

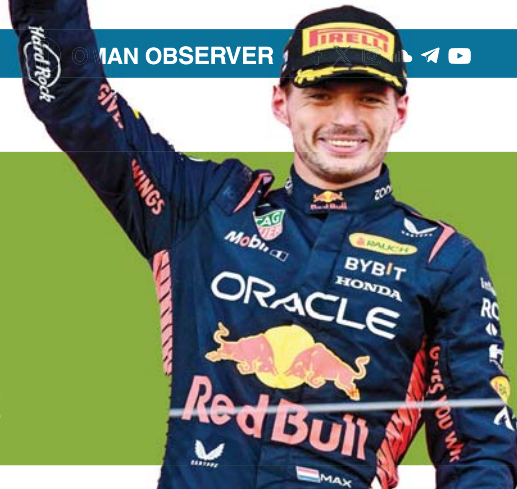
P15

OIL PRICES
STEADY AS RUSSIA
EASES FUEL
EXPORT BAN



P10

VERSTAPPEN
POWERS
RED BULL
TO TEAM TITLE



P19

THE 'TYRANNY
OF THINNESS'
STILL DOMINATES
FASHION



■ MUSCAT

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA DISCUSSED

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received at his office on Monday Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation and his delegation. Gen Al Numani underscored the depth of bilateral relations and their development in various areas of interest. For his part, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia expressed his appreciation for Oman's stances regarding regional and international issues.

DETAILS ON P3

DHOFAR TO WELCOME 400 TOURIST FLIGHTS

Around 400 chartered tourist flights from Europe, Russia and neighbouring countries are expected to touch down in Dhofar during the winter season, which will kick off in October. The governorate, with its beaches and historical sites, has become an attractive destination for tourists from Europe, with direct flights operating to Salalah Airport from several European countries. This is part of its strategy to promote the governorate as an ideal all-year round tourist destination because of its moderate weather, soft sandy beaches, mountains, valleys, deserts, caves and bays rich in aquatic life.

DETAILS ON P3

OPINION

P8



Julia Angwin

The internet is about to get much worse

P9



Lakshmi Kothaneth

Life can be delightful!

■ BIDS TO OPERATE AND MANAGE CASTLES



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism announced the opening of bids to submit competitive offers to manage, operate and utilise the castles of Al Hillah and Khandaq in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi, the Governorate of Al Buraimi. The ministry has set November 16 as the deadline to submit bidding documents. — ONA

Economy grows by 2.1 per cent

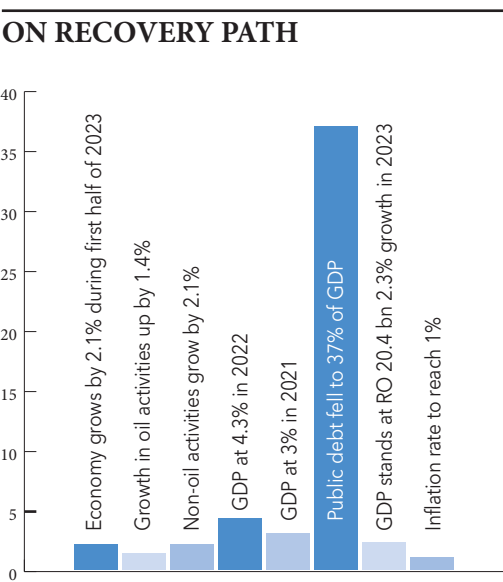
MUSCAT: Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, has affirmed the recovery of the Omani economy from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This, said the minister, reflects positive developments in the performance of overall indicators, as the economy witnessed a growth in fixed prices, amounting to 2.1 per cent during the first half of 2023.

During a media gathering organised by the Ministry of Economy on Monday, the minister said that this rise was driven by the growth achieved in oil activities by 1.4 per cent and in non-oil activities by 2.1 per cent.

PUBLIC DEBT

He said that the GDP at fixed prices witnessed positive growth rates during 2021 and 2022, amounting to 3 per cent and 4.3 per cent, respectively, in addition to positive developments in the performance of the trade balance and the performance of the financial sector. Moreover, the size of public debt, added the minister, decreased to about 37 per cent of the GDP, which was also reflected in the improvement of the credit rating by many agencies.

Dr Al Saqri pointed out that the policies espoused by the government contributed to



improving macroeconomic indicators, as the government prioritised reducing public debt, enhancing development spending and promoting an attractive investment environment to stimulate the performance of the national economy, in addition to rearranging priorities for sustainability and balance in public finance. These policies, said the minister, made it possible to benefit directly from the improvement in global energy prices.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, presented the first topic of the media gathering's presentation. He highlighted developments in the global and local economy and reviewed the global economy's future prospects. The under-secretary also touched on the burdens of global debt and the concern regarding controlling global inflation, as well as the issue of geo-economic competition and the impacts of climate change on the global economic scene.

GLOBAL INFLATION

Dr Al Maawali pointed out that according to July 2023 report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects growth rate to be at 3 per cent for 2023 and 2024. Global inflation rate is also expected to decrease to 6.8 per cent in 2023 and 5.2 per cent in 2024.

He stressed that the macroeconomic indicators of the national economy point out to improved economic growth paths, which in turn enables the Sultanate of Oman to enhance its competitive capabilities regionally and globally. The performance of most of the major economic sectors are progressing towards achieving the economic goals of Oman Vision 2040, he said. **SEE ALSO P13**

Oman flays desecration of copies of the Holy Quran in the Netherlands

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its strong condemnation of the persistent desecration of copies of the Holy Quran by a group of extremists in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The desecration of the holy book took place in front of embassies in 'The Hague. Oman voiced its rejection of such repeated provocations of Muslims' feelings and sacrilege of their sanctities, noting that such acts constitute an incitement to violence and hatred. A statement to this effect was issued today by the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman, which reiterated its plea to the international community to take a more solid stance by criminalising all acts that incite hatred and hostility towards religions and cultures. Oman stressed that such acts contradict the values of peaceful coexistence and tolerance among communities, thus posing an obstacle to building a world where peace and mutual respect prevail.

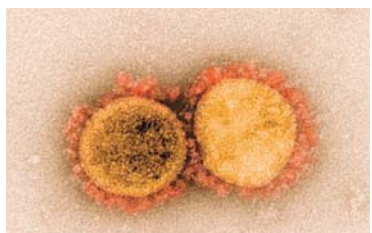
Recently, Muslim leaders addressing the United Nations berated the West over burnings of the holy book, denouncing the acts protected as free speech as discriminatory. — ONA

Anti-Covid drug may have led to virus mutations: study

PARIS: An anti-Covid drug widely used across the world may have caused mutations in the virus, researchers said on Monday, but there was no evidence that the changes had led to more dangerous variants.

Pharmaceutical giant Merck's antiviral pill molnupiravir was one of the earliest treatments rolled out during the pandemic to prevent Covid becoming more severe in vulnerable people.

The drug, which is taken orally over a five-day course, works



Researchers sifted through databases of more than 15 million genome sequences of Sars-CoV-2.

mainly by creating mutations in the virus with the goal of weakening and killing it.

However, a new UK-led study

has shown that molnupiravir "can give rise to significantly mutated viruses which remain viable," lead author Theo Sanderson said.

NO EVIDENCE

Sanderson, a geneticist at London's Francis Crick Institute, emphasised that there is no evidence that "molnupiravir has to date created more transmissible or more virulent viruses."

None of the variants that have swept the world were due to the drug, he added. — AFP

Egypt presidential vote on Dec 10-12

CAIRO: Egypt will hold a presidential vote on December 10-12, election officials said on Monday.

President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, a former army chief in power for nearly a decade, has yet to formally announce his candidacy, but state-aligned media has already published messages of support from pro-government entities.

Sisi, 68, was first elected in 2014, the year after he led the ouster of president Mohamed Mursi, and then won a 2018 vote in a landslide against one of his own supporters.

Only two other candidates



Judge Walid Hassan Hamza, Chairman of Egypt's National Election Authority and Vice President of the Cassation Court, speaks during a press conference in Cairo. — AFP

have so far declared their intention to run this time, including opposition politician Ahmed al Tantawi.

The election had initially been

expected in the spring of 2024.

Some experts have said it was moved forward to schedule it ahead of a possible switch to a flexible exchange rate that could exacerbate social tensions in the country of 105 million.

The vote will be held "on December 10, 11 and 12," said National Election Authority chairman Judge Walid Hassan Hamza.

Hopefuls can apply from October, with the candidate list to be finalised by November 9. The campaign period runs until November 29 and the winner will be announced on December 18. — AFP



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Royal Office Minister receives Secretary of Russia’s Security Council

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Monday Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation and his accompanying delegation.

The meeting came within the framework of the attention accorded by the Sultanate of Oman to recent regional and international issues.

Gen Al Numani underscored the depth of bilateral relations and their development in various areas of interest.

For his part, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman’s stances regarding regional and international issues, as well as Oman’s active roles in tackling these issues.



The meeting of Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office and Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation came within the framework of the attention accorded by the Sultanate of Oman to recent regional and international issues. — ONA

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the march of relations between Oman and Russia in various fields and

means of promoting them to achieve joint interests. They also discussed several matters of mutual concern.

The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS CLEANLINESS AND RECYCLING

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Environment Authority hosted a symposium on public cleanliness as part of the of ‘Be Careful’ campaign under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

The primary objective of the symposium was to promote awareness about preservation and the significance of maintaining the pristine aspects of the environment.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the EA, emphasised that the public cleanliness symposium is the culmination of tireless efforts invested by government bodies, private organisations, and individuals participating in the Be Careful campaign. He highlighted the visible evidence of Oman’s progress in public cleanliness, infrastructure, and the shared commitment of individuals and society towards maintaining a



The Environment Authority hosted a symposium on public cleanliness as part of the of ‘Be Careful’ campaign whose primary objective was to promote awareness about preservation pristine aspects of the environment. — ONA

clean environment.

Dr Al Amri stressed Oman’s dedication to environmental safety, pollution mitigation, and preservation of environment in alignment with sustainable development goals. He cited numerous policies, strategies, laws, and regulations formulated across various environmental domains, demonstrating Oman’s steadfast commitment to environmental responsibility.

Dr Al Amri outlined the national waste management

strategy and environmental legislation. The agency strives to establish an environmentally effective and economically feasible system, recognising waste as a national asset that can be harnessed through resource recovery.

“The number of waste recycling factories reached 67 factories, and the percentage of recycled waste reached 31 per cent of the total waste produced and collected in engineering landfills,” Dr Al Amri said.

Dr Al Amri said EA was keen to activate the National Waste Management Register. It includes monitoring, recording and following up on the collection, transport of waste from various sources and its safe disposal in specialised facilities..

The symposium featured a comprehensive review of the Be Careful public cleanliness campaign, utilising three key elements—clean air, clean land, and clean sea — to convey impactful messages and promote social behaviours to achieve better public cleanliness.

Professor Yamada Miki, former Minister of State for the Environment in Japan, and Secretary-General of the Japanese-Omani Parliamentary Committee, shared insights from Japan in promoting public hygiene and building cleaner cities.

Koike Yuriko, Tokyo Governor, spoke via video conferencing on the Japanese capital’s strategies to tackle air and water pollution; the Clear Sky Project in Tokyo; and the role of education in dealing with waste.

400 tourist flights to land in Dhofar for winter season

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

About 400 chartered tourist flights from Europe, Russia and neighbouring countries will touch down in Dhofar during the winter season, which will kick off in October. The governorate, with its beaches and historical sites, has become an attractive destination for tourists from Europe, with direct flights operating to Salalah Airport from several European countries.

This is part of its strategy to promote the governorate as an ideal all-year round tourist destination because of its moderate weather, soft sandy beaches, mountains, valleys, deserts, caves and bays rich in aquatic life. This will also help Dhofar economy to maintain the momentum as busy khareef makes way for other tourism seasons.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is meeting with stakeholders to identify challenges and resolve them.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, earlier said this year’s khareef season’s results were encouraging due to better facilities. “Work is being done to maintain the governorate’s attractiveness during the winter season through joint promotion and support for charter airlines from Europe. There are plans to operate charter flights from other countries for the first time.”

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism worked with Dhofar Municipality and the Omran Group to develop several tourism projects, which had a significant impact on the availability of services and facilities and the diversity in the number of events during Khareef Dhofar season.

OVER 900,000 VISITORS TO KHAREEF DHOFAR
The Khareef tourist season in Dhofar Governorate drew 924,000



visitors this year, a 17 per cent increase on the previous year.

HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, said: “The increase in visitors number came as a result of great efforts and integrated action by various sectors and employees who worked around the clock to ensure the readiness of service facilities in different wilayats and areas of Dhofar Governorate. They made sure to provide entertaining, cultural and social events that targeted all segments of tourists.”

His Highness affirmed the tourism in Dhofar is not restricted to one season as the governorate boasts fine weather all around the year. He noted that the governorate witnessed varied activities that targeted children, women and young people.

The governor of Dhofar praised small and medium enterprises, volunteers and job-seekers for the efforts they exerted and the initiatives they presented to make the season a success. He also hailed the Royal Oman Police (ROP) for ensuring order and security and easing traffic on Dhofar roads.

HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, valued the role of media which, he said, had an important role in the success of the season expressing his thanks to all media outlets and social media celebrities from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman for the high-quality media coverage they provided to the during the season.

■ COMMANDER OF QATARI EMIRI GUARD ARRIVES IN OMAN



MUSCAT: Lt Gen Hazza Khalil Al Shahwani, Commaner of the Emiri Guard of the State of Qatar and his accompanying delegation arrived on Monday on an official visit that lasts several days. Upon his arrival, the Qatari commander was greeted at Muscat International Airport by Maj Gen Salim bin Ali al Hosni, Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) and several RGO senior officers. — ONA

Conference focuses on children’s creativity and skills

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Oman Childhood Conference and Expo being held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre is focusing on intellectual giftedness in children with and how to support them to reach their full potential.

The three-day conference has brought together experts from Oman, Arab and international countries.

In her opening speech, HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for International Relations at Sultan Qaboos University and the Chairperson of Children First Association, said that minds of children are full of creativity. She said experts have gathered to discuss



Oman Childhood Conference and Expo has brought together experts from Oman, Arab and international countries to discuss modern strategy for giftedness. — ONA

modern strategy for giftedness. “Gifted children are very important and we should find the best ways to support them,” she said, adding that the theory of giftedness will be looked into,” she said.

The conference will have presentations of 40 papers and 17

workshops in addition to training sessions and recommendations. About 50 exhibitors are participating at the expo repressing public and private sectors in the fields education, health and environment.

The conference is also looking at

using mentoring to help youth and young adults across the STEM

Talent Development Pipeline. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is an umbrella term used to group together the distinct but related technical disciplines of science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics.

According to Prof Dr Albert Ziegler, Chair Professor of Educational Psychology and Research on Excellence at the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen, Germany, an enormous pool of untapped and underdeveloped talent and ingenuity exists within science, technology, engineering mathematics and medical sciences (STEMM).

A highly promising avenue of educational intervention for helping unlock youth’s and young adults’ potential in STEMM domains is mentoring because it offers an individualised means of supporting the learners that can attend to individual learner’s specific developmental stage and

skill level as well as their interests and goals.

Self regulation for learning is another topic that is being addressed- helping students learn how to learn. As per Dr Richard M Cash from nRich Educational Consulting, Inc from USA, critical for college and career readiness are students personal abilities to appropriately manage their affect, behaviour and cognition (ABCs).

Self registration for learning is the ability to effectively balance the ABCs to pursue worthy academic goals. Students who under-perform, struggle to achieve or selectively produce May lack coordination between their feelings (affect), potential learning strategies (behaviours) and Mets- cognitive thought process (imagination).



WE ARE REVOLUTIONISING
HEALTH CARE
SMARTWATCHES



SWIMMING



SLEEP



CYCLING

HEALTH AT HAND

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

THE integration of wearable devices, particularly smartwatches, into our daily routines has been remarkable with such gadgets becoming an integral part of people's lives, offering an extensive array of features that cater to their well-being.

Among their impressive capabilities, smartwatches stand out for their capacity to monitor various aspects of health including tracking heart rate, monitoring sleep patterns, and counting steps which have transformed these devices into invaluable tools for those striving to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Abdulrahman al Maamari, a dedicated smartwatch user, exemplifies just how deeply these devices have embedded themselves in our daily lives. For him, his smartwatch is not merely an alarm clock but a vital companion in his quest for health and fitness.

The satisfaction he derives from achieving a minimum of 10,000 steps during his working hours speaks volumes about the motivational impact of these devices.

Beyond step counts, his watch proves invaluable during afternoon workouts, effectively tracking water consumption, prompting well-timed breaks, and meticulously recording exercise distances and durations.

Abdullah shared a similar reliance on his smartwatch, emphasising its role in shaping his daily routine. He emphasises the real-time feedback that these devices provide, serving as constant motivators to maintain activity levels, meet fitness goals, and avoid the pitfalls of prolonged sitting.

Dr Lamya al Waeli also underscores the enduring advantages of smartwatches in health management. She said their ability to analyse data over extended periods yields critical insights into long-term health trends, providing users with a holistic view of their well-being.

In some advanced models, features like ECG and blood oxygen level monitoring offer early warnings of potential health issues, further enhancing the watch's value as a health companion.

The rapid growth in the popularity of smartwatches has not gone unnoticed by communication companies. In response, these companies are engaged in a competitive race to continually update and enhance the features, design, and functionality of these devices.

The forthcoming releases are expected to come equipped with more powerful processors, promising improved battery life and operational efficiency. As a result, the evolution of smartwatches continues, ensuring they remain at the forefront of our efforts to live healthier, more connected lives.



Forty participants graduate from National Collaborative Leadership Programme

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, forty participants graduated from the National Collaborative Leadership Programme.

The programme, which includes leaders from both the government and private sectors, equips participants with advanced and modern leadership experiences that embrace new developments in business in the Sultanate of Oman. The graduation ceremony was held in the presence of Dr Ali bin Qasim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, as well as a number of Their Highnesses, Excellencies, CEOs, and officials from both sectors.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy of Management, congratulated the graduates of the National Collaborative Leadership Programme, which, he said, the government views with great interest



as it promotes building partnerships between the government and private sector in planning and implementation. This approach aligns with modern global developments that prioritise partnership to achieve sustainability in line with the radical transformations in business economics.

These transformations emphasise the role of data, models, and scenarios to create

the desired economic development impact. To achieve a balanced transformation in both government and private institutions, it is necessary to empower and integrate the capabilities of administrative and executive leadership in both sectors, driven by the needs of economic development and aligned with the new development model.

He added that realising Oman Vision

2040, the national vision, requires an application of the knowledge acquired from the National Collaborative Leadership Programme, working tirelessly, and perceiving challenges as incentives rather than obstacles. He also stated that, "Momentum of collaboration between government and private sector leaders must be maintained as we are all one team

on the same path, working towards the same goal. Integrating the efforts of both sectors is crucial to improving the business environment and achieving national goals. It is also important to build practical bridges to ensure that development plans reflect the aspirations of the private sector and provide solutions to the challenges it faces." Dr Ali bin Qasim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, stated that as global transformations in business become more profound and reliant on technology, data, information, artificial intelligence, and business innovation, it is essential to be guided by real market needs and satisfy beneficiaries.

He also added that the National Collaborative Leadership Programme was implemented in partnership with leading international institutions, including Said Business School at the University of Oxford and the International Institute for Management Development (IMD).

Batinah North launches award to empower, support youth

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 25

To foster entrepreneurship and empower the youth, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, the Governor of Al Batinah North, announced the launch of Al Batinah North Entrepreneurship Award that aims to recognise and support young entrepreneurs, ultimately contributing to the economic and social growth of the region.

At a press conference held at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar, Al Kindi revealed the details of the award, which will culminate in the announcement of winners in late December this year. The



Al Batinah North Entrepreneurship Award that aims to recognise and support young entrepreneurs, was announced in Suhar on Monday

event was attended by dignitaries, elders, media professionals, journalists, and representatives of media, websites, and social media.

The award's logo, symbolising the continuous growth of trade and the economy in Al

Batinah North Governorate, was revealed at the conference. Al Kindi emphasised that entrepreneurship is a collective responsibility, not limited to any specific entity or organisation. He stressed the importance of guiding young individuals to

become productive citizens and ambassadors for their country and nation.

"Today, we are coming together to provide a building block that encourages young entrepreneurs in Al Batinah North Governorate to have a positive impact and become proficient ambassadors in their fields," he said.

Al Batinah North Governorate Entrepreneurship Award seeks to inspire and motivate young entrepreneurs, enabling them to excel and serve as role models. It also aims to highlight the success stories of entrepreneurs and provide a platform for them to showcase their work, benefiting other young people seeking employment and self-realisation.



The screening of promotional films during the Riyadh International Book Fair 2023 represents another dynamic aspect of the ministry's participation

Toursim ministry to showcase Oman at Riyadh Book Fair

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's active participation in the Riyadh International Book Fair 2023 as the guest of honour within the Sultanate of Oman's exhibition area represents a multifaceted and comprehensive approach.

The ministry's engagement during the event, which spans from September 28 to October 7, 2023, underscores their commitment to promoting Oman's cultural heritage and tourist attractions.

One of the primary facets of their involvement is the introduction of their diverse range of scientific and specialised publications in the field of cultural heritage.

This initiative not only emphasises the ministry's dedication to scholarly research

but also serves as a platform for sharing valuable insights into Oman's rich cultural heritage with a broader audience.

In addition to academic publications, the ministry is actively engaged in the dissemination of tourist brochures and informational materials.

These materials play a crucial role in showcasing Oman's breathtaking tourist destinations, making them more accessible and inviting to visitors. This effort aligns with the Sultanate of Oman's broader strategy to promote tourism and cultural exchange.

The screening of promotional films during the event represents another dynamic aspect of the ministry's participation. These films serve as a visual window into the Sultanate of Oman's diverse and captivating tourist attractions.

The Royal Opera House Muscat ready to mesmerise



MUSCAT : The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced that the start of the new season is packed with exciting musical performances filling the calendar from September 2023 to May 2024. The dazzling opera which will open the season with traditional elegance and fanfare is The Barber of Seville from popular composer Gioacchino Rossini. Season 2023-2024 is built from an amazing variety of shows. Entitled Stars, Legends, Dreams, the season encompasses the best star artists of the world, an homage to incredible legendary singers we all know and love, with wonderful storytelling and humour, and finally, dreams to enjoy from which to create our own aspirations and fire the imagination.

Malayalam movie director to grace cultural event on Oct 6

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Malayalam movie director K Madhu, who is known for his CBI series, will be the chief guest of 'Layam 2023' cultural event by Haripad Kootayma to be held on at Al Falaj Hotel October 6.

Speaking to media, the organisers of the Haripad Kootayma said that a plethora of socio-cultural events awaits the audience.

"The main attraction of the three-hour musical evening will be a music concert led by renowned playback singer Vidhu Prathap and his team. Apart from that, various art programmes presented by group artistes are in store," the organisers

informed. Haripad community, a group of Haripad residents of Kartha taluk of Alappuzha district, was formed in 2013 and has been active in the field of philanthropy and social work. The Haripad Association, now in its 10th year, has grown in its chosen path by extending a helping hand to the society all this while.

"In 2018, we were able to lend a helping hand to those affected by the unexpected floods in the state. It is also worth mentioning that the leadership of the association has been at the forefront of providing necessary assistance to the people who experienced difficulties during Covid-19 pandemic in Oman," the organisers said.



Organisers of the Haripad Kootayma said the main attraction of the three-hour musical evening will be a music concert led by renowned playback singer Vidhu Prathap and his team.



Libya orders arrest of 8 officials after flood disaster

TRIPOLI: Libya’s prosecutor general has ordered the arrest of eight officials as part of his inquiry into the recent flood disaster that killed thousands, his office said on Monday.

The flash flood, which witnesses likened to a tsunami, broke through two ageing dams on September 10 after a hurricane-strength storm lashed the area around Derna, a port city in Libya’s east.

The officials are suspected of “bad management” and negligence, among other offences, a statement from the prosecutor general’s office said, adding that seven of them served currently or previously in offices responsible for water resources and dam management.

“The mistakes that they made” and their “negligence in the matter of disaster prevention” contributed to the catastrophe, the statement charged.

Derna’s mayor Abdulmonem al-Ghaithi, sacked after the flood, is among the detainees.

Almost 3,900 people died in the disaster, according to the latest official toll, and international aid groups have said 10,000 or more people may be missing.

After opening a probe, Libya’s



A view shows destroyed buildings in the aftermath of the deadly storm that hit Derna, Libya. — Reuters file photo

prosecutor general Al-Seddik al-Sur said more than a week ago that the two dams upstream from Derna had been cracked since

1998. But repairs begun by a Turkish company in 2010 were suspended after a few months when Libya’s

2011 revolution flared, and the work never resumed.

According to his office, the investigation is focused on a dam

maintenance contract reached between the Turkish firm and Libya’s water department.

After the flood, hundreds of

protesters rallied in Derna on September 18, accusing authorities of neglect and calling for “a speedy investigation and legal action” against those responsible for the disaster.

The prosecutor general’s statement said the mayor is suspected of “abuse of power and bad management of funds allocated to city development”.

Politicians and analysts say the chaos in Libya since 2011 has left much of its vital infrastructure dilapidated.

The first dam to collapse in the disaster was the Abu Mansur dam, 13 kilometres from Derna, whose reservoir held 22.5 million cubic metres of water.

The deluge then broke Al Bilad, the second dam, which had a capacity of 1.5 million cubic metres and is just a kilometre from the coastal city.

The wall of water and debris swept through the normally dry riverbed or wadi that cuts through the city centre.

Both dams were built by a Yugoslav company in the 1970s, “not to collect water but to protect Derna from floods”, Sour said earlier. — AFP

Thai police raid top officer’s home in ‘Betflix’ probe

BANGKOK: Thai police swooped on the home of one of the kingdom’s most high-profile officers on Monday as part of a series of raids targeting an illegal online network dubbed “Betflix”.

Most forms of betting are illegal in Thailand, with authorities striving recently to shut down the illicit sites, often foreign-owned, that have sprung up.

A sprawling investigation across six provinces saw SWAT teams raid some 30 locations — including Deputy National Police Chief Surachate Hakparn’s central Bangkok house.

Surachate, well known in Thailand for his regular appearances in the media giving updates on investigations, denied any involvement in the alleged ring.

“I’m not worried at all, because I’m not involved in this and I can answer any question,” he told reporters outside his home while the raid was under way.

Police Major General Trairong Phiwan said the raids stemmed from a probe into a website called “Betflix” and 12 subsidiary sites.

Later on Monday he told local media that of 23 suspects, 17 had



Thailand’s deputy national police chief Surachate speaks during a press conference at the Crime Suppression Division in Bangkok. — AFP file photo

been arrested, including eight police officers.

Officers conducting the raid on Surachate’s house said they were unaware whose residence it was.

Known by the nickname “Big Joke” — for his seniority, not his sense of humour — Surachate insisted the search warrant for his home was “irregular” and hinted at rivalries within the force.

“Today I see this as nothing more than internal politics within the police,” he said.

The raid comes only a few days before the selection of a new police chief, with Surachate touted as a possible candidate.

The long-serving officer has been linked to powerful figures in the previous government.

He was appointed by ex-deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwan as chief of the Immigration Bureau in September 2018.

He disappeared in 2019 over unclear reasons, before then-prime minister Prayut Chan-ocha made him a special adviser on strategy to police in 2021.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who took office last month, told reporters he was monitoring the situation.

— AFP

Petition against felling trees in historic Tokyo park area

TOKYO: Campaigners filed a fresh petition with almost 225,000 signatures on Monday against plans to fell large numbers of trees and tear down a historic baseball stadium in a rare green area of central Tokyo.

Lush with trees donated to honour Emperor Meiji a century ago, Meiji Jingu Gaien offers respite and shade — Japan saw its hottest recorded summer this year — in one of the world’s biggest urban areas.

The park area is also home to Jingu Stadium where US baseball star Babe Ruth wowed spectators in 1934 and where celebrated Japanese author Haruki Murakami says he was inspired to become a writer.

According to the petition submitted on Monday to the government, 1,000 trees will be cut down. The new baseball stadium will also endanger a boulevard of ginkgo trees, just six metres away, whose stunning autumn leaves attract huge crowds, campaigners say.

“These are all huge beautiful trees,” said Rochelle Kopp, a



People take part in a protest against the Tokyo metropolitan government redevelopment project for the Meiji Jingu Gaien district in Tokyo. — AFP file photo

management consultant who organised the petition — one of several — and who is also involved in a lawsuit against the project.

“The online petition numbers continue to grow because the more members of the public learn the details of the plan, the more people are unhappy about this plan to cram as many skyscrapers as possible into a small space and forever change a beloved landscape,” Kopp said.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) this month put the number of

trees in danger at around 3,000 in a “heritage alert” issued by the advisory body to Unesco.

The redevelopment “will lead to the complete destruction of the urban forest that has been formed and nurtured over the past 100 years,” ICOMOS said.

“Urban parks are places for people’s recreation and also contribute to maintaining rich biodiversity. They mitigate the heat island effect in cities and provide shelter in case of natural disasters such as major earthquakes,” it said in a statement. — AFP

BAMAKO

Junta delays February presidential election

Mali’s ruling junta on Monday announced a delay to a presidential election scheduled for February that was aimed at returning civilian leaders to power. The two rounds of voting — initially set for February 4 and 18, 2024 — “will be slightly postponed for technical reasons”, government spokesman Abdoulaye Maiga said in a statement.

Those reasons include issues linked to the adoption this year of a new constitution and a review of the electoral lists.



He also cited a dispute with French company Idemia, which the junta says is involved in the census process. Authorities are also refusing to organise legislative elections, initially scheduled for the end of 2023, before the presidential election. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia boosts China palm oil exports

Malaysia will increase palm oil exports to China by 500,000 tonnes a year as it faces pressure from new European Union restrictions targeting deforestation, a senior minister said on Monday. The trading bloc introduced new rules this year that ban goods from land that has been deforested.

Malaysia’s Plantation and Commodities Minister Fadillah Yusof said that his country was now upping exports to China, a major importer of



the commodity. The increase is the result of a deal between Malaysian-headquartered palm oil product firm Sime Darby Oils International and Chinese state-owned Guangxi Beibu Gulf International Port Group.

— AFP

PORT SUDAN

Hundreds dead from dengue fever in Sudan

Outbreaks of dengue fever and acute watery diarrhoea have “killed hundreds” in war-torn Sudan, medics reported on Monday, warning of “catastrophic spreads” that could overwhelm the country’s decimated health system.

The Sudanese doctors’ union warned that the health situation in the southeastern state of Gedaref, on the border with Ethiopia, “is deteriorating at a horrific rate”, with thousands infected with dengue fever.



80 per cent of the country’s hospitals are out of service, according to the United Nations. This year, with Gedaref hosting over 250,000 internally displaced persons according to the UN, the situation is much worse. — AFP



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In brief

■ BERLIN



SCHOLZ AIMS HIGH ON GREEN JET FUEL OUTPUT

Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday set out Germany's ambitions to become a strategic production centre for sustainable jet fuel and to lure investment to build on its importance as one of aerospace group Airbus' manufacturing centres.

German energy firm HH2E announced a joint venture with logistics giant DHL and South Africa's Sasol to explore hydrogen-powered SAF production in Germany.

Scholz told delegates at the National Aviation Conference in Hamburg on Monday the EU targets would be challenging for companies and that it was crucial they did not distort competition in the event other non-EU countries have less rigorous targets. — Reuters

■ ROME



MAFIA BOSS MESSINA DENARO DIES IN HOSPITAL

Sicilian Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, captured in January after three decades on the run, died on Monday in hospital in central Italy.

L'Aquila mayor Pierluigi Biondi confirmed the mobster's death in hospital "following a worsening of his illness".

His death "puts the end to a story of violence and blood", Biondi told the ANSA news agency. He thanked prison and hospital staff for their "professionalism and humanity".

It was "the epilogue of an existence lived without remorse or repentance, a painful chapter in the recent history of our nation". — AFP

■ PARIS



TRIAL OPENS FOR SUSPECT IN POLICE KILLINGS

A French court opened a trial on Monday against the suspected accomplice of the man who in 2016 killed a couple, both police officers, at home outside Paris in front of their child.

Mohamed Lamine Aberouz, 30, is accused of complicity in killing a public official, terrorist conspiracy and complicity in illegal detention, with the maximum penalty life in prison.

Wearing a white T-shirt, with long hair tied back and a beard without moustache, he confirmed his name to the packed courtroom before the plaintiffs' statements.

The defendant has maintained his innocence since he was charged in 2017. — AFP

Russian air strikes on Ukraine kill four, damage port facilities

KYIV: Russian air strikes killed four people in Ukraine and caused "significant damage" to infrastructure at the Black Sea port of Odesa and to grain storage facilities, Ukrainian officials said on Monday.

The attacks were part of an air campaign that has made it harder for major grain producer Ukraine to export its products since Moscow quit a deal in mid-July that had enabled Black Sea shipments and helped combat a global food crisis.

The strikes have intensified as Kyiv presses on with a counteroffensive in the south and east that has made slow gains but could be boosted by the delivery of US-made Abrams tanks, announced on Monday by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

"Another massive attack on Odesa!", Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said on X. "The attack resulted in the destruction of grain storage facilities and significant damage to the seaport."

Oleh Kiper, the Odesa region governor, said the facilities that were hit had contained almost 1,000 tonnes of grain and that the bodies of two men were found under the rubble of a warehouse where grain was stored. Ukraine's military said 19 drones and 11 cruise missiles were shot down overnight, most of them directed at Odesa region. The grain storage facilities that were destroyed were hit by two supersonic missiles, it said.



This photograph taken in the Odesa region in southern Ukraine shows an industrial building damaged after a Russian attack. — AFP

The energy ministry said damage to power grids cut off power to more than 1,000 consumers in the Odesa region, a reminder of air strikes that at times left millions of Ukrainians without heating and light in the freezing cold last winter.

A man aged 73 and a woman of 70 were killed in a separate air

strike on the town of Beryslav in the southern Kherson region, officials said.

Zelenskiy said Abrams tanks had already arrived in Ukraine and were being prepared for action.

"I am grateful to our allies for fulfilling the agreements! We are looking for new contracts and expanding our supply geography,"

said Zelenskiy, who visited the US last week.

Ukraine's counterattack has included stepping up its attacks which Moscow says have hit targets in Russia and Crimea, the peninsula seized and annexed by Moscow in 2014.

The Russian Defence Ministry said on Monday its air defences

had shot down drones over the northwestern part of the Black Sea, over Crimea, and over the Russian regions of Kursk and Belgorod regions.

Kyiv did not comment on the Russian reports, and Moscow offered no comment on the air strikes in Ukraine.

— Reuters

Kosovo police enter northern village after shootout



Kosovo police officers display weapons and military equipment seized in the village of Banjska, in Mitrovica. — AFP

JOSEVIK: Kosovar police units in armoured vehicles moved in to secure and search a village in north Kosovo on Monday, a day after four people were killed in a shootout between police and ethnic Serb gunmen in the restive region.

The gunmen stormed the village of Banjska on Sunday, battling police and barricading themselves into a Serbian Orthodox monastery. Police retook the monastery late on Sunday, after three attackers and one police officer were killed.

Armed police searched houses in the village on Monday, looking for any gunmen who had not fled, a police source told Reuters. The village remained sealed off to journalists on Monday morning.

On Monday the United States condemned attacks on police and urged the governments of Kosovo, a former Serbian province with a 90% ethnic Albanian majority, and Serbia to defuse tensions.

Kremlin spokesman

Dmitry Peskov said Russia was monitoring the "tense and potentially dangerous" situation in Kosovo.

Although ethnic Albanians comprise the great majority of Kosovo's 1.8 million people, some 50,000 Serbs in its north reject Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence and regard Belgrade as their capital, more than two decades after a Kosovo Albanian guerrilla uprising against Serbian rule.

"From yesterday, nothing can be the same anymore," Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said at a ceremony honouring the Kosovo police officer who was killed in the incident.

"Afrim Bunjaku was killed during an attack on Kosovo policemen and on our state itself by a group of heavily armed and heavily equipped, professionally trained and planned, politically supported, materially financed and logistically supported by Serbia," Kurti said. — Reuters

Thousands flee into Armenia after Azerbaijan retakes enclave

GORIS: Thousands of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh streamed into Armenia on Monday, as the leaders of Azerbaijan and ally Türkiye hailed Baku's victory over the rebel enclave at a summit.

While Azerbaijan showcased its regional alliances, Russia hit back at embattled Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after he blamed Moscow for the swift defeat of the breakaway territory.

Several days after the fighting, the first refugees arrived in Armenia on Sunday and 6,650 people have so far entered, Yerevan said on Monday.

Refugees were crowding into a humanitarian hub set up in a local theatre in the city of Goris to register for transport and housing.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars in the last three decades over Nagorno-Karabakh, a majority ethnic Armenian enclave within the internationally recognised border of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan launched a lightning operation on September 19 to seize control of the territory, forcing the separatists to lay down their arms under the terms of a ceasefire agreed the following day.

It followed a nine-month blockade of the region by Baku that caused shortages of key supplies.

Azerbaijan's state media said officials held a second



Refugees wait after crossing the border and arriving at a registration centre of the Armenian Foreign Affairs Ministry, near the border town of Kornidzor. — AFP

round of peace talks with Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian community aimed at "reintegrating" them.

But on the road heading to Armenia, more and more residents from the region appeared to be trying to get out as the witnesses said cars were snarling up in traffic.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lauded Baku's "historic success" at a meeting with Azerbaijan's leader Ilham Aliyev in the country's western enclave of Nakhichevan. "The window of opportunity has opened to settle the situation in the region. This opportunity must not be missed," Erdogan said.

Aliyev vowed that the rights of ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region would be "guaranteed".

"Karabakh's residents — regardless their ethnicity — are citizens of Azerbaijan," he said.

Armenia's premier on Sunday sought to deflect blame for the outcome on long-standing ally Russia, signalling a breakdown in the countries' security pact.

In nationally televised comments, the Armenian leader said the security agreements between the two countries had proved "insufficient", suggesting he would seek new alliances.

Moscow on Monday slammed Pashinyan's comments in an angry broadside.

"The leadership in Yerevan is making a huge mistake by deliberately trying to destroy Armenia's multifaceted and centuries-old ties with Russia," Russia's foreign ministry said.

— AFP

Ukraine: Weariness amidst solidarity



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

Ukrainian President Zelensky’s recent visit to the US, the UN, and Canada yielded positive results, as he successfully secured crucial military and financial support for Ukraine. Yet, amid this backdrop of cooperation and solidarity, a kind of weariness appears to be setting in within the Western world when it comes to the ongoing Ukraine crisis.

Zelensky’s diplomatic pilgrimage was orchestrated with precision, and the outcomes were on the whole favourable for Ukraine. The US, long a stalwart supporter of Ukraine’s sovereignty, reaffirmed its commitment with a bolstered aid package, signalling solidarity with the embattled country. The UN, that venerable forum for international discourse, provided a stage for Zelensky to articulate Ukraine’s grievances and elicit global sympathy. Canada, too, pledged its unwavering support, demonstrating that the echoes of the Ukraine conflict resonate far beyond the European continent. However, beneath the veneer of camaraderie and support lies a subtle undercurrent of fatigue — a feeling that, while not openly acknowledged, is beginning to cast a shadow over the Western world’s response to the Ukraine

crisis. It is akin to the weariness one experiences after a prolonged theatrical production, where the initial enthusiasm and passion have given way to a more subdued sentiment.

This fatigue stems from the relentless nature of the crisis, which has been a fixture of international headlines for years. The West has shouldered the burden of maintaining sanctions, providing aid, and engaging in diplomatic wrangling with Russia. The ceaseless debates, negotiations, and posturing have apparently started taking a toll on the collective patience of Western leaders. The West is acutely aware that finding a resolution that satisfies all parties is a Herculean task, and the longer the crisis endures, the more elusive a lasting solution seems.

Ukrainian troops understand that their ability to make headway in the weeks ahead is not only a matter of military strategy but also a crucial determinant in sustaining the international community’s attention and commitment.

Similarly, during his recent visit to Washington, Zelensky faced a relatively quieter reception compared to his previous sojourn last year. The political landscape in the US has undergone a subliminal shift since Zelensky’s address to Congress

WORTH NOTING IS MCCARTHY’S DECISION TO DECLINE ZELENSKY’S REQUEST FOR A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS, A STRIKING DEPARTURE FROM THE DRAMATIC VISIT WHEN SUCH A SESSION WAS ARRANGED IN LAST DECEMBER

last December, a moment when he basked in resounding applause and was hailed as a war hero. However, the recent bout of US aid for Ukraine, though generally well-received, was met with noticeably less enthusiasm in the Congress compared to the hero’s welcome of the previous year.

Intriguingly, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, currently grappling with opposition to the Ukrainian funding package from Republicans aligned with Trump, made a conspicuous choice by abstaining from the welcoming committee for President Zelensky. Worth noting is McCarthy’s decision to decline Zelensky’s request for a joint session of Congress, a striking departure from the dramatic visit when such a session was arranged in last December. McCarthy attributed this move to logistical constraints arising from short notice, hinting at a shift in the typically bipartisan stance toward Ukraine amidst the ebb and flow of internal political dynamics. This episode serves as a stark reminder of the evolving and increasingly partisan nature of US foreign policy engagement under the looming influence of Trump.

Nonetheless, it is evident that a sense of fatigue is beginning to permeate the Western world’s perspective on the Ukraine crisis.

Indonesia traders urge TikTok sales ban

AGNES ANYA

As clothing seller Hendri Tanjung struggles to hawk his tunics to Indonesian buyers outside his market shop, he says customers are turning to cheaper versions on TikTok, pummelling his income.

The 35-year-old sells his wares at Tanah Abang, Southeast Asia’s largest textile market, where sellers are desperately calling out to passersby.

The market in the capital Jakarta is less crowded than usual, with some outlets shuttered, as many of its thousands of merchants selling products made in factories or by tailors and weavers complain about the impact of TikTok’s booming e-commerce arm on their business.

“We want the government to close TikTok Shop, or at least regulate them. I feel bad for my employees,” said Tanjung.

Indonesians spent more money on the Chinese-owned app than anywhere else in the region over the past year, as TikTok Shop rapidly gained a substantial regional market share and millions of sellers since its 2021 launch.

But government ministers in Southeast Asia’s biggest economy have threatened to ban the app outright because of its impact on local sellers, including those at Tanah Abang who rely on offline buyers. Tanjung said a tunic he sells at 60,000 rupiah (\$3.90), can be found for 40,000 rupiah on TikTok Shop, undercutting his business.

“I don’t know where they source their products to sell at such low prices. Ours are our own products and we cannot sell them at that price,” he said. After a daily revenue drop of more than 80 per cent from 30 million rupiah (\$1,948) to five million (\$324) in recent months, he was forced to lay off five of his 30 employees.

Laws in the archipelago nation do not cover transactions through social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook or Instagram. But President Joko Widodo said new regulation on social media transactions could come as early as Tuesday.

The draft regulation, expected to be presented soon after Widodo said on Monday it was “being finalised in the trade ministry”, will aim to curb what Jakarta says are monopolistic practices.

Experts say such regulation would create a level playing field for local businesses.

“The key is to regulate social commerce to be on par with e-commerce and traditional offline retailers,” said Nailul Huda, a researcher at the Institute for Development of Economics and Finance. — AFP

The internet is about to get much worse



Julia Angwin

WE ARE IN A TIME OF ERODING TRUST, AS PEOPLE REALISE THAT THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO A PUBLIC SPACE MAY BE TAKEN, MONETISED AND POTENTIALLY USED TO COMPETE WITH THEM. WHEN THAT EROSION IS COMPLETE, I WORRY THAT OUR DIGITAL PUBLIC SPACES MIGHT BECOME EVEN MORE POLLUTED WITH UNTRUSTWORTHY CONTENT.

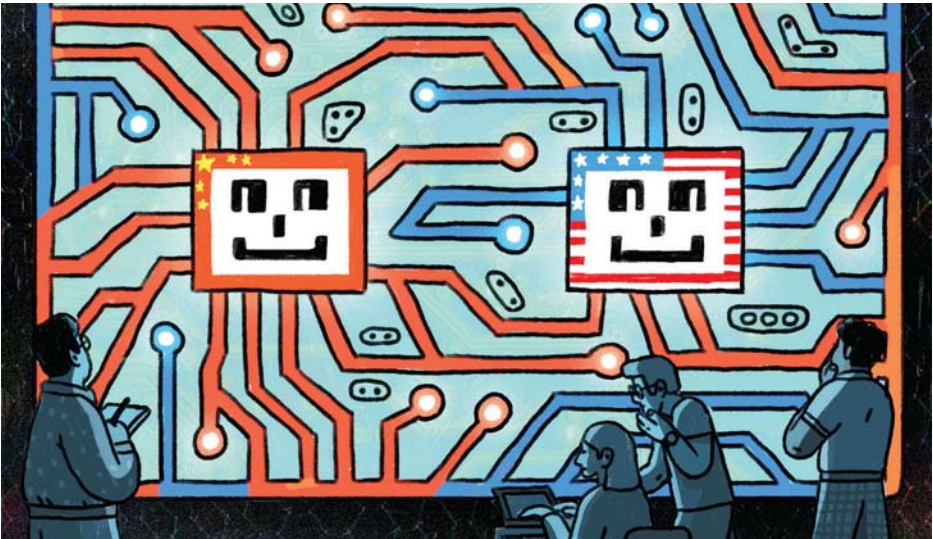
Greg Marston, a British voice actor, recently came across “Connor” online — an AI-generated clone of his voice, trained on a recording Marston had made in 2003. It was his voice uttering things he had never said.

Back then, he had recorded a session for IBM and later signed a release form allowing the recording to be used in many ways. Of course, at that time, Marston couldn’t envision that IBM would use anything more than the exact utterances he had recorded. Thanks to artificial intelligence, however, IBM was able to sell Marston’s decades-old sample to websites that are using it to build a synthetic voice that could say anything. Marston recently discovered his voice emanating from the Wimbledon website during the tennis tournament. (IBM said it is aware of Marston’s concern and is discussing it with him directly.) His plight illustrates why many of our economy’s best-known creators are up in arms. We are in a time of eroding trust, as people realise that their contributions to a public space may be taken, monetised and potentially used to compete with them. When that erosion is complete, I worry that our digital public spaces might become even more polluted with untrustworthy content.

Already, artists are deleting their work from X after the company said it would be using data from its platform to train its AI Hollywood writers and actors are on strike partly because they want to ensure their work is not fed into AI systems that companies could try to replace them with. News outlets including The New York Times and CNN have added files to their website to help prevent AI chatbots from scraping their content.

Authors are suing AI outfits, alleging that their books are included in the sites’ training data. OpenAI has argued, in a separate proceeding, that the use of copyrighted data for training AI systems is legal under the “fair use” provision of copyright law.

While creators of quality content are contesting how their work is being used, dubious AI-generated content is stampeding into the public sphere. NewsGuard has identified 475 AI-



Last month, Chinas Baidu unveiled a chatbot that it claimed was better than ChatGPT, the one developed by Silicon Valleys OpenAI. – The New York Times

generated news and information websites in 14 languages. AI-generated music is flooding streaming websites and generating AI royalties for scammers. AI-generated books — including a mushroom foraging guide that could lead to mistakes in identifying highly poisonous fungi — are so prevalent on Amazon that the company is asking authors who self-publish on its Kindle platform to also declare if they are using AI.

This is a classic case of tragedy of the commons, where a common resource is harmed by the profit interests of individuals. The traditional example of this is a public field that cattle can graze upon. Without any limits, individual cattle owners have an incentive to overgraze the land, destroying its value to everybody.

We have commons on the internet, too. Despite all of its toxic corners, it is still full of vibrant portions that serve the public good — places like Wikipedia and Reddit forums, where volunteers often share knowledge in good faith and work hard to keep bad actors at bay.

But these commons are now being overgrazed by rapacious tech companies that seek to feed all of the human wisdom, expertise, humour, anecdotes and advice they find in these places into their for-profit A.I. systems.

Tim Friedlander, founder and president of the National Association of Voice Actors, has called for AI companies to adopt ethical standards. He says that actors need three Cs:

consent, control and compensation.

In fact, all of us need the three Cs. Whether we are professional actors or we just post pictures on social media, everyone should have the right to meaningful consent on whether we want our online lives fed into the giant AI machines.

And consent should not mean having to locate a bunch of hard-to-find opt-out buttons to click — which is where the industry is heading.

Compensation is harder to figure out, especially since most of the AI bots are primarily free services at the moment. But make no mistake, the AI industry is planning to and will make money from these systems, and when it does, there will be a reckoning with those whose works fuelled the profits.

For people like Marston, their livelihoods are at stake. He estimates that his AI clone has already lost him jobs and will cut into his future earnings significantly. He is working with a lawyer to seek compensation. “I never agreed or consented to having my voice cloned, to see/hear it released to the public, thus competing against myself,” he told me.

But even those of us who don’t have a job directly threatened by AI think of writing that novel or composing a song or recording a TikTok or making a joke on social media. If we don’t have any protections from the AI data overgrazers, I worry that it will feel pointless to even try to create in public. And that would be a real tragedy.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Life can be delightful!

The best years of our life ought to be of childhood when we run around instead of walking and sing instead of speaking. Even the tears are instant but temporary, only to express the moment of pain. The pain is forgotten too. We are impulsive most of the time. It is only later we begin to comprehend the concept of dealing with consequences.

At the conference, Oman Childhood, being currently held in Muscat, HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Chairperson of Children First Association, spoke about how minds of children are filled with creativity.

There is something we learn from children each time we speak to them. Their intention is not to preach, instead they are just being themselves because they would find preaching tiresome. They are too busy, you see.

Their mind is fresh unlike ours, which are filled with emotions, conditions and memories waiting to be triggered with a fragrance or a song. Children, meanwhile, are busy smelling the air, observing the insects and giggling at anything that tickle their mind.

They are just beginning to collect memories and the fascinating part is that we have an opportunity to provide them with some good ones.

Life is not that simple. The destiny takes each one on their own unique path. There are voices to clean out from the background to hear one's own voice. What we fail to understand is that the generation of today is no way like us at that age because the information they are exposed to is way beyond what we were used to. The other factor is we easily forget we were once kids too.

Our source of information at their age were parents, teachers, siblings and friends maybe the news. Here now they have information streaming to them from social media to traditional classrooms. They have already formed their opinions.

We had lot of fears and those fears we unknowingly want to pass it on to the young ones. They are not so keen to take them because they are seeing so many options out there. They are even aware when they are ill-treated.

However, emotions are the same no matter which generation one belongs to. Dignity, self respect and acceptance



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

IF ONE COULD PRACTICE EMPATHY, THEN THAT COULD BE ONE OF THE BEST SERVICES TO LIVING THINGS

are all precious no matter which decade you were born.

Words once spoken, can never be deleted as it is not a recording session. A compliment is cherished forever, a hurtful comment is a burden one will carry for a long time even if they want to overcome the pain with inner strength. In comparison, a kind advise will always be remembered and will be a source of motivation. It is the motivation that is the inner drive.

Many of us might have forgotten but if we look back you would hear those special voices again.

As a young child, my grandmother would point out a beautiful model driving a car and say you should drive like her. I immediately approved the looks of the model. At the same time, many years later I found out that I was not too keen a driver but I wanted to drive for her, my grandmother. And I did. I had that scene of conversation embedded in my mind.

Today I realise, my grandmother had lot of dreams for me, and she had never hesitated to express them. So did my mother and father. And whatever they had said had shaped my thoughts too. But life also brings in other people through out our life in different roles. It is not possible for all of them to think of your welfare because they are also storming through their life.

If it were a smooth life we would not learn so much. For it is not just knowledge that shapes us it is also emotional intelligence. If one could practice empathy, then that could be one of the best services to living things.

To be in another person's shoes is one way of looking at it, while there are some individuals who have inborn talent when it comes to emotional intelligence. Maybe it is the creativity in children that keeps them happy and give them the ability to bounce back to life. Somewhere along the way adults think creativity is a waste of time.

George Bernard Shaw had said something very interesting, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

And now for the youngsters these are wonderful words from him, "Life is not meant to be easy, my child, but take courage: it can be delightful."

So no matter what stage you are in your life, remember: Life can be delightful!

Just get some creativity into life again.

CONSOLING THE BABY!



A US Border Patrol agent holds one-year-old Olga as she waits for her mother to climb off a shipping container after crossing the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass, Texas, on Monday. Dozens of migrants arrived at the US-Mexico border, hoping to be allowed into the United States, with US border forces reporting 1.8 million encounters with migrants in the last 12 months. – AFP

The roots of the global water crisis

In March 1977, representatives from 116 countries gathered in Mar del Plata, Argentina, for the inaugural United Nations Water Conference. At the time, the event received very little attention. Global politics was dominated by a handful of powerful countries, most of them in temperate regions where water scarcity, severe pollution, and flooding were not considered major issues.

The atmosphere at this year's UN Water Conference, which took place in New York in March, was markedly different. Instead of apathy, there was a palpable sense that the water crisis is a global problem. Today, every country in the world faces water-related challenges, underscoring our collective vulnerability as the planet's most vital natural resource is increasingly threatened. The robust engagement of the scientific community and civil society was also instrumental in shedding light on the far-reaching consequences of this crisis.

Unsurprisingly, the countries that were most at risk in 1977 are even more vulnerable today. The reckless exploitation of the planet has accelerated humanity's breach of planetary boundaries. The long-



Joshua Castellino

The writer is Co-Executive Director of Minority Rights Group International

EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD FACES WATER-RELATED CHALLENGES, UNDERSCORING OUR COLLECTIVE DEPENDENCE ON THE PLANET'S MOST VITAL RESOURCE

anticipated sea-level rise is now submerging vast areas, while deserts are expanding at an alarming rate as water sources diminish and aquifers become depleted. Meanwhile, pollutants from human waste, along with the byproducts of industrial activities, contaminate our rivers, lakes, and oceans. At a time of growing scarcity, our seemingly insatiable thirst for consumption has aggravated these trends.

The fact that some remain unaffected by this crisis attests to their privilege. While many experience environmental degradation on a spiritual level, some of the world's poorest populations face immediate and tangible consequences as they try to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

Much like the response to the climate crisis, the response to the water crisis suffers from a lack of global coordination and opposition from entrenched interests seeking to prevent crucial reforms. As the Indian environmental activist Vandana Shivaputs it, "When the rich, powerful, and dominant

economic forces of society" exceed their fair share of Earth's resources, "indigenous communities and minority groups are deprived of their share of water for life and livelihoods." This, she writes, forces entire communities "to carry the heavy burden of water poverty."

A recent petition proposed by prominent water-rights activist Rajendra Singh offers a potential path forward. Singh, chairman of the People's World Commission on Drought and Flood, outlines ten critical transformations

required to restore water harmony. By transcending anthropocentrism, his proposed pledge aims to rejuvenate the global water cycle and harness its immense power to promote the well-being of all living things.

At the heart of Singh's pledge lies the bedrock principle of climate-oriented thinking: a complete system overhaul. This perspective views humanity as part of a much larger whole that encompasses the diverse species with which we share our planet. Instead of commodifying

natural resources for profit and relentless consumption, this ethos encourages people to be mindful of the potential consequences of their actions and commit to repairing any damage they cause.

This raises three fundamental questions. First, what actions are required to address the global water crisis? Second, which key stakeholders must step up? Third, how can we ensure that these stakeholders implement vital systemic changes?

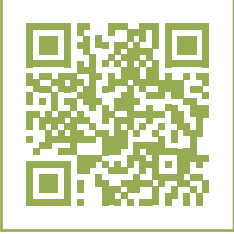
For too long, policymakers have emphasised minor changes in household consumption habits, thereby unfairly shifting the burden to families and communities whose contributions to the water crisis have been negligible. The root causes of water scarcity are large-scale industrial production, lack of attention to quality, and the failure to address rampant pollution. At the macro level, extractive industries and an economic system centred on profit maximisation drive the increase in global temperatures, further disrupting water cycles.



The reckless exploitation of the planet has accelerated humanity's breach of planetary boundaries.



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Winner Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium at the end of the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix at the Suzuka circuit. — AFP

DUTCH DRIVER
HOLDS A
177
POINT LEAD OVER
TEAM-MATE AND
NEAREST
CHALLENGER
SERGIO PEREZ

VERSTAPPEN POWERS RED BULL TO TEAM TITLE

PEREZ GOT INTO
TROUBLE WHEN
HE PICKED UP A
5
SECOND
PENALTY FOR
A SAFETY CAR
INFRINGEMENT

SUZUKA: Max Verstappen helped Red Bull clinch the Formula One constructors' championship and took a giant step towards his third straight drivers' title by winning the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday. Runaway championship leader Verstappen finished ahead of McLaren pair Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri and can lift the title at next month's Qatar Grand Prix. He holds a 177-point lead over team-mate and nearest challenger Sergio Perez. Verstappen's win helped Red Bull clinch their second straight constructors' title even though Perez retired from the race. "You have built a rocket ship of a car," he told his team over the radio after crossing the line. Nearest challengers Mercedes were unable to stay in contention, with Lewis Hamilton finishing fifth and George Russell placing seventh. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fourth, while team-mate Carlos Sainz was sixth.

Verstappen was back to his breathtaking best after a disappointing fifth-place finish at last week's Singapore Grand Prix. "Unbelievable weekend, to win here is great," said Verstappen. "The car was working very well on every compound but the most important thing was to win the constructors. "We are having an incredible year and I'm very proud of everyone." Verstappen held off a double challenge from McLaren to take the lead ahead of Norris at the first turn. First the Dutchman veered right to squeeze out Piastri, who was starting from second on the grid, then moved left to stop Norris from darting through the gap. "The start had too much wheelspin but after that it was quite a straightforward race," said Verstappen. Norris also finished second in Singapore and he said his McLaren team were "getting there".

FORMULA 1
17. Japanese Grand Prix
Suzuka circuit

September 24

1 Max Verstappen (NED) Red Bull	1:30:58.421	Driver standings	Max Verstappen (NED) 400
2 Lando Norris (GBR) McLaren-Mercedes	at 19.387	Sergio Perez (MEX) 223	
3 Oscar Piastri (AUS) McLaren-Mercedes	at 36.494	Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 190	
4 Charles Leclerc (MON) Ferrari	at 43.998	Fernando Alonso (ESP) 174	
5 Lewis Hamilton (GBR) Mercedes	at 49.376	Carlos Sainz (ESP) 150	

Teams

Red Bull	623
Mercedes	305
Ferrari	285

*18th race after Emilia Romagna Grand Prix cancelled due to flooding
Source: Formula 1.com

"My start was very good and I almost had Max, but Max is Max," said the British driver. "We're not close to Max but we're not miles away either."

PEREZ RETIRES
Australian rookie Piastri took his first podium finish behind team-mate Norris. "It feels pretty special, definitely — I will remember it for a very long time," said the 22-year-old. "I can't thank the team enough for giving me this opportunity. "It wasn't my best race ever but it was enough to get a trophy at the end." The safety car came out after a chaotic first lap, with Alfa Romeo's Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu taking damage at the start of the race. Perez got into trouble when he picked up a five-second penalty for a safety car infringement. The Mexican retired from the race a few

laps later, telling his team "the car doesn't feel right". He later came back out, ensuring that he would not have to serve his time penalty at the next race. Red Bull chief Christian Horner said Perez "got knocked about a bit" in the race. "It wasn't his day but he'll bounce back," said Horner. "He's been a big part of this success as well." Red Bull were still able to clinch the constructors' title without Perez picking up any points in Japan. "It's been the most amazing year for us," said Horner. "Max is on another level at the moment — another incredible performance." Russell and Hamilton tried to chase Leclerc but Sainz got himself in the mix by going past Russell late on. Bottas, Aston Martin's Lance Stroll and Williams pair Alex Albon and Logan Sargeant failed to finish the race. — AFP

AL SEEB BEAT AL BASHAYER TO CLINCH CREDIT OMAN CUP



Al Seeb players pose with the trophy along with the officials.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Al Seeb Club emerged victorious in the second Credit Oman Basketball Cup championship, triumphing over Al Bashayer 58-47 in the final at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Sunday.

The final was under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Nasser al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura., in the presence of His Highness Sayyid Malik bin Shihab al Said, President of Al Seeb Club, Engineer Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association, and Mohammed bin Hilal al Jabri, Sales Director of Credit Company.

The first quarter witnessed a close fight with Al Seeb keeping a solid defence. Al Waqqas al Hinai scored the opening two points from a fast attack. Al Bashayer responded with Bassam al Busaidy making two three-pointers as they led 6-2 and his

teammate Osama al Ryami added two points. Al Seeb came into the match with 4 points through Rashid al Zuhaibi, while Zakaria al Wahaibi found a three-pointer as they led 9-8.

The first quarter ended with Al Seeb leading Al Bashayer 14-12.

In the second quarter, both teams continued their offensive efforts, but Al Seeb managed to maintain their lead and extend it with Abdulredha al Battashi's three-pointer, giving them a 22-17 lead. Al Seeb capitalised on their scoring opportunities, adding another three points through Rashid al Zuhaibi. Al Bashayer countered with an impressive three-pointer from Bassam al Busaidy. The competitive intensity continued with each team notching additional points, concluding the first half with Al Seeb leading Al Bashayer 32-22.

The third quarter showcased a back-and-forth exchange, with both teams successfully

converting scoring chances. Al Seeb maintained their lead at 39-25. As both teams sought to score from beyond the arc, Hassan al Faraji capitalised on a mistake to add a point for Al Seeb, while Bassam Al Busaidy contributed two points for Al Bashayer from a similar error. Ahmed al Halali followed with two points, narrowing the gap further. The third quarter ended with Al Seeb keeping lead at 45-39. The fourth quarter saw an intense showdown between the two teams, with Bassam al Busaidi once again making crucial plays to reduce the deficit. Al Bashayer's staunch defence held off Al Seeb's attacks for a time, and an error allowed Bassam al Busaidy to score two more points, bringing the score to 43-45. Al Seeb responded with two points from Rashid al Zuhaibi. Both teams traded blows, and the match concluded with Al Seeb emerging as the victors, defeating Al Bashayer with a final score of 58-47.

CRUCIAL SUPPORT

Shaikh Ahmed al Nadabi, the Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura., commended the technical level of the match and emphasised the importance of such championships in promoting basketball. He also praised Oman Credit Company for their support and encouraged continued support for basketball and other sports from the private sector.

Eng Khalfan al Naabi, expressed gratitude to the participating clubs and Oman Credit Company for their sponsorship. He highlighted the competitive nature of the match and stressed the significance of the championship in preparing Omani players for future competitions.

He acknowledged the success of the championship and looked forward to its continuation, suggesting areas for improvement in future editions through the evaluation by the Oman Basketball Association.



OTA chief Mutasim al Zadjali congratulates David Hegerty on his re-election as the president of International Tennis Federation.

OTA chief takes part in ITF General Assembly

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Chairman of Oman Tennis Association (OTA), participated in the General Assembly of the International Tennis Federation (ITF), which took place in the Mexican city of Cancun, amid a large participation of members of the General Assembly from various countries of the world.

The General Assembly meeting witnessed the selection of the new Council of the ITF for the next four years, where it was chosen to re-nominate former American president David Hegerty as president. This is the third session that David enters as ITF president, and it is his last session.

Hegerty beat his French competitor Forne Arnim by 318 votes to 118. Tunisia's Salma Ghazani became the Arab presence in the Council when she won the membership.

During the General Assembly

meeting, a project to support lower-level countries in the game was reviewed. The officials held talks on the new strategy for the Davis Cup and WTA Billie Jean King Cup tournaments so that professional players can be present in these tournaments, in addition to attracting emerging players.

They also discussed aspects of internationally prohibited stimulants, the mechanism for stopping them permanently.

Remote training courses and training programmes via electronic systems also came into discussion.



Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali

Iyer, Gill help India crush Australia to clinch ODI series

INDORE, India: Shreyas Iyer and Shubman Gill hit attacking centuries to help India thrash Australia by 99 runs in a rain-hit one-day international on Sunday to clinch the series 2-0.

Iyer (105) Gill (104) put on a dominant second-wicket stand of 200 to lay the foundations for India's 399-5 after being invited to bat in Indore.

Stand-in-skipper KL Rahul's 52 and an unbeaten 72 by T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav contributed to the mammoth total and the bowlers then combined to hand India an unbeatable lead in the three-match series.

The matches are a tune-up for the World Cup in India starting October 5.

Captain Rohit Sharma and star batsman Virat Kohli will return for the final ODI in Rajkot on Wednesday and the team will have to make some tough calls in picking the starting XI.

"It (selection) is the headache of the coach and Rohit...whoever gets picked has a job to do," said stand-in skipper Rahul.

"Sitting out can be hard after scoring a lot of runs but everyone has been through that."

Chasing a DLS revised target of 317 in 33 overs after rain interrupted play in the chase, Australia were bowled out for 217 in 28.2 overs.

Spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja took three wickets each.

Australia have lost five ODI matches in a row but skipper Steve Smith remained hopeful of a quick turnaround.

"We have lost quite a few

(matches) in a row, in South Africa and here. We need to sort out a few things," said Smith.

"We have a few days now, we are working towards the World Cup, both the teams are. Hopefully we'll turn it around in the last game."

Indian batsmen set up victory after a flying start and Iyer, 28, put doubts over his fitness to rest, hitting his third one-day century before being caught.

Iyer hit 11 fours and three sixes in his 90-ball knock and was named man of the match.



India's Shreyas Iyer (R) celebrates after scoring a century in Indore. — AFP

14 teams to take part in women's volleyball tourney



OVA board member Aisha al Jabri will be guest of honour.

MUSCAT: Fourteen teams will take part in the women's volleyball tournament to be organised by the Expatriate Volleyball Association headed by Khalil al Balushi in association with Oman Volleyball Association at Al Amal Sports Complex in Ghala on September 29.

The teams are divided into four groups. Group A includes Blitz, Muscat Strikers, Famous Thai and Phil Oman. Group B consists Mixer, Vollydigger and Eagle. Group C features Exotic, Ball Hammer and Muscat Blazers while Group D includes

Asian MCG, No name, Foxhard and Slashers teams.

Aisha al Jabri, member of board of directors of the Oman Volleyball Association and head of the Women's Volleyball Committee, will be the guest of honour on the occasion. The one-day tournament will kick off with at the Al Amal volleyball facility in Ghala at 9 am.

"The tournament will see players from different nationalities like Italy, USA, Philippines, Iran, Ukraine, Thailand, Tunisia, Austria, Brazil and Oman," chief organiser Khalil al Balushi said.

INDIA FIRE FIRST WORLD RECORD

CHINA SWEEP 32 OF 51 TITLES DECIDED AT GAMES



Bronze medallist India's Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar in action during the men's 10m air rifle final.



Gold medallist India's Divyansh Singh Panwar, Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Rudranksh Patil celebrate on the podium after winning the men's 10m air rifle team final. – Reuters



India players pose with their gold medals during the awards ceremony of the 2022 Asian Games women's cricket final match between Sri Lanka and India. – AFP



India players celebrate their victory at the end of the 2022 Asian Games women's cricket final match between Sri Lanka and India. – AFP



(L-R) Silver medallist Japan's Ryuta Arakawa, gold medallist China's Zhang Liang and bronze medallist Hong Kong's Chiu Hin-chun pose during the medal ceremony for the men's single sculls final event of rowing. – AFP



China's Zhang Liang competes in the men's single sculls final event of rowing. – AFP

HANGZHOU: India claimed the first world record of the Hangzhou Asian Games on Monday as hosts China snapped up more gold medals and a nine-year-old skateboarder melted hearts.

The Indian trio of Divyansh Panwar, Rudranksh Patil and Aishwary Tomar blew away the field with a new world best 1,893.7 points to win the men's 10m air rifle team event on day two of the multi-sports extravaganza.

They beat the previous mark of 1,893.3 set by China last month and in doing so won India's first gold of a Games where the hosts

have swept 32 of the 51 titles decided so far.

"In the 10m event they are both perfect athletes," Tomar said of his teammates. "Playing with them is huge, it's really good."

India claimed their second gold in the afternoon when they defeated Sri Lanka in the final of the women's cricket by 19 runs.

Another shooting world record fell to Chinese teenager Sheng Lihao in the men's 10m air rifle with his 253.3 points surpassing teammate Yu Haonan's 252.8 from Rio four years ago.

"I had good luck in the final. I did quite well today, I was basically smooth," said the

18-year-old, a Tokyo Olympic silver medallist.

In other action, Mazel Paris Alegado — aged just nine — said it was "so fun" competing in skateboarding.

Thought to be the youngest athlete in Hangzhou and representing the Philippines, she qualified for the "women's" park final and came seventh out of eight.

The competition was won by comparative veteran Hinano Kusaki from Japan, aged 15. China's Chen Ye, also just 15, won the men's park in skateboarding.

At the Fuyang Water Sports Centre, Zhang Liang became the

most successful Asian Games rower of all time.

China's Zhang won the men's single sculls to add to his men's double sculls gold from Sunday and now has five Asian Games titles from four editions.

"I cannot say I am a leader. I do what I should do as a rower, to pursue my goals and dreams, to do well," he said.

QIN TARGETS GOLD

After winning all seven gold medals in the swimming pool on the opening day, China are primed to dominate again on Monday night, spearheaded by breaststroke world champion

Qin Haiyang. The Chinese star caused a major upset at the world championships in Fukuoka in July when he won the 100m gold in 57.69 ahead of a stacked field and in the absence of British great Adam Peaty.

He went on to complete an unprecedented clean sweep of the breaststroke titles, an achievement he is aiming to match at his home Asiad as he builds towards next year's Paris Olympics. Qin was in a class of his own in the heats, touching in 58.35 to better the previous Games best set by Japan's Yasuhiro Koseki in 2018.

South Korea's Choi Dong-yeol

came in second — a gaping 1.55 seconds behind Qin.

Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey could prevent another Chinese clean sweep when she lines up in the women's 200m freestyle final.

After earning silver behind Australian star Ariarne Titmus at the Tokyo Olympics, she narrowly missed the medals at the July world championships. But she reinforced her credentials with a silver in Fukuoka over 100m.

Haughey qualified fifth-fastest in 2:00.75 in the 200m freestyle, conserving energy while capable of swimming a lot faster. China's Li Bingjie was quickest through the heats. — AFP



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Governance, policy clarity and growth enablers sustain Oman’s economic recovery

KEYTREND: GDP at constant prices grew by 2.1% during H1 2023 amounting to RO 17 bn

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Omani economy has witnessed tangible progress, as evidenced by the preliminary indicators of economic performance and the ongoing economic growth and expansion, said Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy (MoE).

Addressing a press conference on the country’s post-pandemic economic recovery, he said: “The Omani economy witnessed a growth rate of 2.1% at constant prices, driven by a 1.4% growth in the oil sector and a 2.1% growth in non-oil activities. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), at constant prices, showed positive growth rates of 3.0% and 4.3% in the years 2021 and 2022, respectively.”

“Additionally, there were positive developments in the performance of the trade balance and the financial sector. Public debt also decreased to around 37% of the GDP, leading to an improvement in credit ratings by various relevant institutions. These positive developments place important responsibilities on us as the Ministry of Economy. The first of which is to leverage such conditions to achieve economic sustainability and capitalise on the direct gains from them,” the minister further stated.

According to the official, the positive state of the Omani economy could be attributed to three main elements: governance, policy clarity, and the presence of enduring accelerators, such as the Tenth Five-Year Plan programmes and national initiatives that support the priorities of the vision.

“These factors have contributed to creating an environment conducive to achieving the targets set in the initial executive plans of



Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy

the vision, bringing us closer to realising our desired objectives,” Al Saqri noted.

Dr Nasser al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, shared that the overall economic indicators for the national economy indicate an improvement in economic growth trends.

During his address, he

explained that the GDP at constant prices grew by 2.1 per cent during the first half of 2023, amounting to RO 17 billion, compared to RO 16.7 billion in H1 of 2022.

Furthermore, he shared that the ministry’s economic growth forecasts indicate a growth rate of 2.3 per cent in 2023.

In addition to an anticipated inflation rate of 1 per cent in 2023,

a lower figure in comparison to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast of 1.9 per cent, he said.

However, actual data indicates that inflation rates in the national economy remain at safe, low levels, with the Consumer Price Index registering approximately 1.2% during the first eight months of this year, he noted.

Additionally, Al Maawali added that key initiatives have been taken to mitigate the effects on inflation including fuel price stabilisation, expanding the list of VAT-exempted goods (513 items), the support of wheat purchases, assisting farmers, calculating imported inflation amongst many others.

According to Intisar al Wahaibi, Director-General of Development Planning, 78 per cent of the programmes envisioned in the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) are currently under implementation. This translates to 337 out of 430 strategic

programmes that have so far been put into effect, she said.

By the end of July 2023, a total of 1,915 projects were approved, with a developmental budget of around RO 8 billion, she said. The majority of the projects are related to infrastructure (940), followed by social infrastructure (524 projects), service production (258 projects) and goods production (193).

According to data from the National Competitiveness Office, Oman has made progress in several indicators, including the Economic Freedom Index, where it achieved a ranking of 95 out of 184 countries in 2023. In addition to ranking 46th out of 121 in the Soft Power Index and 35 out of 113 countries in the Food Security Index.

However, Oman fell by 4 positions in the Economic Complexity Index, ranking at 73 out of 134 countries in 2022. Additionally, Oman fell by 2 positions in the Global Innovation Index, where it was ranked 79 out of 132 countries in 2022.

OQ symposium spotlights HSSE imperatives

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

In a significant move towards enhancing workplace safety and environmental consciousness, OQ, a global integrated energy group, organised a symposium on Occupational Health, Safety, Security, and Environment (HSSE) on Monday, September 25, 2023.

The event, presided over by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, focused on the theme “Human Reliability.” It marks a crucial effort by OQ to strengthen occupational health and safety standards in workplaces, while contributing to the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The symposium served as a platform for promoting communication and joint cooperation among partners and contractors to spread the culture of occupational health, safety, and environmental awareness.

It attracted international experts in the field, who presented the latest developments and conducted specialised workshops for attendees keen on enhancing their HSSE knowledge.

Furthermore, the event aimed to propagate OQ’s principles among its partners and contractors, aligning them with the group’s HSSE strategy.

Ashraf al Maamari, Chief Executive for People, Technology and Culture of OQ Group, underscored the event’s central



Presenter at the OQ Symposium

objective which is enhancing accident prevention and the application of national and international occupational health and safety principles.

OQ places paramount importance on raising public awareness to prevent accidents within its companies and facilities. Al Maamari emphasised that such efforts not only safeguard institutional assets but also protect the environment and ensure the sustainability of operations.

The symposium was attended by approximately 400 health and safety specialists from companies operating in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors. It reflected OQ Group’s unwavering dedication to promoting public awareness of occupational health, safety, and the environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Maamari elaborated on the symposium’s purpose, stating, “OQ Group organised this symposium to discuss the best ways to improve occupational health, safety, security, and environmental practices.

Oman hosts 14th ME Health Insurance Conference

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Middle East Healthcare Insurance Conference 2023, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman and organised by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in collaboration with Middle East Insurance Review (MEIR), commenced on Monday, September 25, 2023, with a focus on mitigating the impact of fraud, abuse, and waste (FAW) in healthcare insurance.

The event, held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, brought together officials from CMA, insurance companies, public and private healthcare institutions, and international and regional participants.

Ahmed al Mukhaini, CMA Expert — Office of the Executive President, said health insurance companies and healthcare providers are vital players in the healthcare ecosystem.

Discussions on the first day revolved around the progress of the “Dhamani” project, a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders, such as the Omani Medical Association, CMA, Ministry of Health (MoH), insurers, and reinsurers. These discussions emphasised the project’s significance in



Attendees at the 14th Middle East Healthcare Insurance Conference

enhancing healthcare services and highlighted its challenges and milestones.

The second session provided an extensive overview of healthcare insurance in the Middle East, offering valuable statistics and insights from compulsory healthcare insurance markets across the region. This session aimed to provide a broader perspective on industry trends and challenges.

The third session explored fraud risk management from various angles, featuring insights from insurers, reinsurers,

solutions to healthcare insurance challenges.

Ahmed al Mukhaini emphasised the importance of building trust between health insurance companies and healthcare providers, highlighting the need for a seamless connection to enhance confidence and service delivery.

Dr C H Asrani, Founder and Chairman of INCHEs Group in India, presented regional case studies on fraud management, shedding light on effective strategies employed in different contexts.

TURN TO PAGE 15

hospitals, and claim management experts. Discussions centred around identifying key fraud indicators and strategies to effectively address them.

Several experts presented working papers, offering practical

OQ Gas Networks IPO subscription opens today

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The subscription period for the initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks SAOG (under transformation) – also known as OQGN – opens today, Tuesday, September 26, 2023.

The offering comprises of the sale of a total of 2,122,005,720 existing shares by OQ SAOC (OQ) directly and indirectly through Oman Energy Trading Company Limited (OETCL) and Oman Oil Services Limited (OOSL together with OQ and OETCL, the Selling Shareholders), representing 49 per cent of OQGN’s total issued share capital.

The offer is expected to raise up to RO 297 million (equivalent to \$771 million) at the top of the price range, valuing OQGN at up to RO 606 million (equivalent to \$1,574 million).

Three Anchor Investors — Saudi Omani Investment Company, a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund, Falcon Investments LLC, a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, and Fluxys International SA/NV — have irrevocably committed to subscribe



OQGN Pipeline

to the Offering at Bzs 140 per share, subject to the terms contained in their respective anchor investment agreements.

The shares will be offered in parallel, across two categories:

The Category I subscription

period, for non-individual investors, will run from 26 September to 9 October 2023. Category I is open to institutional investors, representing 40% of the total Offer size. The subscription price range will be Bzs 131 to Bzs 140 per share.

The Category II subscription period, for individual investors, will run from 26 September to 5 October 2023. Category II is exclusively open and reserved for individual investors and represents 30% of the total Offer size. Category II shares

will be offered at a discounted maximum price of Bzs 126 per Offer Share, providing a 10% discount on the maximum price of Bzs 140 per share. Exclusively reserving 30% of the total Offer size for individual investors and

offering shares at a discounted price aim to provide greater access to potential individual investors in the IPO.

The IPO will allow OQGN, the exclusive operator of the natural gas transportation network in Oman, to move the Company into the next chapter of growth. It is part of a broader divestment programme envisioned by the government and being implemented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

It offers an opportunity for Omani and international investors to participate in Oman Vision 2040, the long-term national development plan that aims to make Oman a prosperous, competitive and sustainable nation and to rapidly diversify its economy.

In January 2024, OQGN intends to pay a dividend of RO 33,000,000 for the first 9 months of 2023 and expects to pay a second dividend distribution of around RO 11,000,000 for the last three months of 2023, around April 2024.

OQGN shares are expected to commence trading on the MSX on or about 24 October 2023.

Oman to host GCC tourism meetings



Oman Across Ages Museum

MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will host the 7th Meeting of Their Excellencies the Ministers and Their Excellencies the Heads of Tourism Authorities of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The meeting is scheduled to take place from October 4th to 5th, 2023, in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, in the Wilayat of Manah, at the Oman Across Ages Museum.

This meeting is part of Oman’s presidency of the current session of the Gulf Cooperation Council and aims to further enhance integration among the member countries in the tourism sector. Discussions during the meetings will cover various issues related to the development of the travel and tourism sector in the region and raising awareness of its importance as an economic development driver and a means of cultural exchange.

The hosting of this event will also include numerous activities, visits, and tourism experiences organised for the participating delegations to showcase Oman’s unique tourism attractions, cultural richness, natural beauty, historical heritage, and various tourist sites. These are being leveraged through ongoing development projects and diverse tourism sector initiatives.

It’s worth mentioning that the meetings will be held in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, specifically at the Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah. This choice highlights the museum’s significance as an iconic cultural and tourist landmark that embodies Oman’s unique tourism assets and diverse experiences, reflecting the country’s rich history throughout different eras. Oman is actively working to develop its tourism sector in alignment with the clear vision outlined in “Oman Vision 2040.” This vision aligns with similar national plans of fellow member countries in the GCC and is complemented by the Gulf Tourism Strategy, adopted in 2022 and beginning implementation in 2023, through a set of ambitious executive initiatives. — ONA

RO 10 million for total government treasury bills this week

MUSCAT: The total value of government treasury bills allocated for this week is 10 million Omani rials, with a maturity period of 91 days.

The statement issued by the Central Bank of Oman explained that the acceptable average price was 98.689 Omani rials, and the lowest acceptable price was 98.685 Omani rials per 100 Omani rials. The average discount rate was 5.26041%, and the average yield was 5.33032%.

Treasury bills are a guaranteed short-term financial instrument issued by the Ministry of Finance to provide investment opportunities for licensed commercial banks.



Central Bank of Oman

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issuing agent for these bills.

The statement also indicated

that the interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank of Oman for these bills is

6%, while the discount rate with the Central Bank for Treasury bills facilities is 6.50%.

Treasury bills can be quickly liquidated by discounting them with the Central Bank of Oman or through repurchase (repo) transactions with the Central Bank. Licensed commercial banks can also conduct repo operations among themselves in the interbank market. This instrument contributes to creating a benchmark for short-term interest rates in the local financial market, and the government can use it for smooth and flexible financing of some of its expenses.

— ONA

Fitch Ratings Raises Oman Credit Rating Report to BB+

NEW YORK: Fitch Ratings issued a credit rating report for the Sultanate of Oman, in which it raised the credit rating to “BB+” with a stable outlook.

According to the agency, this positive development in the rating reflects the tangible efforts made by the government to continue controlling public spending, utilising additional oil revenues to reduce the state’s public debt, and managing the lending portfolio. Additionally, Fitch Ratings has improved its expectations regarding oil prices.

The agency explained that among the key factors contributing to the credit rating upgrade are the government’s commitment to implementing fiscal consolidation measures and the decrease in the breakeven oil price from \$80-90 per barrel during the period of 2017-2019 to less than \$70 per



barrel. This significantly reduced Oman’s vulnerability to oil price fluctuations despite ongoing risks in the oil markets.

Fitch Ratings commended the government’s commitment to its measures even as oil prices have risen, expecting current expenditure to align with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The agency anticipates GDP growth to

increase from 2.1 per cent in 2023 to 2.7 per cent in 2024.

Furthermore, the agency expects the state’s general budget to achieve a financial surplus of about 4.1 per cent in 2023, 2.4 per cent in 2024, and 1 per cent in 2025.

The agency also noted in its report that it expects the public debt as a percentage of GDP to

decrease to around 36 per cent in 2023, stabilising at 35 per cent in 2024 and 2025. This is compared to its previous expectations of public debt reaching around 45 per cent in 2023.

Fitch Ratings explained that the government’s approach to managing public debt and paying off some external loans ahead of schedule, benefiting from additional revenues, has led to a reduction in the risks of external financial liquidity pressures. The agency expects the net foreign asset position to return to a positive level and foreign currency reserves to grow moderately in 2023.

Fitch Ratings concluded in its report that Oman’s credit rating may further improve if the external public debt continues to decline as a percentage of GDP, and if there is an improvement in sovereign foreign assets. — ONA



Oil prices steady as Russia eases fuel export ban

LONDON: Oil prices held steady on Monday after Russia relaxed its fuel ban, taking the edge off earlier gains on a tighter supply outlook and wariness over interest rates that could curb demand.

Brent crude futures were up 27 cents, or 0.29%, at \$93.54 a barrel at 13:31 GMT after settling 3 cents lower on Friday. US West Texas Intermediate crude was up 24 cents, or 0.27%, at \$90.27.

Russia approved some changes to its fuel export ban, lifting the restrictions for fuel used as bunkering for some vessels and diesel with high sulphur content, a government document showed on Monday.

The ban on all types of gasoline and high-quality diesel, announced last Thursday, remains in place.

“The market continues to digest Russia’s temporary ban on diesel and gasoline exports into an already tight market, offset with the Fed’s hawkish message that rates will stay higher for longer,” said IG Markets analyst



Oil rig

Tony Sycamore.

Crude prices fell last week after a hawkish Federal Reserve rattled global financial markets and raised concerns over oil demand. That snapped a three-week rally of more than 10% after Saudi Arabia and Russia constrained supply by extending production cuts to the end of the year.

Last week, Moscow issued a temporary ban on gasoline and diesel exports to most countries to stabilise the domestic market, fanning concerns of low products supply as the Northern Hemisphere heads into winter. — **Reuters**

Oman hosts 14th ME Health Insurance Conference

FROM PAGE 13

Navneet Kumar Bhatt, Chief Underwriting Officer of Takaful Oman SAOG, shared insights into the future of healthcare insurance in Oman and the broader region.

Dr Matlooba al Zadjali, Managing Director of Heart Vascular Centre HVC Oman, presented a working paper on the collaborative efforts required between hospitals and insurers to effectively mitigate FAW.

The second day of the conference will delve even deeper into healthcare insurance, with topics including advanced pricing methodologies for healthcare insurance underwriting, insights drawn from previous risk management experiences, and strategies to advance universal health coverage through sustainable financing resourcing.

Another session will focus on the key to universal social obligation and responsible commercial enterprise in compulsory healthcare insurance, addressing issues related to claim management efficiency and cost containment in private healthcare insurance.

The day will culminate in a discussion session dedicated to innovation in healthcare insurance, highlighting the role of technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and innovation in combatting FAW.

Oman’s decision to host the Middle East Healthcare Insurance Conference aligns with the country’s increasing interest in health insurance.

Recent years have seen health insurance claim the largest share of gross insurance premiums, accounting for 35.4% of all insurance products.

In 2022, gross direct premiums in the health insurance sector surged by 16.9%, reaching RO 191.517 million compared to RO 163.866 million in 2021.

Oman to set up national payment gateway for commerce

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, SEPT 25

A dedicated national payment gateway designed to facilitate e-commerce transactions in the Sultanate of Oman is currently under development, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The announcement comes on the heels of the launch, earlier this month, of a framework regulating e-commerce activities, by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The regulatory framework – part of the National E-commerce Strategy – seeks to foster the growth of a vibrant, safe and robust marketplace for e-commerce aimed at opening up investment, business and employment opportunities.

It requires market players and e-commerce stores to, among other things, register their particulars with a view to curbing the potential for fraud and abuse.

The Central Bank says it is working with the Ministry, among other stakeholder institutions, in establishing a payment system necessary to underpin the seamless operation of a flourishing e-commerce industry.

“With a view of taking further the digitalization of payment and settlement system in Oman, the CBO is actively involved in developing a national payment gateway for e-commerce.



A new payment gateway for e-commerce is on the anvil in Oman (illustrative image courtesy Reuters)

This initiative is being undertaken in close coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Consumer Protection Authority, and other organisations,” the apex bank stated in its newly released 2022 Annual Report.

The initiative is part of a broader endeavour by the Central Bank to promote digital payments via the development of comprehensive Payment and Settlement Systems (PSS) and support infrastructure.

This goal is being pursued in

conjunction with efforts to bolster the resilience of the banking and financing industry in the face of potential threats posed by cyber criminals, it noted.

Significantly, a National Payment Gateway will enable Oman-based e-commerce operators and stores to transact business in a safe, secure and cost-competitive manner.

At the same time, customers have the underlying assurance of transparency and accountability in their online dealings.

E-commerce players license to operate in Oman are also mandated to adhere to local

regulations on matters related to, for examples, disputed payments, returned goods, disparity in delivered goods, and so on.

Likewise, transaction fees are minimal in comparison with those involving the use of overseas payment gateways.

Around 180 categories of products and services have been approved for transactions via e-commerce by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

To date, around 57 companies have been licensed to engage in e-commerce in the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Participates in Global Sustainable Transport Forum in Beijing

BEIJING: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is currently taking part in the Global Sustainable Transport Forum, held in the Chinese capital, Beijing.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology leads Oman’s delegation in the two-day forum themed “Sustainable



Transport: Working Together to Promote Global Development”.

Over 50 countries and organizations, as well as leaders

of the transportation and logistics sectors, representatives of regional and international organizations, and senior

CEOs of major transportation companies around the world are taking part in the forum.

On the sidelines of his participation, Eng. al Maawali held a meeting with Eng. Saleh al Jasser, Minister of Transport and Logistics Services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between Oman and the KSA, and means of promoting them in various fields of transport and logistics.

— **ONA**

International delegations to attend Duqm Economic Forum

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Representatives of leading international companies, investors and decision-makers are expected to attend the Duqm Economic Forum, organised by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and set to take place during October 16 – 17, in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Confirming their attendance are delegations from Belgium, India, Brazil, Japan and China, among other.

A group of companies will take part in the Forum, some of which are setting up investment projects in SEZAD while others are working to get business opportunities or form partnerships related to green industries.



Duqm Economic Forum Logo

There are other companies, specialised in industrial production, that have been invited to invest in SEZAD.

Saleh bin Hamoud al Hassani, Adviser to the Chairman of OPAZ, pointed out that Duqm Economic Forum aims to shed light on the investment opportunities available in SEZAD, which is witnessing rapid economic growth, in addition to being a destination attracting international corporates and strategic projects in the fields of green industries, renewable energy projects and petrochemicals.

SEZAD has witnessed a great interest from international companies to establish their projects in the Zone, according to studies conducted by these companies.

“The Forum reflects the government’s plan and its

constant efforts aimed at bringing foreign direct investments to the Sultanate of Oman in general and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm in particular.

The Zone has recently been placed on the global map for renewable energy, hydrogen and green iron projects by attracting a number of key projects in these sectors from India, Japan and Brazil.”

The Forum serves as a platform for the exchange of knowledge, visions, expertise and insights, as well as showcasing local and international projects and experiences during the Forum’s discussion sessions over the two days.

Likewise, the Forum will also provide participants with the opportunity to closely get familiarised with the infrastructure facilities and major projects in the SEZ.

What climate finance needs



NOURIEL ROUBINI

is Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University's Stern School of Business



REZA BUNDY

is Co-founder and CEO of Atlas Capital Team

As we move from UN Climate Week to COP28 in Dubai later this year, we must stop the “greenwashing” and “greenwashing” and start thinking about the instruments that will enable the private sector and private investors to channel more capital toward climate resilience and sustainable development. While the public sector has an important role to play in this respect, scalable solutions require significant commitments of private-sector resources. With climate change already wreaking havoc on poor and rich countries alike, unlocking this largely untapped pool of capital has become an urgent priority. Yet as matters stand, many investors associate climate-centric investments with “social impact” and reduced profitability. While

sophisticated investors have the means to deploy their capital profitably toward decarbonization, the energy transition, and other climate-related sectors, such investments tend to be illiquid. They remain tightly wound up in private-equity funds, and thus inaccessible to the ordinary investors and savers who are most exposed to climate-driven food, water, and energy insecurity. The solution is to create climate investments that are profitable, liquid, and accessible to all. COP28 offers an opportunity to rethink how we deliver such market solutions, and how we can harness digital innovation to scale up promising models. To mobilize capital at scale, we must draw on the global savings of individual investors as well as institutions such as pension funds, insurers, and sovereign funds. Risk diversification can be achieved

through retail-friendly, liquid, easily accessible instruments such as exchange-traded funds (ETFs). The sensible way to construct a profitable, long-term, climate-aligned, widely accessible investment strategy is to develop a diversified portfolio of assets that directly or indirectly support climate financing. For investors with a long-term horizon, a portfolio that meets these requirements should be composed of three main asset types. The first is climate-resilient real estate and infrastructure – meaning assets in weather-proof, stable geographies that have low climate exposure. Real-estate and infrastructure valuations in such regions are poised to appreciate significantly on the back of population shifts from high-risk areas across the Southern Hemisphere to more resilient communities in North America,

Northern Eurasia, and select geographies in the Global South. Carefully selected Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and exposure to greenfield developments through ETFs are two ways to secure reliable returns from climate-adaptation efforts. And as an added bonus, such investments offer broader economic and societal benefits, including productivity growth, job creation, and the provision of employment and housing for migrating populations. The second component is green commodities. An orderly transition to a more resilient future requires massive investments not only in energy, food, and water assets, but also in the metals and critical minerals used in renewable energy and electric vehicles (EVs). These include commodities such as soy, wheat, copper, rare-earth

elements, cobalt, lithium, and so forth. To avoid “greenflation” and supply bottlenecks, we urgently need to boost production and lower the cost of securing these commodities. Finally, a sensible climate-aligned portfolio should include assets that provide a hedge against inflation and geo-economic risks, such as short-term and inflation-indexed sovereign bonds and gold. Not only does the negative correlation between these assets and other climate-related investments offer extra ballast, but it also provides liquidity and low volatility to meet the needs of many individual investors, pensioners, and savers. And again, there is an added bonus: greater investments in inflation-proof sovereign assets will allow governments to do more to finance the green transition. © Project Syndicate, 2023

Imperatives of supply chain collaboration

NOOF AL AJMI

Although supply chain collaboration has existed for a long time, most businesses have now started to pay attention to them as a value-added to their operations and actions (Chen et al., 2017; Fawcett et al., 2015; Liao et al., 2017; Ramanathan and Gunasekaran, 2014; Soosay and Hyland, 2015). More recently, there has been an increased interest in supply chain collaboration among logistics companies across the world. Apparently, it's a very broad and encompassing concept and it incorporates many aspects of supply chain activities such as procuring goods and services, manufacturing, strategic sourcing, financing, and logistics (Ellinger, 2002; Fawcett and Magnan, 2002). Supply chain collaboration has been defined as a long-term relationship where participants working jointly to share information, plan their processes and execute their supply chain activities (Whipple et al., 2010, p. 507, Simatupang and Sridharan, 2002). According to Fawcett et al., (2008), supply chain collaboration is referred to as two or more companies working together towards greater supply chain transparency. This concept has been widely used, often to emphasise the importance of planning and management of all activities involved in strategic sourcing, procurement, as well as all logistics management activities. Collaboration is much more than information sharing at an operational level because it touches major functional areas including strategic and management levels (Barratt, 2004a). It is worth mentioning that supply chain collaboration has been a hot topic today where many researchers have studied its functions and advantages (Horvath, 2001; Min et al., 2005; Sahay, 2003; Zacharia et al., 2009; Lehoux et al., 2014). While other practitioners have perceived it as one of the key elements in the future of supply chain management (Hoyt



Image courtesy of Asyad Group

and Huq, 2000; Ireland and Bruce, 2000; Mentzer et al., 2000; Horvath, 2001; Frazellle, 2002). Unsurprisingly, organisations are desperately trying to combine their capabilities for the purpose of value creation (Barratt, 2004; Daugherty et al., 2006; Allred et al., 2011). Supply chain collaboration is regarded as the driving force behind effective supply chain management and may be considered as the main element in improving supply chain performance (Anthony, 2000, Lee, 2000; Margetta, 1998). Due to rapidly changing customer's requirements and intensive competition, collaboration is becoming more of a necessity rather than a choice. The concept of supply chain collaboration has gained greater attention in recent years (Andraski, 1999; Anderson and Lee, 1999; Anderson and Lee, 2001; McCarthy and Golcic, 2002). As a matter of fact, it has

been discussed several times by consultants in the mid-1990s (Holweg et al., 2005). Asyad Group is Oman's national logistics firm, in charge of the country's logistics development. It is considered as one of the companies that implemented supply chain integration to provide integrated services and end-to-end logistics solutions to fulfil the needs and expectations of its customers. Basically, the group is made up of 16 logistics firms and other alliances. Asyad Drydock, Asyad Shipping, and more have worked jointly in the Supply Chain Management department. Furthermore, the company is utilising big data and restructuring its business units to manage internal skills and improve overall performance. Collaboration has been portrayed as the formation of interfirm linkages whereby parties work together toward common goals for the purpose of accomplishing mutual objectives

(Cao and Zhang, 2011; Chen et al., 2017; Flynn et al., 2010; Yan and Dooley, 2013). Consequently, to foster partnership benefits from the context of business partners, Daugherty et al. (2006) stressed the importance of creating a central relationship-based synergy while taking into consideration the expertise and skill of individual firms. However, despite the large number of scholarly books and academic publications, there is still a misconception of collaborative supply chain definitions. Collaboration seems to encompass the whole supply chain and when it is put in the context of the supply chain it requires further explanations. Today's supply chains are more complex than ever before where many businesses are encountering issues such as failure to enhance the efficiency of their supply chain processes (Ellinger, 2002; Fawcett and

Magnan, 2002), lack of trust among business partners (Ireland and Bruce, 2000; Barratt, 2002), failure to identify the right company to coordinate with (Sabath and Fontanella, 2002), risk sharing, update business processes and other issues (Kumar, 1996; Burgess et al., 1997; Boddy et al., 1998; Holmes and Srivastava, 1999; Hoyt and Huq, 2000; Humphreys et al., 2001; Reary, 2002). On the other hand, there are also benefits that supply chain collaboration can provide such as developing both explicit and tacit knowledge (Kahn et al., 2006), capitalising on resources (Fawcett et al., 2012; Mentzer et al., 2008), improving forecasting accuracy, enhancing customer experience (Ku et al., 2007; Li, 2014; Panahifar, Byrne and Heavey, 2015; Lorenzo Ochoa et al., 2017), increasing flexibility (Fisher, 1997; Lee et al., 1997) and reducing cost (Cao and Zhang, 2011; Chen et al., 2017).

SUPPLY CHAIN COLLABORATION IS REGARDED AS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND EFFECTIVE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND MAY BE CONSIDERED AS THE MAIN ELEMENT IN IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for Sohar, today administered the oath of office to the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for Sohar, Dr. Abdulhadi bin Ahmed al-Hadi, in the presence of the Chairman of the Supreme Court, Dr. Saif bin Khalifa bin Ahmad, and the Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court, Dr. Saif bin Khalifa bin Ahmad.

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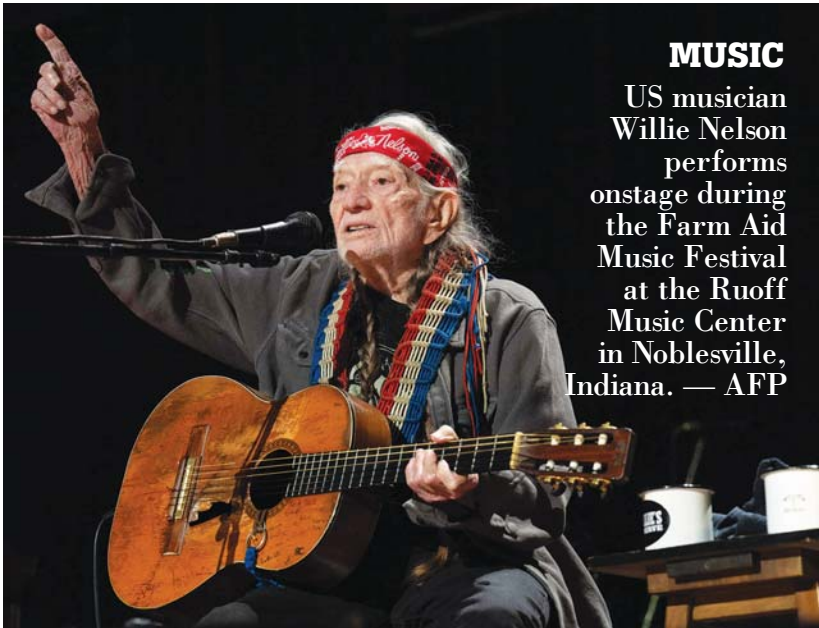
STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

MUSCAT: The frequent critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should adhere to social distancing guidelines as being on our feet.

Dr. Abdulhadi bin Ahmed al-Hadi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for Sohar, today administered the oath of office to the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for Sohar, Dr. Abdulhadi bin Ahmed al-Hadi, in the presence of the Chairman of the Supreme Court, Dr. Saif bin Khalifa bin Ahmad, and the Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court, Dr. Saif bin Khalifa bin Ahmad.



FISH
Sardines are grilled during the Saint Anthony celebration at Alfama neighborhood in Lisbon. — AFP



MUSIC
US musician Willie Nelson performs onstage during the Farm Aid Music Festival at the Ruoff Music Center in Noblesville, Indiana. — AFP



FASHION
A model walks the runway of the Giorgio Armani show during the Milan Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
China Wang Xueer competes after competing in the heats of the women's 50m backstroke event during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
Children refugees eat as they wait in front of Red Cross registration center in Goris. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 26, 2023 | RABEE AL AWWAL 10, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



Give summer a slip visit Salalah to beat the heat

Khaled Abdul Malak

If you are seeking respite from the scorching summer temperatures that plague the Gulf Arab countries, there is no need to embark on a long journey. Just 1,000 kilometres south of Muscat lies Salalah, a unique gem on the Arabian Peninsula. From July to September, Salalah offers a cool climate and lush green landscapes, attracting a diverse crowd of Gulf nationals and international visitors alike.

While the rest of the Gulf region swelters in temperatures soaring between 40 to 50 degrees Celsius, Salalah, in Dhofar Governorate, enjoys a gentle misty embrace with temperatures rarely exceeding the 20s. This atmospheric transformation is courtesy of the monsoon known as 'khareef'.

"The mist that blankets the entire region revitalises the arid wadis (valleys), transforming them into vibrant, green havens during khareef, with temperatures remaining remarkably pleasant. This mag-



netic allure beckons our Gulf brethren," explained Ali Ghawas, a Salalah native.

Traditionally, Salalah's residents would descend to coastal areas and low plains during khareef, abandoning their mountainous city due to the thick fog that engulfs the region. Ghawas added, "During this season,



it becomes perilous to release our animals to graze in the wadis due to the slippery terrain and limited visibility, often reduced to mere metres."

Over the past decade, Salalah has evolved from a tranquil, small port renowned for exporting the region's famous frankincense to a thriving destination for Gulf nationals and expatriates alike. Apart from its moderate climate, Salalah boasts expansive sandy beaches, archaeological treasures, and the historic Souk Al Haffa market. Here, visitors can explore traditional Omani wares, including clothing, gold and silver handicrafts, and an array of fragrant frankincense. During the Salalah Tourism Festival held in July and August, visitors can immerse themselves in the vibrant world of traditional Dhofari dancing.

Salalah's coastal allure is further enhanced by the Indian Ocean's majestic waves, which surge during khareef. These waters entice surfers and sea enthusiasts who can bask on unspoiled sandy beaches. Just a few kilometres east of the city, Taqah beach, a beloved spot for Italian surfer Alessandro Guidoni, offers pristine sandy shores and exhilarating waves. Guidoni shared, "I found it superb with its sandy beach and great waves. One day, I was so lucky the waves were perfect, and I was practically surfing with schools of dolphins, some 50 meters from the shoreline."

Salalah's historical significance as "The Land of Frankincense" is evident from its past role as a crucial trading hub for this aromatic gum. Frankincense was once shipped from Khor Rori, a natural harbour situated approximately 40 kilometres east of Salalah. Among Salalah's most visited archaeological sites is the ruins of the fortified ancient port city of Sumhuram, built in the Khor Rori area between the fifth and third centuries BC.

With its new international airport, designed to accommodate 1 million passengers in the initial phase and a staggering 6 million upon completion, Salalah is positioned to become a premier tourist destination in the Gulf region. Additionally, the construction of high-end resorts further elevates its appeal.

While khareef welcomes visitors with its mild climate and verdant landscapes, the rest of the year sees Salalah emerging as a haven for speleologists (cavers) from Oman and around the world. Numerous expeditions have been undertaken to explore the breathtaking cave systems within the region, including Tawi Ateer, Teyq, and Shaat sinkhole. It's worth noting that during the khareef period, access to these caves becomes restricted due to the elevated water levels inside them.



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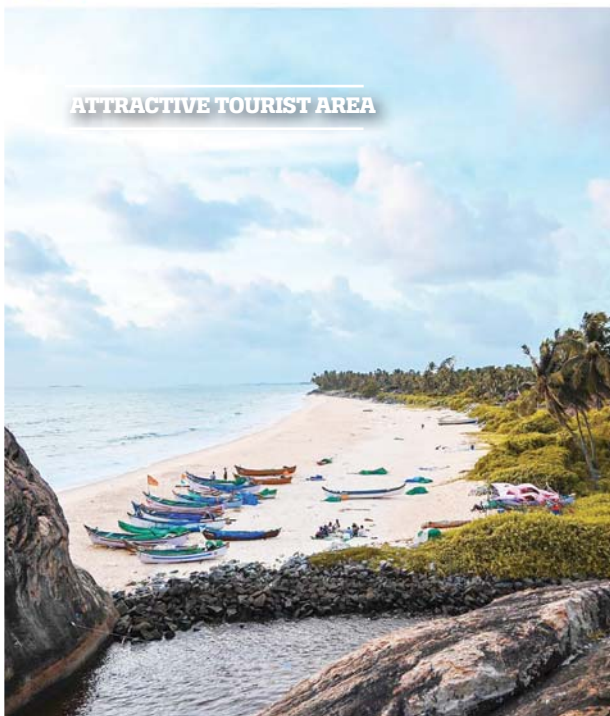
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PHOTOGRAPH

After 4 decades of clicking Oman, Thomas says farewell

KABEER YOUSUF
@KABEERYOUSEF

AFTER 40 YEARS, CT Thomas is bidding adieu to Oman, his second home. He is leaving Oman with unforgettable images and sweet memories.

Thomas, who hails from the South Indian state of Kerala, has been capturing many moments and his camera bears witness to the growth of Oman as a modern nation.

Thomas also known as Achayan (elder brother in Malayalam) arrived in Oman in early 1980s following his brother CT James, who came in 1978. He joined his brother's studio in Wadi Kabir.

"It feels like yesterday when I arrived in Oman in the 1980s and it has been a truly remarkable journey. This nation is an oasis of peace and the people are very hospitable with no prejudice," says the 65-year-old photographer.

Hailing from a very humble family in the district of Pathanamthitta of Kerala, he has been running a studio at Star Cinema Complex, Ruwi, since 1989 and has always been a familiar face among both citizens and expatriates. Over the past 40 years, Thomas has clicked events from first Asian Beach Games to trade fairs and international conferences and Muscat Festivals.

"Living in Oman itself is a bliss and I have enjoyed life in Oman with my wife and three daughters. Along with the blessings, I faced several adversities in life, but I withstood them all as I have been honoured to live in Oman," smiles Thomas.

For him, photography has always been a passion but never imagined that the same hobby would become his bread and butter one day. He said he was fortunate to meet leaders, top company officials and most of the who's who in the country," says



CT Thomas' archival footage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik attending an event

Thomas, who is also involved in many humanitarian initiatives. As a photographer, what gives him

a unique sense of contentment and purpose is the National Day celebrations held every year.

"National Day celebrations are festivals of celebrations as several countries and cultures come together in Oman and it becomes a mélange of celebrations."

Since 1985, he recalls that he has clicked more than 100,000 pictures in Oman. Nothing seems as bright and as lively as the sunrise and sunset in Muscat which are the most spectacular moments to behold. In his own words, "They present a glorious blend of colours indeed."

"When I click, I forget all my sorrows because only calmness and peace can create the best photo out of what you see in the front. My interest in photography grew in my childhood and a love for nature took me to this profession," a photographer by chance but a dedicated professional by perseverance, said.

According to him, it needs years of hard work and patience to learn photography. Thomas was also a signboard artist for a while before he opened his own studio in Ruwi.

The personality that inspired Thomas as a photographer has been His Majesty the Sultan and he would often stand for hours in front of the inspiring pictures of HM, which were taken by veteran national photographers.

Having begun his career with Mamiya and Pentax cameras nearly four decades ago, he feels that photography has undergone a drastic change from films to digital ones. He says only the smartest can survive in the industry.



C T Thomas

Thomas feels he had a highly successful life in Oman and wants to lead the rest of his life in his home town in Kerala. For all achievements in life, he feels he is indebted to God almighty, to the country, to the rulers and to his family which comprises wife Jolly Thomas and three daughters.

Recently, Thomas was honoured by St Thomas Marthoma Church, Ruwi, for his contributions as a longstanding member for the last 25 years. As the Sultanate of Oman celebrates its 53rd National Day, Thomas celebrates his 40th year of life in Oman.

"Oman is my second home and I will always be holding the great, colourful and unforgettable images of the country and people that formed me, my thoughts and my life. Ma'assalama Oman," Thomas shared his feelings with the Observer with a tearful smile.

FASHION

The 'tyranny of thinness' still dominates fashion

DESPITE CLAIMS THAT the fashion industry is embracing curvier bodies, the data suggests it could be guilty of what one expert calls "fat-washing".

While a handful of plus-size models such as Paloma Elsesser have grabbed media attention in recent years, the figures shows they remain a vanishingly small minority.

Vogue Business looked at 9,137 outfits unveiled during 219 shows in New York, London, Milan and Paris last season and found that 0.6 per cent were plus-size — defined as US size 14 or above, which is actually the average size for a woman in the United States — and only 3.8 per cent were size 6-12.

This means 95.6 per cent of outfits presented were in US size 0-4.

Paolo Volonte, who teaches sociology of fashion in Milan, says brands use a few curvy models to deflect criticism.

"It's 'fat-washing'," he said, comparing it to criticisms of cynical "green-washing" by which the industry is accused of making empty climate pledges.

"They use curvy models in their shows to show inclusivity but in fact this is to preserve and maintain a system based on the tyranny of the thin ideal," Volonte said.

Ekaterina Ozhiganova, a 20-year-old model and law student, says luxury brands simply "refuse to represent normal people".

Medium-sized women "are often told either to lose weight... or to push themselves up to XL," she said. "Neither is healthy."



'DARLING, THAT'S THE JOB' Ozhiganova's advocacy group, Model Law, carried out a survey that found nine out of 10 models felt pressure to change their bodies, more than half on a regular basis.

"It's very hard for them to talk about," she said. "If you complain, everyone will just say: 'Darling, that's the job.'"

How it became "the job" is a



question of history.

Volonte says the obsession with thinness dates back to the birth of industrial production techniques.

Previously, designers made clothes specific to individuals.

In the mass production era, they use small templates which they scale up for larger sizes.

This only works up to a certain size, however, after which fat and muscle can change the shape of bodies in more complex ways.

"It is much more expensive to produce and sell clothing on higher sizes and requires more expertise," said Volonte.

At the same time, thinness became firmly associated with wealth — having the time and money to work on your body — an aspiration that has been deeply entrenched by advertising and the day-to-day practices of the fashion industry.

A FANTASY WORLD

There have been efforts to change things since the early 2000s when fears spread that size-zero models were encouraging anorexia in young people.

Since 2017, France requires models to pass medical examinations, while the country's two biggest luxury conglomerates, LVMH and Kering, signed charters vowing to stop using size-zero models.



But with sizes varying from one brand to the next, this is hard to enforce.

Designers are as trapped in the status quo as everyone else.

Elite couturier Mohammad Ashi says discrimination based on race and gender has been fairly well tackled in fashion, but shape is tricky.

"We're not trying to avoid it, but from an industrial point of view, we can't produce a plus-size dress. We sell what we show and I know our clients personally. It's just business," he said.

Couturier Julien Fournie has used pregnant models and his favourite model, Michaela Tomanova, has "six centimetres everywhere more than the others".

But he says, "fashion remains fashion... It's a fantasy world and that will never change fundamentally." — AFP



art & life

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ART

‘Break down walls’: Tunisia dance show celebrates diversity

A PERFORMER ON a wheel-chair, another who is blind and a third with Down syndrome share the stage for a pioneering new dance show seeking to push the boundaries in Tunisia.

Choreographer Andrew Graham says “the show is not about disability at all” but rather a celebration of diversity and inclusion that also involves migrants and LGBTQ artists.

“The idea is to break down all the walls,” said Graham, 35, whose production “Lines” premiered this weekend and runs until October 8 at the Dream City Festival in Tunis.

The performance brings together 15 dancers from different segments of society in the north African country.

It offers an opportunity for “sharing and mutual aid”, said Gabonese dancer Cedric Mbourou, 29.

The performance comes at a difficult time for Tunisia, which recently saw a wave of racial violence mainly targeting migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Mbourou himself was forced to go into hiding after an anti-migrant speech by President Kais Saied set off a wave of attacks.

“We see people just dancing for an hour non-stop,” said Graham, a Franco-British dance artist and teacher based in Marseille with his company L’Autre Maison.

“And very quickly the onlooker becomes interested in the dance and not necessarily who they are but in what they actually do.”

‘A LOT OF ENERGY’

Graham hopes that this “very ambitious” show can “travel around the world, in Europe, the Middle East and Africa”.

As the ensemble performs together, the audience is captivated by 16-year-old Rayen descending from his wheel-chair onto the stage to perform his mesmerising dance number.

Graham conceived of “Lines” after directing workshops in Tunis in 2021 for L’Art Rue, the organiser of Dream City, and activities aimed at making art accessible to underprivileged children.

The choreographer said he also drew inspiration from the stories of his grandfather, a Sicilian from Tunisia, and from “this extremely mixed country that has blended many cultures”.

The show features rhythmic “hadra” chants from the Muslim Sufi tradition and electronic music beats.

On stage, the singer and dancer Iyed — who at just 13 years old studies at the prestig-



ious music conservatory in Tunis, and who is visually impaired — is gently hoisted into the air by the other performers.

His mother Hakima Bessoud, 49, is proud to join her son as they live out a passion that she said was a “childhood dream”.

She left a tourism sector job in 2018 to accompany her son to the conservatory and said that, since rehearsals started for “Lines”, her life has been “turned upside down”.

“Before, I had the routine of a homemaker: children, the house,” she said. “Now, I have a lot of energy, and I rush to do everything to attend rehearsals.”

‘READJUST EVERYTHING’

Bessoud, who says she hails from a conservative background, said she welcomed being around the show’s openly gay dancer and actor Ahmed Tayaa.

“I have no problem with differences,” she said. “We must accept everyone, even Iyed is different.”

Tayaa, meanwhile, said he was amazed to see his sister Nourhene, 21, who has Down syndrome, perform.



He marvelled at having “discovered the artist that is Nourhene”.

“We all have a disability,” he said. “The people who see the show will discover their disability on the inside.”

“Lines”, he said, is “a paradise for people with all kinds of differences”.

One of the show’s professional dancers, Sondos Belhassen, 55, hailed the experience as “unique for a dancer”, saying they had experienced “something wonderful”.

“I wonder what weight it will leave in their universe, what memories they’ll keep?”

She said the performance had forced her to “readjust everything”.



“We are forced to experiment,” she said about working with performers whose physique is not “typical of a dancer”.

“We have a free body that can do anything, even the unexpected.” — **AFP**

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



Dr Zainab Al Ajmi

Identify Hidden Talents of Students

EACH STUDENT IN the school is special and has hidden talents. What’s more, the way students find joy in the classroom portrays their passion for life and creativity. Passion serves as the driving force behind groundbreaking innovations, and the unearthing of hidden talents is indispensable for the creation of new inventions. In other words, the key is to create an environment where students feel comfortable exploring their interests and abilities. To this end, it is necessary to develop non-academic skills. It is essential for children’s growth and development to be aware of what they like to do and how they spend their time. Mindful activities like reading, singing, and writing, will provide them with both entertainment and engagement in their non-academic learning, allowing them to utilise their talents (Ahuja, 2022, Tutoring Platform).

Put simply, talents refer to the skills and abilities that a person has a natural affinity for. Referring to the views of (Luke, 2022) when people think of talents, they often only focus on drawing, acting, singing, playing instruments, learning languages quickly, and so forth. In fact, there are a collection of talents that people have, such as magic tricks, endurance, cooking, flexibility, singing, multilingualism, athletic ability, innovation, leadership, perfect pitch, puzzle-solving, creativity, public speaking, out-of-the-box thinking, acting, fashion sense, a great memory, and video game skills (arrestyourdebt.com). According to (https://www.myprivatetutor.ae/blog/), teachers are better positioned than parents, and friends to sense a latent talent in a student. Teachers can encourage their students to develop their gifted skills by providing them with opportunities to learn and practice. Here are some specific things that teachers can do: 1. Observing the hobby of a student: Teachers can identify the talents of a student from their hobbies and can counsel them to pursue their hobbies in a serious manner. People usually tend to pick up those hobbies in which they are talented. Furthermore, people having natural talents in a skill tend to be drawn towards similar hobbies and find their calling in that.

2. Asking them about their passions and interests: Teachers can gain insights into their students’ talents when they observe them passionately pursuing their interests. They can get honest replies from younger students and can observe them while the students are immersed in the activities that they truly love. 3. Organising various competitions and shows: The objective of these contests should not be to intensify a feeling of competition or rivalry among the students but to help them discover their hidden talents and gifts lying within them. Similarly, teachers can also organise some shows and exhibitions, such as science exhibitions, arts, and crafts exhibitions, that will encourage students to participate in them and showcase their talents. 4. Arranging a group outing and encouraging them to express themselves freely: Students are usually spontaneous when they are outdoors and are provided with some downtime and thus feel free to express themselves. It is not surprising to see a reticent and shy student, voicing some melodious songs without feeling any inhibitions. 5. Organising extracurricular Olympiads: Teachers can also spot the latent talents of students by organising extracurricular Olympiads such as Math Olympiad, Science Olympiad, etc. Students tend to prepare themselves best and give their best performance for these Olympiads.

To conclude, distinguishing hidden talents in the classroom can be a gratifying experience for both the teacher and the student. It assists students in discovering their strengths and abilities as well as gives them the confidence to pursue their aspirations.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT zeinbf@moe.om