for exams ever noticed that intense, last minute cramming often leads to forgetfulness during exams. It is because excessive pressure hinders memory retention. Instead, steady preparation with breaks allows for better absorption of information.



Bhavna Batra

The writer is entrepreneur, HR expert, intuitive energy healer, Reiki master, miracle coach and motivational speaker

THE PARADOX OF TRYING AND NOT TRYING UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN STRIVING AND SURRENDER

Similarly, when entering a new social setting, a desperate quest for friendships may come off as intense. However, if you relax, smile, and genuinely connect with others, you are more likely to build meaningful connections.

Even in sports and hobbies, an obsession with perfection and relentless pushing can lead to frustration. Instead, regular practice coupled with a positive mindset and enjoyment of the process leads to improvement and fun.

So striking balance is important and there are ways to do it. While having ambitions is admirable, they must be achievable. Unrealistic expectations often result in stress and disappointment.

Breaking down daunting tasks into manageable steps can make them less overwhelming and more attainable.

It is ideal to embrace a sense of wonder and a readiness to learn. Innovative solutions often emerge when we explore new perspectives.

Patience is key to any solution. Better to understand that success may not come immediately, as growth and progress are gradual processes that require time and dedication.

There is no harm in accepting mistakes. Mistakes are stepping-stones to growth. Instead of self-criticism and blame game, view them as opportunities for improvement.

The paradox of trying and not trying teaches us that balance is the key to a fulfilling life. It is about recognising when to exert effort and when to pause. In this equilibrium, we find the wisdom to navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and lead enriching lives. So, when you encounter a daunting task, remember the paradox — breathe deeply, approach it with a harmonious mindset, and discover that solutions often emerge when you neither try too hard nor give up altogether.

FLYING HIGH



Fighter jets fly over in Prayagraj, India, during a rehearsal ahead of the upcoming 91st Air Force Day celebrations. — AFP

Gender justice is climate justice

The Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, held this past June, rightly focused on promoting an inclusive climate action plan that leaves no one behind. As 13 world leaders stressed in a joint commentary published ahead of the gathering, we must ensure that climate initiatives do not overshadow other development efforts, including the global fight against poverty.

This is a daunting challenge, particularly at a time when centrifugal forces threaten the rules-based international order and many countries are grappling with rising interest rates and elevated debt levels. But if global leaders are serious about leaving no one behind, they must address the specific needs of vulnerable groups — especially women and girls, who comprise half of the world’s population.

The United Nations’ fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG5) — achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls — is inextricably linked to other SDGs, such as those covering health, education and access to water. Climate change jeopardises all these interconnected goals, potentially generating a cascading effect.

Women and girls in developing countries, particularly those living in rural areas, bear the brunt of the climate crisis. For starters, girls are often tasked with acquiring water and food for their families. Given that most indigenous families have at least five members, these responsibilities amount to a heavy burden — one that becomes heavier as the climate crisis escalates, forcing girls to travel increasingly long distances to fulfil their families’ needs.



Bertrand Badré

The writer is a former managing director of the World Bank, is CEO and Founder of Blue like an Orange Sustainable Capital



Immaculate Atuhamize

The writer is a climate and gender activist from Uganda

This contributes, for example, to girls arriving at school late. Moreover, without access to clean water, girls struggle to maintain their menstrual health and hygiene. Such challenges force some to drop out of school, thereby losing their chance to acquire quality basic education. Climate change also contributes to increases in child marriage, as desperate families trade their daughters for scarce resources.

Climate change exacerbates other societal problems affecting girls and women, such as gender-based violence. And, given that women carry out most of the unpaid domestic and care work, they face distinct challenges when disasters strike. This has been the case in Uganda, which has lately faced severe climate-related catastrophes, such as floods in the east and southwest and prolonged drought in the north. Since few women have training in disaster mitigation, they die at higher rates than men under such circumstances. Despite all of this, women and other vulnerable groups are frequently sidelined in climate-policy discussions. The recent Africa Youth Climate Assembly — held the day before the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi — showed just what a serious problem this is.

At the event, young people representing various African countries discussed climate-related challenges with which they have firsthand experience, shared personal stories, and engaged with leaders and peers. As the Africa Climate Summit unfolded, many youth-led

organisations continued their work, holding climate walks, side events, and press conferences highlighting further the issues that directly affect them and their communities, but were being left out of the leaders’ discussions.

These young people (including one of us) observed with astonishment that most leaders and international organisations seemed focused primarily on carbon markets, but paid little attention to pressing issues like increased plastic pollution in Africa. They were equally dismayed by nebulous commitments to allocate resources for resilience and adaptation measures, and vague promises to help countries deal with loss and damage from climate-driven disasters.

The Africa Climate Summit should be a platform for African people, particularly youth, to share and propose homegrown solutions, rather than an opportunity for polluters to

promote strategies that perpetuate the crisis. Africa is not a dumping ground; it is a continent rich with innovative thinkers and viable solutions. African climate solutions are global solutions, and Africans’ ideas deserve attention and genuine support.

Solutions devised without input from those directly affected will always fall short, and the consequences of leaving some behind can extend well beyond the group in question. Despite playing a central role in the sector, women often lack the same access to agricultural resources, services, and formal decision-making bodies as their male counterparts.

Increasing women’s access to these resources would not only reduce their vulnerability; it would also bolster the food security and climate resilience of households and communities. The Food and Agriculture Organization projects that ensuring gender equality in farming could boost women’s

farm yields by 20-30 per cent. The resulting efficiency gains could reduce global hunger by at least 12-15 per cent and lead to a 2.1 gigatonne decrease in carbon-dioxide emissions by 2050.

Similarly, Project Drawdown, a coalition of scientists and economists from around the world, lists girls’ education as one of the most effective ways to combat global warming, particularly when combined with voluntary family planning. Bridging the gender gap in education could help countries adapt to climate change and mitigate its worst effects. Investing in girls’ education prepares them for the future they inherit and reduces the existing inequalities many women and girls face. Likewise, integrating climate topics into school curricula could foster greater ecological awareness among these children and thus contribute to their communities’ resilience.

It is too soon to assess the Paris Summit’s impact. But the event undeniably set the tone for subsequent international gatherings, including the Africa Climate Summit, as well as the G20 meeting in New Delhi and the annual session of the UN General Assembly.

The message that emerged from these meetings — that climate change and development must be addressed simultaneously — is also likely to feature prominently at November’s UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in the United Arab Emirates.



The Africa Climate Summit should be a platform for African people.

sport

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Top players to vie for Muscat WTT Contender title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

The top ranking paddlers across the world are expected to arrive in Muscat early of next week to take part in the 2023 Muscat WTT Contender event which will begin on Sunday and will run for one week at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. As many as 150 players in total representing 34 nations will vie for \$75,000 cash prizes which are set for the toppers in this world class table tennis event.

Organised by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in coordination with World Table Tennis (WTT), the Muscat international event will feature five different competitions categories including men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles.

This is the third appearance of WTT Contender events in Muscat after two successful outings in March and September 2022.

Japanese paddler Tomokazu Harimoto, World No 4 paddler, will be the top seed in the men's categories besides fifth-ranked



As many as 150 players representing 34 nations will vie for \$75,000 cash prizes which are set for the toppers in this world class table tennis event.

Brazilian Hugo Calderano. Other ranking players are Lin Yun Ju (World No 7) from Chinese Taipei, Dimitrij Ovtcharov (World No 9) from Germany and others from Nigeria, Sweden, South Korea, France, Denmark and England.

Japan's Hina Hayata, World No 6, will be among the top-

seeded women players. World No 9 Shin Yubin from South Korea will be another competitor along with Puerto Rico's Adriana Diaz (World No 13) besides other players.

Oman table tennis head coach Omid Shamas Sharbabki from Iran has selected the players who will represent Sultanate of Oman

in this major TT assignment. The squad included Muhanad al Balushi, Asad al Raisi, Badar al Jassasi, Loqman al Farsi and Mohammed al Mutawa. The national players underwent an intensive training programme couple of weeks ago under direct supervision of the national head coach. The Iranian coach selected

the domestic paddlers based to their latest achievements in the local events.

Despite the top technical level of this mega event, Oman's paddlers will aim to gain the required experience and reach in further stages in the finals. Moreover, Omani players will chase up developing their world

ranking while competing with the world's top players.

OTTA Chairman Abdullah Bamakhlif said that hosting this international tournament in Oman is part of the OTTA's yearly plans to organise world class events.

"The OTTA is used to host global level championships and events in Muscat since few years ago. Moreover, hosting these major events are inline of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth targets to bring mega sporting events in Sultanate of Oman. The OTTA had succeeded in hosting two editions of WTT Contender in Muscat last year. This is the third edition which comes after we successfully hosted the 2023 World Veteran Championship at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre during the beginning of the year," he added.

"Many players among the world top 20 paddlers have registered for the tournament but the event's rules do not allow accepting of more than eight paddlers in the same event. I am confident this edition will be one of the tough edition in the WTT contender series," Abdullah Bamakhlif signed out.

Sur dominate Muscat to enter HM Cup last 16



Sur players during an attack at the Muscat penalty box in the HM's Cup preliminary round match.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

In an opening match of the preliminary round of the His Majesty's Cup Football Championship, Sur Club showcased their prowess and emerged triumphant with a resounding 4-1 victory against Muscat. The match unfolded on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex Stadium.

From the onset, Sur demonstrated their attacking flair and maintained high possession, which swiftly translated into the first goal of the match.

Yousef al Mukhaini skillfully netted a header from a corner kick in the second minute, setting the stage for an action-packed encounter.

While Sur maintained control and persistence in their offensive plays, Muscat sought to adopt a defensive strategy with counter-attacks. Muscat striker Kayutia seized an opportunity but misfired, missing a golden chance to level the score. However, they managed to equalise the score in the 40th minute with a well-executed cross from the left side, beautifully converted by Irfan al Salami.

Undeterred by the equaliser, Sur rallied back and secured their lead in the 47th minute as Yousef al Mukhaini brilliantly headed a free kick into the net to end the first-half with

a 2-1 lead.

The second-half started with hard attacks from Sur players trying to score the third goal. From the right side, a low cross was sent that was deflected by Muscat defence and ended up in front of Mohammed al Makhaini, who struck it powerfully into Muscat net in the 50th minute,

scoring the third goal for Sur. Muscat players tried to reduce the gap, but they lacked attacking effectiveness and density during the counter-attacks.

From an attack from the right side and a perfect cross, the ball reached Mamoun al Araimi unmarked to put it directly into the net in the 78th minute, scoring the fourth goal for Sur. After that, the match witnessed violent interventions, and Sur had several opportunities to add another goal. The referee then blew the whistle, announcing the end of the match with Sur victory over Muscat 4-1.

With this win under the leadership of their Tunisian coach Abdelhaleem al Araimi, Sur advanced to the HM's Cup round of 16, where they will face Al Nahdha, who won the domestic double last season.





STOKES DOUBTFUL FOR ENGLAND’S OPENER

BROOK MAY DEBUT, NZ PACER SOUTHEE TO MISS ACTION

AHMEDABAD, India: The universe seems conspiring to fulfil Harry Brook’s World Cup dreams and the 24-year-old is likely to make his tournament debut replacing Ben Stokes, who is nursing a minor hip injury, in Thursday’s opener against New Zealand in Ahmedabad.

England sacrificed opener Jason Roy to accommodate Brook, who has been marked out as a future superstar of the game because of his explosive batting.

Stokes, who reversed his shock one-day retirement to return to the squad, has not yet been ruled out of what would be a re-match of the 2019 final but skipper Jos Buttler revealed why England’s number four batter was not fully fit.

“He’s got a slight niggle with his hip. Fingers crossed that it will be good news for us,” Buttler told reporters at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Wednesday.

“He’s working hard with the physios and we’ll know more

when the guys arrive for training (later) today.”

Test captain Stokes, who has long been nursing a troublesome knee, is back in the one-day setup purely as a batter and his record-breaking 182 against New Zealand last month proved what he is capable even in a reduced role.

England are naturally wary of rushing him so early in a six-week long tournament.

“We’ll make the right call here — if he’s not fit to play, he’s not fit to play,” Buttler said.

“It’s not the time to take big risk on someone at the start of the tournament.”

Brook, an automatic pick in England’s Test side and part of their T20 World Cup winning team last year, is likely to be the beneficiary of circumstances.

“Harry, we all know, what a fantastic player he is. The start of his international career has been outstanding in T20 cricket and in the Test format,” Buttler said.



England's Harry Brook plays a shot during a warm-up match between Bangladesh and England at the Asom Cricket Association Stadium in Guwahati. — AFP

“He has not played loads of ODI cricket but it’s a format that should suit him perfectly.

“It would allow him to bat for a long time and make big runs and

that’s something he enjoys doing.

“He’s got all the shots. We know from Test cricket, he can play big innings. So it’s a format that should suit him really well.”

HEAD-TO-HEAD

England
45 wins
New Zealand
44 wins
Tied
2
No Result
4

champions England as he continues his recovery from thumb surgery, stand-in skipper Tom Latham said on Wednesday.

Southee dislocated and fractured his thumb while attempting to take a catch during a one-day international against England last month but was cleared to join the team in India having progressed well in his recovery.

New Zealand are also without regular skipper Kane Williamson for Thursday’s opener, which is a rematch of the 2019 final that England won. Williamson is recovering from a knee injury.

“No Kane and no Tim as well,” Latham told reporters. “He’s unavailable for selection just in terms of what happened to his thumb ... but he’s recovering nicely. He’s nearly two weeks post-surgery so fingers crossed he can keep recovering. It’s a bit of a day-by-day process with him in terms of what that looks like,” Latham added. — **Reuters**

SOUTHEE CONTINUES RECOVERY

New Zealand fast bowler Tim Southee will miss their World Cup opener against defending

Fearless England’s biggest test will be India



ANIS SAJJAN



The first match of the World Cup starts between defending champions England and runners-up New Zealand on Thursday at the iconic Ahmedabad stadium and all eyes will be on Team England to see how they go about defending their title which they won four years ago at Lord’s in a match made for heavens where they tipped the Kiwis on boundary count.

England had started the 2019 World Cup as favourites at home because of the way they had changed their style of game, playing fearless and aggressive cricket. After their early exit in the 2015 World Cup, England director Andrew Strauss and captain Eoin Morgan built a team which changed the face of ODI cricket. From 2015 to 2019, England scored 24 plus scores of 300 and above and five scores of 400 plus, the highest being 481 against Australia. They had openers like Johnny Bairstow and Jason Roy who would go berserk from ball one and set the platform for the rest like Joe Root, Ben Stokes, Eoin Morgan, Jos Buttler and Moeen Ali. What made them superior to the rest as they had batting

till number 9 and maintained a run rate of 6.29 per over in ODIs they played after 2015. They created a template which other teams found difficult to cope with and won almost every series playing the same brand of cricket.

Four years after their first ODI world cup win, their skipper must have changed, but In Jos Buttler they have a skipper who is the most devastating white ball batsman in the world and with Ben Stokes coming out of retirement, who was their star in 2019 World Cup has added the experience England wanted in Indian conditions. Harry Brook might not have had an ideal IPL, but he is apt replacement for injured Jason Roy and along with David Malan, Liam Livingstone makes them a mighty dangerous side with the bat.

In Sam Curran they have one of the finest bowling all-rounders who is touted as their future captain, is very handy with the bat and in Mark Wood, they have the pace to rattle any team. In the spin department, they have Adil Rashid and Moeen Ali and hence have all their bassets covered.

India is the only team they have not beaten in the last 8 years in a bilateral series but beat them both in the 2019 ODI World Cup as well as 2022 T20 World cup. India will be their biggest challenge in defending their title and it should be a fascinating game if both India and England are touted as favourites to make it to the final. Time will tell if this happens, but current form of both teams make them title contenders.



ICC MEN'S
CRICKET WORLD CUP
INDIA 2023

FIXTURES

5 OCTOBER - 19 NOVEMBER 2023

Thursday, 5 October	ENGLAND		V		NEW ZEALAND	Ahmedabad
Friday, 6 October	PAKISTAN		V		NETHERLANDS	Hyderabad
Saturday, 7 October *	BANGLADESH		V		AFGHANISTAN	Dharamsala
Saturday, 7 October	SOUTH AFRICA		V		SRI LANKA	Delhi
Sunday, 8 October	INDIA		V		AUSTRALIA	Chennai
Monday, 9 October	NEW ZEALAND		V		NETHERLANDS	Hyderabad
Tuesday, 10 October *	ENGLAND		V		BANGLADESH	Dharamsala
Tuesday, 10 October	PAKISTAN		V		SRI LANKA	Hyderabad
Wednesday, 11 October	INDIA		V		AFGHANISTAN	Delhi
Thursday, 12 October	AUSTRALIA		V		SOUTH AFRICA	Lucknow
Friday, 13 October	NEW ZEALAND		V		BANGLADESH	Chennai
Saturday, 14 October	INDIA		V		PAKISTAN	Ahmedabad
Sunday, 15 October	ENGLAND		V		AFGHANISTAN	Delhi
Monday, 16 October	AUSTRALIA		V		SRI LANKA	Lucknow
Tuesday, 17 October	SOUTH AFRICA		V		NETHERLANDS	Dharamsala
Wednesday, 18 October	NEW ZEALAND		V		AFGHANISTAN	Chennai
Thursday, 19 October	INDIA		V		BANGLADESH	Pune
Friday, 20 October	AUSTRALIA		V		PAKISTAN	Bengaluru
Saturday, 21 October *	NETHERLANDS		V		SRI LANKA	Lucknow
Saturday, 21 October	ENGLAND		V		SOUTH AFRICA	Mumbai
Sunday, 22 October	INDIA		V		NEW ZEALAND	Dharamsala
Monday, 23 October	PAKISTAN		V		AFGHANISTAN	Chennai
Tuesday, 24 October	SOUTH AFRICA		V		BANGLADESH	Mumbai
Wednesday, 25 October	AUSTRALIA		V		NETHERLANDS	Delhi
Thursday, 26 October	ENGLAND		V		SRI LANKA	Bengaluru
Friday, 27 October	PAKISTAN		V		SOUTH AFRICA	Chennai
Saturday, 28 October *	AUSTRALIA		V		NEW ZEALAND	Dharamsala
Saturday, 28 October	NETHERLANDS		V		BANGLADESH	Kolkata
Sunday, 29 October	INDIA		V		ENGLAND	Lucknow
Monday, 30 October	AFGHANISTAN		V		SRI LANKA	Pune
Tuesday, 31 October	PAKISTAN		V		BANGLADESH	Kolkata
Wednesday, 1 November	NEW ZEALAND		V		SOUTH AFRICA	Pune
Thursday, 2 November	INDIA		V		SRI LANKA	Mumbai
Friday, 3 November	NETHERLANDS		V		AFGHANISTAN	Lucknow
Saturday, 4 November *	NEW ZEALAND		V		PAKISTAN	Bengaluru
Saturday, 4 November	ENGLAND		V		AUSTRALIA	Ahmedabad
Sunday, 5 November	INDIA		V		SOUTH AFRICA	Kolkata
Monday, 6 November	BANGLADESH		V		SRI LANKA	Delhi
Tuesday, 7 November	AUSTRALIA		V		AFGHANISTAN	Mumbai
Wednesday, 8 November	ENGLAND		V		NETHERLANDS	Pune
Thursday, 9 November	NEW ZEALAND		V		SRI LANKA	Bengaluru
Friday, 10 November	SOUTH AFRICA		V		AFGHANISTAN	Ahmedabad
Saturday, 11 November *	AUSTRALIA		V		BANGLADESH	Pune
Saturday, 11 November	ENGLAND		V		PAKISTAN	Kolkata
Sunday, 12 November	INDIA		V		NETHERLANDS	Bengaluru

Wednesday, 15 November	SEMI FINAL 1	Mumbai
Thursday, 16 November	SEMI FINAL 2	Kolkata
SUNDAY, 19 NOVEMBER	FINAL	AHMEDABAD

ALL DAY-NIGHT MATCHES BEGIN AT 1400 LOCAL TIME
* DAY MATCHES BEGIN AT 1030 LOCAL TIME

ALL DAY-NIGHT MATCHES BEGIN AT 1400 LOCAL TIME
DAY MATCHES BEGIN AT 1030 LOCAL TIME



BARSHIM EASES TO HIGH JUMP GOLD, INDIA HAIL MOST SUCCESSFUL GAMES

HANGZHOU, China: Indian trailblazer Neeraj Chopra added Asian Games gold to his Olympic and world titles in javelin on Wednesday as his nation celebrated its biggest medal haul at the continental showpiece in Hangzhou.

India's first Olympic athletics champion threw 88.88 metres, more than 0.70m further than Budapest where the 25-year-old claimed the country's first title in track and field.

He was challenged by silver-winning teammate Kishore Jena, who threw a personal best of 87.54m to draw out Chopra's winning effort at the Hangzhou Olympic stadium.

There was less suspense in the high jump, though, where Qatari great Mutaz Barshim clinched his third Asian Games gold, 13 years after his first in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

The triple world champion, who owns the second highest jump of all-time (2.43 metres), cleared 2.35m before missing all three attempts at 2.37m.

South Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok was runner-up with a jump of 2.33m.

India surged past their previous record of 70

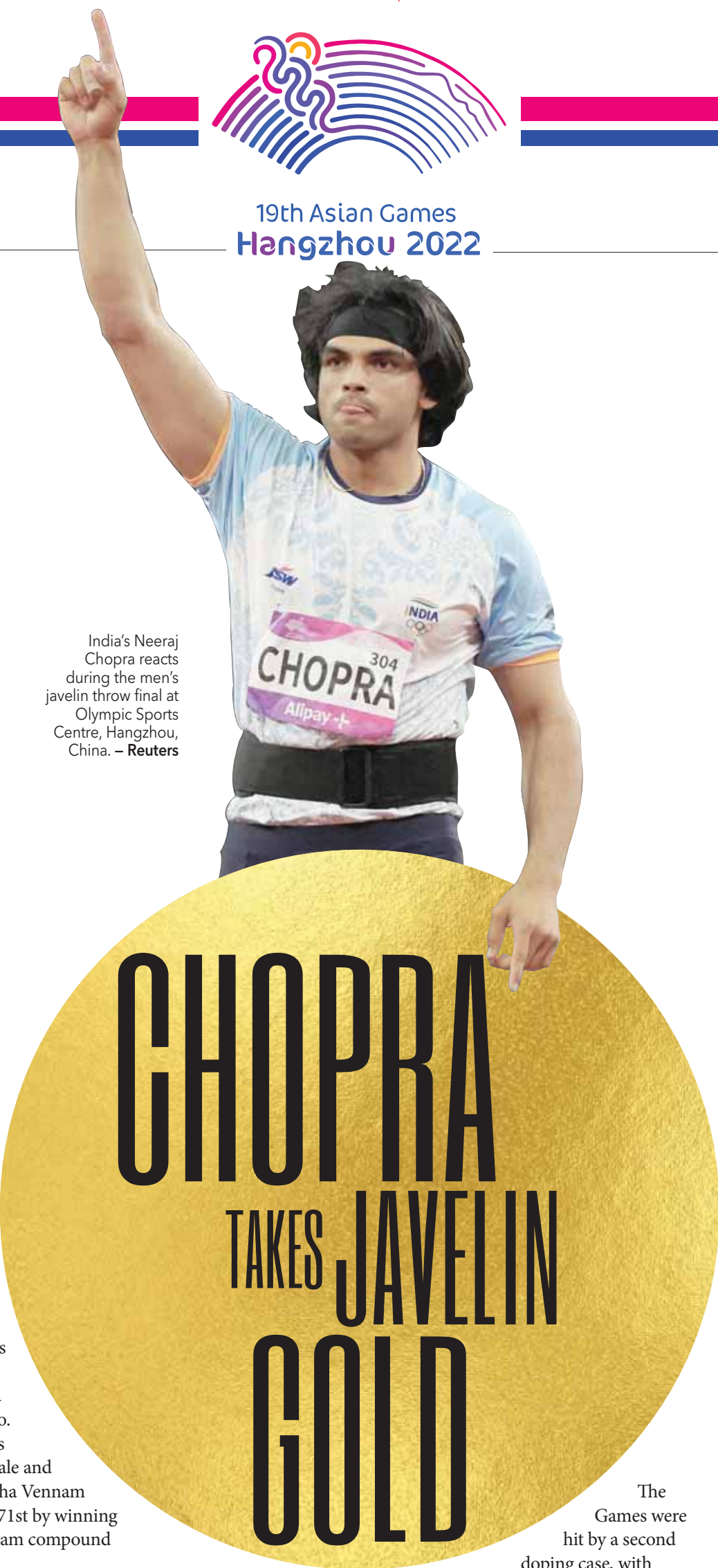
Asian Games medals from Jakarta five years ago. Archers Ojas Pravin Deotale and Jyothi Surekha Vennam secured the 71st by winning the mixed team compound event.

"We are celebrating our best-ever medal tally, a testament to the unparalleled dedication, grit and sporting spirit of our athletes," India Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The rising Asian power has work to do to catch China, though, with the hosts having sailed past 300 medals and won more than 170 golds.

China's Li Qian, runner-up in women's middleweight boxing at the Tokyo Olympics, beat India's world champion Lovlina Borgohain for the 66-75kg division title.

Li turned the tables on Borgohain who beat the Chinese boxer in the semifinals on the way to the middleweight world championship in March.



India's Neeraj Chopra reacts during the men's javelin throw final at Olympic Sports Centre, Hangzhou, China. – Reuters

CHOPRA TAKES JAVELIN GOLD

The Games were hit by a second doping case, with Saudi Arabian distance runner Yousef Mohammed Alasiri, who tested positive for darbepoetin, provisionally banned.

Darbepoetin is a re-engineered form of erythropoietin, also known as EPO, a common blood-booster.

Alasiri, 34, was entered in the men's 5,000 and 10,000m events but did not start either.

China completed a sweep of the race walking events, picking up gold in the mixed team 35km early on Wednesday, with Japan taking silver ahead of bronze-winning India.

Myanmar claimed their first gold of the Games, beating Indonesia for the men's quadrant title in sepak takraw. — Reuters



Gold medalist India's Neeraj Chopra poses with silver medalist India's Kishore Kumar Jena and bronze medalist Japan's Roderick Genki Dean after the men's javelin throw final. – Reuters



Gold medalists India's Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Ojas Pravin Deotale pose with silver medalists South Korea's So Chaewon and Joo Jaehoon and bronze medalists Chinese Taipei's Chang Cheng-Wei and Chen Yi-Hsuan during the medal ceremony for the archery compound mixed team event. – Reuters



India's Jyothi Surekha Vennam reacts after winning the the archery compound mixed team gold medal match. – Reuters

LOCAL FLAVOUR

ABMIPS TRIUMPHS AT MUSCAT CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

MUSCAT: Students of Ahmad bin Majid International Private School (ABMIPS) victoriously secured first place among 72 schools at the highly anticipated Chess Championship for Government and Private Schools of the Muscat Governorate at the Bausher Stadium recently.

The Muscat Chess Championship is an annual event that brings together the finest young chess players from across Muscat.

The chief guest, Mubarak bin Said al Mashari, Director of the Career Guidance Department and Students Statistics, Directorate of Education, Muscat Governorate, conferred the awards. The first-place honours were claimed by grades 5 and 6 students, notably, Aws bin Faisal al Mahdali, Houd bin Hilal al Rashdi, Jibreel bin Raif al Harthi, Jasim bin Fahad al



ABMIPS students centre with second and third runners of the championship with the chief guest and other officials.

Kindi and Yousuf bin Salah al Balushi, whose exceptional talent led to the victory. Displaying analytical skills and precision, these students showcased the true spirit of a champion with impressive manoeuvres and unwavering focus.

Al Saeedia School for Basic

Education secured the second place and Mohammad Al Mundhiri Government School took the third place.

"Chess is not just a game; it is a sport that builds students' character and hones important skills that transcend beyond the chessboard. As such,



First place winners ABMIPS chess team with their sports teacher.

ABMIPS recognises the value of chess in nurturing young minds and instilling a passion for intellectual pursuits," said Abdalhadi Mustafa Mohamed, sports teacher.

Chess is known for its cognitive benefits, developing critical thinking, problem-

solving and analytical skills.

"The game requires students to strategically plan their moves, anticipate their opponents strategies, and make quick decisions under pressure. These skills are crucial in various aspects of life, from academic pursuits to future careers," he

said. While the win exemplifies the strong foundation and training received at school, it would not have been possible without the unwavering support of passionate parents and the dedicated teachers. Their commitment to encourage the students was vital in achieving such a remarkable result. This win reaffirms the school's commitment to nurturing young minds and instilling a passion for intellectual pursuits, noted Rayan bint Najim al Timami, Board Member, ABMIPS.

Al Timami expressed her utmost pride and admiration for the extraordinary achievements of the students, stating, "We are thrilled to witness such an exceptional display of talent and determination. I congratulate the entire community of the school for this momentous accomplishment."



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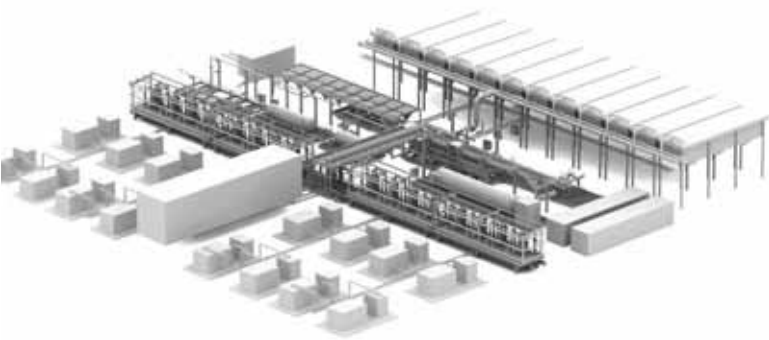


Illustration of EH2's 100 MW electrolyser systems, billed as the 'world's most powerful'

US green hydrogen systems maker receives Oman funding support

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 4

US-based Electric Hydrogen (EH2), a leading manufacturer of electrolyser systems — a critical component in green hydrogen production — has announced that it has secured funding from an array of leading international investors, including the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

Massachusetts-based EH2 said its \$380 million Series C financing round was successfully oversubscribed, generating new capital that would accelerate the manufacture and deployments of what is billed as the world's most powerful green hydrogen systems.

For Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the latest financing adds to a series of climate-tech investments made by the wealth fund that align with, on the one hand, the Omani government's support for global decarbonisation efforts, and on the other, the wealth fund's keenness to partner with start-ups on the cutting-edge of sustainable energy and climate mitigation technologies.

Electric Hydrogen plans

to deliver and commission industrial-scale electrolysers — systems that produce green hydrogen from renewable electricity and water. With a capacity of 100 megawatts (MW), each unit will be capable of producing around 50 tonnes of cost-competitive green hydrogen per day.

Oman is anticipated to require potentially thousands of these mega-scale electrolyser systems to meet its target of producing 7 – 8 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2050.

Partnerships with leading-edge manufacturers, such as Electric Hydrogen (EH2), will give Oman a foothold in this critical sector. Underscoring the robust investment appeal of Electric Hydrogen, a large number of leading global investors participated in the funding round.

It was led by Fortescue, Fifth Wall and Energy Impact Partners and included new investors Oman Investment Authority, bp Ventures, Temasek, Microsoft's Climate Innovation Fund, the United Airlines Sustainable Flight Fund, New Legacy, Kajima Ventures and Fatima Holdings USA.

TURN TO P14

NASRULAH AL AJMI & ONA
MUSCAT, OCT 4

A key forum in In-Country Value (ICV), held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, concluded here on Wednesday with a call for the formulation on a national strategy to unlock the potential of value addition in support of socioeconomic growth.

Organised by *Al Roya* newspaper, the 'Oman Forum on Value Added' also mooted the establishment of a national-level nodal agency to drive ICV development across multiple economic sectors.

The mandate of this proposed body, according to key delegates and presenters, should encompass, among other things, the roll-out of programmes to support local added value initiatives, boost the competitiveness of local products through dedicated marketing portals, and promote research and innovation in value-addition efforts.

Earlier, in welcome remarks, Hatim al Taie, Editor in Chief of *Al Roya*, underscored the importance of leveraging Oman's diverse resources to enhance local value addition and promote innovation.

Al Taie emphasised the necessity of drawing upon the experiences of advanced nations that align with Oman's needs and policies, all within the framework of the future vision "Oman 2040."

Al Taie described the forum as a valuable platform aimed at discussing mechanisms and efforts to optimise the outcomes of value-added projects and programmes. The ultimate goal is to transform these initiatives



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, with dignitaries at the opening of the Oman Forum for Added Value.

into sustainable strategies and robust policies that contribute to propelling the national economy towards greater growth and prosperity.

Presenting the vision of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in promoting ICV development, Eng Al Mutasim bin Said al Sariri, Director General of In-Country Value, said the Authority is presently developing benchmarks that its affiliated companies must meet in providing business opportunities to Omani SMEs.

In 2022, ICV related expenditures by OIA affiliated companies and organisations amounted to RO 187 million, representing around 10.9 per cent of their total spend. Beneficiaries comprises 8,334 small and medium enterprises, he said.

The Authority is presently developing a portal to monitor ICV commitments by corporates and organisations that form part of OIA, and to push companies to build on ICV opportunities

via this platform. The project is expected to be operational before the end of this year, said Al Sariri.

According to Eng Zahran bin Mohammed al Abri, Director of In-Country Value at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), ICV and localised added value efforts amounted to RO 860 million in value in 2022. Of this total, local community contractors (LCCs) and SMEs received RO 535 million in contracts, far exceeding last year's tally.

Further, PDO plans to boost in-country spend from its total expenditure from the 38 per cent in 2021 to 50 per cent by 2030.

To this end, it has identified 111 investment opportunities for local added value, including 21 opportunities linked to current energy transition, decarbonisation and digital transformation goals.

In a separate presentation, Dr Hilal bin Hamoud al Sawa'ee, Director General of Local Content at the General

Secretariat of the Tender Board, said the Secretariat is currently working to boost the efficiency of localised spending and enhance the local added value associated with projects, contracts and government procurement in integration with government and private agencies and civil and community institutions.

Sultan bin Said al Khadouri, Head of ICV and Local Content Office at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the Ministry is seeking to revamp policies and regulations with a view to incentivising the growth of local suppliers of intermediate commodities for the manufacturing sector.

With the sector contributing around RO 4.6 billion to Oman's GDP (2022) at current prices, it has the potential for significant localisation, he said, adding that foreign direct investments into the sector crossed RO 1.5 billion in 2022.

Oxy to explore direct air capture project in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT OCT 4



In a recent announcement, Occidental Petroleum Corp (Oxy), under the leadership of its President and CEO Vicki Hollub (pictured), revealed its intention to explore a Direct Air Capture (DAC) project in Oman.

Hollub emphasised the potential for accelerated advancements in DAC and point source capture technology, which could surpass the cost reduction achieved by wind and solar energy over the past decade.

Oxy aims to leverage digital twin technology and increased

computing power to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of DAC. By utilising digital twin simulations during the development process, the company expects to accelerate the improvement of the technology.

Hollub highlighted the advantages of having greater



A facility for capturing CO2 from air is placed on the roof of a waste incinerating plant. Image for illustration only. – Reuters

computing power and the ability to execute projects more effectively, emphasising that Oxy has already begun operating a pilot plant utilising

this innovative technology. After revealing a collaboration with ADNOC, the state oil company of Abu Dhabi, to investigate the potential of a DAC

(Direct Air Capture) initiative, which aims to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions resulting from the burning of fossil fuels to prevent their release into the atmosphere, Hollub informed an ADIPEC session on Tuesday that a functioning project model had been showcased to the Sultan of Oman.

"We will be able to improve the technology of Direct Air Capture (DAC) and point source capture, at a faster pace than wind and solar. We are able to reduce their cost, which took about 10 years, to get their cost down to about 80 to 85 per cent.

Any new technology can be

better improved today at a faster pace because of the fact that you can build digital twins while you are doing it.

We have a lot more computing power than we've had previously, like other companies for things we would like to execute. We built a pilot plant, so we're already operating this technology today. It's just a matter now of scaling it up and working down the cost curve, which will happen sooner than later."

The implementation of a DAC project in Oman aligns with Oxy's commitment to sustainability and reducing carbon emissions.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Ford’s popular Territory SUV now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Now is a good time to own the Ford Territory SUV with exclusive benefits. On offer is service 3 years / 60,000 kms and registration 1 year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

The campaign will last until November 8, 2023. The Territory SUV is mix of modernity, style and space. It is a perfect choice for young professionals and small, busy families.

The Ford Territory was envisioned through Ford’s new ‘Progressive Energy in Strength’ design philosophy, which is based on the rich heritage of the brand and its iconic aesthetics. It embodies three fundamental design principles: commanding, agile, and responsive.

The Ford Territory is equipped with an integrated grille and signature light – balanced with lower graphics, with full LED lighting, which drives the focal point higher and communicates purpose, stability, and capability.

The headlamps show off a unique design, with daytime running LED lights incorporated with a strong horizontal grille bar, which adds to the eye-catching appearance.

The form also has function, with the headlamps lowered towards the ground for an expanded lighting areas that also creates a more powerful front look.

The bold grille bar is manufactured with high quality



Ford Territory SUV

materials that help to reflect Ford’s global design DNA on the car. Adding comfort and indulgence on every journey is the territory’s impressive interior. The horizontal coast-to-coast design evokes a connecting space in an embracing gesture, creating openness and spaciousness.

Comfort and function are maximised through premium leather seats, with a 10-way adjustable ergonomic driver’s seat. Built to optimise loading capacity, Territory is also equipped with more than 20 spacious storage compartments – as well as an extendible trunk with a 448-litre volume – allowing passengers to flexibly use storage spaces throughout the car.

Powering the Territory is an

EcoBoost 1.8L engine, delivering 320Nm torque using moderate fuel and impressive power up to 190 hp. The vehicle is equipped with an advanced dual clutch seven-speed automatic transmission providing smooth, responsive gear shifting.

The Territory SUV is equipped with four driving modes – eco, normal, sport, and mountain – to provide customers the ability to tailor their driving experience across a range of situations, whether driving in crowded urban areas or across the open highway on long-distance journeys.

The Ford Territory is equipped with a suite of driver-assist technologies that offer maximum safety and enhance customers’ driving experiences. The vehicle

enables customers to drive with confidence by offering an impressive array of safety features available in Ford co-pilot.

The all-new Ford Territory also includes safety technologies such as: lane departure warning (LDW) and lane keeping aid (LKS), tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS), and passive anti-theft system to ensure absolute safety for drivers and passengers.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC.

Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Naue Group to participate in ISWA 2023 World Congress

MUSCAT: Geosynthetic manufacturer based in Germany, Naue Group will participate in the upcoming ISWA 2023 Wold Congress which will be held in Muscat on Oct 30 – Nov 1.

Dr Jovanna Husemann (pictured), Dr Naue Group business development manager, said, “It is my pleasure and honour to participate in the 39th ISWA World Congress which will take place in Oman.

The Congress offers a perfect opportunity to appraise the international efforts of diverse stakeholders coming from industry, academia, investment, and government sectors toward achieving sustainable waste management worldwide.

It is an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to work together, across borders, to effectively tackle the ongoing waste management challenges of today’s world, and to discuss innovative strategies for the future.

With that regard, the selected location of this year’s World Congress has significant importance.”

“The Sultanate of Oman and Oman Environmental Services Holding Co (be’ah) have become important players within the waste management landscape, not only in the Gulf region but internationally as well.

Naue Group has had an opportunity to establish a successful collaboration with be’ah, and I am very much looking forward to the Congress and learning more about be’ah’s efforts and achievements in modernising Oman’s waste management sector,” Dr Husemann said.

“Naue’s commitment to contribute to the World Congress may be recognised through the many diverse



activities we plan.

We are very much looking forward to personally welcoming the participants at the exhibition space and sharing our ideas and solutions in light of Naue’s motto ‘Building on the sustainable ground’.

With that regard, we prepared a poster where we summarised the findings of the comparison of geotechnical over conventional construction materials in light of sustainability aspects.

I am particularly glad that I may support this distinguished event as a speaker by addressing the topic how the Arabian Peninsula Fast-Tracks Sustainable Waste Management Practice.

This is to be round with my planned participation at the ISWA Landfills & Closing Dumpsites Task Force meeting where I will have an opportunity to exchange ideas, new trends, and concrete action plans with international experts.

Finally, I am particularly excited about visiting Oman for the first time and meeting its rich cultural heritage and people,” Dr Husemann added.

To delve deeper into the topics of Protecting Human Health & the Quality of the Environment, we invite you to register for ISWA Congress 2023 today. Secure your spot now by visiting our registration page at <https://www.iswa2023.com/registration/>

US green hydrogen systems maker receives Oman funding support

FROM PAGE 13

Existing strategic investors Amazon’s Climate Pledge Fund, Equinor Ventures, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Rio Tinto continued their participation, as did previous financial investors Breakthrough Energy Ventures, Capricorn Partners, Prelude Ventures, and S2G Ventures.

Electric Hydrogen, which is building a 1.2 gigawatt (GW) factory in Massachusetts, has

more than 5 GW of its electrolyser systems on order. Deliveries are expected to begin later in 2024.

Capital raised by Electric Hydrogen since its founding in 2020 totals over \$600 million.

Raffi Garabedian, CEO and Co-founder of EH2, commented: “We’re here to replace natural gas and coal with renewable green hydrogen. To address the global climate challenge, we need new technologies that help critical industries reduce their emissions.

Electric Hydrogen’s 100MW electrolyser systems do that.

Today’s hydrogen comes from natural gas and coal and accounts for around 2.5 per cent of global carbon emissions.

There has not been a viable solution to this problem because renewable green hydrogen has been too expensive to produce at scale. The Electric Hydrogen team is changing that and the opportunities for decarbonisation go far beyond today’s applications.”

Oxy to explore direct air capture project in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Direct Air Capture involves the extraction of carbon dioxide (CO2) directly from the atmosphere, thereby mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

As the global focus on environmental conservation grows, companies like Oxy are increasingly investing in renewable technologies to address climate change concerns.

The decision to focus on Oman for the DAC project stems from several factors. Oman boasts favourable environmental conditions for carbon capture, with its strategic geographical location and its vast potential

for carbon sequestration.

Additionally, the project aligns with Oman’s own sustainability goals and its commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

While the specific timeline and details of the project are yet to be disclosed, Oxy’s dedication to accelerating the cost curve reduction suggests that progress will be made sooner rather than later.

As the project moves forward, it is expected to create numerous job opportunities and foster collaborations among local and international stakeholders, driving economic growth and the development of a sustainable, low-carbon future for Oman.

MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS LAUNCHES ALLURE-FANCY SHAPE DIAMOND JEWELLERY COLLECTION



MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds launched their Allure-fancy shape diamond jewellery collection at their showroom in Oman Avenues Mall. The collection launch was conducted in the presence of Najeeb K - Regional Head of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Muhsin P - Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Udesb P T - Branch Manager, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers and well-wishers.



SQU Forum concludes with pledge to boost financial literacy drive



A presenter explains his research during the forum.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

The 14th edition of the Financial Forum, organised by the Economics and Finance Group and the Accounting Club at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), concluded on Wednesday with a plan for the launch of a mass effort to boost financial and economic literacy among Omani youth.

Collaboration with influential social media figures was a key element of their strategy to increase community awareness of the forum and its associated activities, with the aim of attracting a larger and more diverse audience to future editions of the conference.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Mohammed bin Juma al Rashdi, the Administrator of the Financial Forum, emphasised the significance of such gatherings in enhancing society's awareness of economic and financial concepts and the latest global economic developments, highlighting their impact on the nation's economy as a whole and individuals on a personal level.

Recognising that finance is the lifeblood of society, Al Rashdi stressed the importance of events like this to bring together financial and economic knowledge and expertise, fostering a financially literate and economically aware community.

He outlined one of the primary objectives of the forum as increasing financial and economic literacy among all segments of society, including those who are well-versed in financial matters and those with a particular interest in the financial sector.

Additionally, the forum aims to engage relevant institutions in the country's economic and financial landscape, encouraging their contribution to the dissemination of financial literacy.

Regarding the role of games and competitions to support their campaign, Al Rashdi explained that they view entertainment activities as complementary to the content provided to users. These games and competitions aim to further engage attendees in financial topics and make them more accessible and enjoyable.

US services sector activity down

WASHINGTON: The US services sector cooled slightly in September on slower growth in new orders and employment, according to survey data released on Wednesday.

The services index of the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) edged down to 53.6 per cent last month, from 54.5 per cent in August. The reading sits above the 50-point mark signaling growth, and ISM said on Wednesday that the services sector has expanded for a ninth straight month.

"There has been a slight pullback in the rate of growth for the services sector, which is attributed to slower rates of growth in the new orders and employment indexes," said ISM survey chair Anthony Nieves in a statement.

But he added that "the majority of respondents remain positive about business conditions" even if some had worries about challenges ahead. Activity in services is holding up even as the manufacturing sector has been struggling after the US Federal Reserve embarked on an aggressive campaign to lower inflation by lifting interest rates. — **AFP**

Masirah Island now linked to OETC's transmission network

MUSCAT: In a groundbreaking initiative, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) is set to embark on a historic project in the Sultanate of Oman.

This project aligns with Oman's Vision 2040 that aims to achieve carbon neutrality by marking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions.

The key project involves linking the Island of Masirah to OETC's transmission network through a 35-kilometre submarine cable with a voltage of 132 kilovolts and 60 kilometres of overhead power transmission lines.

The connection will extend from the Mahout substation at 400/33 kilovolts to the Masirah substation. The consultancy contract for this project was awarded to an experienced firm in December 2023.

Furthermore, the transmission line routes, and the marine cable directions have been approved by all relevant authorities, and a tender for project implementation is set to be released, with construction scheduled to commence in 2024.

These strategic projects are aimed at realising Oman's Vision of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. They aim to reduce reliance on diesel-based power generation, curb carbon emissions, meet the energy demands of Masirah Island, and accommodate the growing electricity consumption while also facilitating the integration of renewable energy sources.

This project includes a unique



OETC's headquarters in Muscat.

technological component in the form of the submarine cable, which employs complex and highly critical technologies.

The project consultant has successfully completed marine surveys, including geophysical and geotechnical surveys, each with its specialised equipment and expertise. These surveys represent the crucial initial steps required for the construction of the undersea cable.

Eng Hisham al Riyami, the General Manager of the Planning and Design Department, emphasised the strategic significance of this project and its potential to enhance the power

supply on Masirah Island.

He noted that it will improve various services on the island, saying, "Oman Electricity Transmission Company always strives to meet the growing energy demand across different sectors and locations in the Sultanate of Oman. This demonstrates our commitment to contributing to the development and progress in various fields in the country. This project will support all local activities and services on Masirah Island, improve the electricity sector's infrastructure, and provide sustainable solutions to meet sector needs."

It is worth mentioning that

OETC, a member of the Nama Group, is the company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate of Oman's network.

The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates. The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south.

Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

OQGN initial public offering ends tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Initial Public Offering of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) ends today (Thursday) for the second category of individual investors. The company floated about 636,601,716 shares for this category.

This represents 30 per cent of the total floated stocks (2,122,005,720 shares). The price range of this category was set at about 126 baisas per share.

The IPO for the first category (corporate entities) ends on October 9, 2023. The company floated about 848,802,288 shares for this category, which constitutes 40 per cent of the total floated shares.

Anchor investors include the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Qatar Investment Authority, represented by Falcon Company and the Belgian company Fluxys International have committed to buy a 30-per cent stake of the total floated shares.



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the OQ oil hub.

The IPO comes as part of the economic diversification policies adopted by the Omani government to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which reflects a long-term development and sustainability plan.

OQGN holds a natural monopoly over critical gas transportation infrastructure in Oman as the exclusive owner and operator of the natural gas transportation network.

In 2022, the company transported about 39.4 billion cubic metres of gas from six gas suppliers to around 130 gas consumers along 4031 kilometres of gas pipelines.

In its operations, the company is supported by 3 compression stations and 25 gas supply plants. OQGN works according to a long-term franchise granted to it by the Omani government for 50 years until 2070 in line with the amended franchise agreement.

The company plays a vital role in connecting gas producers with consumers through its assets, which include a gas pipeline network supported by compression and gas supply stations which generate transportation and delivery fees for the company. Driven by strong and sustainable profit margins, the company is based on huge and growing regulatory assets. This makes it an attractive entity for investment that achieves the aspirations of investors. — **ONA**

OCCI hosts Omani-German Business Forum

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

In efforts to strengthen bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI hosted the Omani-German Business Forum here on Wednesday, October 4, 2023.

The forum was attended by a German commercial delegation, in addition to several Omani and German business owners.

In a press statement, Second Deputy Chairman of the Chamber's Board of Directors, Eng Hamoud al Saadi, shed

light on trade relations between the two countries, "It is well known that the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany have strong trade relations that have contributed to the development of cooperation and partnership, strengthening business relationships between the two friendly nations."

He added: "This visit [by the German commercial delegation] underscores the mutual desire between the two friendly countries to enhance partnership and cooperation in various economic and investment fields."

According to an OCCI representative, the forum



The forum was attended by a German commercial delegation, in addition to several Omani and German business owners.

planned to target a wide range of industries, including renewable

energy, transportation and logistics, tourism, real estate

and construction, healthcare, petrochemicals and the legal sector.

Al Saadi also emphasised the importance of trade delegations across countries in fostering trade relations and expanding opportunities for mutual investment and commerce.

Elaborating that trade delegations facilitate cooperation, knowledge exchange, and enable the facilitation of import and export operations between nations.

According to external trade data, the trade volume between Oman and Germany reached RO 201.8 million in 2021. German

exports to Oman were estimated at RO 172.9 million, and Omani exports to Germany stood at RO 28.8 million.

Key German imports included vehicles, chemical and pharmaceutical products and machinery. Omani exports included medical and pharmaceutical products, electronic equipment, tuna, minerals, electric cables and plastic products.

In 1978, both nations established the Omani-German Joint Economic Commission with the aim of developing bilateral economic and trade relations.

Significance of India-Middle East-European Corridor



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

Some wonder about the absence of the Sultanate of Oman from participating in the new global shipping system that was announced on the sidelines of the G20 meetings held in India recently. Oman participated with several countries outside the G20 in response to an invitation from India.

At the same time, others believe that Oman has done well by not entering into this proposal adopted by some countries which today faces many challenges

due to the other giant project, the ‘Belt and Road’ of China as, well as from the decisions of the BRICS group.

This proposal aims to introduce Israel into the global trade route between India and Europe through the Gulf region, and to push for normalisation between some Arab countries and Israel during the next stage, especially with Saudi Arabia, before the end of this year.

There is a desire among some Arab countries to transform their bilateral relations with some countries in the G20 into

multidimensional partnerships by joining this corridor known as India-Middle East-European Corridor (IMEC) that can serve energy issues in the future. The last G20 summit was held in the absence of the Russian and Chinese leaders.

The latest proposal for this corridor came from America, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and a group of European Union countries, which will work to enhance trade and stimulate economic development among them, as well as enhance communication and economic integration among them.

The IMEC proposal will be carried out — as stated in Memorandum of Understanding — to be a reliable and cost-effective cross-border transport network through ship transit and then rail transit; which will facilitate the smooth movement of goods and services.

The United States believes that this project is an alternative to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. It focuses strongly on the cooperation of some Arab and Mediterranean countries.

As for China, it is continuing its tireless efforts to implement its plan for the Belt and Road project, while it has been able, through its membership in the BRICS group to include 6 other countries.

As for the Indian sources, they see that the India-Gulf-Europe corridor is a manifestation of the deep integration between India and the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as to create a broader geopolitical and economic rapprochement and to large the volume of the trade.

US oil producers reprieved by Saudi Arabia output cut

JOHN KEMP

US crude oil production increased again in July and neared the pre-pandemic record, showing output has remained more resilient than expected in the face of a steep downturn in drilling. Total production of crude oil and condensates increased to 12.99 million barrels per day (bpd) in July 2023, which was not statistically different from the record of 13.00 million bpd set in November 2019.

Output from the Lower 48 states excluding federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico increased to a record 10.7 million bpd, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Lower 48 production had increased by 990,000 bpd since the same month a year earlier, though growth had slowed modestly to just 185,000 bpd in the most recent three months.

Oil drilling and production growth has slowed in a delayed response to the sharp drop in oil prices since the middle of 2022.

Inflation-adjusted US crude futures prices averaged \$71 per barrel in June 2023 down from \$120 (82nd percentile) in June 2022. In response, the number of rigs drilling for oil fell to an average of just 510 in September 2023 down from a recent peak of 623 in December 2022.

But production has continued to increase partly because of the delays in the system – it takes on average about 12 months for a change in prices to filter through into a change in output.

Shale firms have also tried to eke out extra output by concentrating the smaller number of rigs on only the most promising well sites and boring much longer laterals.

Longer horizontal sections ensure each well is in contact with more reservoir rock and can bring more oil to the surface, boosting productivity per well.

Nonetheless, it is likely output would have levelled off or even started to fall from

the third quarter onwards in response to lower prices and less drilling.

Since the start of the third quarter, however, futures prices have risen strongly in response to extra production cuts announced by Saudi Arabia and Russia, relieving pressure on the US industry.

Front-month prices averaged more than \$89 per barrel in September, in the 60th percentile for all prices since the start of the century in real terms.

Higher prices have boosted cash flow and improved confidence in the short and medium term outlook for shale producers.

Production cuts by Saudi Arabia and Russia have thrown a lifeline to the US shale firms, helping them avoid a much deeper downturn.

US crude output is now more likely to stabilise than decline through the end of 2023 and the first half of 2024 as a result of the restraint of the Opec+ producer group, which includes Saudi Arabia and Russia.

In turn, the largest US shale producers have indicated they have no intention of raising output in response to the recent rise in prices.

Like US oil production, gas output has also continued to increase, a lagged response to high prices in 2022, but the subsequent slump in prices has been more severe and is causing a more pronounced slowdown in output growth.

Dry production amounted to 3,222 billion cubic feet in July 2023, an increase of less than 4% compared with the same month a year earlier.

Growth has decelerated from almost 7% a year ago as the industry adapts to some of the lowest futures prices in decades in real terms.

Since then, prices have risen, but only modestly, averaging \$2.70 in September 2023, which has not been high enough to relieve the pressure on producers.

With no equivalent of Saudi Arabia, Russia and Opec+ to accelerate the rebalancing, US gas producers have experienced prices lower for longer than their oil counterparts. — Reuters

Will AI transform the economy, and if so, how?



PAUL KRUGMAN

The writer, a New York Times Opinion columnist, writes about macroeconomics, trade, health care, social policy and politics



Artificial intelligence can be used for image recognition, like in this display at a technology conference. – AFP

So, will artificial intelligence transform the economy? Today I thought I'd take a break from my usual preoccupation with ongoing crises to engage in a bit of big think about how technology may change the economic landscape in the years ahead, including a topic that seems important but hasn't drawn much attention: how AI might change the US budget outlook.

Starting last fall there was a huge surge in buzz, both positive and negative, about AI.

That buzz seems to have died down to some extent, with usage of ChatGPT, the most famous implementation of the technology, declining in recent months. And many more observers have realised that what we've been calling AI — or what more careful people call “generative AI” — isn't really intelligence.

What it is instead is extrapolation from pattern recognition. Or as some people I talk to put it, it's basically souped-up autocorrect.

But that doesn't mean that it's not important. After all, a lot of what human workers, even workers considered highly skilled, do for a living is also arguably souped-up autocorrect.

How many workers regularly engage in creative thinking? Even among creative workers, how much time is spent being creative as opposed to engaging in pattern recognition?

I don't say this to disrespect knowledge workers, but rather to suggest that what we're calling AI could be a big deal for the economy even if it doesn't lead to the creation of HAL 9000 or Skynet.

But how big? And what kind of a deal?

Obviously, nobody really knows. Some people are trying

to figure out the impact from the bottom up, looking at various kinds of work and guesstimating how much of that work can be replaced or augmented by AI.

The most widely circulated numbers come from Goldman Sachs, whose base case has AI increasing the growth rate of productivity — output per person-hour — by almost 1.5 percentage points a year over a decade, for a total over that decade of about 15%.

Is this plausible? Actually, yes. One parallel, if you've studied the historical relationship between technology and productivity, is the productivity boom from 1995 to 2005, which followed decades of weak productivity growth.

By the time the productivity surge tapered off, productivity was about 12% higher than the trend from the prior two decades would have led you to expect it would be. Since AI is arguably an even more profound innovation than the technologies that drove the 1995-2005 boom, 15% isn't at all unreasonable.

But will higher productivity make us richer or simply reduce the number of jobs? Fears of technological unemployment — a term invented by none other than John Maynard Keynes in 1930 — go back at least to the early 19th century.

They have even inspired one pretty good novel, Kurt Vonnegut's “Player Piano.” While technology has often eliminated some jobs, however, historically this has always been, as Keynes wrote, “a temporary phase of maladjustment,” with other forms of employment rising to replace the jobs lost.

For example, the Microsoft Excel shock — the rise of spreadsheet programmes — seems to have eliminated many bookkeeping jobs, but these were replaced by increased employment even in financial analysis.

However, while there's no reason to believe that what we're calling AI will lead to mass unemployment, it may well hurt the people who are displaced from their jobs and either have trouble finding new employment or are obliged to accept lower wages. Who are the potential losers?

The likely answer is that big impacts will fall on relatively high-end administrative jobs, many of them currently highly paid, while blue-collar jobs will be largely unscathed.

Now, while this seems right for generative AI, there are other applications of big data that may affect blue-collar work. For example, with all the buzz around ChatGPT there has been relatively little attention paid to the fact that after years of failed hype, self-driving cars are actually beginning to go into service.

Still, at this point it seems more likely than not that AI will, unlike technological progress over the past 40 years, be a force for lower rather than higher income inequality.

Finally, it seems worth considering how generative AI might bear on one issue that has regained prominence: worries about government debt. Until recently, many economists, myself included, argued that public debt was less of a concern than many people imagine, because interest rates on debt were below the economy's long-term growth rate. This meant that the common idea that debt would snowball, with interest payments leading to higher debt and hence to even higher interest payments, was wrong: The ratio of debt to gross domestic product, the number that matters, would tend to melt rather than snowball.

But rapidly rising interest rates have made debt considerably more worrisome. Conventional estimates of the economy's long-run sustainable growth rate, like those of the Federal Reserve, tend to put it around 1.8%. And real interest rates on federal debt are now above that number.

Discussions about debt sustainability are, however, oddly disconnected from the discourse about generative AI.

In fact, I'm pretty sure there are people warning both about a debt crisis and about mass unemployment from AI, although I haven't made the effort to track them down. But if optimistic estimates of the boost from the technology are at all right, growth will be much higher than 1.8% over the next decade, and debt won't be a big concern after all — especially because faster growth will boost revenue and reduce the budget deficit.

All of this is, of course, highly speculative. Nobody really knows how big an impact AI will have. But again, it doesn't have to be “true” artificial intelligence to be a big deal for the economy, and the best guess is that it will probably matter a lot.

— The New York Times

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Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
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LIFESTYLE

US Kenneth Noll, in the costume of the English naturalist, geologist and biologist Charles Robert Darwin, walks at the beach in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island in Galapagos, Ecuador. — AFP



LIFE

A Venezuelan migrant girl bathes in rain at a shelter in Paso Canoas, some 300 km south of San Jose, in Puntarenas Province, Costa Rica. — AFP



SINGER

French singer Najoua Laamri poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan attends a promotional event ahead of the 2023 ICC men cricket World Cup, in Mumbai. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

A boy performs fire breathing for mid-autumn celebrations at a village in the outskirts of Hanoi. — AFP

art & life

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Chef Faisal elevates Omani cuisine on the global stage

SIHAM AL SAIDI

Faisal al Saidi, a talented Omani chef, has embarked on a remarkable culinary journey that has taken the flavours of his homeland to international acclaim. His story is one of unwavering passion, relentless perseverance, and a deep-rooted love for the art of cooking.

Faisal's culinary odyssey began in his childhood, as he observed his mother expertly crafting traditional Omani dishes in their cozy kitchen. The captivating aromas of spices, the sizzle of pans, and the meticulous care put into each meal left an indelible mark on young Faisal. This early exposure ignited his culinary curiosity, prompting him to experiment with Omani recipes, infusing them with his unique twists. Little did he know that these humble beginnings would pave the way for him to compete in prestigious cooking contests around the world.

Driven by his unwavering passion, Faisal pursued a Bachelor's degree in Hospitality and Tourism, further expanding his culinary knowledge through online courses from around the globe. He swiftly transitioned into becoming a celebrated chef, a mentor to aspiring culinary talents, and a sought-after menu developer and consultant for numerous restaurants and cafes.

Faisal's breakthrough moment arrived when he decided to test his mettle in international cooking competitions. His mission was crystal clear — to

share the delectable flavours of Oman with the world and showcase the richness of Omani cuisine. Armed with authentic Omani recipes and his imaginative culinary prowess, he embarked on an epic culinary adventure.

One unforgettable highlight was his participation in the prestigious "International Culinary Challenge" in Paris. Faisal presented a unique creation that melded Omani spices with French cooking techniques. The judges were enthralled by the harmonious blend of flavours, awarding Faisal the top prize. His triumph not only brought honour to Oman, but also introduced the world to the exquisite realm of Omani cuisine. Reflecting on this momentous achievement, Faisal remarked, "When I competed in a pasta competition against a group of seasoned chefs, I incorporated the colours of Oman's flag — beetroot, eggs and a sauce infused with Omani spices like barbecue seasonings and our authentic Omani vinegar. The judges were eager to uncover the secret behind the mesmerising flavours of my pasta. It was then that I realised Oman's unique ingredients and flavours could leave an indelible mark anywhere."

Among Faisal's most exhilarating experiences was his participation in an international team cooking competition set in a challenging forest environment with harsh weather conditions. The teams had to make do with only agricultural equipment sourced from the environment. Faisal's team was tasked with

transforming a deer into a variety of dishes using inventive methods and flavours. Despite the odds, their resilience, honed through their experiences in Oman's rugged terrain, led them to victory.

Faisal's journey was not just about accolades; it was also about imparting his knowledge and passion for cooking to others. In Oman, he became a mentor, sharing the art of Omani cooking with aspiring chefs. His commitment to preserving traditional recipes while adding his own innovative twists inspired a new generation of chefs, eager to carry forward the Omani culinary legacy.

More than just a chef, Faisal al Saidi became a cultural ambassador. He graced food festivals and cultural events worldwide, introducing people to the captivating world of Omani cuisine. Through his culinary prowess, he built bridges between diverse cultures, fostering understanding among people from different backgrounds.

Despite achieving global acclaim, Chef Faisal remained deeply connected to his roots. He continued to frequent the local markets of Muscat, sourcing fresh ingredients from vendors he had known since his childhood. This unwavering dedication to quality and tradition imbued his dishes with an unforgettable authenticity.

In a world where traditions often fade, Chef Faisal al Saidi's journey serves as a powerful reminder that one person's passion can illuminate an entire culture. With his profound love for cooking, his relentless commit-



ment to preserving Omani flavours, and his zeal for teaching, Chef Faisal has left an indelible mark on the global culinary stage. His story underscores that the love for one's craft can unite people across borders through the universal language of food.

Faisal al Saidi's remarkable culinary voyage from Omani kitchens to international acclaim is a testament to love, dedication and the joy of cooking. His accomplishments have not only instilled pride in Oman, but have also shared the delightful tastes of Oman with the world. His narrative serves as an inspiration to chefs and food enthusiasts worldwide, illustrating that a passion for cooking can bridge divides and bring people from diverse backgrounds together through the enchantment of food.





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Green issues dominate Paris fashion for LV, Stella McCartney

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS tried to disrupt Louis Vuitton's event at Paris Fashion Week on Monday, while Britain's Stella McCartney made green technologies central to her own show as climate issues increasingly dominate the industry.

One of France's biggest YouTube stars, Jeremstar, was briefly arrested after dressing like a "dismembered snake" to protest Louis Vuitton's use of animal skins, outside the brand's show on the Champs-Elysees.

Activists also spray-painted the brand's nearby boutique, saying in a statement: "The deaths from climate precariousness are on their conscience."

Inside the venue, stars including Cate Blanchett and Zendaya seemed unconcerned and joined a standing ovation for artistic director Nicolas Ghesquiere's breezy spring-summer collection.

The bohemian-chic collection was full of airy skirts, loose shirts and pastel tones.

There were elaborate, though informal, suits of mini skirts and loose jackets, with white tights and arty heeled shoes.

Meanwhile, across town, Stella McCartney tried to give a more positive example, setting up a show-case for "cruelty-free and conscious material innovations".

The market stalls included several types of vegan leather, organic cotton and a seaweed-based yarn grown from regenerative kelp.

Getting these new technologies off the ground has proved difficult, however.

McCartney backed a US start-up,



Bolt Threads, that was considered a leader in mushroom-based leather, but it announced in July that it was halting production after failing to gather enough investment.

As for the clothes, some were inspired by her parents — Paul and Linda McCartney — during their time on tour with Wings in the 1970s, including ruffled shirts and crystal-encrusted waistcoats.

It was a highly varied collection, with a relaxed but high-end take on jeans and crottops, a sumptuous cape over a casual white tank top, and a silk gown gathered in two billowing balloon shapes around the shoulders.

McCartney said 95 per cent of the outfits were made from "responsible materials".

Blanchett was also present for that show, along with fellow Hollywood stars Robert Downey Jr and Chris Rock.

"The eclectic, ageless collection

blurs the lines between genders and generations —reinterpreting pieces from Stella's archive as well as those she borrowed from her parents, and (that) her daughters now borrow from her," the press release said.

Activists also targeted the Hermes show on Sunday.

The French brand had one of the prettiest stage designs, with guests nestled in a prairie of wildflowers and tall grasses.

But animal rights group PETA did not like its style and briefly interrupted the show, objecting to its use of crocodile skin.

Louis Vuitton has been targeted before.

An Extinction Rebellion protester gatecrashed its Paris catwalk two years ago, and members of the group spraypainted slogans including "Tax the Rich" on the Louis Vuitton Foundation art museum in May. — **AFP**

HOLLYWOOD

Striking Hollywood actors resume contract talks with studios, networks

NEGOTIATORS FOR STRIKING Hollywood actors resumed contract talks on Monday with representatives of major studios, television networks and streaming services, marking the first time the two sides have returned to the bargaining table since mid-July.

Renewed talks between the SAG-AFTRA actors union and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) came eight days after the produc-



ers clinched a separate contract deal with Hollywood writers, who launched their own strike on May 2, about 10 weeks before the actors.

"SAG-AFTRA and the AMPTP met for a full day bargaining session and have concluded," the two sides said in a joint statement at the end of the day. It said negotiations would resume on Wednesday.

No further details were immediately available. Both sides agreed to observe a news "black-out" during their talks.

The tentative accord reached Sept. 24 between the producers and the 11,500-member Writers Guild of America not only paved the way for ending their labour dispute three days later, it could serve as a template for settling the actors strike.

SAG-AFTRA, Hollywood's largest union, representing 160,000 television and film performers, walked off the job on July 14 demanding higher base wages and residual pay from streaming TV as well as restrictions on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in



entertainment.

The same issues were at the centre of the writers strike.

In the area of artificial intelligence, actors want to protect their images and work from being replaced by computer-generated "digital replicas."

At the same time, they are seeking compensation that reflects the value they bring to the relatively new frontier of streaming, specifically in the form of revenue sharing.

Other demands from actors include limits on self-taped auditions used in casting, which they argue are more costly to them

than in-person readings. They also demanding assurances of greater racial equity on the set, including provision of hair and makeup artists capable of working with varied hair textures and skin tones.

The resumption of contract talks between the actors and studios also coincided with network television's late-night hosts - Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers and Jimmy Kimmel - bringing their shows back to television on Monday. Comedian John Oliver returned to HBO's "Last Week Tonight" on Sunday.

— **Reuters**

FILM

South Korean migrant's tale to open Asia's biggest film festival



Children pose for photos next to large letters displayed for the 28th Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) at the Busan Cinema Centre in Busan on Wednesday. — AFP

THE WORLD PREMIERE of Jang Kun-jae's "Because I Hate Korea" will open Asia's largest film festival later in the night as it looks to rally from a year marked by scandal and budget cut-backs.

The South Korean director's tale of a disillusioned young woman who relocates to New Zealand is among 209 official entries from 69 countries set to unspool at the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), which runs until October 13.

Eighty will be making their world premieres in the southern port city.

This year's edition comes as organisers grapple with the fallout from former festival director Huh Moon-yung's resignation in May amid accusations of misconduct.

The scandal saw BIFF's 2023 budget reduced by about 10 per cent as sponsors withdrew in the wake of the allegations, according to organisers.

Kang Seung-ah, now serving as acting deputy director, acknowledged they had endured a "difficult phase" before assembling a lineup she said was "more substantial than ever before".

Director Jang, who noted he'd attended BIFF far more as an audience member than a film-maker, told a late afternoon news conference he had sought to address serious questions



Actor Joo Jong-hyuk speaks during a press conference at the Busan Cinema Centre in Busan on Wednesday. — AFP

with his film.

"I believe it's necessary to pay attention to the fact that many young people are finding it difficult to navigate through Korean society. I started questioning whether our society is providing a fair and equitable foundation for young people to pursue their dreams," he told reporters after a preview screening.

Based on the best-selling Chang Kang-myoung novel, "Because I Hate Korea" received support from BIFF's Asia Project Market back in 2016. South Korea has transformed itself into a cultural powerhouse since then thanks to the explosive success of the Oscar-winning "Parasite" and the Netflix series "Squid Game".

"Many people are now showing great interest in Korean content such as K-pop, K-movies, and

K-dramas. Living in such an era, they might develop a certain fantasy about South Korea, I think," Nam Dong-chul, the festival's acting interim director, told reporters.

But "I thought it might be good to consider these views from the perspective of people living in Korea and especially the youth in South Korea", he said of the opening night choice. "They might have different thoughts and experiences."

Frequent Bong Joon-ho collaborator Go Ah-sung, who delivered a memorable performance as the protagonist of "Because I Hate Korea", was unable to attend the festival due to a back injury.

STAR POWER

Despite Go's absence, the festival will still feature serious star power, with acclaimed Hong Kong actor

Chow Yun Fat scheduled to receive the Asian Filmmaker of the Year award.

Three of Chow's films — "A Better Tomorrow" (1986), "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000) and 2023's "One More Chance" — will be screened in his honour.

Other highly anticipated screenings include "Dear Jinri", a documentary that features late K-pop star Sulli's last and incomplete project.

Sulli, born Choi Jin-ri, took her own life in 2019 after a long struggle with online bullying. The film includes her final media interview, which has not been disclosed previously.

Korea's filmmaking diaspora will also be showcased with a special series of screenings that includes "Searching" (2018), starring John Cho, and director Celine Song's Sundance favourite "Past Lives".

Netflix's highly anticipated "Yellow Door: 90s Lo-fi Film Club" will also have its world premiere at BIFF.

The documentary spotlights South Korea's renowned cinephile generation of the 1990s, acclaimed "Parasite" director Bong among them.

"The Movie Emperor", director Ning Hao's satirical take on the Chinese film industry starring Hong Kong actor Andy Lau, is set to close the festival. — **AFP**



Japan startup develops 'Gundam'-like robot with \$3m price tag

TOKYO-BASED START-UP Tsubame Industries has developed a 4.5-metre-tall (14.8-feet), four-wheeled robot that looks like "Mobile Suit Gundam" from the wildly popular Japanese animation series, and it can yours for \$3 million.

Called ARCHAX after the avian dino-



saur archaeopteryx, the robot has cockpit monitors that receive images from cameras hooked up to the exterior so that the pilot can manoeuvre the arms and hands with joysticks from inside its torso.

The 3.5-ton robot, which will be unveiled at the Japan Mobility Show later this month, has two modes: the upright 'robot mode' and a 'vehicle mode' in which it can travel up to 10 km (6 miles) per hour.

"Japan is very good at animation,



games, robots and automobiles so I thought it would be great if I could create a product that compressed all these elements into one," said Ryo Yoshida, the 25-year-old chief executive of Tsubame Industries.

"I wanted to create something that says, 'This is Japan!'"

Yoshida plans to build and sell five of the machines for the well-heeled robot fan, but hopes the robot could one day be used for disaster relief or in the space industry.



Yoshida became interested in manufacturing at an early age, learning how to weld at his grandfather's ironworks and then going on to found a company that produces myoelectric prosthetic hands. He said he is eager to keep Japan's competitive edge in manufacturing alive.

"I hope to learn from previous generations and carry on the tradition," he said. — **Reuters**

