

Ugandan consular services in Muscat

The Embassy of Uganda in Saudi Arabia will organise consular services from November 27 to December 1 in Muscat. Services related to passports, visas, attestation etc, would be done for citizens and residents during the period. Ivan Kakama, Head of Consular and Labour Affairs at the Embassy, said the date to convert the old, machine-readable passports to e-passports had been extended. **SEE PAGE 4**



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THE CITY OF SUR:
THE HEART OF
SHIPBUILDING IN OMAN



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S&P UPGRADES OMAN'S
CREDIT RATING TO 'BB'
WITH STABLE OUTLOOK



P19

TEAMS BATTLE FOR
FINAL FLEET POSITIONS
ON THIRD DAY



MUSCAT

FM RECEIVES CALL FROM EU OFFICIAL

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call on Saturday from José Manuel Albares, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Spain. During the phone call, they discussed bilateral relations and joint cooperation between the two friendly countries and reviewed regional and international issues of common concern. — ONA

RAWALPINDI

IMRAN ATTENDS FIRST RALLY SINCE SHOOTING

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan addressed thousands of supporters on Saturday at his first public appearance since being shot earlier this month in an assassination attempt he blamed on his successor. Khan alleged that “three criminals” were waiting to make another attempt on his life. But he said “fear makes an entire nation into slaves”, telling supporters they should not be intimidated by threats or violence. During his speech, he also admitted failures in tackling corruption during his premiership - saying he “failed in bringing the powerful under the law”. **SEE P5**

INSIDE



PHOTO BY SAMI AL HINAI

BIKE RALLY IN NIZWA

To celebrate the 52nd Glorious National Day, Nizwa Bikers organised a bike rally in the public square in Nizwa Market on Friday. The event was held with more than 300 participants from inside and outside the country. They performed a bike rally between Nizwa and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. **REPORT ON P4**

Battle against silent pandemic a global goal

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Out of 45 countries present at the third Global High-Level Ministerial Conference on antimicrobial resistance (AMR), 34 countries have adopted Muscat Manifesto on accelerating the ‘One Health’ actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), said, “The Muscat Manifesto is ambitious and concrete. The next step is to act on the targets. The conference has been really successful. AMR is a silent pandemic, and the world should take it seriously.

The Sultanate of Oman will be taking steps towards combating AMR. On the sidelines of the conference, the Observer spoke to Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and asked about the



steps taken towards combating AMR.

“Standards and procedures need to be in place,” Dr Hilal said, adding, “We have to educate starting from the farm, the clinic, the health centre, healthcare workers and healthcare providers. We also have to educate the public from the basic level, but we also have to look at the other

part, which is very important, that is a political will from the governments and wise use of antibiotics.”

To the question of how soon the action can be taken, he said, “This is going to be a progressive step, and it has to be oriented as there is huge work to be done in changing the culture and practices.” **TURN TO P2**

Liwa residential city to open today

STAFF REPORTER
LIWA, NOV 26

HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham al Said will preside over the opening of the model residential city in the Wilayat of Liwa today in conjunction with the 52nd National Day anniversary.

The residential city project is the biggest project of its kind undertaken by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to relocate citizens affected by Sohar Port within the area stretching from Ghatfan township to the wilayat roundabout.

The project in Naber area includes schools, places of worship, a health centre, power generation stations, two filling stations, parks, playgrounds, and lands for commercial establishments such as malls.



The project includes 2,963 residential plots on an area of 1,256 hectares and includes about 3,400 residential homes that include projects for infrastructure, roads and lighting.

The city will have a water supply network spanning a

54 days on, no sign of missing Izki woman

VINOD NAIR
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The search is still continuing for Hameeda bint Hamood al Amri, a senior citizen who went missing from Izki on October 3.

Yusuf al Hadrami, her son, said on Friday, “More than 53 days have passed, but we have not lost hope of finding my mother.”

Abu Talal al Hamrani, a journalist, has announced a reward of RO 11,000 for anyone who provides information on the woman.

He said that it is impossible for a woman of this age to get lost or disappear for so long and the family should re-analyse the search methods.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) earlier clarified that the social media report of finding the missing woman in Izki is not true, and said this particular news is related to a previously reported incident.

ROP urged people who have information about her or her whereabouts to contact the nearest police station or the number 9999.

Documentary traces 3 women’s incredible conquest of Empty Quarter

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 26

In 2018, an all-women team including two Omanis embarked on the grueling 800 km walk through Oman’s most formidable landscape, Rub al Khali, the Empty Quarter. Britain’s Janey McGill, along with Atheer al Sabri and Baida al Zadjali dropped

everything to walk across the Empty Quarter in Oman, to become the first modern women to cross this vast stretch of barren wilderness.

With a male British and Omani crew in support, the women walked 758 km, the equivalent distance of London to Switzerland over 28 days with a clear objective: To challenge prejudices and



breakdown stereotypes, and to deliver a message to the world that we are “better together” regardless of culture, gender or identity differences.

Accomplished American film director and cinematographer Matthew Millan of 180 Films was flown in at very short notice to accompany the entire expedition.

This grand journey through

the land of dreams forced the three women to dig into the deepest recesses of their resolve to face not only the most hostile of environments, but also the spectre’s that haunted their pasts.

Arrowhead features unbelievable cinematic scenes filmed deep inside the Empty Quarter together with up-to-date interviews with the three women.



COUNCIL OF OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ARAB PARLIAMENT MEETINGS

CAIRO: The Council of Oman took part in the meetings of the standing committees and the second session of the third annual convening of the Third Legislative Term of the Arab Parliament which were held in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

The meetings debated several issues pertaining to pan-Arab coordination, ways to boost joint Arab parliamentary action, as well as the most prominent challenges facing joint action and ways to overcome them. Besides, the session reviewed the reports of the standing committees and made suitable decisions.

Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani

took part in the meeting of the Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee which discussed the political and security developments in the Arab world and reviewed the draft report of the political situation in the Arab world.

Majlis Ash'shura was represented at the meetings by Shaikh Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, and Hameed bin Ali al Nasser.

The agenda of the Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee included the Algiers Declaration issued at the 31st the Arab League Summit held in Algeria in November this



year. The declaration included: the Palestinian cause, the situation in the Arab world, enhancing joint Arab action, relations with neighbouring countries and partnerships and international situations.

Shaikh Ali bin Nasser al Mahrouqi participated in the meeting of the Social, Educational, Cultural, Women and Youth Affairs Committee. The committee approved a number of proposals which included: a proposal to protect the Arabic language, a proposal for the Arab family in sports affairs, and the divorce phenomenon and reluctance to marry.

Large-scale awareness needed to tackle AMR, says Dr Bharati

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 26

The issue of anti-microbial resistance (AMR) is a multifaceted, complex problem with consequences for individuals and healthcare systems, Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar, India's Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, said during her participation in the Third Global Conference on anti-microbial resistance.

"Awareness, enhanced surveillance measures, strong infection prevention and control, and necessary investments are key to control AMR," she said.

She highlighted India's high-level commitment to tackle AMR holistically and mentioned the country's National Action Plan (NAP) for AMR launched in April 2017 to improve awareness, enhance surveillance measures, strengthen infection prevention and control, and promote investments to control AMR.

In her statement, she urged all countries to commit to a strong political will, promote inter-sectoral coordination between public and private sectors, and comprehensively strengthen the healthcare systems worldwide to tackle AMR.

She shared India's experience while participating in the 'Ministerial panel discussion on AMR and the political response' and called for global commitment to tackle the issue.

During her stay in Muscat, Dr Pawar met Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and discussed ways to deepen the already excellent cooperation in the area of healthcare.

She also had a fruitful interaction with the prominent members of the Indian community and invited them to participate "enthusiastically in the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas (PBD)", being organised in January 2023 in Indore, Bhopal.

Call for animal welfare body

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Calls for measures and systems to save stray animals, neuter and release them have been on the rise to protect them from peril.

Touched by the increasing number of cases where strays are subject to the human ordeal, a group of animal lovers has come forward requesting a regulation to protect these homeless creatures from dangers.

Speaking to the Observer, a group of women who work for the welfare of the wadi dogs by feeding them within their housing compound said there needs to be an Animal Welfare Body to take the cause forward.

"The Sultanate of Oman is the most beautiful, safe, hospitable country, and this country is simply amazing. Omanis smile from the heart, and this country is a paradise for both the citizens and the residents. Still, we need to have a body to protect stray animals and ensure their well-being. For this, we need to have an awareness campaign," Neha Chakraborty, one of the animal lovers, said.

This group of women feed, neuter and release such stray,



wadi dogs inside their housing compound and ensure that their over-population is controlled. They recently neutered two packs of 10 dogs and were vaccinated. No more puppies are born besides the existing ones, and all are disease-free.

Side by side, they allow the adoption of these dogs once they are tamed. "We are working closely with Pet Care, and we work with the vet at a negotiated price and help to vaccinate and neuter animals. If we find puppies, we report them to the clinic, and they check them and take action against ticks and other flies. Eventually, we

give them to new owners for free, and we take their contact numbers so that if the dog is lost, we can report it," she added.

They request only an official body designated to look after the affairs of both domesticated and stray animals. Can they be protected from getting killed, especially in front of the children, and from letting them live with the bullets inside their bodies lifelong?

Asked about the potential dangers that such strays can pose, the group of women said they need to make sure that the population remains controlled and these dogs don't encroach on the residential

areas.

"The problem begins when we encroached on their habitats and redesigned their areas into our fashions as the population increased faster. Their reproduction needs to be controlled, and adoption should be encouraged. Once their basic needs are met, we don't think they would pose any danger to the neighbourhoods."

They advocate the TNR programme (Trap-Neuter-Return), which is essential to the process. If the goal is to keep the population decreasing, fixed cats need to be returned to the location where they were trapped. Of course, it's in the best interest of the cats to go back to their original location. The proper process of rehoming is long, sometimes tedious and isn't always successful. Often, recently rehomed cats leave the new location to return home and are killed in the process of crossing busy intersections.

According to them, only humans are the reason for the existence of stray animals as humans dump rubbish, and as long as there is rubbish, there will be street/feral.

Battle against silent pandemic a global goal

FROM PAGE 1

Kuwait's Minister of Health, Ahmad al Awadhi, explained that they are very happy with the conference's outcome: "I think it is time to implement this outcome and declaration. We appreciate the Sultanate of Oman for hosting this event."

According to Dr Haileyesus Getahun, Director of Global Coordination and Partnership, Anti-microbial Resistance Division, WHO, some of the complex and multifaceted global challenges range from lack of basic access to clean water and sanitation, poor infection and disease prevention and control in healthcare facilities, farms and communities, poor access to high-quality and affordable medicines, vaccines and diagnostics.

"Anti-microbial resistance is a threat to food security for humans, animals and the environment. We need all these sectors to work together.

For the first time, we have had the highest number of health and agriculture ministers attending the event. We hope this conference



will be transformational and add to the global efforts to tackle anti-microbial resistance."

India's Minister of State for Health, Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar, noted that India launched a National Action Plan (NAP) for AMR, in April 2017, to improve awareness, enhance surveillance measures, strengthen infection prevention and control, and promote investments to control AMR. She also urged all countries to commit to a strong political will, promote inter-sectoral coordination between public and private sectors, and comprehensively strengthen the healthcare systems worldwide to tackle AMR.

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With the World Cup 2022 in Doha all set to enter its second week, the football fever has gripped the Sultanate, which is one of the partner countries.

Several football fans are now residing in the Sultanate of Oman and travel to and from neighbouring Qatar via shuttle flights operated specifically for the tournament.

Speaking to the Observer, Haarun, an Iranian team supporter who had returned from Doha after his team trounced Wales on Friday, said: "There is a group of some 35 Iranian supporters, mostly based in Italy, staying put at one of the hotels of the country in Qurum. Irrespective of the team's performance, we will visit Qatar for a few matches, including important ones."

He said, "Came here as part of the hospitality packages of the World Cup, and the entire procedure has been smooth and efficient. Barring a few unoccupied shifts, the shuttle flight that we have been to has been operated to the full facility." He said fans of other national teams also stay in the Sultanate of Oman in groups and fly to Qatar just before the match.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Heritage and



Tourism (MoHT) said that several Argentine fans residing in the Sultanate of Oman visited many tourist sites before heading to Qatar for their team's crucial match against Mexico on Saturday. Led by Messi, Argentina was shocked when Saudi Arabia defeated them 2-1.

"It is a great achievement through an unprecedented work that attracted World Cup fans to the Sultanate," said Suleiman, an Omani citizen. It may be noted that the 'Oman World Cup Programme' is having a Football Fan Festival at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) from November 18, which can cater to 4,000 guests at a given point in time, offering them contests, activities, competitions, food stalls and live broadcasts of

all 64 matches.

As part of the Sultanate of Oman's programme for the FIFA World Cup 2022, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched the #HalfTimeForOman competition on social media platforms to win free holidays in the Sultanate of Oman, through the national travel operator platform — visitoman.om, in partnership with Oman Air. Aimed at getting inbound tourists to the Sultanate, the competition will be held during the break between the halves of all matches of the Qatar 2022 World Cup and targets fans from outside the country and give them the opportunity to explore unique experiences, heritage and tourism sites.



‘Amad Duqm 22’ gets off to a spectacular start

DUQM: The ‘Amad Duqm 22’ began in Duqm on Friday. The nine-day event started with a youth auto march in which the local community, employees at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and the teams participating in the event took part.

The march started from Amad Duqm village to Saay Commercial District. The sky of Duqm was also adorned with paragliders that accompanied the march.

The event, organised in cooperation with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will see many youth activities in various fields such as culture, sports, innovation, technology, sustainability and entertainment.

Eng Tariq bin Mohammed al Mujaini, Head of the team preparing the site for ‘Amad Duqm 22’ event, said, “We faced challenges in preparing the site before the start of the event, due to the lack of some materials that we had to bring from the capital, Muscat. Thanks to the efforts of Omani youth, we were able to overcome the challenges. All facilities were completed on schedule and now many visitors are enjoying the event and its activities.”

“Preparing such a large site within a short period of time is not easy at all. We had to pave the ground and supply electricity to the site. Thanks to everyone who contributed to preparing this event in Duqm for the first time,” he added.



SCULPTURES IN NUFOON VILLAGE

As part of the events accompanying ‘Amad Duqm 22’, the Special Economic Zone Department of Duqm organised a number of visits to the Sculptors’ Forum in Nufoon village. The programme included visits to a number of school students and members of the Omani Women’s Association in Duqm. Visitors expressed their admiration for the aesthetics of these sculptures, which will be transferred to decorate a number of sites in Duqm.

Nufoon village also received many tourists and visitors to see

the sculptures, made by a group of international sculptors who came from Spain, Germany, Bulgaria, Romania and Tunisia, in addition to a number of prominent Omani sculptors. The statues reflect the geological nature of the Sultanate of Oman.

The sculptors participating in the event produced statues of different sizes, ranging in height from 2-3 metres. The Sculpture Forum, which will last until December 3, includes workshops to introduce the art of sculpture to locals, employees of companies operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and school students.

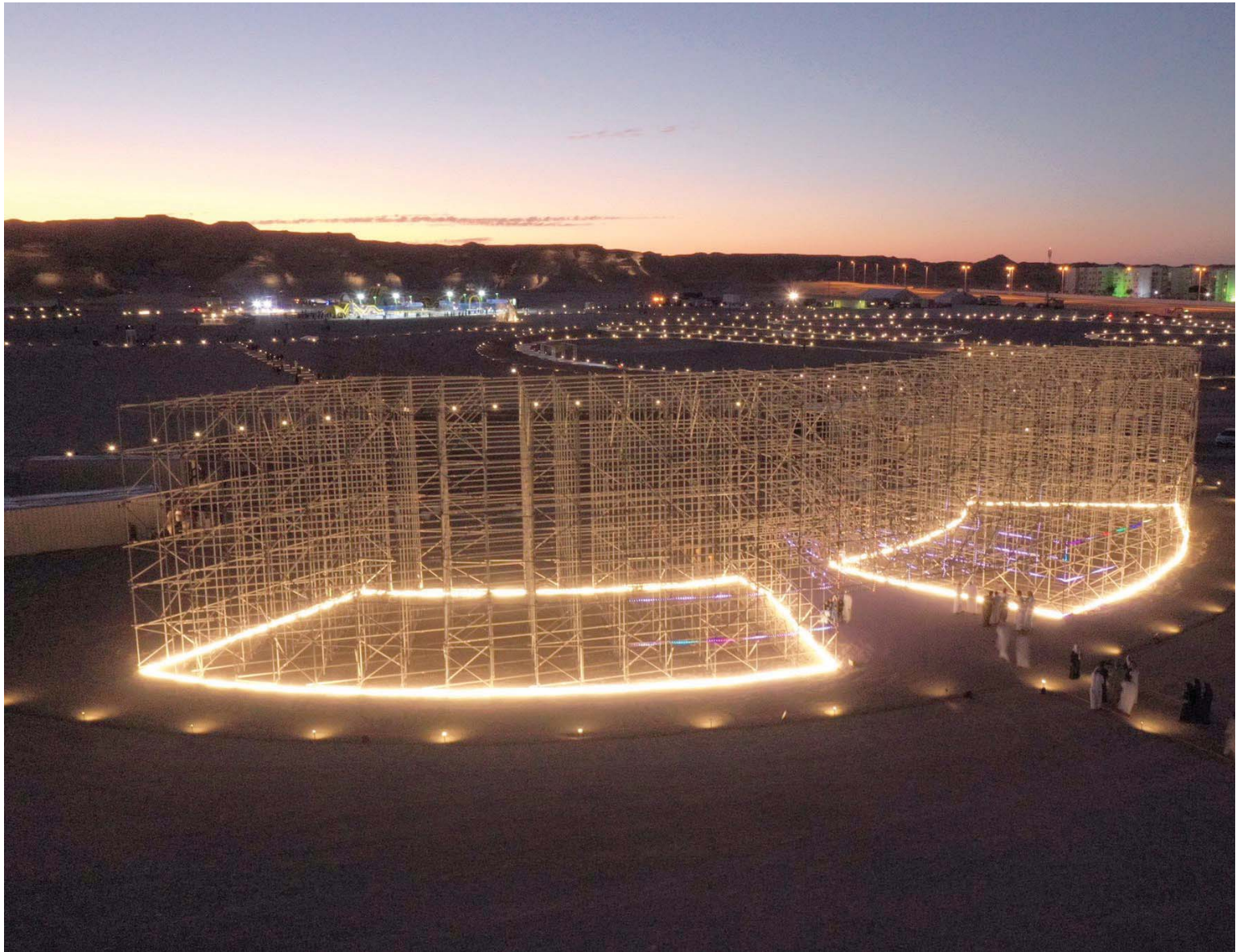


The ‘Amad Duqm 22’ includes more than 30 youth activities in various fields such as culture, sports, innovation, technology, sustainability and entertainment

The Event, which is being held in an area of 500,000 sqm, was designed to simulate a residential village with integrated facilities.

Duqm is suitable for the Event because it encourages immersion in the experience and meditation in an atmosphere of tranquility away from the noise of the city”, he furthered.

The activities in ‘Amad Duqm 22’ will be diverse and combine the future vision of youth and brainstorming. They include meditation sessions, an electric bike circuit (scooter), padel exhibition games, an obstacle course, drones, a remote control car racing circuit, art labs, video games, and backgammon. There will be concerts, astronomy camp and other activities that introduce visitors to the pristine nature of Duqm. Also, for the first time in Duqm, there will be orchestra performances in addition to a number of musical performances.





Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN
For HYUNDAI Grand Santafe & DM Santafe



Date of Campaign : 27 / 11 / 2022
Campaign Type : Recall
Recall Segment : Electrical
Product Description : Hyundai Grand Santafe & DM Santafe

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2015 - 2018	Hyundai	Grand Santafe & DM Santafe	KM8SN4HF0HU215324 to KMHSY81XDJU294015	3205

Description:
An electrical short in the HECU (Hydraulic Electronic Control Unit) module may occur very rarely. It could increase the risk of an engine compartment fire.

Procedure:
Replace the ABS multi fuse kit.

For More information:
Customers of affected vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment for further details/booking Appointment etc from Date – 27/11/2022

Contact Details:
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.30 PM with effect from Date 27/11/2022



Ugandan consular services in Muscat from Nov 27 to Dec 1



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Embassy of the Republic of Uganda in Saudi Arabia will organise consular services from November 27 to December 1 in Muscat. Services related to passports, visas, attestation etc, would be done for citizens and residents during the period.

Speaking to the Observer, Ivan Kakama (pictured), Head of Consular and Labour Affairs at the Embassy of the Republic of Uganda in Riyadh and Permanent Mission to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, said the date to convert the old, machine-readable passports to e-passports had been extended, and all Ugandan citizens were encouraged to replace their old passports with the new international electronic passports.

“The government of the Republic of Uganda extended the deadline for using the old machine-readable passports to April 4, 2023, and all citizens living away from Uganda should get their passports converted into electronic documents without which travelling will be difficult,” he said, adding that this measure is in adherence to ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) regulations on digital passports.

In line with the above directive, the Ministry of International Affairs has issued guidelines for processing the applications for e-passports for Ugandans in the diaspora.

Accordingly, the Embassy



of the Republic of Uganda will undertake a consular visit from Sunday, November 27, to Thursday, December 1, from 11 am to 10 pm at the Royal Tulip, Ghubra, to ensure that all Ugandans living and working in the Sultanate of Oman are supported to attain the e-passport and all other consular services that will be offered.

“Additionally, the mission will offer all other consular services during the visit, and all Ugandan citizens and residents who look forward to the diplomatic services can make use of this opportunity,” adds Esther Babirye (pictured), Coordinator of Ugandan Embassy services in Oman. They include attestation of academic documents, official documents, marriage certificates and business-related documents from Uganda and the Sultanate of Oman.

The visiting mission representatives will also be visiting the prisons and hospitals to offer support to the Ugandans in distress. Emergency travel documents to Ugandans in need whose passports are lost or damaged and letters of No-Objection for repatriation of deceased Ugandans after securing the necessary documents indicating the cause of death from the authorities will also be issued.

“We also call upon all Ugandans in the Sultanate of Oman to engage themselves to share the government policies available to them for national development and to be law-abiding citizens,” Esther added.

Biker rally marks National Day

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, NOV 26

To celebrate the 52nd Glorious National Day, the Nizwa Motorcycle Club (Nizwa Bikers), affiliated with the Oman Automobile Association, organised a bike rally in the public square in Nizwa Market on Friday.

The event was held with more than 300 participants from inside and outside the country. They performed a bike rally between Nizwa and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Ahmed bin Salim al Ismaili, President of the Nizwa Bikers Club, said, “The celebration is part of the glorious 52nd National Day. The ceremony also included many craft, cultural and sports activities. It also contains an exhibition of products made by men and women belonging to social security families. The event witnessed the broad participation of cycling teams from the GCC and Arab countries.”

PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI



UTAS-Nizwa celebrates 52nd National Day

NIZWA: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences — Nizwa (UTAS-Nizwa) commemorated the glorious 52nd National Day under the auspices of Dr Saeed al Rubaie, President of the UTAS.

The celebration was attended by the deans, assistant deans, members of the supporting and administrative academic staff, and university students.

The event began with the Omani National Anthem followed by a recitation of a national poem delivered by the student Maathar al Siyabi.

Then the ceremony witnessed performances of traditional dances and songs. The theatre committee of UTAS-Nizwa presented a theatrical show in



which they embodied the history of Oman through the past and present.

The ceremony concluded with a poetic operetta of Hilal al

Shiyadi performed by a group of the University students. Also, the students displayed a painting of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

At the end, Dr Al Rubaie extended his thanks and appreciation for the efforts put into organising the event with a rich and fruitful content.



Oman Hotel and Tourism celebrated the 52nd National Day at Sur Plaza Hotel, by cutting the longest 5.2-metre cake prepared for the first time in Sur, in the presence of Talal bin Khalfan al Shaabi, Assistant Director at Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, and Anslam, General Manager.

Knowledge Oman sets up new team for community seminars

MUSCAT: As part of enriching the society with knowledge-led seminars that aim at engaging the public in critical thinking on current issues and collaborative efforts towards aligning with the Oman Vision 2040, Knowledge Oman, the leading community knowledge sharing platform in the Sultanate, has appointed both local and expatriate new team members from the private sector, academia and youth in order to enhance the delivery of community seminars touching all segments of the society.

Imad al Hamdani, working for one of the telecom operators, is the new head of seminars, while Bradley Levack, an expat educator in one of the private international schools, will act as his deputy, and Hassan al Afarai will lead the volunteers that are integral part of the delivery of the seminar programmes.

“Sharing various practical industry knowledge, promoting

talents and positivity across the country is what we do at Knowledge Oman. Bringing different industries together under one roof, along with the support of the academia, while ensuring youth too are part of the society impact has always been our goal. For that, we have now set up a new team that comprises of individuals who work in companies, educators who work in academia, and youth who are active and eager to be part of the impact,” said Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman.

Imad al Hamdani, currently heads the strategic planning at Ooredoo, joins Knowledge Oman to lead the seminars team primarily focusing on planning, organising and conducting sessions for the society. Al Hamdani is a Chemical Engineering graduate from the University of Sheffield with more than 20 years of diversified experience in the fields of



Imad al Hamdani

Engineering, IT, Commercial, Corporate Communication and Strategic Planning and Performance Management.

Bradley Levack, a South African educator at the Qurum Private School, joins the team to support Imad al Hamdani in seminar planning, organising and conducting sessions for community knowledge transfer. Bradley has been involved in community development through Integrated Development



Hassan Salem al Subi

Planning, a German Technical Cooperation programme. He has been instrumental in Heritage and Cultural Tourism development, having served on the Board for Tourism Development and lecturing tourism at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, in Port Elizabeth. He supports various municipal structures in rural areas focusing on Youth Development Skills Programmes. Bradley currently coordinates the International Cambridge and



Bradley Levack

Pearson Edexcel Programme at Qurum Private School.

Hassan al Subi, a student at the Middle East College, joins the team to lead the volunteers to support the necessary delivery of the seminar programmes and logistics. Hassan has received numerous certificates of appreciation from the college for organising and conducting events as part of the academic activities. Hassan holds a certificate in human development accredited by the Magic Training LTD Institute.

Knowledge Oman has been conducting events along with other private and public institutions since 2008. Members of the platform come from diverse and different backgrounds, both local and expats. The platform encourages community engagement amongst all passionate individuals within the Sultanate to enhance their own self-development as well as to collaborate towards serving Oman and moving it forward towards its 2040 goal. Seminars have included areas of interest such Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Cyber Bullying, Gamification and the most recent seminar “Woman: The Pulse of a Sustainable Society” that acknowledge women’s contribution for the society. Knowledge Oman seminars often draw on expertise within the community and are offered free to the public. These efforts form the basis of Knowledge Oman’s commitment to knowledge sharing and community upliftment.



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In brief

■ **TAIPEI**



TAIWAN LEADER TSAI QUILTS AS RULING PARTY CHIEF

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen has stepped down as head of her ruling party after it suffered defeat in Saturday's local elections, while the Beijing-friendly main opposition held its ground.

Voters cast ballots for mayors, magistrates and various other posts in 22 cities and counties in elections Tsai had previously described as a stage to showcase "Taiwan's persistence and resolve to defend freedom and democracy" as Beijing ramps up pressure on the island.

But her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) lost four out of the island's six key mayoralities, including capital Taipei.

■ **MOSCOW**



FOREIGN MINISTER OF BELARUS DIES

The foreign minister of ex-Soviet Belarus, who this year dismissed concerns that Russia would send troops to Ukraine from his country, has died at the age of 64, the Belta news agency reported on Saturday.

The Belarusian leadership is a close ally of the Kremlin and allowed Belarusian territory to be used by Moscow's troops to launch a military operation against Ukraine in February. "The Belarusian foreign minister Vladimir Makei has died suddenly," Belta state news agency reported citing the foreign ministry spokesman Anatoly Glaz.

■ **WASHINGTON**



SINGER AND ACTRESS IRENE CARA DIES AGED 63

Irene Cara, an Oscar-winning singer and actress who recorded the title tracks to the blockbuster 1980s movies "Fame" and "Flashdance," has died at age 63, her publicist said on Saturday.

Cara was found deceased at her home in Florida on Friday, publicist Judith Moose said, adding that the cause of death was unknown at this point.

"She was a beautifully gifted soul whose legacy will live forever through her music and films," Moose said earlier in a written statement.

Cara is well-known for singing the title track of the smash 1980s film "Fame," with its indelible refrain "I'm gonna live forever, I'm gonna learn how to fly."

We cannot be broken: Zelensky



Rescuers work at a site of private houses heavily damaged by a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack in Dnipro, Ukraine, on Saturday. – Reuters

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed on Saturday that Ukraine would continue to resist Russian attacks, as the country marked the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor famine that affected millions of Ukrainians under Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

Several European leaders travelled to Ukraine to pledge support after weeks of Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy grid caused widespread power and water cuts as temperatures plunge with the onset of winter.

"Ukrainians went through very terrible things... Once they wanted to destroy us with hunger, now -- with darkness and cold," Zelensky said in a video posted on social media.

"We cannot be broken," he added.

Leaders from Belgium, Lithuania and Poland were in Kyiv on Saturday to commemorate

the victims of the 1932-33 Holodomor — Ukrainian for "death by starvation" — which is regarded by Kyiv as a deliberate act of genocide by Stalin's regime.

The Polish and Lithuanian prime ministers were in Ukraine for talks that, according to local media, could in particular focus on a possible new wave of migration from Ukraine this winter.

Ukraine's Border Guard Service said Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was in Kyiv and "honoured the memory of the Holodomor victims" at a memorial in the Ukrainian capital.

Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo was also in Kyiv on his first visit since Russia attacked.

"Arrived in Kyiv. After the heavy bombing of recent days, we stand with the people of Ukraine. More than ever before," he said on Twitter, posting photos of him

shaking hands with Zelensky.

According to the Belga news agency, Belgium pledged a further 37.4 million euros (\$39 million) of financial aid for Ukraine.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron announced in video statements new financial aid packages to support Ukrainian grain exports, which have been disrupted by the war.

"The most vulnerable countries must not pay the price of a war they did not want," Macron said in his statement.

Lawmakers from Germany are set to recognise the Holodomor as "genocide," according to a draft text of a joint resolution from Germany's ruling coalition and the opposition seen by AFP.

The German resolution says that up to 3.5 million people are believed to have died that winter alone but historians put the total

death toll as high as 10 million.

At the tall candle-shaped Holodomor memorial centre in central Kyiv, a dozen Orthodox priests in black and silver robes gathered on Saturday for a religious ceremony for the victims of the famine.

"It was an artificial genocidal famine... Now when we experience this massive unprovoked war of Russia against Ukraine, we see history repeating itself," priest Oleksandr Shmurygin, 38, said.

Among those gathered to commemorate the victims of the famine was 39-year-old lawyer Andriy Savchuk, who spoke of its "irreparable" loss for Ukraine.

"Stalin's system, the repressive state wanted to destroy Ukraine as a nation. Today we see that the efforts made by Stalin are continued by (President Vladimir Putin," he said.

— AFP

■ LUCKY CHARM ON THE BLOCK



An employee poses with a Christian Dior dress worn by actress Elizabeth Taylor, and recently discovered with other dresses in a suitcase, ahead of their sale at Kerry Taylor Auctions, in London on Friday. A "lucky charm" Christian Dior dress worn by Elizabeth Taylor on the night she won best actress at the 1961 Oscars is to be sold at auction on December 6 after being stored in a suitcase in London for over 50 years. — AFP

Artemis 1 test mission enters orbit around the Moon

WASHINGTON: NASA's Orion spacecraft was placed in lunar orbit on Friday, officials said, as the much-delayed Moon mission proceeded successfully.

A little over a week after the spacecraft blasted off from Florida bound for the Moon, flight controllers "successfully performed a burn to insert Orion into a distant retrograde orbit," the US space agency said on its web site.

The spacecraft is to take astronauts to the Moon in the

coming years — the first to set foot on its surface since the last Apollo mission in 1972.

This first test flight, without a crew on board, aims to ensure that the vehicle is safe.

"The orbit is distant in that Orion will fly about 40,000 miles above the Moon," NASA said.

While in lunar orbit, flight controllers will monitor key systems and perform checkouts while in the environment of deep space, the agency said. — **Agencies**

Imran addresss first rally since being shot

RAWALPINDI: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan addressed thousands of supporters on Saturday at his first public appearance since being shot earlier this month in an assassination attempt he blamed on his successor.

Khan alleged that "three criminals" were waiting to make another attempt on his life.

But he said "fear makes an entire nation into slaves", telling supporters they should not be intimidated by threats or violence.

During his speech, he also admitted failures in tackling corruption during his premiership - saying he "failed in bringing the powerful under the law".

The shooting was the latest twist in months of political turmoil that began in April when Khan was ousted by a vote of no confidence in parliament.

Saturday's rally is the climax of a so-called "long march" by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to press the government



Workers install a bullet proof glass shield on the main stage of the venue ahead of the start an anti-government rally lead by former prime minister Imran Khan (not pictured) in Rawalpindi on Saturday. — AFP

to call a snap election before parliament's term expires in October next year.

"My life is in danger, and despite being injured I am going to Rawalpindi for the nation," PTI quoted Khan as saying in a morning tweet.

"My nation will come to Rawalpindi for me."

China reports over 30,000 Covid cases for 3rd straight day

BEIJING: China reported 35,183 new Covid-19 infections on November 25, of which 3,474 were symptomatic and 31,709 were asymptomatic, the National Health Commission said on Saturday, setting a new high for the third consecutive day.

That compared with 32,943 new cases a day earlier - 3,103 symptomatic and 29,840 asymptomatic infections, which China counts separately.

Excluding imported cases, China reported 34,909 new local cases on Friday, of which 3,405 were symptomatic and 31,504 were asymptomatic, up from 32,695 a day earlier.

There were no deaths, keeping fatalities at 5,232. As of Friday, mainland China had confirmed 304,093 cases with symptoms.

Mega-cities continue to struggle to contain outbreaks, with Chongqing and Guangzhou recording the bulk of new cases.

Chongqing, a southwestern city of 32 million people, reported 7,721 new local cases for Friday, a jump of almost 20 per cent from the previous day.

Guangzhou, a prosperous city of nearly 19 million people in southern China, reported 7,419 new local cases for Friday, down slightly from 7,524 cases a day earlier.

New local cases for Friday in the capital Beijing jumped 58 per cent to 2,595, according to figures released by local health authorities on Saturday.

There are COVID outbreaks in almost all Chinese provinces, with Hebei, Sichuan, Shanxi and Qinghai provinces each registering more than a thousand new cases on Friday.

— **Reuters**

Is parenting for ever ?

Ahmed (not his real name) is a 65-year-old man with a long history of mental health problems. He often attends the clinic with his old mother who is in her 80s but insists to attend with him and know everything about his treatment.

Ahmed never married and he lives with his mother since his other siblings moved out with their new families. I once suggested that Ahmed is doing well and it's OK if he comes alone due to mum's poor health, she looked at me and said in Swahili, "wazazi newazazi." When I asked her to translate she said, "parents will always be parents."

The story of Ahmed and his elderly mother is not unique as we see many parents, especially in the Arabic countries, remain the main support system for their grownup sons and daughters regardless of their ages.

One can understand that when a person is battling mental illness , his or her parents would be the closest to feel their pain and modify their life to care even when other family members are willing to do that. These roles however may be unjustified if the person is in good health yet he still brings his problems to their aged parents who did their share of upbringing. Having said that, some parents enjoy being needed regardless of how inconvenient, that can be.

The situation in the west is entirely different as children leave the family home after the age of 18 so they can be independent and the parents can rest and enjoy their lives while keeping social contact with their children. The idea of mentioning this is not to



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

THE BEST WAY IS TO ENABLE A YOUNG PERSON TO MAKE CHOICES AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE AND TEACH HIM/HER TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHOICES. THIS WAY THEY GROW AS RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE WHO WOULD SEEK ADVICE FROM OTHERS BUT TAKE THE FINAL DECISION AFTER DEEP THINKING

compare east and west as each culture has its own values that makes it special but rather to describe a difference in children-parents relationships.

The question that pops to mind is, to what degree should parents get involved in their children's lives? It's natural for parents to want the best for their children but who gets to define best and best for whom?

What if the parents are too involved to take full charge of children's lives? I remember interviewing a young woman doctor who was applying to join a psychiatrist training programme. Her father wrote her CV for her and even wrote her a reference despite not being a doctor himself. He took photos of her seeing patients, collecting blood from them and talking to other patients. He included that in her application folder, which was rather unusual.

During the interview it was clear that the young doctor was not very interested in being a psychiatrist but was trying to fulfil her father's dream.

So how can parents strike a balance between caring and giving the young generation a little more freedom in planning their lives? I personally think the best way is to enable an young person to make choices as early as possible and teach him/her to take responsibility of choices. This way they grow as responsible people who would seek advice from others but take the final decision after deep thinking. This way they don't blame others when the new couple face marital difficulties.

FAN GLORY



A Mexican supporter wears a traditional head dress at the Souq Waqif marketplace in Doha, during the Qatar 2022 World Cup tournament, on Saturday. – AFP

Horse-drawn, petrol-powered, cycling chats

How safe do you think cyclists feel when they are on the road? Apart from finding them an inconvenience now and again, do you ever genuinely consider them as much road users as you are? They are intriguing questions, aren't they?

I must admit that, as a frequent road-user, I had rarely thought much about it. I mean, in Oman we have some people who have no clear concept of where they should, or should not cycle, road or footpath, facing the traffic or joining it, left side or right side. I think we can all agree that there is no set rule, so we simply beware, and be aware, of every eventuality. Let's just say they are a perpetual hazard.

Then too, we see the everyday active cyclists, usually early in the morning or early evening, when the population is breakfasting or dining, the lycra-clad, brightly attired groups cycle their daily routes of 'penance' as they sweat out their lifestyle excesses to maintain their physiques. My good friends Andrew, Bernie, and Dave



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EVEN THE SMALLEST VEHICLES BECOME, AT 30KMPH, 100,000 JOULES OF KINETIC ENERGY, STEEL-JACKETED KILLING MACHINES

just a few of the 'wheelers' I both envy, for their health and fitness, and chastise for their intense commitment to their exercise routines.

I would say I'm jealous... but I'm not. In fact, I don't know whether I admire their bravery for taking on the challenge of Oman's roads, sans armor, or whether I simply shake my head and think "mad dogs and Englishmen (Irishmen, Scotsmen, Americans et al), go out..." well, you know the rest...

Why have I thought of this today... well first, I read a wonderful piece of literature from an old exam paper today, written in 1896, when Susan, Countess of Malmesbury, wrote a humorous magazine article describing the perils of cycling among the horse-drawn Hansom Cabs of the times. She writes of being the "prey" in a new sport of "chasing the lady who rides her bicycle," commenting that cycling "would be so much nicer... if they weren't trying to kill me." Being, as she

said, "as nervous as a hare that feels the greyhound's breath," she nevertheless ventures on, later admitting to such exhaustion that she, "went straight to bed," emerging only to pen her thoughts.

She turns a wonderfully sarcastic phrase or two when advising to "avoid being made into a sandwich, composed of a pedestrian who will not, and an omnibus that cannot, stop." She so deliciously understates too her



A woman rides a bike in Cairo, Egypt. – Reuters

intent to ride in the shelter, or slipstream, of that very omnibus much akin to "a dolphin playing around an ocean liner." I enjoyed the gaiety, the forced goodwill, and appreciated the satire of her writing, drawing all the fun and just enough hesitancy to reassure the reader of the validity of her experience.

Then a perfect counterpoint emerged by way of Peter Walker, who is a cyclist, and who is quick to point out the perils of his daily

commute to work, at the hands of motorists, but making the distinction that it is not a battle between cyclists and motorists, but rather a competitive edge, a mindset, that one falls into when they get behind the wheel, correctly pointing out that most cyclists also drive, thus "waging war upon themselves." It is more or less the individual fitting into a role like when pushing their way onto a train, scrambling up an escalator, or hogging the overhead luggage compartment on an airplane.

He is incredibly conciliatory too, but begs we motorists consider just one thing, that it is simple physics to recognise that even the smallest vehicles become, at 30kmph, 100,000 joules of kinetic energy, steel-jacketed killing machines, 'competing against' "human beings, unprotected flesh and bone seeking to get to work, to see their friends, to return to their loved ones." It's not fair is it... bringing a gun to a knife fight?



The City of Sur: The Heart of Shipbuilding in Oman

By Olga Velikaya

White seagulls soared over the shimmering turquoise-blue Gulf of Oman. Many roundabouts around the city were decorated with statues of dolphins, ships, fish, ship's wheels and anchors. All little details hinted at Sur's long history of being a glorious port renowned for building ships. From a distance, a brown circular lighthouse topped with a blue dome could be seen on the corniche.

Al Ayjah Lighthouse was a guiding landmark for all travellers coming from the sea or land to Al Sharqiyah South Governorate's capital. Its design was in harmony with the surrounding flat-roofed white houses, brown watchtowers on hills, and docked dhows. White and blue fishermen's boats dotted the corniche on one side, while local shops, restaurants and old houses took over the other.

"Allah Akbar," the sound of the call to prayer echoed across the open sea, and people hurried to the nearby mosques and quickly parked their vehicles. Despite the hot sun, the breeze made the air feel cool. This neighbourhood right in the heart of the city still retained its old charm with its narrow streets, small houses and enchanting doors. The souvenir shop next to the lighthouse had different small and medium-sized handmade replicas of wooden ships, drawings and other keepsakes. The shop's owner welcomed visitors with Omani coffee and dates and shared true captivating stories of his father's sailing adventures, his own travels to Kuwait, days of working as a teacher, and his expertise in ship model making (which he modestly called a hobby).

"I wanted to make small models for my kids and grandkids so that they would know about different kinds of ships built in Sur," said Ahmed al Alawi. "Later, my friends asked me to make some for them... That's how it all started." Reminiscently, he looked around the shop filled with ships of all sizes from 20 centimetres to 2 metres. It took him about two months of meticulous work to complete the larger model. A warm smell of teak wood emanated from his workshop, where every inch was covered with wood scraps and panels.

Near the Khor Al Batah bridge, a seaside restaurant served fresh catch of the day for lunch. The smell of grilled fish and the salty scent of the sea mixed together in a unique aroma of Sur. Everywhere I looked, my eyes stopped at something white, blue, or brown. Those three shades dominated



the landscape and created a coastal palette.

A full-scale beautiful wooden Ghanja ship and other traditional dhows greeted visitors at the entrance to the Fatah Al Khair Centre. The newly-renovated museum provided an insight into Oman's maritime heritage. The first ships were built with palm fronds and coconut husks, followed by dugout canoes, boats sewn together with natural fibres, and only in the middle of the sixteenth century AD, Omanis started using nails to build large vessels. More than thirty ships were given the name "Fatah Al Khair", others received religious names or blessings, and some were named



after animals, birds, or stars. During their glory days, Omani ships sailed to India, China, Iraq and East Africa. Despite the difficulty of travelling by sea and frequent storms and winds, the sea was the primary source of livelihood. People believed that anyone who went into the sea was lost, and those who returned were reborn. They were blessed with patience, perseverance and persistence.

If the modern museum was a walk-through encyclopedia of shipbuilding, the Ship Factory was an actual dusty workshop. Located close to the suspension bridge, it allowed visitors to see a real shipbuilding



process. The first large ship was still at the initial stage, but the other one, coated in the fresh layer of brown paint, was almost finished. Shipbuilders took full advantage of modern tools such as saws and electric drills, yet traditional techniques and materials were also used.

"I've learned how to build ships from my father," said Ali al Arami, the factory owner. "Now, my children also work with me." He mentioned that a ship could be ready to sail in 1.5 to 2 years, depending on its size. The workers used imported golden-coloured teak wood because of its durability to withstand moisture and heat for the ships



exterior work and Omani wood for the interior.

Inside the shop, young pupils in festive traditional clothes were filming a project for their school. Lujain, dressed in a red and black embroidered dress and golden jewellery, was holding a ship model. Despite the cameras, all kids were enthusiastically speaking in cheerful voices. Sur's history was created by their great-grandfathers, passed down to their parents, and preserved by the young generation. Due to the dedicated work of its people who poured their hearts into their work, Sur's shipbuilding glory was destined to continue.

Instagram Top Picks

sanjoysengupta
 Muttrah Market for Fish, Fruits & Vegetables

A MOMENT TO REST

iamraffi_d
 Desert Palm Oman - Sama al Wasil Desert Camp

LISTENING TO THE DUNES

retheesh.ph

GREEN ESCAPE

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

Around the World

Dining

How to Make a Cheese Board



THE GATES ARE flung open, guests start to arrive and Thanksgiving dinner? Soon. In the meantime, something to nibble with a glass of wine is required. The simplest, most appealing choice is a cheese plate. A few cheeses artfully arranged with a smattering of fruits and nuts is enough to whet the appetite for the big feast (and not ruin it either, since it's up to the guests to monitor what they consume).

THE CHEESES

Three cheeses, each with a different personality, is what you'll need to satisfy most guests. Select a hard cheese in the Cheddar category: something semisoft but not too funky or runny, like a Camembert style; and a fresher example, like a log of goat cheese. Avoid blue-



veined cheeses that tend not to be crowd-pleasers, and molten soft-ripening examples, often with rind that has to be pared off, which can turn your display into an unmade bed. Whether to offer generous wedges and knives or to precut your selections depends on how much mac and cheese you're planning in days to come. Among American hard cheeses, the Cheddars from Vermont makers like Grafton Village and Cabot are excellent, as is aged dry Monterey Jack from Vella Cheese in California. In the semisoft category Pleasant Ridge Reserve from Uplands Cheese in Wisconsin or Jasper Hill Farm's Whitney from Vermont would be top choices. For a fresh cheese, look to Cypress Grove's Humboldt Fog from California and Firefly Farms Mountain Top from Maryland, both goat milk with a just trace of blue that's not aggressive but provides complexity.

THE CRACKERS AND BREAD

Resist those everything bagel crackers and opt for plain so as not to outshine the cheeses. Toasted croutons made from thin slices of baguette are excellent vehicles for your cheeses. Pile them in a napkin-lined bowl or in a basket adjacent to the cheese display.

THE GARNISHES

Pecan or walnut halves, small bunches of seedless grapes, fresh or dried figs, seedless Medjool dates, a dish of condiment like a chutney or fig jam, slivers of fresh fennel or thin wedges of fuyu persimmon can give your display that welcome touch of cornucopia abundance while enhancing its munchability.

Travel Tales

Horseman and hero: Who is Argentina's 21st century gaucho?



RIDERS IN BERETS, espadrilles and traditional neck scarves stand out against a dust cloud enveloping a melee of hundreds of horses as they expertly herd the animals.

The riders are gauchos, deft horsemen who occupy a special place in the Argentine psyche, somewhere between legend and reality.

Every year, thousands of people from all over the country flock to San Antonio de Areco for the Festival of Tradition on December 6.

The city is just 120 kilometres (75 miles) from the capital Buenos Aires, but a different world altogether — a world of horses, pampas (grassland plains) and gauchos who wear daggers in their belts and play folk songs on guitars around campfires.

Every December 6, Argentina celebrates its national day of the gaucho.

And 2022 is special, marking 150 years since the publication of the poem "El Gaucho Martin Fierro" by Jose Hernandez — a 2,314-verse ode to Argentina's version of the cowboy.

Translated into dozens of languages, the poem tells the melancholic story of a 19th century gaucho, including his life of nomadic freedom in the expansive pampas and the discrimination he suffered due to his mixed-race origins.

Rebelling against authority and the advance of the city and fences, the character is a cattle thief and brawler.

He is also courageous, loyal and generous, making the gaucho "a kind of rebel 'avenger' in the minds of the poor classes," historian Ezequiel Adamovsky of Argentina's CONICET research council told AFP.

The poem sparked a romanticised obsession with the Argentine horseman and a literary genre that saw dozens of gaucho-themed books "devoured" by rural and work-

ing-class readers in particular, he said.

POLITICAL APPROPRIATION

Years later, under a conservative government, Fierro received an extreme makeover, with the anti-establishment rebel becoming a patriotic figurehead of the military, no longer just a popular idol.

In 1913, "El Gaucho Martin Fierro" was declared Argentina's "national poem."

Then, at the start of the 20th century, Fierro became white in the retelling of his tale rather than of mixed race.

It was a time that "the elites of

nationalists have all since claimed the gaucho for their own.

In San Antonio de Areco, modern-day gauchos herd horses and break them in, showing off their skills to adoring crowds in a world far from folklore and fantasy.

Well-kept horses are mounted with ease by children and octogenarians alike.

"The gaucho, the man of the field, continues and will continue to exist," said Victoria Sforzini, the city's director of heritage.

"It is impossible to replace the work done on horseback," she said, noting that with the territo-



the nation pushed the outlandish but enduring vision of a white, "European" Argentina," said Adamovsky, an expert on how the image of the gaucho has been massaged through history even as it was elevated to a national symbol.

In Adamovsky's Spanish-language book, "The Indomitable Gaucho," the subtitle calls the gaucho "the Impossible Emblem of a Torn Nation."

Many sectors of Argentine society grasp the gaucho as a symbol. Anarchists rejecting state authority, communists fighting the class struggle, "Peronists" representing the demands of rural workers and

ry's diverse topography and vegetation, "there are places where cars cannot go."

So who are the gauchos of 2022?

Are they the riders who perform for tourists on day-long excursions from Buenos Aires? Are they the rural workers who still ply their trade on horseback today?

Or are they like gaucho-descendant Julio Casaretto — a suburban mason who makes sure to go riding with his little girl on weekends.

"Even if the fields recede, even if everything gets lost a little, it is in our blood," he said.

— AFP

Events

Buffalo Museum to Reopen in May



THE FORMER Albright-Knox Art Gallery, now named the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, will reopen to the public on May 25 with a vastly renovated and expanded campus designed by the OMA partner Shohei Shigematsu.

A \$20 million commitment from New York state, announced on Monday by Gov. Kathy Hochul, completes the Buffalo museum's \$230 million capital campaign, believed to be the largest for a cultural institution in the history of western New York.

Throughout its history, the museum has been early to acquire works by living artists — beginning with a gift from Hudson River School painter Albert Bierstadt in 1863, the year after it opened. It was also among the first institutions to collect artists including Jackson Pollock, Henry Moore, Frida Kahlo, Andy Warhol and Mark Bradford.

The expansion is a "transformative project that will provide a significant boost to Buffalo's future," said Hochul, whose hometown is Buffalo. The museum has been closed since construction began in November 2019.

With this campus overhaul, the museum's annual economic impact on the state would increase to \$47 million from \$24 million as annual attendance would rise to 185,000-205,000 from 135,000, according to the University at Buffalo Regional Institute, a research center that the museum partnered with to conduct a comprehensive two-part regional study.

The centrepiece of Shigematsu's design is a new three-story gallery building, sheathed in a glass-curtain wall. The building will be connected by a fanciful transparent bridge, snaking through a grove of oak trees, to the 1905 neoclassical building designed by E B Green. Shigematsu has overseen substantial renovations to the 1905 building, as well as to a modernist building designed in 1962 by Gordon Bunshaft,

who bridged the two structures with an outdoor sculpture court that was rarely used, given Buffalo's inclement weather.

Now, the courtyard is being enclosed with a dramatic canopy of glass and mirrors rising from a funnel form, in a site-specific artwork by Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann of Studio Other Spaces that creates a new community gathering space for the campus.

"A key driver of this entire campus project has been to conceive an architectural solution that is synergistic with our mission to be an open and accessible museum to diverse audiences," museum Director Janne Siren said.

Financier Jeffrey Gundlach, a Buffalo native represented by the G in the museum's new name, gave \$65 million for the expansion, with the stipulation that the campaign include both private contributions and government support. (The new gallery building is also named after Gundlach.)

Overall, the museum is doubling its exhibition space to 50,000 square feet, all dedicated to the permanent collection in an inaugural reinstallation that will display more than 400 works.

Roughly 15% have never been exhibited, including recent acquisitions of work by Nick Cave, Ed Clark, Simone Forti, Jeffrey Gibson, Arthur Jafa, Simone Leigh and Stanley Whitney. A highlight will be the exhibition of all 33 of the museum's monumental paintings by the abstract expressionist pioneer Clyfford Still, the second-largest holdings of the artist worldwide after the Clyfford Still Museum's collection. Still gave 31 of these works to the Buffalo museum in 1961 after his first career retrospective there in 1959.

"Still recognised the museum as a good home for his art," Siren said, "a home that had this artist-centric ethos."

— NYT

business



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S&P upgrades Oman’s credit rating to ‘BB’ with stable outlook



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Leading international rating agency S&P has upgraded the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman from “BB-” to “BB” with a stable outlook, attributing this enhancement to the improved financial performance of the country.

The upgrade, announced on Saturday November 26, 2022, also cited improvements in Oman’s balance of payments, crediting various financial measures adopted by the government within the framework of the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP), coupled with the rise in international oil prices.

According to S&P, Oman’s

financial performance further improved during the current year. It cited the significant efforts made by the government to reduce public debt which is projected to decline to 44 per cent of GDP in 2022, down from 61 per cent in 2021.

At the same time, state revenues are anticipated to increase over the next two years, while the state’s general budget and current account will continue to achieve financial surpluses until 2024.

This will lead to a strengthening of the state’s financial reserves, and achieve a fiscal surplus of about 5.8 per cent of the GDP during this year.

This compares with a deficit of about 4.9 per cent and 16.2 per cent during the years 2021 and

2020, respectively.

Economic activity will be supported by an increase in hydrocarbon production, an improvement in investment rates, and the government’s provision of more supportive measures directed at society and the private sector, the agency said, noting GDP growth will reach approximately 4 per cent in 2022 and 3 per cent in 2023.

Non-oil activities will become the main engine of growth in the coming years, S&P said, with the sector growing from 1.8 per cent in 2022 to an average rate of about 2.5 per cent during the 2024-2025 period.

S&P also praised the tangible efforts made by the government towards enhancing the principle

of transparency and disclosure of financial and monetary data and gross domestic product (GDP), through periodic bulletins.

It pointed out that Oman’s credit rating may continue to rise in the event that financial measures continue to strengthen the financial position of the state, particularly as the country directs more financial surpluses towards reducing public debt, and increasing financial flexibility to address any crises and unexpected shocks.

Standard & Poor’s has raised the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman twice in the last 12 months, from a “B+” rating in October 2021 to “BB-” last April. It has now raised it again to become “BB” for this year 2022.

MAFWR and FAO implement 7 projects worth \$2.3m in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
[@JmObserver](#)

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) last week said the ministry, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), currently has seven projects in cooperation with the private sector companies and the Green Climate Fund (CGF) — the world’s largest climate fund.

Valued at around \$2,335,819, the projects were revisited last week during the visit of Qu Dongyu, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. He was met by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, at the ministry’s general office in Muscat. These projects include:

1. Small pelagic fisheries management plan project in the Sultanate of Oman.
 2. Project to improve ship monitoring systems (VMS) in the Sultanate of Oman.
 3. Project to get rid of expired pesticides (second phase).
 4. A project to enhance the capabilities of small and medium enterprises in the bee products industry in Oman.
 5. Empowering groups of women producers in the Dhofar Governorate by strengthening the value chain of camel milk and its derivatives.
 6. A project to build a resilient environment and sustainable agricultural, water and fish resources to adapt to climate changes in the Sultanate of Oman.
 7. Development research project for the production and propagation of pest-free citrus seedlings.
- TURN TO P12**



(For illustration only)

Conditions met on Omantel, Helios \$575 million tower deal

JOMAR MENDOZA
[@JmObserver](#)

Wireless infrastructure group Helios Towers said “all closing conditions” are met as it set to acquire 2,890 cell tower sites of Omantel, Oman’s national operator.

The \$575 million deal — which was first announced in May 2021 — will transfer all of Omantel’s passive tower infrastructure portfolio transferred to Helios. The deal is now “unconditional” after the satisfaction of “all closing conditions”, said Helios.

Helios anticipates the formal completion by next month, in line with the series of long-stop date extensions announced by Helios as the deal prep dragged on.

Helios did not explain the reasons for the delay of the deal.

Kash Pandya, former CEO of Helios Towers, who has since been replaced by Tom Greenwood said: “We are delighted to announce the creation of our long-term partnership with Omantel through this transaction. We view Oman as a very attractive and supportive market for foreign investments, with strong growth and exciting future prospects. We will be further investing capital in Oman as we add to the tower count through greenfield BTS site development and colocations, enhance the current tower portfolio and develop a talented local Omani team.”

Last year, Helios agreed to buy Omantel’s passive infrastructure



(For illustration only)

portfolio of 2,890 sites for \$575 million and representing an enterprise value of \$615 million, including the Group’s estimate costs and capitalised leases of \$40 million.

The Africa-focused mobile

phone tower developer said it had previously intended to be the sole purchaser, but then agreed to purchase 70% of the newly-incorporated holding company.

Helios Towers explained that the rationale for the partnership

was to combine the operational expertise of Helios with the local and regional expertise of Rakiza Telecommunication Infrastructure LLC (Rakiza), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman Infrastructure Fund (Rakiza Fund) which will hold the remaining 30 per cent. Once completed, Helios Towers and Omantel will enter into a long-term service contract for a period of 15 years.

Through the deal, Helios will make a foray into the Middle East infrastructure market, having been Africa-focused over the last few years. The target assets are expected to deliver annual revenue of \$59 million and adjusted earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) of \$40 million in

the first full year of operations with further growth anticipated through collocation lease-up and 300 build-to-suit sites committed over the next seven years, for which \$35 million growth capex is expected to be invested.

Other commercial targets for Helios include number-two operator Ooredoo Oman and Vodafone Oman, the country’s third player, which debuted services in late last year.

Helios new CEO Tom Greenwood flagged to analysts earlier this month that he had recently visited Oman for a “couple of days” and met with “some key stakeholders there, including all of our customers, which include Omantel, Ooredoo, and Vodafone”.

Bank Nizwa offers home finance solutions for the Sustainable City – Yiti



MUSCAT: As the leading Islamic bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa has consistently endeavoured to contribute to the nation's revenue diversification agenda. In line with the same, the bank recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sustainable Development and Investment Company (SDIC) to offer Shariah-compliant home finance solutions to customers aspiring to buy properties at The Sustainable City – Yiti. This strategic agreement will help customers finance off-plan residential properties in the city whilst it is still under construction.

With a competitive profit rate of 4.85 per cent, Bank Nizwa seeks to make owning a home at this iconic location even more convenient, quick and secure. The Sustainable City – Yiti is set to be the first fully sustainable community in Oman, and will meet the highest standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability, with mixed housing typologies to suit different categories. The new project is also in alignment with Bank Nizwa's core values of supporting the country's transition to a green, circular economy whilst focusing on holistic well-being.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer at Bank Nizwa, said: "We are indeed delighted

to have signed this MoU with SDIC, the company responsible for developing the Sustainable City – Yiti, one of the region's most prominent urban development projects to embrace the principles of sustainability.

"This strategic initiative is congruent with Bank Nizwa's vision of playing an instrumental role in key national projects that are shaping the future of the country. The project's keen focus on green energy also complements Bank Nizwa's efforts towards fostering sustainable socio-economic progress in the country through unique, industry-first products and services."

He added saying, "As the Sultanate's foremost Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has established itself as a transparent, reliable and capable Shariah-compliant lender. Our actions are driven by an inherent zeal to make Islamic financing simpler, seamless and easily accessible to the community. At the same time, we constantly seek to deploy propositions that add value to the lives of our customers. Bank Nizwa's flexible Shariah-compliant financing solutions will go beyond giving an impetus to the real estate sector – it will help individual customers contribute to Oman's green vision as they enhance their asset portfolio."

Bank Muscat onboards General Federation of Oman Workers on B2B Connect solution

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed an agreement with General Federation of Oman Workers for its cutting-edge digital banking solutions for Host-to-Host connectivity.

The General Federation of Oman Workers, the trade union representing the Sultanate's workers before official authorities and in local, regional and international forums, has been on-boarded to Bank Muscat's B2B Connect.

Speaking on the occasion, Wafa bint Ibrahim al Ajmi, Assistant General Manager, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to onboard General Federation of Oman Workers to our sophisticated Corporate Banking solutions. Our solutions are designed to enable the General Federation of Oman Workers to process their large-scale banking transactions in an efficient way through digital channels.

"The straight-through nature of our payment solutions will support the General Federation of Oman Workers to provide faster responses to their stakeholders.

"The General Federation of



Oman Workers will be able to achieve a high degree of automation in payables, reconciliation and minimise risks related to payment processes. We continue to enhance our relationship with the General Federation of Oman Workers with our complete range of products and services which includes collections and payment solutions."

Nabhan bin Ahmed al Battashi, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers, said: "We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to use the bank's state-of-the-art B2B Connect solution to greatly improve our operational efficiencies. Our members, vendors and partners

will find it easier to complete their transactions with us, and we are confident that this will improve their satisfaction.

"Our partnership with Bank Muscat has fortified the digital transformation of General Federation of Oman Workers, and we look forward to further augmenting this successful partnership for serving and benefiting private sector employees."

Bank Muscat's comprehensive B2B Connect solution is a Host-to-Host solution built on an advanced architecture and addresses various corporate needs.

The B2B Connect solution connects the ERP system of the

corporate/institution with the online banking platform of the bank in such a way that payment requests automatically flow from the ERP to the Online Banking platform and payment status and account reconciliation information from the bank's system will flow to the organisation's ERP. Leveraging this connectivity, the corporate/institution can make salary and vendor payments with more efficiency and less operational risks.

The B2B Connect solution can easily be implemented by the corporate as the solution is not specific to any ERP system and can be configured across both standard and custom-built ERP solutions.

As the trusted banking partner in Oman, Bank Muscat is committed to supporting government entities and corporates to make a mark in digitalisation to create a successful business environment. Bank Muscat's processes and technology are designed to drive future corporate transactions and digital banking requirements. Bank Muscat provides a complete range of products, services and technology driven digital offerings catering to government entities, corporates, SMEs and retail.

Muzn presents exclusive offers on 52nd National Day

MUSCAT: Continuing to create value for its customers, National Bank of Oman's Islamic banking window, Muzn, presents exclusive offers on the occasion of the 52nd National Day. New and existing account holders get to benefit from financing solutions, cashbacks for privilege banking and investment referral programme, merchant discounts and more.

Utilising Islamic finance concepts that have been approved by its Shariah Supervisory Board, Muzn



offers the best banking experience with the highest standards. Muzn is offering customers attractive financing rates starting

from 4.5 per cent and up to three months instalment holiday on all new loans for salary transfers, allowing them to take out a loan without the pressure of having to start paying their instalments immediately.

This includes Personal, Home, Auto, Education, Travel and Goods financing, all with an easy and fast application process, and attractive monthly instalments.

Salima al Marzouqi (pictured), Assisting General Manager and

Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking, said: "As Oman's first Islamic banking window, we are committed to fostering the development of the country's Islamic finance sector and to bringing our customers the best banking experience.

"Taking a financing facility is one of life's biggest decisions, which is why, with our three-month instalment holiday, we are making it even more flexible and headache-free."

Saud Bahwan Automotive wins HVT Exceptional Growth Award 2022

MUSCAT: In a special ceremony – Contivention 2022, held at Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, Karel Kucera, Managing Director, Continental Middle East, honoured Saud Bahwan Automotive with the prestigious HVT Exceptional Growth Award 2022. The award recognises Saud Bahwan Automotive's efforts for exceeding sales targets for High Value Tyres (HVT) and becoming the Best Distributor for Continental Tyres in the GCC and LEVANT region.

Receiving the award was Abdullah Mohammed Bahwan, Managing Director Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group.

Speaking on the occasion, Karel Kucera said: "I would like to congratulate Shaikh Mohammed Saud Bahwan, Chairman, Saud Bahwan Group, for this noteworthy achievement. Saud Bahwan Automotive has demonstrated exceptional results



owing to its innovative marketing practices and customer-focused initiatives. I would like to thank the chairman for his strong leadership and strategic investments in development of the Continental Tyres brand in Oman. These have resulted in Continental Tyres benefitting with outstanding sales

in the High Value Tyre segment in GCC and LEVANT region."

Sharing his views on the occasion was Juan Uruburu, Head of Sales – Passenger and Light Truck tyres and Commercial Vehicle Tyres (CVT) for Middle East Region. He said: "Saud Bahwan Automotive is a very important partner for

us. We greatly appreciate their commitment to customer care and various marketing initiatives that reflects in all their activities. Indeed we are very delighted that they have won this prestigious award and we wish them the best for the future. We are confident that Saud Bahwan Automotive will continue its journey of success while exceeding all expectations year-on-year."

Accepting the prestigious award, Abdullah Mohammed Bahwan said: "On behalf of our Chairman, Mohammed Saud Bahwan, I dedicate this honour to our esteemed customers. I also take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to Continental Tyres for their commitment to bring in state-of-the-art product range, continued support and encouragement, without which this achievement would not have been possible."

JSIS holds 52nd National Day celebrations

MUSCAT: Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel LLC (JSIS) held a community-driven National Day celebrations as part of its commitment to improving the quality of life in the locality it operates in. Held at JSIS's Al Noor Hall in Suhar, this patriotic event was graced by Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah. Among the attendees were the Vulcan Steel Oman Managing Director, Chief Executive Officer of Jindal Shadeed, high-ranking government officials, community and state representatives from Suhar and surrounding neighbourhoods as well as non-profit organisations and charities.

The event celebrated Oman's long-standing history, achievements, people and heritage, with an array of locally sourced and freshly made traditional Omani food and dances.

Highlights of the evening included performances by North Batinah Al Noor Association for the Blind, Sohar Special Needs Association, surrounding elementary schools, and other local organisations.

Sanjay Anand, Managing Director, Vulcan Steel Oman, stated: "On this auspicious occasion of the 52nd National Day, on behalf of my Jindal Shadeed family, I would like to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and pray for his long life, good health and happiness. I wish peace, progress and prosperity to this great nation and its people. I also thank Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, for being our esteemed guest on this joyous occasion."



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ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUELI VOL. 39 NO. 231 | PAGES 16

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfalla al-Rusaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Sheikh Al Mukhtar bin Ahmad bin Al-Hadi, the oath of office at Al-Balad Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN
NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world," he urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — ONA

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS
are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, while expressing his ire, Hamed said. "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of COVID-19. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can assure them that," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH
MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Oman Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

E-commerce trends and strategies for 2023



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

In a survey conducted in 2021, 86% of US marketers and agencies said that they planned on including shopping features within influencer marketing campaigns. Given affiliate links are the most popular revenue-generating strategy for influencers, it is no wonder their impact in the industry continues to grow from year to year.

Ultimately, this transition will give e-commerce brands and affiliate marketers a lot more in-depth insights about what customers want and do. In 2023, e-commerce will start seeing the merger of affiliate and loyalty marketing, with influencers, ambassadors, publishers, and other forms of affiliates being used to drive repeat purchases among existing customers, by pushing products directly along with rewards, incentives, points, and other reasons for buying from the brand multiple times.

If you are planning to grab a slice of the e-commerce cake in 2023, you could start by drop shipping products.

Dropshipping is a method of retail fulfilment in which the store does not hold in-stock any products that they are selling. Instead, when a store sells a product using a dropshipping model, it purchases the product from a third party and has it shipped directly to the customer.

Dropshipping offers an alternative, which allows retailers to just fill orders, and then leaves inventory management, warehousing, and fulfillment - the higher-overhead aspects of sales - to the designated supplier for the dropshipping, typically a wholesaler or manufacturer.

One possible drawback of the dropshipping model is that the sales agent is removing responsibility for the timely and correct delivery of products, placing the bulk of customer support directly in the hands of the manufacturer or supplier.

Perhaps most significantly, if you decide to start dropshipping, you would be under no accountability in terms of delivery, it would be your suppliers job to deliver products on time, but your customers would place blame on you for any defective products or delayed deliveries.

You do not control the supply chain, you must depend on your suppliers for the quality, authenticity, and shipping of products.

When you are relying on a dropshipper to fill orders, you have a limited ability to offer customer support for the products you are selling.

The benefit of dropshipping is that you do not need to buy hundreds or thousands of the same products before you can sell them on your e-commerce store. You can use dropshipping as the main order fulfilment method, or as an addition to your existing business model.

Using dropshipping means when you decide that a product is worth having on your website, you can begin advertising it nearly instantly. You find the right supplier for dropshipping, you set up your website, and you begin selling.

Once you receive product information, you can upload your products on an online store or sales platform of your choice. If you are looking to start an online store and test new products, you might want to check out dropshipping marketplaces such as AliExpress or Direct Dropship.

With the growing success of influencers and a massive social media content consumption during the 2 years of pandemic, a growing number of marketers are producing content for social media to share with their followers how to use and appreciate the products that they are selling, either via affiliate marketing or dropshipping.

Fintech, digital technology can help drive Oman's economic diversification: IMF

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Developing fintech and digital technology has the potential to facilitate Oman's economic diversification, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In a report, the Washington DC-headquartered financial agency of the United Nations acknowledged nascent efforts by the Omani government to unlock the benefits of digitalisation in driving economic development.

"Given the rapid development of advanced technology, adopting digital technologies, as being implemented as part of Oman's e-government initiatives, and investing in relevant education are of even greater importance to support development and facilitate economic diversification," the Fund stated. The observations came in a newly published 'Selected Issues' paper prepared by IMF staff as background documentation for the periodic consultation with Oman.

In particular, the report stressed the importance of new technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), in improving efficiency and reducing cost, enhancing forecasting accuracy, and improving risk management and compliance.

"It also enhances financial inclusion and boosts geographic competition among banks, which can service more distant customers. These new technologies also offer the potential to strengthen prudential oversight and to equip central banks with new tools to pursue their monetary and macro-prudential mandates," it stated.

According to the report, the Omani government along with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) have been building an ecosystem



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: 'OPEN BANKING API STRATEGY TO HELP ESTABLISH COMPREHENSIVE AND NURTURING FINTECH ECOSYSTEM IN OMAN'

that is conducive to the success of the financial services sector.

The CBO has taken steps to develop fintech and the digital transformation journey in the financial and banking sector, it said. The Fund cited in particular the Central Bank's plans towards formulating an Open Banking API (application programme interface) Strategy as part of a wider push to stimulate innovation in the finance sector.

"The Open Banking API Strategy is part of the Oman fintech strategy, which aims at establishing a comprehensive and nurturing fintech ecosystem in Oman," it said.

Further, the unveiling of a Financial Regulatory Sandbox in December 2020 now enables participants to live-test their innovative fintech solutions in a safe environment under the supervision of the central bank, the report noted.

"A Regulatory Sandbox allows the regulator,

innovators, financial service providers and customers (as final users) to conduct field tests in an off-market development environment and collect evidence on the benefits and risks of new financial innovations, while carefully monitoring and containing their risks," the report stated.

In other efforts to support digitalisation, Oman and Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in November 2021 to strengthen cooperation in the fields of communications and information technology, the IMF noted.

A Saudi-Omani Digital Skills Initiative launched at the same time aims to support the exchange of best practices and expertise, as well as develop digital skills to meet the needs of the labour market.

Local banks too have undertaken initiatives to stay abreast of fintech's rapid evolution, it said. Bank Muscat, one of Oman's biggest lenders, launched a \$100 million fintech investment vehicle called BM Innovate to create a strong network in the fintech ecosystem and invest in both local and international fintech companies. Other banks are engaging and partnering with third party service providers to accelerate fintech adoption, it added.

MAFWR, FAO implement 7 projects worth \$2.3m

FROM PAGE 9

The meeting also included the signing of an agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the FAO to implement the strategic partnership programme under the South-South Cooperation (SSC) and Triangular Cooperation (TrC) strategies.

This agreement comes in the framework of joint cooperation and the desire of both parties to further strengthen their cooperation for a more efficient, effective and innovative partnership, supporting activities that are

in line with the organisation's mission and the sustainable development priorities, contributing to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

The agreement aims to enhance the strategic cooperation between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the FAO to develop general terms and conditions regarding the voluntary government contributions to the organisation, as well as the contributions of the FAO in the form of the provision of technical and scientific experience.

It also includes the methods of cooperation

between the southern countries and the triangular cooperation — a framework for development cooperation between two or more developing countries, along with other development stakeholders, engage in cooperation and mutually beneficial exchanges with the support of one or more developed countries and/or a multilateral organisation.

The agreement has the overall goal of supporting sustainable development of agriculture in Oman and contributing to the FAO's efforts to assist member states to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan.

Digitisation and Innovation: Key drivers of banking

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Digitisation and innovation will be the key drivers of banking and financial transactions of Oman in the future and is crucial for the booming FinTech sector, according to experts banking and FinTech who attended the Cedar-IBSi Summit in Muscat on Thursday.

Speaking to the Observer, V Ramkumar, Senior Partner, Cedar Management Consulting, a global strategy consulting, research, and analytics firm said that the banking landscape in the Middle East is being realigned, driven by the digital arrowhead with technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cloud Computing, and Microservices at the forefront of innovation. "Oman's banking and financial



sector is fast developing to the extent that the sector is all aligned

to meet future challenges of innovation and digitisation," said

Ramkumar. "Customer

expectations

are also shifting rapidly, with an increasing demand for an enhanced and personalised experience with 24/7 access to banking services," he added. The Cedar-IBSi Summit on NextGen Banking and Technology explored this convergence, with perspectives drawn from industry experts, banking leaders, and technology players on a wide range of topics, including Innovation, Digital Adoption, FinTech Collaboration, Customer Journeys, Open Banking, Payments, and more.

"Every business that attended today are aligning their activities with the Oman Vision 2040. But more importantly, for banks to survive, the hygiene factors such as having the right digitisation in practice and keeping abreast of the trends in innovation are crucial without which the business will be

left behind," he added.

The event which was attended by the best voices in the banking ecosystem of the middle east such as Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at National Bank of Oman (NBO), Mujahid al Zadjali, General Manager of IT and Operations, Bank Nizwa, Khalid al Hoqani, Head of IT, Alizz Islamic Bank, Vishal Govil, Head of Technology Strategy and MIS Bank Muscat, Hassan al Lawati, AGM-Head of SME and Special Assets Department, AhliBank SAOG, and Bhanu Narendrakumar, Head of Transformation, Core Platforms, Emirates NBD, also sought ways to address the future challenges of finance sector.

Technology experts from Oracle Financial Services, Infosys Finacle, Exlpeo, Yethi, and Kiya.ai shared their views on the application and advancements in technology.



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LEWANDOWSKI ENDS WORLD CUP DROUGHT

REPORT & PICTURES **P15**



France's Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring his team's second goal against Denmark. — AFP



MBAPPE PUTS FRANCE IN LAST 16

REPORT & PICTURES **P14**

Poland's Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring their second goal against Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

MBAPPE DOUBLE SINKS DENMARK



France's Kylian Mbappe scores their second goal. — Reuters

DOHA: Kylian Mbappe scored twice, including a late winner, as holders France edged Denmark 2-1 on Saturday to become the first team to reach the last 16 of the World Cup.

A potent French side knew a second victory in as many Group D outings would take them through to the knockout phase and they were well worth the lead that Mbappe gave them when he opened the scoring at Stadium 974 just after the hour mark.

However, Andreas Christensen soon equalised for the Danes and Les Bleus needed Mbappe to deliver again in the 86th minute as he turned in Antoine Griezmann's cross to puncture the Danish resistance once and for all.

Having scored four during France's victorious 2018 campaign and one against Australia, Mbappe now has seven goals in nine World Cup appearances.

Didier Deschamps's side now have the luxury of going into their final group game against Tunisia knowing a draw will guarantee them top spot, and even a defeat may not prevent them finishing first.

Having come roaring back to batter Australia 4-1 in their opening match in Qatar, France were more wasteful in front of goal on this occasion but at

least they did not come unstuck against opponents who have caused them problems before.

They were reigning champions when a defeat to the Danes knocked them out of the 2002 World Cup, while the sides played out the only goalless draw in 2018.

More recently Kasper Hjulmand's side beat France home and away in this year's Nations League, and it seemed that Deschamps had learned lessons from those two encounters.

If France were a shadow of their usual selves in Copenhagen in September, they were much better in this match, played in a pop-up stadium made of shipping containers on Doha's waterfront.

Deschamps changed three of his back four, with Theo Hernandez at left-back in place of his injured elder brother Lucas and Raphael Varane coming in for his first game in over a month.

PACE AND POWER

But the French attack was untouched from the Australia game.

If Olivier Giroud took the headlines then, here Ousmane Dembele was electric at times on the right, Griezmann excelled in an advanced midfield role, and Mbappe made the difference.



France's pace, power and passing were all too sharp for the Euro 2020 semifinalists who were lucky to go in level at half-time.

There were some French appeals for a red card in the 19th minute when Mbappe burst onto a beautiful threaded through ball by Griezmann only to be hauled down by Christensen, but the Danish defender escaped with a yellow.

The holders' best chances in the first half came from headers by Varane and Adrien Rabiot, but when Mbappe turned away from Joachim Andersen just before the hour mark and accelerated away, it was a sign that a goal was coming.

His shot was turned behind by Kasper Schmeichel, and Griezmann then wasted a great chance shortly after, but in the 61st minute Mbappe did score.

The Paris Saint-Germain superstar linked up brilliantly with Hernandez on the left and met his team-mate's cutback with a shot that beat Schmeichel thanks to a deflection off Christensen.

Denmark had offered little but suddenly they were level midway through the second half as Andersen nodded down a corner and his fellow defender Christensen headed home.

— AFP

LEWANDOWSKI

OFF THE MARK AS POLAND CLOSE IN ON LAST 16

Poland forward Robert Lewandowski (R) shoots and scores his team's second goal past Saudi Arabia goalkeeper Mohammed al Owais (L) during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group C match between Poland and Saudi Arabia at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan, west of Doha. — AFP



AL RAYYAN: Robert Lewandowski scored his first ever World Cup goal as Poland brought Saudi Arabia back down to earth with a bump on Saturday with a 2-0 Group C victory that rejuvenated their tournament campaign.

Lewandowski, who missed a penalty in Poland's opening draw with Mexico, was visibly emotional after finally finding the net. He pounced on a mistake in the 82nd minute to double Poland's advantage after Piotr Zielinski had given them a first-half lead. After completing one of the tournament's greatest ever shocks when they cut Argentina down to size in their opener, the Saudis found Poland a tougher nut to crack at the Education City Stadium. The Green Falcons failed to

convert a first-half penalty.

The win moved Poland to four points, one more than the Saudis, and left them needing a draw in their final game against Argentina next Wednesday to guarantee their spot in the knockouts.

Saudi Arabia, the second-lowest ranked team in the tournament, will head into their final match against Mexico with all still to play for. It was effectively a home match for the Saudis with their raucous fans, who had made the short journey across the border, far outnumbering their Polish counterparts.

Their team gave them plenty to shout about too in the early stages as they were by far the more ambitious, pressing high against the Poles, who seemed lethargic in comparison.

The encounter was spiky. The Saudis frequently hit the deck, with the referee, who dished out four yellow cards in five first-half minutes, seeming willing to oblige a feisty crowd baying for punishment.

There were half-chances for both sides before the game sprang to life in the 39th minute when Poland shook themselves from their slumber to take the lead. Matty Cash skipped down the right and crossed low for Lewandowski who lifted it over the keeper and pulled it back for Zielinski to fire into the roof of the net.

Their hopes of cruising through to halftime, however, were ended four minutes later when Krystian Bielik made minimal contact with the back of Saleh al Shehri's leg

and he hit the turf. The referee had initially waved away Saudi appeals but he was instructed to look at the VAR monitor and pointed to the spot, sparking celebrations from the Saudi players.

Those proved premature, however, as Salem al Dawsari's low effort was palmed away one-handed by Wojciech Szczesny, who was quickly on his feet to parry the follow-up from Mohammed al Breik brilliantly over the bar.

The Saudis were almost level early in the second half when substitute Nawaf al Abed burst through the Polish rearguard but took a tumble as defenders closed in. The ball found its way to Al Dawsari but his follow-up was well saved by Szczesny's legs. A better

chance was then spurned by Firas al Buraikan who wildly slashed his effort wide with only Szczesny to beat.

Poland could have extended their lead in the second half when Arkadiusz Milik's header rattled the crossbar while Lewandowski hit the post with an effort that deflected off his knee.

Lewandowski, who had drawn a blank in his four previous World Cup games, did not have to wait too much longer, however, for his goal.

Abdullah al Malki slipped and Lewandowski pounced, robbing him of the ball before sliding a tidy finish beyond Mohamed al Owais and into the net, with the striker seemingly in tears as he was greeted by team-mates. — **Reuters**

We are still alive, says Saudi coach Renard

ADIL AL BALUSHI
DOHA, NOV 26

Saudi Arabia head coach Herve Renard asserted that the Green Falcons' hopes are still alive after their 2-0 defeat against Poland on Saturday at Education City Stadium in Doha in a Group C match of Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022.

"Despite the defeat, I am very proud on my players as they showed a top game. We did not lose the game because we are unlucky. However, the team was not fully efficient. Abdullah al Malki did a mistake for the second goal, but I will not blame him alone. It is a team which comprised of many players and the mistakes could happen anytime in a football game. We will fight until our last game," he added.

The French man pointed out during the post press conference that he needs the



stadium full of green again in the forthcoming game. "I understood that in football the result is the most important for everyone and all the fans were looking for a positive

result today. However, the chance is still alive for the team to qualify. My message to all the fans is to attend in the third game against Mexico to support the team

and achieve the desired target. Their attendance will raise the chances of the team to perform better and move to the next stage," he said.

Replying to a question on

the penalty taken by Salim al Dawsari, the 54 years old responded: "We have a plan for players for taking the penalties. Salim was selected as first beside two others in the list. Missing a goal from penalty has happened to many top players in the world."

The Saudi football manager appreciated the performance of the Polish's goalie Szczesny Wojciech after he saved many scoring attempts. "There are many top players in the Poland team including the top star Robert Lewandowski who scored in the game. Besides that, goalkeeper Wojciech was the man of the match after he avoided many goals of Saudi," he ended.

GREAT MOMENT

Man of the match Robert Lewandowski expressed his joy after he assisted his team to clinch a crucial win over Saudi

Arabia. "I cannot express my feelings to represent the team and finally score in the World Cup. The goal has a top value and came in style. I missed a penalty for the team in the opener. However, I learned from mistake and could play better in today's match," he said.

On the other hand, Poland head coach Czesław Michniewicz said that he is looking for the team to stay longer in the Fifa World Cup in Qatar. "This match made the hopes alive for Poland and we are very proud of the team's performance today. We have done only two substitutions in the game and depended on the same players although many would like to take part in the World Cup matches. The main focus is to register the winning results that ensure team's appearance in the top global football event," he added.

AUSSIE GRIT BLUNTS TUNISIA'S ATTACK IN VITAL WIN



Australia's Mitchell Duke scores their first goal. — Reuters

AL WAKRAH: A prankster, presumably with Tunisian allegiance, changed the north African country's World Cup page on Wikipedia to insert a 5-0 victory over Australia before their Group D match had even kicked off on Saturday.

What the culprit failed to take into account though was a superbly drilled Australian side that defended as if their lives depended on it to preserve a priceless 1-0 victory that gives them real hope of reaching the last 16.

With world champions France and Denmark favourites to progress from the group, Tunisia and Australia had targeted their clash in the Al Janoub Stadium as a must-win game.

But Australia edged the tactical battle in the first half to deny Tunisia's technicians the time on the ball they required and then, in the second half

as Tunisia threw caution to the wind, Graham Arnold's side withstood the siege admirably. No-one epitomised Australia's defensive grit more than 24-year-old Stoke City defender Harry Souttar, who made a sublime goal-saving sliding block before half-time and numerous crunching tackles late on as Tunisia poured forward.

Australia did such a great job of stifling Tunisia's three-man forward line that their keeper Mat Ryan did not have a single save to make until well past the hour mark.

But Australia's first World Cup victory in 12 years was not simply the result of a dogged rearguard action.

In Aaron Mooy they had the best midfielder on the pitch, the Celtic man pulling the strings and allowing Australia to boss possession in a first half in which they made clever use

AUSTRALIA'S
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LAID SIEGE
TO THE GOAL

of the channels against a narrowly defending Tunisian outfit.

It was no surprise that Mitchell Duke's glancing header in the 23rd minute came from one of 12 crosses Australia attempted to deliver into the Tunisia box in the first half.

Despite the temperature hovering around 30 degrees Celsius, Australia's energy-levels barely dipped, although they were hanging on for the final 20 minutes as Tunisia, roared on by thousands of red-clad fans, laid siege to the goal.

"I'm hugely proud of the boys. They showed Aussie fighting spirit. They were in their faces all the time and I'm sure they made the nation very proud."

With three points and Denmark to come, Arnold's team can dream of reaching the last 16. For Tunisia, who did well to forge an opening 0-0

draw with Denmark, they will need to beat France to stand any chance of progressing.

The 32-year-old striker Youssef Msakni, who has waited so long for his World Cup chance, will wonder how he did not score just before the break, steering a close-range shot wide.

Defeat means Tunisia have still only won two World Cup games and questions will surely be asked as to why coach Jalel Kadri opted not to give the country's second-highest goalscorer Wahbi Khazri more game time here in Qatar. He was an unused substitute in the first match against Denmark and did not enter the fray on Saturday until the 67th minute when he replaced Aissa Laidounias. "Australia were physically strong but we can't say we played a bad game," coach Kadri said. "We just weren't efficient." — Reuters

World Cup 0-0 draws due to fear of losing, say Fifa experts

DOHA: The high number of goalless draws at the World Cup has been due to teams' fear of suffering an early setback, Fifa's technical study group said on Saturday.

There were five goalless matches in the first 20 matches in Qatar, already just two short of matching the record amount in a World Cup. There was only one 0-0 stalemate at the 2018 tournament — between eventual winners France and Denmark. "It's because teams don't want to take too much risk at the beginning," said former Nigeria international Sunday Oliseh. "Past data shows about 70 per cent of teams who lose their first game go out in the group stage and they're all aware of

that." Uruguay's match with South Korea on Thursday was the first World Cup game to not even see a shot on target in the 21st century.

"Many teams are relying on a cautious approach," said veteran Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni.

"Lots of teams fielded five defenders and played very tight and compact. They wanted to assure at least a point from their first game and if a chance came along, try and grab it to win the game."

Despite England's 6-2 rout of Iran and Spain's 7-0 thrashing of Costa Rica, there have been fewer goals per game so far in Qatar than in Russia or in Brazil in 2014.

— AFP



(From L) Tunisia's defender Ali Abdi, midfielder Ferjani Sassi and forward Naim Sliti celebrate their draw after the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D match against Denmark at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan, west of Doha on Tuesday. — AFP

CROATIA DEMAND ‘RESPECT’ AFTER CANADA TRASH TALK

DOHA: Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic demanded respect for his 2018 World Cup finalists after Canada boss John Herdman pledged the North American side would beat them in Qatar.

Dalic's men face Canada at the Khalifa International Stadium in their second Group F match on Sunday, with both teams fighting to keep alive their hopes of reaching the knockout phase.

"I told them they belong here," Herdman said during a TV interview when asked what he told his players in a post-match huddle following their opening 1-0 defeat to Belgium.

The Canada coach used offensive language to urge his players not to be overawed by the Croatians, featuring stars such as Real Madrid's Luka Modric.

Croatia have been angered by Herdman's provocative declaration of intent after Canada's first match at a World Cup for 36 years.

Herdman insisted on Saturday that his rant was simply intended to get his players to focus on Croatia instead of dwelling on their spirited defeat against fancied Belgium.

"The statement I made was to remind these boys that there is another task ahead," he said. "They have been buying into that mentality from day one."

"I don't even think this group are listening to that stuff. The boys know we have goals here. We have to get after it, get



Croatia's coach Zlatko Dalic attends a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha. — AFP



Croatia players take part in a training session at Al Erssal in Doha, on the eve of the Qatar 2022 World Cup match between Croatia and Canada. — AFP



Canada's players interact as they take part in a training session at the Umm Salal SC in Doha. — AFP



Canada's English coach John Herdman observes his team during a training session at the Umm Salal SC in Doha. — AFP

on the front foot."

But Croatia, who were held to a lacklustre 0-0 draw against Morocco in their opener, have not taken kindly to the 47-year-old Englishman's comments.

Dalic said Croatia deserve more respect from Herdman as a result of their achievements.

"The Croatian team deserves respect from everyone," he said. "We have proven that by the way we have played and our conduct during the World Cup."

"We respect everyone equally. We are worthy of respect. The Canadians must respect us. These words are not of respect. We are the runners-up in the World Cup."

The controversy over the ebullient Herdman's comment has raised the stakes.

"It's a defining moment for Canada in the World Cup. It's a do-or-die moment," he said.

"We've been waiting 36 years to get here. There is no motivation needed. We are playing Croatia at the World Cup, against people like Luka Modric. What a moment."

While Canada have little to lose after their surprise qualification for the World Cup, the Croatians are under far more pressure.

"This is an extremely important and difficult match for us. We have to be more prepared than in the last match," Dalic said.

"I expect a better Croatia. Very often when we face adversity we have responded."

— AFP

Belgium's 'Golden Generation' past best, admits Hazard



(From L) Belgium's Dries Mertens, Michy Batshuayi, Eden Hazard and Axel Witsel take part in a training session at the Salwa Training Site in Salwa Beach, southwest of Doha. — AFP

DOHA: Eden Hazard admitted on Saturday that Belgium's best chance to win the World Cup had come and gone but said they still have the quality and experience to lift the trophy in Qatar.

Belgium, who finished third at the tournament in Russia in 2018, are still ranked second in the world but many of the much-vaunted "Golden Generation" are now in their 30s. "To be fair I think we had a better chance to win four years ago," admitted 31-year-old Hazard, speaking on the eve of Sunday's match against Morocco.

"The team was better four

years ago but still we have the quality to win games and to win the competition. We have a few guys, they are a bit older now but we have experience and the best goalkeeper in the world (Thibaut Courtois).

"We have one of the best midfields in the world, right now. We have good strikers. We have the team and I think it's just the desire to want to win, and the mentality."

He added: "Belgium can win the World Cup if we are in form. If we are not it will be tough."

The Real Madrid forward said he was not over-worried by Belgium's struggles in

their opening Group F match against Canada, which they won 1-0, but he urged the team to play without fear.

NO FEAR

"The first match you always have a bit of fear, you don't always want the ball," he said. "Now we need to get over that. We need to not be afraid to dribble, to play the killer pass. That's what was missing in the first match."

Hazard has struggled to repeat the form he showed at Chelsea since he moved to Spain in 2019 but he said he was able to brush off criticism over his performances.



"There has always been criticism," he said. "Even when you play well you get criticised. I just try to focus on playing the best I can for my country and I'll give everything I can."

Belgium coach Roberto

Martinez was relaxed about his side's form, highlighting the lack of preparation time before the tournament in Qatar.

Martinez gave an update on the fitness of leading striker Romelu Lukaku, who is

recovering from a thigh injury.

The Spaniard said the forward was not expected to be available until the third group game against Croatia, in line with previous expectations.

— AFP



England defender John Stones (L) and USA forward Christian Pulisic fight for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B match at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha. – AFP

Southgate tells England to ignore the noise after limp draw

AL KHOR: Gareth Southgate urged England's players to block out the noise after they were booed off following a limp 0-0 draw against the United States in Friday's World Cup clash.

Southgate's side wasted a chance to book their place in the last 16 with a lethargic display that featured just one shot on target.

After thrashing Iran 6-2 in their Group B opener, this was a wake-up call for England, who were being hyped as potential world champions on the evidence of their first game.

England fans at the Al Bayt Stadium made their feelings known as a vociferous blast of jeers echoed around the stands at the final whistle.

But Southgate insisted his stars must ignore the criticism because he had no complaints about their performance.

"Were we booed off? I'm not sure if that was aimed at us. Personally, I'm really pleased with the application of the players against a really tough opponent," Southgate said.

"Of course I want our fans to go home happy and I want our fans at home to have a smile on their faces. We haven't managed to achieve that today. But I can't let that affect the team.

"We have to stay calm in these moments. We've been through tournaments before.

He added: "This is the tournament of external noise. There will be another layer of that I'm sure but we are on track. We can still win the group and that has got to be our target."

A point keeps England top of Group B and they will qualify for the last 16 as long as they avoid defeat by a four-goal margin to Wales on Tuesday.

Southgate admitted England lacked the verve and quality that blew away Iran, blaming their sluggish showing on an emotional comedown and a tenacious effort from the US.

"The players were very down and disappointed after the game but I told them



England coach Gareth Southgate applauds supporters at the end of the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B match against USA at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor. – AFP

that's not how it's going to be. They showed another side to their game and that will be important going forward," Southgate said.

"We were coming off the emotional high of the first game. To find that same energy was always going to be a challenge. The US front six make it so difficult to get at their defence.

"We lacked a bit of zip. We weren't able to create many chances. I'm sure there will be a lot of noise about the performance but not a lot of teams go through with nine points."

FODEN DEBATE

Southgate was criticised for opting to send on Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish as his attacking changes, with the Manchester City playmaker left on the bench.

Defending his decision, Southgate said: "Whichever one of our forwards I didn't put on if we didn't win the game I would be sitting here answering questions. "We didn't think it was a game for Phil in the middle because he doesn't play there for his club.

"It was a game for experience in the

middle. We love Phil, he is a super player."

Southgate also played down suggestions that Chelsea winger Raheem Sterling had stormed down the tunnel after being substituted following an anonymous performance.

"Raheem started refuelling straight away. He is one of the players on dope testing. I think he went to the bench first and then went in," Southgate said.

Meanwhile, England captain Harry Kane believes his side remain in a "great position" to reach the knockout stages.

"In the game against Iran we took our chances really well. Today we had two or three good opportunities and we didn't quite put it away," Kane told ITV.

"A draw isn't the end of the world for us, it puts us in a great position in the group and we look forward to the next one.

"After our first performance people thought we were just going to landslide every team we play, but it's not the case." — AFP

Standings

Group B

GROUP STAGE

England	Iran
United States	Wales

Standings	Pts	P	W	D	L	f	a	D
1 England	3	1	1	0	0	6	2	4
2 Iran	3	2	1	0	1	4	6	-2
3 U.S.	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
4 Wales	1	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2

Matches: Played - Won - Draw - Lost
Goal for - against - Difference

Monday, November 21

England	6	2	Iran
United States	1	1	Wales

Friday, November 25

Wales	0	2	Iran
England	-	-	US

Tuesday, November 29

Iran	-	-	US
Wales	-	-	England

Source: FIFA





Third day action during the RS Venture Connect World Championships in Musannah.

Teams battle for final fleet positions on third day

MUSCAT: The third day of racing at the 2022 RS Venture Connect World Championships organised by Oman Sail brought with it yet more exceptional sailing and many more surprises.

Oman's Sultan al Wahaibi and Ahmed al Balushi lead the Open category, accruing one win and one second place finish from today's races and staying one point ahead of Genevieve Wickham and Grant Alderson of Australia, and three points ahead of Clementine Gorisse and Lucien Bermont of France.

Piotr Cichocki and Olga Gornas-Grudzien of Poland shone on day three, scoring a win and a second place to lead the Para category by seven points from Sweden's Fia Fjeldahl and Patric Rosenberg. Ange Margaron and Olivier Ducruix of France are in third, just one point back from second, and fourth to 10th are separated by just five points in a close fleet.

Malik al Qartobi and Ghalya al Jabri currently sit in joint 12th



National Day celebration during RS Venture Connect World Championships.

position, seven points behind the medal placings. Zaher al Atbi and Ali al Ghasaini are in 18th place after struggling with a disqualification earlier in the week, Hassan al Lawati and Sami al Sulaimi two points back in 20th. Rayyan al Mujaini and Hamed al Subhi also encountered problems following a premature start, ending the fleet racing in 22nd, and Adil al Siyabi and Nasser al Rahbi finished in 25th.

Dan Jaspers, International Business Development official at RS Sailing, said, "This is the first time we have held an RS Venture Connect event outside of Europe, and this decision has paid off with an increase in participating teams. As a venue, as a destination, the Barcelo Musannah Resort has proved very popular with sailors, and indeed their families. Having everything so close in one venue is amazing for the competition

and the feedback has been excellent."

"The dedicated team at Oman Sail has been incredible and very helpful in managing the event, ensuring we can tune the arrangements to the changing day-to-day needs of sailors."

"There is a great legacy to this event and the SailFree programme is a real credit to Oman Sail, bp Oman and the Oman Paralympic Committee. The performance of the sailors so far this week is something the whole of Oman should be very proud of. Oman is a key location for the RS class and we see this as a hub for growing inclusive sailing across Asia," Jaspers added.

Athletes and coaches also took part in a special celebration in honour of Oman National Day, held under the auspices of HH Sayyida Hujaija al Said, Chair of the Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children.

Racing will continue when the Group Finals get underway ahead of the Grand Finals on Sunday.

Acers & Pacers Running Club honours Muscat Marathon participants

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Members of the Acers & Pacers Running Club who participated in the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon 2022, which was held on November 11 and 12, were feted at an event held in Muscat.

Titled, 'Relishing Runs - Celebrating Muscat Marathon', all members of the running club who made a huge mark at the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon 2022 with 9 of its members participating in the Full Marathon (42.2 km), 26 in the Half-Marathon (21.1 km), 29 participants in the 10 km category and 14 in the 5 km category were lauded for their enthusiasm and endurance.

The Acers & Pacers Running Club, formed in August 2018 by Radhakrishnan R who is a 110-km Ultra-Marathon, envisions to enhance the health and fitness of its members by giving effective coaching in proper walking and



running. It's a non-profit group of passionate runners who aim to promote the culture of running in Muscat. From a humble beginning with just 10 members, Acers & Pacers' membership has grown exponentially and today close to 150 members enjoy the walks, jogs and runs, helping them maintain a healthy body.

The felicitation event that aimed at marking the successful participation in the Al Mouj Muscat

Marathon 2022 was also a venue that aimed to honour, appreciate and inspire the members. It was a fun-filled evening with a sports theme-based fashion show, dance, music, spot prizes and games followed by dinner. Close to 100 people, including the runners and their family members, were in attendance.

The Acers & Pacers provide exclusive training sessions to the members over the weekdays like

interval trainings on Mondays and Tuesdays, strength trainings on Wednesdays, long runs or trail runs on Friday mornings and Friday friendly family runs at Qurum Park on every Friday evenings. Those who are interested to join the group for a healthy and rejuvenated lifestyle may join the Friday friendly family runs at Qurum Park on Friday evenings at 5 pm and may contact Roby Rajan on 99014241.

Ibrahim, Farooqi help Afghans thrash Lanka in ODI opener



Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadran celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) with Najibullah Zadran (L) during the ODI against Sri Lanka in Kandy. - AFP

KANDY, Sri Lanka: Opener Ibrahim Zadran's sparkling century and four wickets by Fazalhaq Farooqi led Afghanistan to an emphatic 60-run win over Sri Lanka in the opening one-day international on Friday.

Afghanistan posted 294-8 after electing to bat as Ibrahim, who hit 106, put on key partnerships, including a 118-run second-wicket stand with Rahmat Shah, who made 52, in Pallekele.

Afghanistan's Farooqi and fellow quick Gulbadin Naib shared seven wickets between them as the tourists bowled out Sri Lanka for 234.

Pathum Nissanka's 85 and a threatening 66 by Wanindu Hasaranga went in vain as Afghanistan ended the Sri Lankan innings in 38 overs. But it was the batting that set the tone for Afghanistan's domination in the first ever bilateral ODI series between the two teams.

Ibrahim led the charge with his second ODI century and Najibullah Zadran's 25-ball 42 boosted the total but some disciplined bowling in the end checked Afghanistan, who looked like getting over 300.

"The pitch was good for

batting, I read the surface and took my time, and it worked," man of the match Ibrahim said.

"The track remained the same throughout, we wanted to get to 320, that was the plan. Our bowlers did a great job."

Rahmanullah Gurbaz justified captain Hashmatullah Shahidi's decision to bat first as he hit a flurry of boundaries in his 53.

Ibrahim joined the attack as the two put on 84 runs to set the tone for the batting charge.

Cameos from Najibullah and Naib, who made 22 off 24 balls, took on the bowlers in the end but Sri Lanka gave away just 31 runs in the final five overs and took five wickets. Hasaranga returned impressive figures of 2-42 in his 10 overs.

The hosts started briskly but regular wickets hurt their progress with Naib picking two to rattle the top-order. Wickets kept falling and Hasaranga was the last man out to Farooqi, who finished with figures of 4-49.

The loss dented Sri Lanka's chances of a direct qualification to the 50-over World Cup in India next year with crucial Super League points up for grabs in the series. — AFP

AVOD employees take part in Muscat Marathon



MUSCAT: Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives (AVOD), Oman's most trusted brand, has always endeavoured to take part in events that are not just good for community bonding, but also promote physical and mental well-being.

To reinforce its commitment to supporting local events and reaffirm its 'Eat Right, Live Well' philosophy, AVOD and its employees took part in this year Al Mouj Muscat Marathon that was held on November 11 and 12. The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon, that saw the participation of 12,000 runners this year, is undoubtedly Oman's biggest running event.

Salem Bortmany, CEO of AVOD, said, "As a health-conscious brand we have always taken part in community events such as the Muscat Marathon

to not just commit to an active and healthy lifestyle, but also contribute to the awareness of benefits that physical activity brings with it."

Sixty employees, consisting of both men and women, represented AVOD in the marathon to champion the cause of health and well-being that has been the cornerstone of AVOD's transformation journey for over 30 years.

AVOD runners were present on both days of the event that consisted of 5 km, 10 km, and 1 km races in Al Mouj area.

Applauding the AVOD team for a fabulous performance on the track, Bortmany said, "I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for AVOD employees, who have always been exemplary health ambassadors for the brand."

E

GROUP STAGE

SPAIN

GERMANY

2022

Sunday, Nov 27 - 1900 GMT

Al Bayt Stadium

RF EF

Luis Enrique

COACH

Hans-Dieter Flick

Gavi

Ilkay Gundogan

FIFA RANKING

Top-ranked team

SPAIN 7

GERMANY 11

Lowest-ranked team

TEAM'S AVERAGE AGE

25

26

27

28

29

BEST WORLD CUP PERFORMANCE

Winner

1/2

1/4

Last 16

Group stage

1st participation

Source: FIFA AFP Photos

AFP

Match program

2022

GROUP STAGE

Sunday, November 27

E

Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, 02:00 pm

Japan

Costa Rica

F

Al Thumama Stadium, 05:00 pm

Belgium

Morocco

F

Khalifa Stadium, 08:00 pm

Croatia

Canada

E

Al Bayt Stadium, 11:00 pm

Spain

Germany

Source: FIFA

AFP

GERMANY FACE ‘FIRST FINAL’ AGAINST SPAIN

DOHA: Just one match into the Qatar World Cup, Germany face what amounts to a must-win clash against Spain on Sunday, a team they have not beaten in a competitive fixture since 1988.

Before Germany were stunned 2-1 by Japan in their opening match, the team faced heavy criticism for backtracking on a promise to wear a rainbow ‘OneLove’ armband in support of diversity and human rights.

Their response was powerful — a team photo before the Japan match in which all 11 players covered their mouths, suggesting they had been silenced by Fifa, who had threatened on-field sanctions for anyone wearing the armband.

But after Japan scored two late goals to beat Hansi Flick’s team, the Germans were hammered by some observers for losing focus on the football when they should be concentrating on avoiding a second successive group stage exit in a World Cup.

On Friday, Chelsea striker Kai Havertz said the players were holding onto their beliefs but knew the challenge ahead, especially against a Spain team that steamrollered Costa Rica 7-0 in their opening game.

“Everyone knows our point of view and how we think,” Havertz said in a pre-match press conference.

“Really, our focus is 100 per cent on football, nothing else. We just said what we think, what our point of view is, everyone knows that, and now it is about playing football.”

With supermarket chain Rewe pulling their sponsorship and with TV ratings for the Japan game the lowest in Germany for a World Cup in more than 30 years, Havertz recognised that the challenges were not just on the field, saying: “I know not everyone is behind us.”

Havertz revealed the squad and Flick held a wide-ranging team meeting on Thursday, admitting “it was time to tell ourselves the truth”.



Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer (C-L) and forward Niclas Füllkrug (C-R) take part in a training session at Al Shamal Stadium. – AFP



Spain defender Alejandro Balde (C) and his teammates take part in a training session at Qatar University in Doha. – AFP

Havertz said “everyone left the meeting knowing what’s going on”.

Sitting alongside Havertz, midfielder Julian Brandt said “we had a very good exchange. All of us left the conversation feeling like we had the determination to win the game.”

‘OUR FIRST FINAL’

The importance of the Spain match at the Al Bayt Stadium cannot be underestimated — national squad manager and 1996 Euros winner Oliver Bierhoff has asked what another early exit would mean for the future of football in Germany.

Speaking with Germany TV network ARD on Friday, Bierhoff said losing “our first final” in Qatar would have widespread ramifications for the sport.

“What does it mean for German football? For the further development?” Bierhoff asked.

“And if you go a little

deeper: (what does it mean) for the investment we have to make to stay competitive (and) to have new players in eight or ten years?”

Far from being haunted by the ghosts of their early exit in Russia however, Havertz said the match could represent “a turnaround” for the under-fire side, saying “we all dreamed of playing these games”.

“Now we are in a bad moment, but I think that can switch around quite fast — if we win the game on Sunday.”

Captain Manuel Neuer on Friday said Sunday’s match was “a huge chance”, emphasising the side could learn from Russia “we blew it once and now we know how not to do it”.

Brandt agreed. “People keep talking about us being in a ‘pathetic situation’, and yes, we are.”

“Spain come to the stadium on Sunday on the back of a 7-0 victory but it is a chance, on Sunday, a chance to change the atmosphere.” — AFP

German pass masters will test Spain’s possession game: Enrique

DOHA: Spain could be given a taste of their own medicine when they take on Germany in a potentially decisive clash at the World Cup on Sunday because both European heavyweights seek to control games by dominating possession, Spain coach Luis Enrique said.

“Without a doubt, they are the team that is most similar to Spain in terms of dominating the play and controlling it. That is a beautiful challenge for us,” Luis Enrique told reporters on Saturday. “I think it will be an open game.”

Spain thrashed Costa Rica

7-0 in their opening match in Qatar on Wednesday when their fluid passing left the Central Americans pinned deep in their own half for much of the game.

“A big win like that creates confidence but we can’t go into the game over-confident,” Luis Enrique said.

Germany, by contrast, suffered a shock 2-1 defeat to Spain in Group E, prompting reporters to ask the Spain coach if he was worried about the risk of a desperate German fight-back in the Al Bayt Stadium on Sunday night. If Japan draw or beat Costa Rica earlier on



Spain coach Luis Enrique arrives at the press conference. – Reuters

Sunday, a defeat for Germany could send the four-time world champions crashing out of the World Cup at the group stage for the second tournament in a row after their ignominious exit in Russia in 2018.

“Will Germany be more dangerous because they need the win more? You never know in football,” Luis Enrique said.

Spain thrashed Germany 6-0 when they last met in November 2020 in the Uefa Nations League, but the former Real Madrid and Barcelona player, who went on to coach Barcelona, warned against any complacency.

Striker Dani Olmo, speaking at the same news conference, said Spain would not be distracted by the high stakes facing their rivals and would go for the win that would qualify them for the knockout phase with a game to spare.

“Of course they are under pressure because they need to win after the loss against Japan, but we know Germany is one of the best national teams in the world and you cannot put them down after one game,” Olmo — who plays his club football in Germany for Leipzig — said.

— Reuters