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OMAN TARGETS 3-FOLD JUMP IN WHEAT PRODUCTION



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SAVOY DYNASTY DAILY LIFE ON DISPLAY WITH GENEVA AUCTION



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COOL BOLE ROMPSTO SALALAH TITLE



MUSCAT

EMPHASIS ON ROLE OF FAMILY IN SOCIETY

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, hosted the Gulf Family Forum 2023, which took the theme of ‘Contemporary Gulf Family: The Challenges and the Aspirations,’ under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information. It underscores the role of families in grooming generations that are more capable of optimising future opportunities and lays emphasis on the role of modern media in instilling such morals. Dr Abdullah stressed that the family is the basic building block in shaping the individual and society. **DETAILS ON P3**

TENDER BOARD AWARDS RO 488M PROJECTS

The Tender Board on Wednesday awarded projects to the tune of RO 488 million to carry out additional works that are in completion of development projects in many fields. The meeting was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy. The additional works covered five main projects including the design and construction of Oman Cultural Complex building comprising the National Theatre, the National Library, and the National Records and Archives Authority and eight other facilities; supply of medicines, vaccines and serums for the Ministry of Health; a project to design and implement the remaining parts of the first phase of Al Batinah Coastal Road; dualisation of Al Ansab-Al Jifnain Road and a project to furnish the Health Ministry’s new building. **DETAILS ON P2**



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Royal directives to send urgent humanitarian aid to Libya

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Directives to send urgent humanitarian aid to Libya to support efforts made to deal with the floods that devastated eastern Libya recently.

The Royal gesture comes within the context of fraternal relations between Oman and Libya and as an expression of Oman’s keenness to extend a helping hand to those facing natural disasters.

FEARS MOUNT

Libya was on Wednesday reeling from a massive flood that killed more than 2,000 people, wreaking havoc in the eastern city of Derna where bodies wrapped in blankets were lining the ravaged streets.

Relief missions gathered pace with many countries rushed aid to the war-scarred country after the disaster that has left about 10,000 missing according to international humanitarian workers.

The Mediterranean coastal city of Derna was hit by a huge flash flood late on Sunday that witnesses likened to a tsunami after two upstream dams burst when torrential rains brought by Storm Daniel battered the region. Footage broadcast on Al Masar network and shared on social media showed parts of the city in ruins, with damaged roads and collapsed buildings. Satellite images of the city after the surge of water showed entire neighbourhoods near the coast almost entirely submerged. **SEE ALSO P6**

HUMAN RIGHTS GUARANTEED BY ISLAMIC LAW

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received here on Wednesday heads of delegations who took part in the GCC Human Rights Institutions Forum that was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed that GCC countries continue protecting and enhancing human rights which are guaranteed by Islamic law. **DETAILS ON P2** PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI



Plans to attract and encourage young entrepreneurs, SMEs

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP LIKELY

MUSCAT: The Supervisory Committee of ‘Promising Omani Startups Programme’ on Wednesday held its third meeting of the year under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Promising Omani Startups Programme.

The meeting was in pursuance of steps to follow up the progress made in the programme’s plans and initiatives aimed at activating the system of startups based on technology and innovation in Oman.

The meeting looked into means



of contributing to fostering the culture of startups in educational institutions, enhancing community awareness of their importance, empowering those with innovative ideas, supporting the establishment of startup firms in this field and linking them to business opportunities.

The meeting also explored investment and financing opportunities in local and global markets, in addition to means of improving Oman’s ranking in international indicators related to innovation, technology and ease of doing business. **TURN TO P3**

‘Partners Support’ offers innovative tourism features

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism launched the ‘Partners Support’ platform, which represents a cutting-edge and practical tool designed to facilitate cooperation and engagement among various stakeholders in the tourism industry, including companies, hotel establishments, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. This digital initiative primarily fosters collaboration within tourism marketing and its associated partners in the tourism sector. Furthermore, it serves as a comprehensive hub and repository of crucial information about the strategy for promoting tourism and the various facets of the Omani tourism potential.

The platform offers a wide array of services to its users. These include monthly newsletters that deliver latest updates in tourism promotion and suggestions and innovations to enhance tourism programmes and marketing efforts.

It also provides access to training courses and knowledge assessments, streamlining the registration process for events and activities and delivering up-to-date insights into tourism trends in the Sultanate of Oman. **TURN TO P3**

A smartwatch which can track missing Alzheimer’s patients

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

One of the major worries for family members of people with Alzheimer’s is having their loved ones go missing and forgetting the way back home.

There have been missing incidents in the past, triggering this innovation.

White Horse Company introduced a smart watch for

senior citizens and individuals with special needs on Wednesday at the National Alzheimer’s Forum 2023, organised by Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Ministry of Health, and Oman Alzheimer’s Society.

Dr Sara Mohammed Shabaan from the company said she was inspired to do something after noticing many missing cases of elderly individuals.

In some cases, they were



lost and sometimes found dead because there was no way to trace them, and if they were found alive, they were in bad condition.

“There was no communication link between them and their families. I put myself in their shoes and searched for tools or equipment to aid the families. I did not find it, so I started to develop some features as my company is related to medical innovation industry, and that

is how we started the journey towards this watch,” said Dr Sara.

The smartwatch was launched in July, and since then, they have had more than 96 Alzheimer’s patients, 11 visually impaired individuals, 12 individuals with Down Syndrome, and 32 senior citizens over 75 years of age who were bedridden due to paralysis.

Many families tried smartwatches during the khareef season as they travelled during the

summer holidays.

“We had a special programme for Oman Alzheimer’s Society and some other organisations that enabled us to provide it to them at a special cost as they have the patient’s records,” she noted.

She pointed out that it is important to know to whom they are providing the watch to avoid misuse of the smartwatch. **TURN TO P3**



Sayyid Fahd receives GCC human rights forum delegates



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers received on Wednesday heads of delegations who took part in the GCC Human Rights Institutions Forum that was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum was participated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Permanent Arab Committee on Human Rights at the Arab League.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed that GCC countries continue protecting and

enhancing human rights which are guaranteed by Islamic law.

He also expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted to boost cooperation between human rights institutions in the region, as well as developing the action mechanisms of those institutions in line with international treaties.

HH Sayyid Fahd also highlighted the march of comprehensive development in Oman which is in accordance with a system that is based on justice and equality among all citizens in terms of rights and obligations.

He reiterated that human rights in the Sultanate of Oman are protected through the Basic Law of the State, as well as national laws and regulations issued in this regard.

Moreover, the meeting discussed several topics included in the agenda of the forum, such as the GCC Human Rights Strategy and means of developing GCC coordination in a bid to boost joint action regionally and internationally and enhance cooperation with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

On their turn, the heads of delegations expressed their appreciation for Oman's hosting of this forum which contributed to reaching positive outcomes. They also affirmed that human rights are protected in Oman.

The meeting was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers and Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, Chairman of Oman Human Rights Commission.

— ONA

Oman, UK discuss Free Trade Agreement

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef met with the British Minister of International Trade, Nigel Huddleston on Wednesday at the Invest in Oman Hall in Muscat.

During the meeting, they discussed areas of mutual cooperation between the two nations in addition to Free Trade Agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the United Kingdom.

Speaking to the Observer, Faisal al Nabhani, Director of International Cooperation and Trade Relations at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said, "The United Kingdom is an essential partner to Oman, which has always played a historical role in Oman's development and will continue to do so."

According to Al Nabhani, the meeting is expected to further strengthen the bilateral ties between the two nations.

Additionally, he stated that the meeting discussed various topics such as potential cooperation within the fields of green energy, trade, investment promotion and mutual investments.

The meeting also acknowledged the United Kingdom as the largest foreign direct investor in Oman.

The United Kingdom is the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Oman, accounting for approximately 51.1 per cent of total FDI received by the country. In Q1 of 2023 alone, the figure increased by more than 44 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2022.

The British Minister is expected to participate in the 65th Trade Cooperation Committee Meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries on Thursday in Salalah to discuss negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement between member states and the United Kingdom.

The agreement is expected to boost bilateral trade by 16 per cent.



Tender Board awards complementary tasks worth RO 488 million

MUSCAT: In its 5th meeting during 2023, the Tender Board on Wednesday awarded tenders to the tune of RO 488,703,331 to carry out additional works that are in completion of development projects in many fields.

The meeting was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The additional works covered five main projects: The design and construction of Oman Cultural Complex building comprising the National Theatre, the National Library, and the National Records and Archives Authority and eight other facilities (RO 147,800,000); the supply of medicines, vaccines and serums for the Ministry of Health (RO 130,641,592); a project to design and implement the remaining parts of the first phase of Al Batinah Coastal Road (RO 78,951,000); the dualisation of

Al-Ansab-Al-Jifnain Road (RO 53,000,000) and a project to furnish the Health Ministry's new building (RO 7,851,605).

The Tender Board also approved the following projects: The construction of a tunnel at Ateen Road's intersection with 18 November Street in the Wilayat of Salalah (RO 7,521,813); the management, organisation, implementation and marketing of Muscat Winter Wonderland activities (RO 6,930,000); the design and implementation of Oman's pavilion and exhibition at Expo 2025 in Osaka Kansai, Japan (RO 6,600,000); the dualisation of Sultan Taimur Street in the city of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate (RO 6,201,339) and the dualisation of Al-Farouq Street in the city of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate (RO 4,979,360), among other projects. —ONA

Oman chairs meet of Islamic affairs under-secretaries

MUSCAT: GCC under-secretaries of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs on Wednesday held their 8th meeting under the chairmanship of Dr Wa'il bin Saif al Harrasi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The under-secretaries discussed consolidating ethical and family values in GCC communities, as well as cementing the concept of cooperation among ministries and organisations of Awqaf, Islamic and

religious affairs. The meeting also discussed joint topics concerned with Awqaf, Islamic and religious affairs, exchanging research and experiences in Awqaf field among the members and exchanging expertise in Islamic and religious affairs.

The meeting also underscored the importance of joint cooperation and sharing ideas that would strengthen ties among the GCC states in various spheres. — ONA



Last date to submit applications for Ash'shura polls today

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Interior announced that the last date to submit applications and transfer registration in the electoral register for the Majlis Ash'shura elections for the 10th term is September 14.

The election process, including voting, is based primarily on AI and digital. One can request to add or make changes through

the 'Entekab' application and the elections website (elections.om) according to the unique national ID and permanent or current address recorded on the personal card.

"Verifying the voting status is important. The ministry had previously notified in a statement to citizens the importance of verifying the status of their registration in the electoral register, through the 'Intekhab' application or the election

website," a source from the Elections Department told the Observer, adding that the rule is based on Article 18 of the Law on Election of Members of Majlis Ash'shura issued by Royal Decree No. 54/ 2023.

Additionally, a voter who has yet to cast his vote for two consecutive electoral periods must submit a request for a new registration in the electoral register in accordance with the procedures and conditions



stipulated in Article 17 of this law.

Earlier, the date of elections was October 29, and the Ministry of Interior had been working hard to make it happen.

Efforts are underway for the elections to the tenth term of the Majlis Ash'shura, where as many as 883 candidates, including 33 women, are running for the seats in the next four-year session.

On October 29, the electronic voting process will be held to choose one member each from

Oman's wilayats to take part in the State's decision-making process to help the Council of Ministers.

However, two members shall be elected to the Legislative body from any wilayat if its population exceeds 30,000.

"There has been an increase in the number of candidates compared with the last session where only 637 candidates vied for the seats, an increase of 245 candidates," he said.



Gulf forum reaffirms family’s role

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Sultanate of Oman hosted the ‘Contemporary Gulf Family Forum Between Challenges and Aspirations’, a two-day event organised by the Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with the National Committee for Family Affairs. The forum aimed to reaffirm the Gulf family’s pivotal role within society and chart a path towards strengthening it further. This initiative is aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and the social work strategy while coinciding with Gulf Family Day celebrated annually on September 14.

The forum’s opening ceremony was organised under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and in the presence of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development. The event drew prominent figures from local and Gulf communities and experts from Gulf organisations dedicated to family affairs. It also welcomed participation from individuals engaged in social matters from universities, research centres and family-focused institutions.

The forum sought to achieve several key objectives, including



sharing experiences and knowledge in family protection systems to strengthen cohesion and formulating a future Gulf vision to support community initiatives addressing Gulf family challenges and emphasising the importance of leveraging modern technology, including social media, to mitigate its adverse effects on family members. Proposing a framework that respects the privacy and needs of the most vulnerable family groups concerning care, rehabilitation and integration into society and generating practical recommendations to facilitate the transfer of expertise and experiences among Council countries, thereby enhancing the Gulf family’s reality.

In his speech, Khalid bin Ali

al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary for Economic and Development Affairs at the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. He underscored the commitment of GCC leaders to family affairs in all its facets. Notably, they initiated studies to counter the negative impact of certain media on young people, entrusted the advisory body of the Supreme Council of the Sultanate of Oman to assess child culture programmes and their development, and devoted attention to women and the elderly while providing essential comforts.

Al Sunaidi emphasised the GCC’s continuous development and alignment with sustainable development goals, particularly

in family-related areas. The GCC countries have seen a significant rise in Gulf women’s participation in the workforce, with some reaching 50 per cent representation in legislative roles and 44 per cent in administrative positions. Women also excel in areas such as education.

Furthermore, Al Sunaidi highlighted the GCC countries’ commitment to children, the building blocks of their advancement. These countries have provided comprehensive services in schools, ensuring a 100-per cent availability rate, and have created an appropriate infrastructure for students with disabilities. Basic health facilities are accessible in 60 per cent of schools across the GCC nations.

Plans to attract and encourage young entrepreneurs, SMEs

FROM PAGE 1

The committee reviewed a vision for establishing the National Centre for Entrepreneurship to serve as an interactive space that attracts and encourages young entrepreneurs, patent owners and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with the prime aim of accelerating business growth and introducing startup products and services in local and global markets.

The committee discussed steps to contribute to sustainable development and groom a generation that is well-versed in the field of innovation and knowledge-economies, a generation that keeps pace with the requirements of technical transformation in all fields. It exchanged views on means of spreading awareness about the importance of supporting emerging projects for various groups. It also discussed an initiative to introduce business subjects in curricula of educational institutions, among other issues.

HH Sayyid Bilalab toured an exhibition showcasing models of eight Omani startups, their services and products based on innovation and their patents. — **ONA**

‘Partners Support’ offers innovative tourism features

FROM PAGE 1

Additionally, users can access a rich library of tourism-related photos and promotional materials from the ministry.

During the initial two months since its launch, the platform has already garnered a substantial user base (584 registered users).

Significantly, the platform’s introduction coincided with the rollout of the ‘Majan’ elite partners programme. This initiative is designed to incentivise partners to actively engage with the platform and take advantage of the valuable features provided by the ministry.

The platform employs a partner classification system categorising users into Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum tiers. Classification within these tiers is determined based on the extent of a user’s interaction with the platform and their successful completion of the required training programmes. Each category offers distinct advantages, granting users special privileges for accessing information and participating in collaborative efforts with the ministry.

State Council participates in population conference



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Council, took part via video-conferencing in the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development, themed ‘Challenges and Prospects Ten Years After the 2013 Cairo Declaration’.

Oman was represented during the conference, which was held in Lebanon, by Dr Raya bint Salim al Manthiri, Member of the State Council.

The conference was organised by the ESCWA, the United Nations Population Fund — Regional Office for Arab States, and the Arab League in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation. — **ONA**

Digital transformation conference looks at importance of integrated solutions

MUSCAT: The 10th edition of the Digital Transformation Conference, which was held in Muscat on Wednesday, underlined the importance of empowering institutions operating in the marketing, banking, oil and gas sectors to adopt integrated digital solutions and keep pace with developments in this field.

The conference, organised by United Media Services Company, also highlighted an array of topics about artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, information technology (IT) and the growth of e-commerce, in addition to technology and cyberspace in the future.

Dr Salim bin Sultan al Ruzaiqi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Information Technology Society, said, “The conference focused on the digital transformation programme, modern technologies and artificial intelligence”.

He pointed out that the conference reviewed some technologies and their



impact on digital transformation in institutions, such as the economic impact and augmenting productivity in private sector establishments.

He added that the transformation brought about by technology in all fields has a fundamental impact on the

digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman. This transformation, he said, has an economic and technical basis, thus good preparation is a must for the future in terms of qualifying national cadres, changing specialisations and qualifying employees. — **ONA**

National Museum celebrates returning Syrian artefacts to their homeland

MUSCAT: The National Museum celebrated on Wednesday the returning of Syrian artefacts back to their homeland from the British Museum in the United Kingdom (UK).

This was achieved through coordination with military departments concerned with local and international affairs related to artefacts.

The move also comes within the framework of the mediation efforts adopted by the National Museum, and its support for efforts to preserve Syrian cultural heritage damaged during the years of crisis.

Dr Lubanah Mshaweh, Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, expressed her appreciation and gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman, which responded to the request



without hesitation and undertook receiving and transporting the artefacts.

On his turn, Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the

National Museum, said: “The initiative to return Syrian objects to their homeland is the result of tripartite cooperation between the National Museum, the General Directorate

of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Hermitage Museum in the Russian Federation, and as a continuation of the process of cooperation regarding the preservation of Syrian heritage that was damaged during the years of crisis.”

He stressed that contributing to the revival of the Syrian cultural heritage during the exceptional circumstances Syria is going through is a human duty and a shared responsibility.

Moreover, Dr Idris Ahmed Mia, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, said: “The civilisational and cultural commonalities between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sultanate of Oman date back to the Stone and Bronze Ages, as is the case in Syria.”

— **ONA**

Smartwatch to track missing Alzheimer’s patients

FROM PAGE 1

“We make sure we know who the patient is and their caregivers are, and only then we hand over the watch,” Dr Sara stressed.

All customers have to go through a screening process to acquire the smartwatch.

The watch is characterised by genuine features that serve the needs of all patients.

The watch monitors oxygen level, blood pressure, heart rate, and other health parameters.

“If the individual moves beyond 200 metres, caregivers would be able to determine as there would be a notification. Over 15 individuals can communicate with the patient, but only three will be on the priority list. The first on the list will be the direct caregiver, followed by the other two to keep the response accurate. The watch works in Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Pakistan and Bangladesh. When we receive requests, we add the countries according to regulations.

“If the patient falls, there will be a notification in the application. Even if the patient is blind, communication is made easy because by just pressing a button, he can call even if he has no balance in his regular SIM card.

“He can call leave voice messages. So, it is a two-way call. The watch also has voice reminders. The waterproof watch will also send out a notification to the caregivers if the patient removes the watch. If the patient has a movement problem, the watch has a feature where calls can be automatically answered. For patients with mobility issues, the watch can be made motion sensitive so caregivers will receive notifications during an emergency situation,” Dr Sara said.

Any customer who wants to purchase the watch is encouraged to come with a reference from the organisation. If they come on their own, they have to provide proof of the patient’s details, and only after the verification we handover the wristwatch to him.

In addition, the smartwatch is handed over to the family member with a declaration that he will be responsible for the patient and that the watch will not be resold.

“Each watch has its own production number that is confidential for registration. Privacy and security of each patient is our priority, which is why we take care of regulations,” noted Dr Sarah.

The company spends time ensuring that customers/ caregivers understand the technology and will use the watch properly.

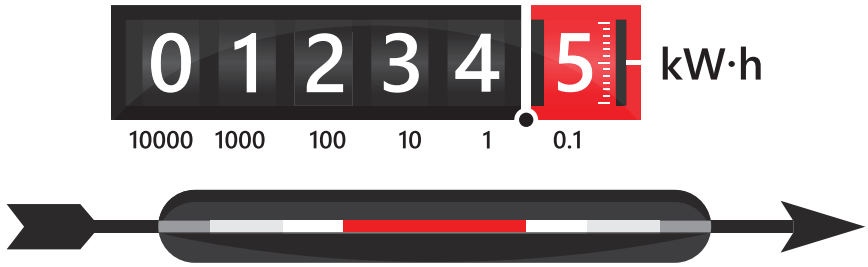
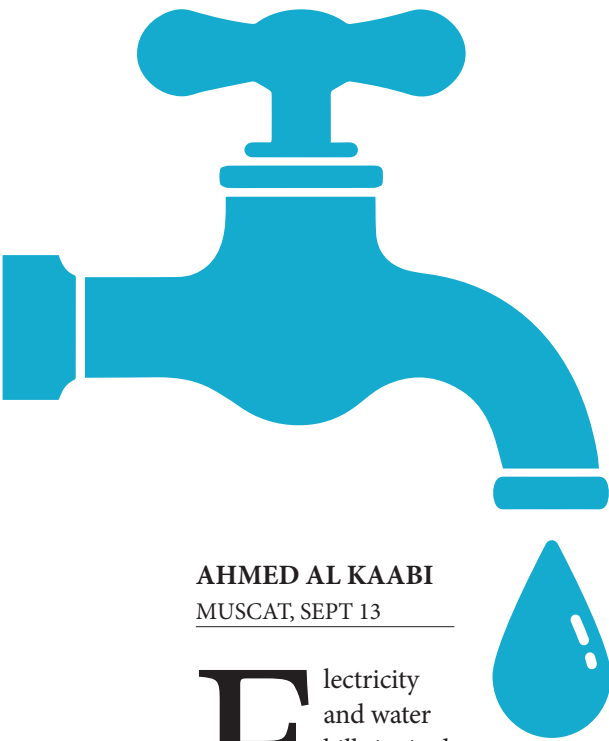
“They have to take care of the patient as we are dealing with the life of a person. The one who will be purchasing it for his parents will be the person who will have the authorisation, although there could be up to 15 members who could be watching and communicating with the patient. Life is precious, so it is important to verify,” she explained.



NOTICE

This is to advise that **Mr. Mahmood Lal Bakhsh Mohamed Al Bulushi, holding ID No: 1857655**, who used to occupy the position of Leasing Coordinator at **Al Mouj Muscat S.A.O.C** (the “Company”), has left the Company on 17th January 2023. From that date onward, he no longer represents the Company in any capacity. The Company confirms there is no continuous relationship between the Company and the aforementioned, and the Company accepts no responsibility for any dealings or engagement concluded with him.





AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

Electricity and water bills invited a growing chorus of concerns calling for a thorough reevaluation of the billing system, particularly during the scorching summer months, driving bills to alarming heights. This outcry has found its platform on social media, with the trending hashtag #High_Electricity_Bills, drawing widespread attention to the unprecedented surge in electricity costs over recent months.

The social media campaign, characterised by active engagement from concerned citizens, highlights a shared perception of an abnormal bill increase during the sweltering summer season.

In an attempt to shed light on the issue, Namaa provided clarification on electricity bills. They suggested that updating personal consumption data could prevent excessive charges, stating, “You may be entitled to 10 baisa per kilowatt for subsidy, while you pay 14 and 22 baisa per kilowatt.” Sultan al Balushi, a resident deeply affected by the soaring electricity and water costs, expressed frustration, questioning the frequent need for data updates. He emphasised the importance of better communication from utility companies, suggesting that text messages could alert citizens to update their data, potentially mitigating the issue.

Al Balushi further noted the inconsistency in consumption patterns, with bills doubling during July, August and September while remaining lower for the rest of the year. He called for an urgent investigation into the reasons behind these staggering increases, proposing the establishment of a neutral advisory body to address the issue comprehensively.

Mohammad Ali, another affected citizen, called for a comprehensive review of the methodologies used by electricity companies to calculate bills. He argued that the bills were unjustifiable to surge by 50 per cent or more within a month, especially when many individuals struggle to meet these unexpected

costs. Mohammad Ali expressed disappointment with the lack of resolution even after data updates, citing overuse as a reason despite no significant changes in usage patterns.

Rashid al Jabri echoed these sentiments regarding data updates, advocating for an end to frequent data updates. He pointed out that many households, particularly those who need access to technology, find these requirements burdensome. Al Jabri called for a simplified update process, requiring individuals to update their data only once.

Al Jabri also touched on water bills, highlighting instances where water was cut off due to late payments as low as 20 riyals. He suggested a more considerate approach, allowing individuals facing financial difficulties additional time to settle their bills without incurring additional charges.

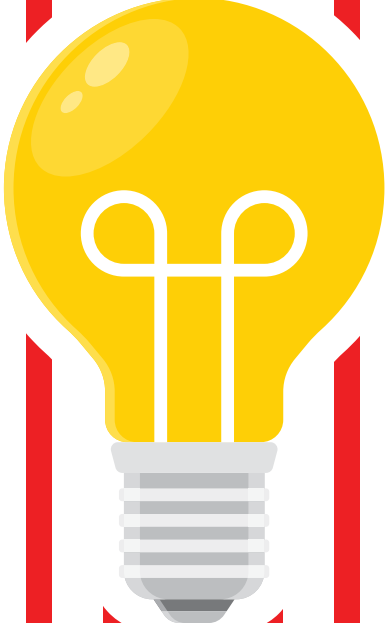
Mohammad al Yaarubi, an electrical engineer, explained that the higher bills, despite similar usage times in winter and summer, are due to the difference in cooling hours rather than the air conditioner’s operating hours. According to Al Yaarubi, the air conditioner automatically turns off in the winter once it reaches the desired temperature and functions more like a fan. However, the air conditioner’s cooling cycle runs much longer in the summer. He emphasised that this should only result in a marginal increase, not the substantial hikes experienced by most families.

Khalid al Balushi shared his personal experience, detailing how his monthly electricity bill skyrocketed during the summer months despite consistent usage throughout the year.

INCONSISTENCY
IN CONSUMPTION
PATTERNS, WITH
BILLS DOUBLING
DURING JULY,
AUGUST AND
SEPTEMBER WHILE
REMAINING
LOWER FOR THE
REST OF THE YEAR
CALLS FOR AN
URGENT ACTION

He noted the financial strain this places on families, impacting their ability to meet essential needs.

In light of these concerns, Khalid al Balushi called for a comprehensive review of strategies to manage high consumption and simplify billing processes. He stressed the need for assistance and payment plans to alleviate the financial burden on apartments and homeowners.



FEELING THE PINCH OF HIGH COST OF ELECTRICITY AND WATER



Work environment affects quality of healthcare in hospitals: Study

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

A study confirms a positive link between the evaluation of the work environment and the quality of care provided to patients.

The study highlighted the impact of the work environment of the nurses in hospitals and its effect on the quality of patient care in the Sultanate of Oman's healthcare system.

Dr Sulaiman al Sabai, from the College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University, conducted this study to investigate the relationship between the work environment, patients' health and safety, and hospital quality of care. The study covered 12 government and six private hospitals in various regions and governorates, involving 2,403 male and female nurses and 1,800 patients.

The results revealed that 97.9 per cent, or about 2,034 nurses, evaluated their work environment as a perfect environment for work. There is a positive, direct relationship between the evaluation of the work environment and the quality of care provided to patients. An appropriate work environment



contributes to delivering high-quality care.

The results also showed an inverse relationship between the work environment and harm threatening patient safety. Whenever the work environment is appropriate and is characterised by the presence of a proper number of nurses in each department, the presence of support from management, and the presence of a precise mechanism for professional development for employees, this is associated with

a decrease in cases of medical or medication errors, a reduction of the number of patients' falls, and the spread of viral and bacterial infections.

The study recommended increasing the number of nursing staff in health institutions at governmental and private levels and establishing a clear mechanism concerned with employees' professional development. In addition to creating a system that contains accurate indicators to evaluate the quality of care

provided to patients and the extent of their safety during their stay in the hospital, stressing the importance of comparing quality indicators and patients' health as their safety is consistent with global indicators.

Developing a healthy and supportive work environment is crucial for ensuring patient safety. Nurse administrators should strive to improve the work environment by creating a culture that values inter-professional teamwork and collaborative relationships.

SAI workshop focuses on National Integrity Promotion Plan (2022-2030)

MUSCAT: Proceeding from the keenness of the Sultanate of Oman to lay the foundations for national action and institutional integration in the field of integrity promotion and anti-corruption and raise the efficiency in the resource management to achieve sustainable development goals, State Audit Institution organised an executive workshop on the National Integrity Promotion Plan held at SAI's headquarters in Muscat on Wednesday, September 13, 2023.

This is in light of the approval of the National Integrity Promotion Plan (2022-2030) by the Council of Ministers to fulfil the requirements of the international agreements and in line with the national objectives set in Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Development Plan.

The workshop was held under the auspices of Ahmed bin Salem al Rujaibi, Deputy Chairman of State Audit Institution, in the presence of Sayyid Dr Munther bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Rujaibi stated that the National Integrity Promotion Plan seeks to achieve its mission of adopting best practices in areas of integrity, transparency and anti-corruption with the effective participation from the public and private sectors, civil society institutions and individuals.

He added that the plan includes four main principles, the first of which focuses on integrity by adopting principles and values of integrity and honest practices towards public fund and public office; whilst the second principle focuses on transparency through institutional disclosure based on principles of accuracy, appropriateness and reliability.

The third principle deals with accountability by creating inclusive legislations and efficient procedures to activate accountability and the fourth principle addresses partnership, which can be achieved through active cooperation by all relevant parties.

Regarding the themes and objectives of the National Integrity Promotion Plan, Rujaibi stated that the plan is based on five themes, from which six main objectives and twenty-one sub-objectives emanate. The first objective is on the legislative system and it aims to promote integrity and combat corruption in accordance with an inclusive legislative system and efficient human resources.

Senior Audit Specialist Shabeeb bin Nasser al Busaidy, General Director of Legal Works at SAI, stated that the approval of the National Integrity Promotion Plan (2022-2030) comes from the keenness of the Sultanate of Oman to adopt the best international practices in all fields. He emphasised that the wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik represents the primary guide for state institutions to embody the principles of justice, integrity and proper resource management.

Integrity and efficiency in resource management are considered the basic foundations for institutional development.

CTF-151 COMMANDER MEETS RNO CHIEF, VISITS MARITIME SECURITY CENTRE



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) received at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Captain Mateo Carido, Commander of the Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on various naval matters and means of enhancing them. Captain Mateo Carido and his accompanying delegation also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). Upon the guests' arrival, they were greeted by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Head of the MSC. The guest and members of the visiting delegation toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies that are used in carrying out its national duties. The delegation was also briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in maintaining the safety of the maritime environment. – **ONA**

Symposium highlighting Izki's history and culture

AMAL AL RIYAMI
IZKI, SEPT 13

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised a symposium titled 'Izki Throughout History' as part of the discussions on Omani cities held by the Literary Forum. It continued for two days, on Monday and Tuesday, in the Izki Public Hall.

The Literary Forum represented the symposium organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. It was held in cooperation with the Izki Governor's Office, the Izki Cultural Center, and the Izki Club over two consecutive days.

This series of symposiums on Omani cities is held by the Literary Forum — through which researchers study the state's geography, history, and famous people, highlighting the features of the renewed Omani Renaissance and cultural topics. It aims to underline and introduce identity to the local and external community.

The symposium was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs .

The Izki Throughout History Symposium came due to its natural, historical, cultural, and human components. It combines plain, mountainous, ancient archaeological sites. It is full of literary and scientific talents that have gained fame internally and externally.

Khamis bin Rashid al Adawi, Civilizational Studies Advisor, gave the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth speech. He talked about the importance of such symposiums in general and the importance of Izki in particular.

Shaikh Sultan bin Hilal al Alawi, Wali of Izki and chairman of the Main Committee of the Symposium, also gave a speech reviewing the great efforts made in preparing for the Izki throughout history Symposium.

During the ceremony, a visual presentation was presented about Izki's importance, historical status, ancient and modern names, the most important villages, archaeological and historical monuments, and its most prominent scholars, writers, and leaders throughout the ages.



And the achieved development projects.

Poet Hesham bin Nasser al Saqri presented a poem about the wilayat of Izki, its importance, its ancient history, and its achievements during the modern era. Younis bin Ali al Manthri, a member of Majlis Ash'shura representative of Izki, presented highlights from Izki, in which he reviewed the importance of Izki in the past and the present, talking about its location, its ancient

history, its most influential scholars and writers, its antiquities and Aflaj, and other aspects related to Izki.

On the first day, the symposium included six working papers distributed over two sessions, presented by several contemporary researchers on Izki's history. The first session included three working papers moderated by Dr Ahmed bin Abdullah al Azizi, where the first paper was presented by researcher Badriyah bint Hamoud

al Amriyah, entitled (Geography of Izki. The Fragrance of the Place), and the second paper, entitled (Izki in Ancient Times), was presented by Dr Naël Hanoun Aliwi. The third working paper is entitled (Izki Historical and Political Status) presented by Dr Ismail bin Saleh al Aghbari.

Dr Majid bin Salim al Ruqaishi moderated the second session, which included three working papers. The first, entitled (Izki in the period from 1624 AD to 1749 AD) was presented by Dr Ahmed bin Humaid al Tubi, while Dr Mohammad bin Hamad al Shuaili presented the second working paper entitled (Izki in British sources). The third working paper, presented by Dr. Salim bin Hamad al Nabhani, was entitled (The Political Conditions in Izki in the Period from 1920 AD to 1960 AD).

On the symposium's second day, the third session was held, moderated by Youssef bin Yasser al Azri. Researcher Rahma bint Saif al Azriyah presented the first working paper, entitled 'Advantages of Izki in Achieving Vision in

2040 AD', while Dr Hamid bin Saif al Nawfali represented the second working paper, entitled 'Economic Conditions of Izki Throughout History'. Dr Masoud bin Said al Hadrami presented the third working paper, entitled (Tourist Attractions and Historical Monuments in Izki).

The symposium papers concluded with the fourth session, which Bader bin Saad al Amiri moderated. Dr. Youssef bin Ibrahim al Sarhani presented the first working paper, entitled (The Izkawi School, History and Message). Dr Zahir bin Marhoon al Daoudi presented the second working paper, entitled (The Cultural Heritage in the State of Izki). In contrast, the third working paper was entitled (Scientific and Literary Life) presented by researcher Shaikh Said bin Nasser al Naabi.

An accompanying exhibition was held during the symposium, including ancient documents and manuscripts about Izki, with the participation of several institutions and individuals.



Fears mount of surging death toll in Libya disaster

DERNA: Libya was reeling on Wednesday from a massive flood disaster that killed at least 2,300 people when a surge of water devastated the eastern city of Derna, leaving another 10,000 missing according to the Red Cross.

Relief missions gathered pace with Turkiye, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates among the first nations to rush aid to the war-scarred country, and the UN pledging \$10 million in support for survivors, including more than 30,000 people left homeless.

The wall of water ripped away entire buildings, vehicles and the people inside them. Many were swept out into the Mediterranean Sea, with bodies later washing up on beaches littered with debris and car wrecks.

Traumatised survivors have dug through the mud-caked ruins of shattered buildings to recover victims' bodies, scores of which were lying wrapped in blankets out in the open before being buried in mass graves.

The confirmed death toll in the politically fractured North African country reached 2,300 by Tuesday afternoon, but some regional officials were quoted as giving figures more than twice as high.



Members of Libyan Red Crescent Ajdabiya work in an area affected by flooding, in Derna. – Reuters

Another 10,000 people were still missing, said Tamer Ramadan of the International Federation of Red

Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "The death toll is huge and might reach thousands," Ramadan said,

adding that the organisation had independent sources saying that "the number of missing people is

hitting 10,000 persons so far". Media reports quoted an interior ministry spokesman of

the eastern-based government as saying "more than 5,200" people had died in Derna.

The city, a 300-kilometre drive east of Benghazi, is ringed by hills and bisected by a riverbed that is usually dry in summer, but which became a raging torrent that also destroyed several bridges.

Mudslides and flooding also hit nearby areas of eastern Libya where aid group the Norwegian Refugee Council said, "entire villages have been overwhelmed by the floods and the death toll continues to rise".

Rescue teams from Turkiye have arrived in eastern Libya, authorities said, and Algeria, France, Italy, Qatar and Tunisia also pledged to help.

The United Arab Emirates sent two aid planes carrying 150 tonnes of food, relief and medical supplies.

The EU said assistance from Germany, Romania and Finland had been dispatched to Libya, including food, water tanks, tents and blankets as well as hospital tents and power generators.

A Kuwaiti flight took off on Wednesday with 40 tonnes of supplies, and Jordan sent a military plane loaded with food parcels, tents, blankets and mattresses.

— AFP

Fifty-six people killed in Hanoi apartment deadly fire

HANOI: Fifty-six people died in a fire at an apartment block in Vietnam's capital Hanoi, police said on Wednesday, with witnesses reporting screams from inside and a small boy thrown from the building.

Vietnam's deadliest fire in 20 years started just before midnight on Tuesday in the parking floor of the 10-storey building, an area packed with motorbikes, witnesses said.

"56 people have been killed and 37 people injured," Hanoi police department said in a statement.

At least three children were among the dead, state media reported.

The owner of the apartment block has been arrested on suspicion of violating fire prevention regulations, Hanoi police said.

A woman who lives near the block, who gave her name only as Hoa, said: "I heard a lot of shouts for help. We could not help them much."

"The apartment is so closed with no escape route, impossible for the victims to get out," she said.

The blaze was out by



Firefighters work to put out a fire and rescue people at an apartment block in Hanoi. – AFP

Wednesday morning but rescuers still struggled for hours to get into the building, which is down a narrow alley in a residential area of southwest Hanoi.

The complex's small balconies were surrounded by iron bars, with the apartment block having only a single exit and no emergency ladder on the outside.

Pictures showed a line of charred motorbikes on the ground floor, where the fire began.

Neighbours reported several people jumping from the block.

"There was a middle-aged woman jumping down onto my terrace here. She hit her arm and broke it. Another person also jumped down here and broke their legs," said Dao To Nga.

Some were able to flee the building using her roof. "This rooftop of my family helped 14-15 people escape," she said.

— AFP

Last-ditch hunt for Morocco quake survivors

INEGHEDE: Rescue teams stepped up a massive effort to bring relief to devastated Moroccan mountain villages on Wednesday as the chances faded fast for finding survivors from the powerful earthquake which killed 2,900 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

Vehicles packed with supplies were inching up winding mountain roads to deliver desperately needed food and tents to survivors of the nation's deadliest quake in more than six decades.

Search teams were in places still scouring the rubble for the living. Morocco is now well past the 72-hour window when rescues are considered most likely, yet survivors are in some cases found well beyond that period.

Moroccan authorities reported that crews were working to clear unpaved tracks that have been cut off by landslides.

In the hardest-hit areas south of Marrakesh, many villages in the High Atlas mountains were completely destroyed and villagers



A member of Morocco's Auxiliary Forces embraces an elderly woman in the town of Amizmiz in al Haouz province. – AFP

were taking shelter in yellow government-issued tents.

The shelters' arrival are an indication that aid is starting to flow but they are intended to be only temporary and will be totally insufficient against the approaching cold and rainy season.

Morocco is deep in mourning for its dead, with the most recent toll on Tuesday recording at least 2,901 killed and 5,530 injured

in the 6.8 magnitude quake that struck late on Friday when many were at home.

In the tourist hub of Marrakesh, many families still slept out in the open, huddled in blankets on public squares for fear of aftershocks.

But the need was most desperate in remote and poor mountain villages, where traditional adobe homes crumbled to rubble and dust. — AFP

TUNIS

Four migrants dead after boat sinks

Four Tunisian migrants died and 21 others were rescued after their boat sank while trying to reach the Italian coast, a judicial source said on Wednesday.

The boat capsized after leaving Sfax in eastern Tunisia, court spokesman Faouzi Masmoudi said, noting that an investigation had been opened.

Sfax has become a major hub for migrants from Tunisia and other parts of Africa attempting perilous voyages across the Mediterranean, often in rickety



boats, in hopes of a better life.

The eastern Tunisian port city is located about 130 kilometres from the Italian island of Lampedusa. Four passengers, a woman and three children, perished in the shipwreck, while the 21 others, were rescued by the coastguard. — AFP

WAD MADANI

Sudan army chief headed to Turkiye

Sudan's army chief was headed to Turkiye on Wednesday on his fifth foreign visit since late August as he vies for legitimacy in a devastating power struggle.

General Abdel Fattah al Burhan will hold talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on "bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them", said the Sudanese leader's office.

Burhan had been holed up under siege in army headquarters in Khartoum ever since fighting erupted on April 15 between



his loyalists and fighters of the paramilitary Rapid Military Support Forces (RSF) led by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. Burhan's visit serve as a diplomatic push to burnish his credentials in the event of negotiations to end the conflict. — AFP

BEIRUT

Palestinian factions back camp truce

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement and Hamas have backed a fledgling ceasefire in a south Lebanon camp hit by deadly fighting.

Clashes have rocked the Ain al Helweh refugee camp, on the outskirts of the southern city of Sidon. At least nine people have been killed and more than 85 wounded, including fighters and civilians, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

Palestinian officials, including Fatah's Azzam al Ahmad and



Hamas's Mussa Abu Marzuk, met at the Palestinian Embassy in Beirut. They expressed their "full commitment to consolidating the ceasefire" and agreed to "work to facilitate the return of those forced from their homes, and vacate schools as soon as possible". — AFP



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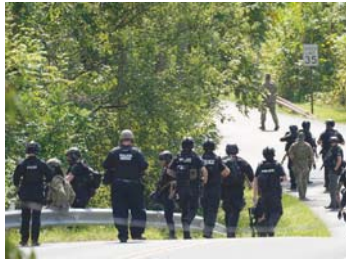
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In brief

NEW YORK



POLICE ANNOUNCE CAPTURE OF BRAZILIAN FUGITIVE

US police announced on Wednesday the capture of a convicted Brazilian murderer who caught national attention with his daring prison escape and two weeks on the run.

Pennsylvania state police said on social media that a press conference would be held shortly “announcing the details of THE CAPTURE of Danelo Cavalcante.”

Footage on CNN showed heavily armed officers in camouflage handcuffing the Brazilian national and removing his shirt, revealing a large tattoo on his back, before placing him in the back of a police vehicle. No further details were given.

— AFP

SARAJEVO



BOSNIA ARRESTS SUSPECTS IN SREBRENICA MASSACRE

Bosnia police arrested five former soldiers suspected of participating in the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, prosecutors said on Wednesday, as authorities raided several locations across the country's east. Officials described the suspects as “former commanders and members” of Bosnian Serb forces — who allegedly “participated in the arrest and murder of approximately 70 victims” in July 1995 — according to a statement released by the country's war crimes prosecutors office.

The suspects are also accused of having “carried out activities to conceal the bodies of those killed”. — AFP

ROME



3 DEAD AFTER BLAST IN EXPLOSIVES FACTORY

Three people were killed in an explosion at a civilian explosives factory in central Italy on Wednesday, firefighters said.

The explosion near Chieti occurred near midday at a company that not only manufactures explosives but defuses bombs and mines, according to its website.

Local news reports said there had also been an unknown number of injuries at the plant.

The factory, Sabino Explosives, was the scene of another explosion that killed three people in December 2020.

A preliminary hearing over that earlier case was due to open on Thursday. — AFP

Putin and N Korea's Kim discuss military matters, Ukraine war



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un visit the Vostochny Cosmodrome in the far eastern Amur region, Russia. — Reuters

MOSCOW: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin met for a rare summit on Wednesday at which they discussed military matters, the war in Ukraine and possible Russian help for the secretive Communist state's satellite programme.

Putin showed Kim around Russia's most advanced space rocket launch site in Russia's Far East after Kim arrived by train from North Korea. Kim asked numerous detailed questions about rockets as Putin showed him around the Vostochny Cosmodrome.

After the tour, Putin and Kim held talks for several hours with their ministers and then one-on-

one, followed by an opulent lunch of Russian “pelmeni” dumplings made with Kamchatka crab and then sturgeon with mushrooms and potatoes. Kim hailed the victory of “great Russia” and to Korean-Russian friendship, predicting victory for Russia in its “sacred fight” with the West in the Ukraine war.

“I firmly believe that the heroic Russian army and people will brilliantly inherit their victories and traditions and vigorously demonstrate their noble dignity and honour on the two fronts of military operations and building a powerful nation,” Kim told Putin.

“The Russian army and people will certainly win a great victory in the sacred struggle for the

punishment of a great evil that claims hegemony and feeds an expansionist illusion,” Kim added.

US and South Korean officials have expressed concern that Kim would provide weapons and ammunition to Russia, which has expended vast stocks in more than 18 months of war in Ukraine. Moscow and Pyongyang have denied such intentions.

Putin gave numerous hints that military cooperation was discussed but disclosed few details. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu attended the talks and the Kremlin said neighbours discuss sensitive issues which are not for discussing in public.

Putin and Kim called each other “comrades” at lunch and

Putin repeatedly reminded Kim that it was the Soviet Union which backed North Korea — and was first to recognise it just over 75 years to the day since it was established.

Amid the Ukraine war, which has become a grinding artillery war of attrition, the United States and Kyiv's other allies are watching to see if Kim's visit paves the way for a supply of artillery to Russia.

Asked about military cooperation, Putin said Russia complied with international rules but that there were opportunities to explore.

The choice to meet at Vostochny Cosmodrome — a symbol of Russia's ambitions as a space power — was notable. — Reuters



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivers the State of the European Union address to the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, France. — Reuters

Von der Leyen vows 'fair' green deal for EU farms and industry

STRASBOURG: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen promised on Wednesday that Europe's green energy transition would be “fair and just” for farmers and businesses fearful of new regulations and unfair foreign competition. Nine months ahead of the European Parliament elections, von der Leyen's State of the Union address to MEPs was more focused on addressing voters' economic concerns than on foreign crises like the war in Ukraine.

Brussels will, she said, launch a probe into what she said were the “huge state subsidies” allowing China to flood the European market with cheap electric cars, opening a new front in the battle to lead the new green economy.

She said the EU would fast-track permits for new wind turbines, vowed that “agriculture and protection of the natural world can go hand in hand” and promised to organise an international conference on ways to fight human traffickers bringing migrants to Europe.

Russia's attack of Ukraine had been the centrepiece of the previous year's address, but played a less central role this time, with the focus on what the EU must do to prepare itself to accommodate Kyiv and the countries of the Western Balkans as new members.

Some member states have dragged their feet on EU enlargement in the past, arguing that Brussels must streamline its decision-making rules — under which the 27 existing member states wield a veto in many areas — before taking on any more members.

But von der Leyen, who is due to report back to member states next month on Ukraine's progress towards meeting the criteria for membership talks, said that Kyiv had made “great strides” and that reform of EU rules should not be an excuse for delay. — AFP

Azerbaijan ready to allow 'regular' aid access to Nagorno-Karabakh

GENEVA: Azerbaijan said on Wednesday it was prepared to allow the Red Cross to bring humanitarian aid into the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh on a “regular basis”, accusing Armenian separatists of blocking access.

Tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh have flared in recent months, as Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of obstructing traffic on the Lachin corridor — the sole road linking Armenia to the Armenian-populated breakaway region.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov stressed his government's “commitment and our readiness to provide access”.

Speaking to reporters with the United Nations correspondent's association in Geneva, he said he had met with the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the Swiss city and had “reconfirmed our commitment to cooperation”.

“ICRC is ready. The government of Azerbaijan is ready” for aid to be brought in, he said. “It can be conducted on a regular basis,” he said, adding that “the only missing point at the moment... is still the blocking (by) the local Armenians”.

His comments came after



Azerbaijani Foreign Affairs Minister Jeyhun Bayramov arrives to a press conference with members of press correspondents to the United Nations (ACANU) in Geneva. — AFP

Russian humanitarian aid arrived on Tuesday in Nagorno-Karabakh via territory controlled by Azerbaijan, according to separatist authorities

in the Armenian-populated area. The Lachin corridor is policed by Russian peacekeepers as part of a ceasefire agreement Moscow

brokered between the ex-Soviet Caucasus nations in 2020.

Baku has rejected Armenia's claim, saying Nagorno-Karabakh

could receive supplies via Azerbaijani-controlled territory.

On September 1, Azerbaijan agreed to simultaneously reopen, for humanitarian supplies, both the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road linking Nagorno-Karabakh with the rest of Azerbaijan.

Bayramov said on Wednesday that the “ICRC is ready to organise everything”, adding the organisation had two convoys ready to go “in a matter of hours”.

He said the convoys could move “in parallel” using the Aghdam and Lachin routes simultaneously.

“We are ready at any scale, ... (within) respect to norms and procedures of Azerbaijani legislation,” he said.

An ICRC spokeswoman confirmed to AFP on Wednesday that the organisation “stands ready to deliver large shipments of desperately needed humanitarian assistance by any route possible”.

“We are extremely concerned for the tens of thousands of people who urgently need food, medicine and other essential items,” she said.

“We hope a humanitarian consensus is reached very soon so that our work can resume and we can get aid to those who need it”

— AFP

Japan’s new cabinet focuses on gender, defence

SAKURA MURAKAMI

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has picked a woman as foreign minister and appointed as defence minister a politician who has worked to build ties with Taiwan in Wednesday’s new cabinet line-up.

The choices, among 11 new faces and five women, spotlight a focus on gender equality and a stronger line on defence, as Kishida battles sagging ratings and with his term as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) set to end next year.

Both ministers face the task of navigating ties with China that soured after Japan began releasing into the Pacific Ocean treated radioactive water from its wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant, angering its neighbour.

“This is a cabinet that finds its strength in change... I’ve appointed ministers who are people of action to execute the three pillars of economic, social, and diplomatic policies,” Kishida said at a news conference held Wednesday evening.

Kishida said the new defence minister will

be Minoru Kihara, a pro-Taiwan politician who has visited the democratically-governed island in the past and belongs to a Japan-Taiwan interparliamentary group.

“I do think this sends a message that Japan is seeking stability in Taiwan alongside the United States,” said security expert Takashi Kawakami at Takushoku University in the capital.

The choice of Kihara as defence minister is not an anti-China move, but indicates a closeness with Taiwan, he added. China claims Taiwan as its own territory and will be sensitive to any shift in Japan’s stance on the island.

Kihara will also oversee efforts to bolster Japan’s military in a plan to double defence spending over the five years to 2027, and grapple with funding the buildup as tension rises in East Asia over China’s military expansion and maritime disputes.

The new foreign minister is Yoko Kamikawa, a former justice minister who oversaw the execution of key members of the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult responsible for the deadly sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995.

NEW FOREIGN MINISTER IS ONE OF FIVE WOMEN IN CABINET WHILE THERE ARE NO CHANGES IN FINANCE, TRADE, SIGNALLING POLICY CONTINUITY. THE KEY TASK IS MENDING CHINA TIES FRAYED OVER FUKUSHIMA

The choice of Kamikawa, who has a master’s degree from Harvard University, shows the government wants to ensure smooth ties with the United States, said Yu Uchiyama, a professor of politics at Tokyo University.

“She has plenty of experience, and I do think she will make significant contributions to strengthening ties with the United States,” he said.

One political commentator said ministerial roles had diminished in importance, however, as summits increasingly become a forum for dialogue with China.

“Around the world, summit diplomacy has become mainstream,” said Shigenobu Tamura, who previously worked for the LDP.

“Even if the foreign and defence minister posts change, there won’t be any change or impact on Japan’s diplomatic policy.”

The cabinet reshuffle comes amid a dip in popularity for Kishida, following a string of scandals from data mishaps linked to government identity cards and the arrest of a vice minister on suspicion of graft. — **Reuters**

Sweden’s king celebrates 50 years on throne

VIKEN KANTARCI

Portraits of Sweden’s King Carl XVI Gustaf, who celebrates his 50th jubilee on Friday, plaster the walls of ardent royalist Kenth Lundqvist’s apartment, adorning plates, posters and medallions.

“My interest in royalty began when I was around six years old when the king and queen got married... I sat in front of the telly, I was amazed,” recalled the 44-year-old organist, who lives in the small central town of Timra.

Sweden celebrates the golden jubilee from September 13 to 16, feting a monarch who has earned the respect of his subjects over the years.

One of the Royalist Association’s several thousand members, Lundqvist expects a large crowd to cheer on a royal cortege through Stockholm’s city centre on Saturday, in a country normally known for its reserve.

The king and his wife Queen Silvia will wave to crowds from a horse-drawn carriage, escorted by 3,000 troops from the army, air force and navy.

“He represents continuity, traditions and Christian values,” said Lundqvist. “To be able to be around 500,000 people and celebrate him, it’s a huge feeling,” he said. The king’s role has been purely ceremonial since 1974. “He’s not a man of power, he’s a symbol of unity for the country,” royal expert Roger Lundgren said.

Royalty notwithstanding, the king’s apparent normalness — he sent his children to public schools, and let them go out and buy sweets in local shops — endeared him to Swedes, said Lundgren. “He is quite shy. He doesn’t love the limelight, he has been given the limelight by birthright but he doesn’t seek it out,” he said.

“He is sort of like the rest of us. We are not a passionate people, we’re kind of mellow. And the king is as well.”

Despite his lack of power, Carl XVI Gustaf, 77, knows how to use his influence, as recently demonstrated when controversy erupted over the Nobel Foundation’s decision to invite Russia’s ambassador to the glitzy Nobel Prize banquet in December.

The king, who hands out the prizes every year, said he may not attend as a result, and the foundation hastily rescinded Russia’s invitation.

A poll this month in Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter said 62 per cent of Swedes were in favour of the monarchy, a level that has remained stable over two decades.

Yet the king’s personality and personal life could have made him a more controversial figure. — **AFP**

Theatres of war that make up the fighting in Ukraine



Marc Santora

The writer has been reporting from Ukraine since the beginning of the war with Russia

SO FAR THE RUSSIANS HAVE FAILED TO BREAK THE UKRAINIAN LINES, ACCORDING TO MILITARY ANALYSTS AND SOLDIERS INTERVIEWED OVER THE SUMMER

Along the southern reaches of the Dnieper River, Ukrainian forces are staging amphibious assaults on Russian positions across the river from around the city of Kherson, forcing Russia to deploy already-stretched units to prevent Ukraine from gaining a foothold on the eastern bank.

Nearly 1,000 miles to the north, it is the Russians who are on the offensive and forming what the Ukrainian military called a “striking fist,” with tens of thousands of soldiers amassed near the towns of Kupiansk and Kreminna. That has prompted Ukraine to dispatch some of its most seasoned airborne assault units to retake positions lost this summer.

On a front line that cuts a jagged path roughly the same distance as from New York to Miami, the fighting rarely relents.

And with Ukrainian forces pressing ahead along multiple lines of attack — Kyiv’s most ambitious and high-stakes offensive campaign in nearly a year — what happens in one sector invariably affects the others.

“A person who simply reads the news does not see it, does not feel it,” Hanna Maliar, a deputy Ukrainian defence minister, said this week. It can seem that everything is taking a long time, “but believe me, it doesn’t seem that way to people who are fighting,” she said.

“In fact, this is a very dynamic, active process,” she said.

To better understand how the fight is playing out along the breadth of the front, it is useful to look at some of the major theatres where Russia and Ukraine have concentrated their troops. Moving geographically from the northeast to the south, this is a snapshot of the fighting as summer draws to a close.

After Ukraine drove Russian forces from nearly all of the Kharkiv region last fall, its offensive was finally halted in the pine forests that dominate the landscape there.

This sector stretches some 60 miles through towns such as Kupiansk and Kreminna, and has been the scene of seesaw battles for months. One army moves a mile or two forward, only to be driven back again.



Soldiers with Ukraines 14th Mechanised Brigade fire a volley of 122mm rockets from their Grad launcher at a frontline Russian position near Kupiansk, Ukraine.

That’s a common sequence in this war; what’s different in the northeast, the Ukrainians acknowledge, is that it is one of the very few places where Russia’s forces are engaged in sustained offensive operations, and making small, tactical gains.

So far the Russians have failed to break the Ukrainian lines, according to military analysts and soldiers interviewed over the summer. Still, there is no indication that Russian pressure will ease. Ukraine warned last week that Moscow had withdrawn ground forces from Belarus to join offensive operations in the area.

Russia claimed victory over the smoldering rubble of Bakhmut in May after a yearlong campaign that featured some of the bloodiest fighting of the war. The city was razed, but the battle never stopped.

Almost immediately, Ukrainian forces began fighting to drive the Russians from areas to the north and south of Bakhmut. The gains can appear small — a few hundred yards in a given clash — but the Ukrainians have continued to advance, slowly but steadily.

On a recent visit to Ukrainian positions around the city, soldiers said they knew they were not the focus of Ukraine’s counteroffensive, with much of the best weaponry and personnel being deployed in the south. But they aid the war effort by forcing the Russians

to devote resources to the defence of Bakhmut.

Maliar said on Monday that Ukraine had reclaimed about 19 square miles around the city.

The fighting has been brutal, with attacks and counterattacks by both sides. For months, Ukraine has gradually progressed south of the city, in and around the village of Klischivka. And it has launched a series of coordinated attacks this week, according to military officials and combat footage geolocated by military analysts.

At the same time, battles rarely cease around the towns of Avdiivka and Marinka to the south of Bakhmut, with Ukraine now hoping to exploit any gaps in the defence that emerge as Russian forces are increasingly stretched.

The Ukrainian military continued the crawl forward on the eastern front, retaking control of part of the settlement of Opytne, which lies to the south of Avdiivka, Maliar said.

While Bakhmut has drawn more attention for the ferocity of the battles there, the coal mining town of Vuhledar has been the site of fierce, destructive fighting. It is where the eastern and southern fronts converge, only a few miles from vital Russian logistical lines that supply Russian troops in southern Ukraine, making it a critical corner of the war.

— **The New York Times**

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Compromising privacy...

It is undeniable that private life is becoming difficult. More than ever, we are reshaping relationships and the way we engage with our family, friends and businesses.

The massive amount of information stored in the cloud, from photos and messages to location, health and financial data, means we are providing personal information willingly, but also many times without our permission or knowledge. Who controls the data in the cloud? Who owns and manages the cloud? Our data has immense value for companies, platforms and criminals!

This is not an abstract idea! When we place a meal delivery order or make a taxi reservation, we are not only using a digital service; we are also giving them access to sensitive information like our address, phone number, payment method and billing details.

Just to illustrate: you are a client with a bank, and you deal with a particular individual there. You later learned that the bank employee with whom you dealt with your finances was also viewing your WhatsApp status. The same is true with the taxi driver who accepted the booking; sooner or later, you will notice that he is checking on you. Shops insist on having your mobile number.

You provide your mobile number to an official from a government institution, and the next thing you see is that the person in charge of dealing with customers is also checking on you.

Within companies or institutions, employees are not hiding their tailings. They are stalking you, either out of curiosity or something else. Motivations and objectives can vary widely. Is the ghosting a sign of immaturity, passive aggression, or emotional abuse? Hard to tell, but what we really don't know is what is done with the seized information!

Our assets are under threat! Assets are not just a home, jewellery, land, or cash. Assets can be abstract, like reputation or virtual data. There are situations in which people become hostages to those who access their information; it



SONIA AMBROSIO
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The writer is journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

OUR ASSETS ARE UNDER THREAT! ASSETS ARE NOT JUST A HOME, JEWELLERY, LAND, OR CASH. ASSETS CAN BE ABSTRACT, LIKE REPUTATION OR VIRTUAL DATA

can be software developers or software businesses. A user's mobile phone may be blocked by some applications if payments or specific details are not provided. This condition, generically called a 'hostage situation,' happens when sites claim ownership over one's information when it truly belongs to individuals. After entering your information, you are unable to remove or even extract it. Usually, providers will say that the deletion of your data will take some time. Whatever happens in that space of time, we don't know.

Scammers are increasingly targeting people in need of loans and job-seekers with fake opportunities. Once gathered or manipulated, information can be used for ransom. Scammers are exploiting genuine and reputable websites, including LinkedIn. Bearing in mind that stolen personal data such as name, address, email, phone number, or card details can be used as cover for cybercriminals, proving that your information has been stolen is a challenging process.

Besides financial information, another area of concern is medical data. All the information on medical visits, procedures, and the results of medical exams is stored somewhere in the cloud, and then you cannot extract or use that information with another medical institution. Sometimes, you have to ask for a copy of the record, and it may happen that you will only receive a fraction of your data. Health records and financial details on individuals are valuable data.

It sounds like hammering on the statement that technology is fast-moving. Similarly, hackers and lawbreakers are evolving their sophisticated tactics. While invasions of large companies and government institutions tend to get public attention, small businesses and individuals who lack the resources or expertise to defend themselves are vulnerable and more at risk. It is about challenges, opportunities and questions such as how much your personal data is worth. It all starts with awareness.

WAITING FOR FOOD



Migrants look through the border fence towards food brought by aid workers after gathering between the primary and secondary border fences between Mexico and the United States where they await processing by US immigration in San Diego, US, on Wednesday. – Reuters

The key to sustainable food systems

The fabric of our global food system is fraying under the strain of climate change and an ever-expanding population. To prevent it from unravelling, we must embrace distributed renewable-energy solutions, which are critical for reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions, boosting resilience and productivity, and cutting costs. Failure to do so would jeopardise efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and threaten our very survival.

Halfway to the 2030 deadline, progress towards the SDGs — conceived as a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet” — is lagging significantly. In July, the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York and the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment in Rome underscored the importance of ensuring access to modern energy (SDG 7) and achieving zero hunger (SDG 2), respectively.

When it comes to strengthening the long-term resilience and adaptability of the global food system, these two objectives are interlinked. Translating this into public policies has taken on new urgency, given that rapid global warming, population growth, public-health crises, volatile energy markets, and conflict have exposed the food system's unique vulnerabilities and shortcomings.

Past solutions and approaches will no longer work; on the contrary,



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they contributed to the current problems. Previously, concerns about food supply — including high prices during the 2008 global financial crisis — invariably led to agricultural intensification and mechanisation, as well as an increase in land use. As a result, agribusiness (including the production, transport and storage of food) today accounts for roughly one-third of all GHG emissions, which in turn threaten the future of agriculture.

While the effects of climate change are felt throughout the global food system, they are disproportionately borne by those least responsible for the problem: smallholder farmers in the Global South. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa, which relies on rainfed agriculture, already experiences one-third of the world's droughts and is vulnerable to higher temperatures and other extreme weather. The International Monetary Fund has found that a single drought can lower an African country's medium-term economic-growth potential by one percentage point.

That conclusion reflects agriculture's central role in the developing world: in some of the least-developed countries, it accounts for more than 25 per cent of GDP, while 52 per cent of employed people in Sub-Saharan Africa are active in the sector. Given this, achieving sustainable and climate-friendly food

production in the Global South could lead to significant welfare improvements. This will require a shift to distributed renewable energy, which can be used in primary production, post-harvest processing, storage and cooking — the agricultural activities that tend to consume the most energy in developing countries.

To be sure, decentralised renewable energy is not a panacea. But it could contribute significantly to stabilising the global food system by lowering energy costs, a crucial factor for boosting productivity; by facilitating financing for productive applications, which could democratise access to yield-enhancing technologies; and by reducing GHG emissions and promoting climate-change adaptation. Last but not least, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and decentralising energy production can help shift global power dynamics within the food

system.

Solar-powered irrigation, for example, has significantly improved water access and enabled multiple cropping cycles, increasing productivity and reducing GHG emissions. Solar-powered pumps have boosted farmers' incomes by more than 50 per cent in India and led to significant increases in yields in Rwanda. The Ethiopian Ministry of Irrigation and Lowlands, which one of us heads, recently banned the import of diesel irrigation pumps to support the rapid transition to renewable-energy solutions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, solar milling machines could make grinding grain into flour more efficient, affordable and sustainable. Additionally, the expansion of mini-grids to power post-harvest processes can bring more economic and environmental benefits by enabling communities to preserve

their produce locally.

Cold storage and refrigeration are crucial for extending shelf life, reducing food loss and maintaining product quality. Decentralised cold-storage solutions that are powered by renewable energy could improve market access and reduce spoilage for smallholder farmers and remote communities. By converting existing infrastructure to renewable energy sources, we can cut GHG emissions and make cold chains more environmentally friendly and affordable.

All the above examples demonstrate the diverse applications of distributed renewable energy, and each solution contributes to a more resilient, sustainable and climate-friendly food system. By scaling up these innovations, we can address the energy challenges faced by smallholder farmers, processors and consumers while reducing our carbon footprint.

Reinforcing the fabric of our global food system requires a new framework designed to reduce land use, enhance productivity, minimise food loss and cut GHG emissions. Renewable energy must be its foundation. Otherwise, developing countries will be unable to raise agricultural yields and end hunger, stop and reverse environmental degradation, or democratise energy access.



Past solutions and approaches will no longer work.

sport

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USA BLANK OMAN IN FRIENDLY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Oman national football team suffered a 4-0 loss against USA in their international friendly match during the early hours on Wednesday at Allianz Field in Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA.

With the match completion, the Red Warriors ended their external camp which lasted for six days as part of their warm-up programme for the future assignments namely the Preliminary Joint Qualification for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides the 2024 AFC Asian Cup which kicks off on January 12, 2024 in Qatar.

The Red Warriors showed a disappointing performance against world No 11 USA as they could not penetrate the rivals defending line and create many scoring attempts during the match. The first half ended with the hosts leading 1-0 and they made it 4-0 in the following half.

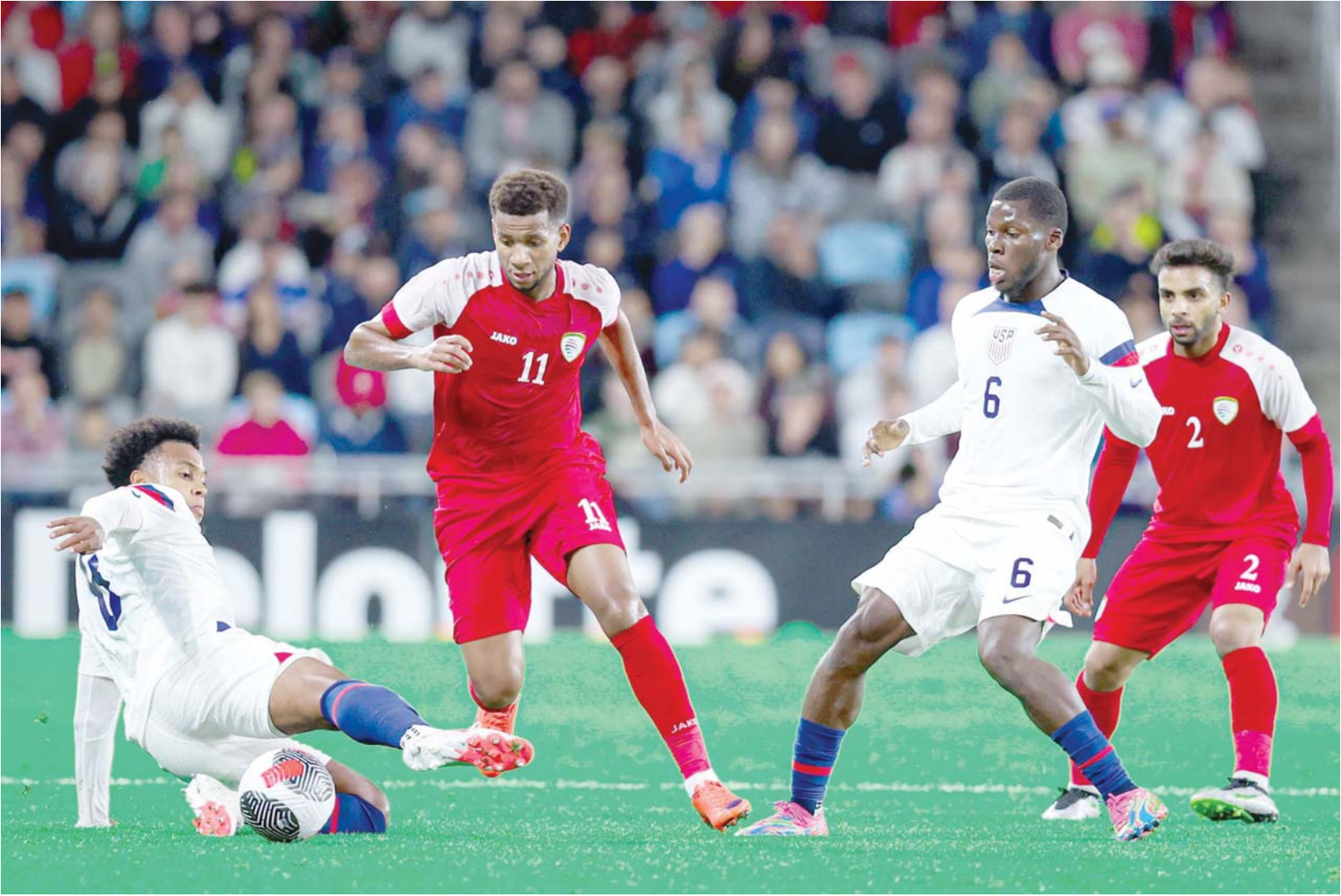
Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic began the match with a starting line-up featured from Ibrahim al Mukhaini as goalkeeper while the four-man defending line comprised Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi, Ahmed al Kaabi and Jameel al Yahmadi. Oman captain Harib al Saadi monitored the midfield accompanied by Abdullah Fawaz, Tamim al Balushi and Zaher al Aghbari. The strikers were Essam al Subhi and Mohsin al Ghassani.

Ivankovic gave chances for several Oman players in the top-class preparatory encounter.

The co-hosts of the Fifa World Cup 2026 started the match strongly as expected by scoring an early goal.

Oman's new young face Tamim al Balushi, who is playing his second international match, managed to send a strong ball towards USA goalie Ethan Harvath as first actual attempt in the match.

Later on, the opponents



The Red Warriors had a disappointing performance against world No 11 USA as they could not penetrate the rivals defence and create many scoring attempts during the match

pressed hard in the Oman penalty box. After 13 minutes, USA broke the deadlock as they netted the opening goal through Folarin Balogun. The goal encouraged American team to attempt more shot on Oman goal.

On the other hand, USA's defence was solid and they blocked all the ways for the Oman players. Also, Oman's three lines including defence, midfield and the forward set ups lacked coordination as there were less

movements towards the rivals' side.

USA RAISE PRESSURE

In the second half of the encounter, UA coach Gregg Berhal Ter's men entered the field with better focus as they worked hard to monitor all the areas in the game and close the gaps for Oman.

Later on, Ivankovic did few changes to bring fresh faces in the field as Musab al Mamari and Abdulrahman al Mushferi replaced Abdullah Fawaz and Zaher al Aghbari respectively. Al Nahdha's goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini managed to save the team from many goals in the first 30 minutes of the second half. USA's young player Benja Cremaschi played his first international match against Oman and he showed a top game in his debut friendly fixture.

After few substitutions from USA team, substitute Brenden Aaronson doubled the lead for his team in the 60th minute. Oman's back side lost their confidence as they made several mistakes as the rival team continued pressure towards Al Mukhaini's net. The third goal for USA was scored by Recardo Pepi in the 80th minute. Two minutes later, Oman's defender Khalid al Buraiki scored an own goal when he intercepted a cross from USA's Kevin Pardes to make the result at 4-0.

It is expected that the coaching staff will evaluate the team's technical performance during this international game. The coaching staff will work to assess the weakness areas and work hard in developing the scoring part besides improving the fitness and physical conditions of the players. The Red Warriors' preparatory programme will stop temporarily during October as the players will join their respective clubs. The national team will resume their training activities in November as their campaign in the joint qualifiers will begin in the same month.

Argentina triumph without Messi, Brazil grab late win in Peru

MONTEVIDEO: World champions Argentina rested Lionel Messi but still shined in a 3-0 victory over 10-man Bolivia in La Paz on Tuesday to maintain their winning start to South American World Cup qualifying.

Brazil also have the maximum six points from two games after a superb 90th-minute winner from Marquinhos against Peru in Lima for the only goal of the match.

But Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay suffered a setback, giving up the lead to end with a 2-1 defeat at Ecuador.

Messi, who has had a hectic schedule with his club Inter Miami, watched his teammates from the bench but was not listed as a substitute, having complained of tiredness after scoring the winner in Thursday's 1-0 victory over Ecuador.

Despite the absence of their talisman Lionel Scaloni's side had too much firepower for Bolivia



Brazil's Marquinhos celebrates after scoring a goal against Peru in Lima. — AFP

with goals from Enzo Fernandez, Nicolas Tagliafico and Nicolas Gonzalez securing an impressive victory.

Chelsea midfielder Fernandez went close with a wonderful effort from 30 yards out superbly saved by Guillermo Viscarra, who then did well again to keep out a near-post drive from Julian Alvarez.

The lively Alvarez had a hand in Argentina's opener in the 31st minute, feeding Angel Di Maria, whose low cross was turned in by Fernandez, who had made a perfectly timed run into the box.

Eight minutes later Bolivia's task got even tougher when Roberto Fernandez was sent off for an over-the-top challenge on



Argentina's Enzo Fernandez celebrates a goal against Bolivia in La Paz. — AFP

Cristian Romero.

Argentina went in at the break with a 2-0 lead after Tagliafico met a floated Di Maria free-kick with a header that looped over Viscarra.

Gonzalez wrapped up the victory seven minutes from the end with a left-footed drive after more hesitant defending from the

home side, who have lost both their opening games.

Scaloni was pleased with the performance by his team, saying they were "not afraid to play with the ball" and also offered an explanation for Messi's absence.

"Leo was not ready to play, he tried to recover, but he did not feel comfortable," he said.

MASTERFUL MARQUINHOS

Brazil came up against a determined Peru side and looked set to be frustrated when Raphinha's rocket in the 72nd minute was brilliantly saved by Pedro Gallese. But in the final minute Neymar whipped in a corner and Marquinhos met it with a masterful glancing header that flashed into the far corner.

Colombia had to settle for a point in a disappointing goalless draw in Santiago, Chile.

After an impressive start to his reign in charge of Uruguay, Argentine Bielsa saw his team lose to two goals from Ecuador defender Felix Torres in Quito.

Venezuela defeated Paraguay 1-0 at home thanks to Salomon Rondon's injury-time penalty.

After the opening two rounds Brazil lead Argentina on goal difference with Colombia third on four points, one ahead of Uruguay and Venezuela. — AFP

KULDEEP SPINS INDIA INTO ASIA CUP FINAL



Wellalage's all-round effort goes in vain for Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Kuldeep Yadav starred as India overcame a brilliant all-round effort from Sri Lanka's Dunith Wellalage to win a tense Asia Cup clash by 41 runs on Tuesday and book a place in the final.

Kuldeep took four wickets including the final two as India defended 213, bowling out Sri Lanka for 172 to silence a large home crowd at Colombo's R Premadasa Stadium.

India recorded their second straight Super Four win in the 50-over tournament, a prelude to the upcoming ODI World Cup, and ended Sri Lanka's 13-match winning streak in ODIs.

Wellalage, who claimed his maiden ODI five-wicket haul, remained unbeaten on 42 when he ran out of partners as left-arm

wrist spinner Kuldeep wrapped up the opposition tail in 41.3 overs. "Kuldeep is a great bowler, I tried to play my normal game with a positive mindset," said Wellalage, who was named man of the match despite being on the losing team.

"I want to thank my teammates and my coaching staff -- they gave me great support."

India skipper Rohit Sharma praised Kuldeep, who also took five wickets in his team's previous win over Pakistan, for his rhythm and consistency.

"For the past year or so, bowling really, really well. He has done a lot of hard work on his rhythm," said Rohit.

"He went back to the drawing board and worked on it. The ball is coming out nicely and you can

see the results in the last 10 ODIs."

It was India's third straight day on the field after they crushed Pakistan by 228 runs on Monday in a match that was played across two days due to rain.

The next Super Four match between Sri Lanka and Pakistan on Thursday will decide the second finalists between the two teams.

ROHIT IN 10,000 CLUB

Rohit, who entered an elite list of players with over 10,000 ODI runs and hit his second successive fifty, scored 53 to hand his team a brisk start but Wellalage hit back.

The 20-year-old returned figures of 5-40 including the key wickets of Rohit and Virat Kohli with strong support from part-time spinner Charith Asalanka,

who claimed four victims for 18 runs.

Wellalage struck with his first ball of the match when he bowled Shubman Gill for 19 and there was no looking back for the young spinner.

He made the home fans erupt with the wicket of Kohli who fell for three a day after an unbeaten 122 against Pakistan at the same venue.

Rohit was also bowled by Wellalage who snared his third scalp in three overs. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

India 213 all out in 49.1 overs (R Sharma 53, KL Rahul 39, I Kishan 33; D Wellalage 5-40, C Asalanka 4-18) v Sri Lanka 172 all out in 41.3 overs (D de Silva 41, D Wellalage 42 not out; K Yadav 4-43, J Bumrah 2-30, R Jadeja 2-33)

Result: India won by 41 runs

Markram, spinners keep SA series hopes alive

POTCHEFSTROOM, South Africa: South Africa's spin bowlers backed up a century by Aiden Markram as the hosts ended Australia's winning streak with a 111-run victory in the third one-day international at the JB Marks Oval in Potchefstroom on Tuesday. Markram hit 102 not out in a South African total of 338 for six.

South Africa survived a furious assault by David Warner and Travis Head before bowling out Australia for 227.

Australia won the first two games in the five-match series after sweeping a Twenty20 series 3-0.

The tourists looked on track for another win when Warner and Head thrashed 79 for the first wicket off only 48 balls.

Australia were 104 for one at the end of the 10-over power play, the second time in a row they reached three figures while fielding restrictions were in place.

But left-arm spinners Tabraiz Shamsi (two for 29) and Keshav Maharaj (two for 37) changed the course of the match on a spin-friendly pitch before fast bowler Gerald Coetzee (four for 50) finished off the Australian innings.

Maharaj also made a key intervention in the field with a direct-hit run-out of Warner, who made 78 off 56 balls before slipping and losing his shoe as he



South Africa's Aiden Markram watches the ball after playing a shot during the third ODI against Australia at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom. — AFP

set off for a single.

"We needed a positive one," said South African captain Temba Bavuma.

"The batters knuckled down and we were banking on the wicket assisting the spin bowlers and it's exactly what it did.

Oman set for first Gulf T20I in Qatar



MUSCAT: Oman national team is all set to compete in the inaugural edition of the 2023 Men's Gulf T20I Cricket Championship, which will be held in Doha, Qatar, from September 15-23.

The team will be led by Aqib Ilyas in the absence of regular skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, while Ayaan Khan has been named the vice-captain, according to a press statement from Oman Cricket (OC) on Wednesday.

Oman will begin their campaign in the six-nation championship, organised by the Qatar Cricket Association (QCA) with a match against the UAE on September 16.

The single round-robin format will see Oman take on hosts on September 17 followed by a clash against Bahrain on September 19.

Coached by Duleep Mendis, Oman will play their penultimate match against Saudi Arabia on September 20 before rounding off their engagements with a match against Kuwait on September 22.

The top two teams from the group will clash in the final a day later.

All the matches will be played at the West End International Cricket Stadium and the championship will be broadcast live to more than nine countries.

The championship will be held under the auspices of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and in accordance with international laws of the game.

Speaking ahead of the team's departure, Mendis said: "It is a great initiative to host a T20I championship in the region. I hope that it becomes

an annual affair and each country gets a chance to host the event. We are looking forward to this first event."

On the team's preparations, the experienced Oman coach said: "Despite the scorching summer, the boys have been really training hard for this tournament. We have played a few practice games to acclimatise

with the match conditions and, more importantly, the weather. The boys are ready and I hope we can achieve good results. We have done good home work ahead of our departure to Qatar on Wednesday."

The national team cricketers were last seen in action during the ICC ODI World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe in June-July where Oman exceeded expectations to make it to the Super Six stage in the ten-nation event.

Despite a switch in the format, the core team that travelled to Zimbabwe remains the same with only one new face in the squad.

Shakeel Ahmed, a left-arm spinner, has been drafted into the national time for the first time.

Experienced all-rounder Mehran Khan makes a comeback and will support the existing group of all-rounders in the team – Aqib Ilyas, Aayan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammed Nadeem, and Rafiullah.

The batting mainstays would be opening batters — Jatinder Singh and Kashyap Prajapati — while the sole wicketkeeper is Mohammed Naseem Khushi.

The other specialist spinner is Jay Odedra and the pace attack will be spearheaded by Bilal Khan, Kaleemullah and Fayyaz Butt.

Oman Squad: Aqib Ilyas (captain, Renaissance CT), Ayaan Khan (vice-captain), Jatinder Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Shoaib Khan (all from Muscat CT), Mohammed Nadeem, Mohammed Naseem Khushi, Kaleemullah, (all from Yalla Shabab), Jay Odedra, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Shakeel Ahmed, (all from Oman Stallions), Fayyaz Butt (Renaissance CT), and Mehran Khan (VLCC).

Officials: Duleep Mendis (head coach), Evert Laubscher (assistant coach), Mazher Saleem Khan (team coordinator), Zeeshan Siddiqui (analyst), and Sean Nowak (physiotherapist).

Oman's schedule (all Oman times): September 16: Oman vs UAE (5.30pm), Sept 17: Oman vs Qatar (5.30pm), Sept 19: Oman vs Bahrain (9.30pm), Sept 20: Oman vs Saudi (9.30pm), Sept 22: Oman vs Kuwait (9.30pm). Sept 23: Final (9.30pm).

Naveen back, Naib dropped from Afghanistan WC squad

KABUL: Afghanistan recalled fast bowler Naveen-ul-Haq in the 15-man World Cup squad announced on Wednesday, but allrounder Gulbadin Naib was dropped despite recent good performance.

Naib, 32, led Afghanistan in the last World Cup held in England four years ago where the team lost all nine matches and he was sacked. But the medium pacer took seven wickets in the last three ODIs, including 4-60 against Bangladesh in the Asia Cup encounter in Lahore last week. Naveen played the last of his seven ODIs against Ireland in January 2021.

Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said the squad is strong and is expected to do well.



"Naveen-ul-Haq returned to the Afghanistan ODI squad after a two-year gap for the World Cup in India and it is a strong squad."

Hashmatullah Shahidi leads the squad that has four changes.

Besides Naib, also out are Karim Janat, Sharafuddin Ashraf and Suliman Safi.

Afghanistan open their 2023 World Cup campaign against Bangladesh in Dharamsala, India, on October 7. — AFP

ALGERIA'S
HAMZA CLAIMS
GREEN JERSEY
WITH FINAL
STAGE WIN

UAE'S ABDULLA
JASIM
IMPRESSES
WITH WHITE
JERSEY

UNIVERSE
CYCLING TEAM
CLINCH TEAM
HONOURS

OMAN FINISH
FIFTH IN TEAM
STANDINGS



TOUR OF SALALAH STAGE 4 RESULTS

RANK	RIDER	COUNTRY	TEAM	TIMING
1.	Yacine Hamza	Algeria	Algeria	03:21:47
2.	Tom Wijffe	Netherlands	UNI	03:21:47
3.	Dominik Merseburg	Germany	TSM	03:21:47
4.	Ponlawat Sakunthanaplum	Thailand	Thailand	03:21:47
5.	Sayed Alawi	Bahrain	BCA	03:21:47
6.	Jacob Buijk	Netherlands	UNI	03:21:47
7.	Azzedine Lagab	Algeria	Algeria	03:21:53
8.	Abdelkrim Ferkous	Algeria	Algeria	03:22:04
9.	Toni Franz	Germany	TSM	03:23:10
10.	Grega Bole	Slovenia	SAD	03:23:10

OVERALL TIME CLASSIFICATION

1.	Grega Bole	Slovenia)	SAD	13:34:57
2.	Abdulla Jasim al Ali	UAE	UAE	+ 10
3.	Kenny Nijssen	Netherlands	UNI	+ 50
4.	Ahmed Naser	Bahrain	VIC	+ 01:12
5.	Eusebio Pascual	Spain	VIC	+ 03:03
6.	Jacob Buijk	Netherlands	UNI	+ 03:55
7.	Campo Schmitz	Germany	TSM	+ 04:20
8.	Azzedine Lagab	Algeria	Algeria	+ 05:21
9.	Marc Clauss	Germany	TSM	+ 06:52
10.	Stefan Verhoeff	Netherlands	UNI	+ 11:19

COOL
BOLE
ROMPS
TO
SALALAH
TITLE

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

GREGA BOLE of Shabab Al Ahli Dubai (SAD) confirmed his first Tour of Salalah title with a comfortable 10th place finish in the fourth and final stage on Wednesday.

Algeria's Yacine Hamza repeated his feat in the first stage to take his second stage win of the Tour in the picturesque 147 km final stage from Ain Razat to Ittin. Hamza clocked the top time of 03:21:47 ahead of Universe Cycling Team's Tom Wijffe and Team Storck-Metropol Cycling's (TSM) Dominik Merseburg who took the second and third spots respectively.

Like in the third stage, the close sprint at the finishing line for the top positions saw the top six cyclists clock the same time.

Bole, who was sure of winning the overall title with a place above his nearest competitor Abdulla Jasim al Ali of UAE, just ensured that by taking the 10th spot (+1:23) ahead of the Emirati teenager who finished 11th with the same timing.

The Slovenian rider won the overall leader's golden jersey (13:34:57) covering the total distance of 522 km in four stages but gave away his green jersey to stage winner Hamza.

UAE's Abdulla Jasim was the rightful choice for the best young rider's white jersey with his consistent performance in the four stages. He finished second (+10) in the overall standings.

Netherland's Kenny Nijssen (Universe Cycling Team) claimed the third overall (+50) position.

Another Dutch cyclist Wijffe showed his pedigree by claiming the silver jersey for the most aggressive rider.

For the hosts, Mohammed al Wahaibi claimed the 17th spot (+19:30) and team-mate Said al Rahbi's ended 19th (+20:50) among the 52 cyclists in action on the concluding day.

HAMZA TOPS POINTS
CLASSIFICATION

Algerian cyclist Hamza capped a fine campaign by topping the points classification with 47 points. Tour winner Bole came second with 37 points and Tom Wijffe finished third with 30 points.

Universe Cycling Team (UNI) bagged the team honours (40:57:26) ahead of second-placed Team Storck-Metropol Cycling (+7:09) and UAE national team ((+17:42).

Oman national team claimed the fifth spot (+42:54) among the 10 teams that finished the stages.



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Oman targets 3-fold jump in wheat production to 7,000 tonnes

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, is targeting an impressive three-fold increase in the cultivation of wheat to around 7,000 tonnes in 2023, up from 2,167 tonnes in 2022.

According to an official source at the Ministry, the anticipated upturn in wheat cultivation is driven by two three objectives: strengthening food security, supporting the sustainable development of the agriculture sector, and unlocking new income streams for Omani farmers.

To help achieve this ambitious production target for the year, land allocated for wheat cultivated has more than doubled to 6,000 acres, up from 2,422 acres in 2022, the official said.

Wheat farmers expected to contribute to this ramped-up output will number around 1,900 farmers distributed across various parts of the country.

Significantly, a budget of RO 5 million has been earmarked for the current year to fuel the revival of wheat cultivation in Oman, according to the official source.

This allocation is intended to support three key goals: R&D (The Ministry has been striving to introduce and promote high-yielding wheat



WHEAT FARMERS EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS RAMPED-UP OUTPUT WILL NUMBER AROUND 1,900 FARMERS DISTRIBUTED ACROSS VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

varieties; Wheat cultivation expansion (In governorates with favourable conditions, such as abundant water, fertile soil, and a suitable climate, the Ministry is spearheading the growth of wheat farming.

Contract farming is also being encouraged to diversify the landscape); and Marketing

strategy (The Ministry is strategically renewing its support agreement with the Oman Flour Mills to ensure robust marketing channels for these emerging crops).

Importantly, the Ministry's commitment to the Omani farming community goes beyond the mere cultivation of wheat, the official explains. "Farmers also receive vital financial assistance from the Ministry to purchase seeds, fertilisers, and other essential inputs.

The Ministry also provides technical guidance through its

extension services, including training on sustainable farming practices, effective pest and disease management, and savvy marketing strategies.

Additionally, the Ministry actively encourages farmers to adopt cutting-edge technologies such as drip irrigation and precision farming to improve productivity."

By investing in sustainable agricultural practices and supporting local farmers, the government is creating a more resilient food system that will benefit Oman for years to come, the official added in conclusion.

Oman government announces offer to buy back outstanding bonds

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, has announced a tender offer to purchase for cash up to \$1.5 billion worth of its outstanding bonds.

The tender offer is part of the government's proactive debt management strategy.

Per the Tender Offer Memorandum dated September 12, 2023, the bonds to be tendered are: (i) \$2 billion 4.397 per cent Trust certificates issued by Oman Sovereign Sukuk SAOC and due in 2024; (ii) \$1.250 billion 4.875 per cent Notes due in 2025, issued by the Omani government; (iii) \$2.5 billion 4.750 per cent Notes issued by the government and due in 2026; and (iv) \$2 billion 5.375 per cent Notes issued by the government and due in 2027.

"The Government invites holders of the securities to tender: (i) any and all of their certificates, and (ii) their 2025 Notes, 2026 Notes and 2027 Notes up to an aggregate principal amount, of \$1.5 billion, less the aggregate principal amount of the certificates validly tendered and accepted for purchase in the 'Any and All Offer' in each case for purchase by the Government in cash upon



the terms of and subject to the conditions set out in the Tender Offer Memorandum as part of its proactive debt management strategy.

Upon completion of the Offers, the Government intends to cancel the amount of Securities purchased pursuant to the Offers," the Ministry stated in the Tender Invitation.

The announcement comes on the heels of the Ministry's revelation earlier in the week that the State Budget has recorded a surplus of \$1.8 billion for the first seven months of the year, underscoring Oman's relatively healthy fiscals, shored up by buoyant oil and gas export revenues, as well as rising non-oil earnings.

The Ministry also announced that J P Morgan Securities plc and Standard Chartered Bank have been appointed to serve as dealer managers for the offer. Global corporate consultancy Morrow Sodali Ltd has been appointed by the government to act as the tender agent in connection with the offer.

Oman's salt basins: Ideal for underground hydrogen storage

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCT, SEPT 13

An enlightening symposium dedicated to exploring the vast potential of hydrogen storage within the Sultanate of Oman was held on September 13. The event, sponsored by Green Hydrogen Summit Oman, in collaboration with Oman Hydrogen Centre featured Nasser al Rizeiqi, from the Department of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, shedding light on Oman's underground hydrogen storage capabilities.

This symposium unveiled a promising future for Oman as a regional hydrogen hub, emphasising the significance of this clean energy source for global energy needs.

Oman's allure as a hydrogen storage destination stems from its geologically favourable attributes, such as abundant salt caverns and porous rock formations. These natural reservoirs offer secure and large-scale hydrogen storage options that can bolster renewable energy integration and carbon reduction efforts.

Furthermore, this positions Oman as a pivotal player in the burgeoning hydrogen

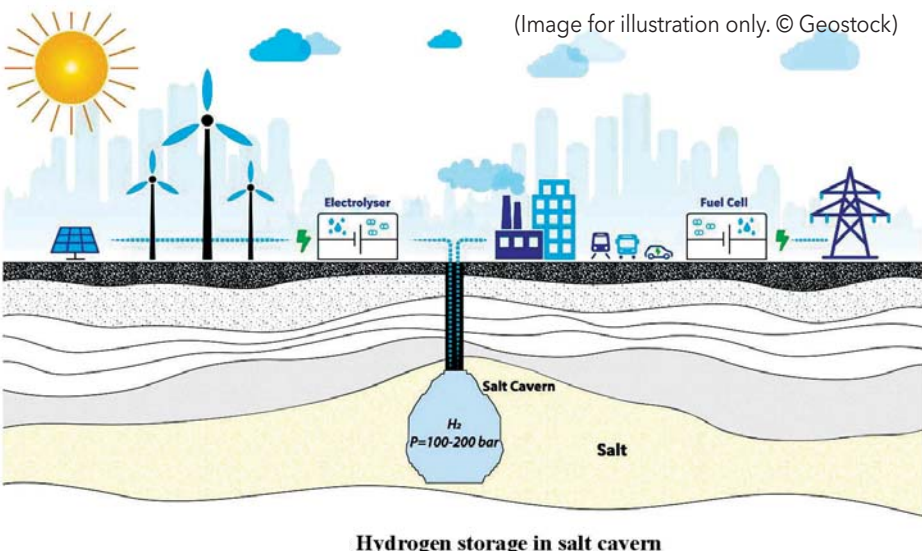


market. Al Rizeiqi talked about his studies on hydrogen storage which have yielded profound insights into the potential of this clean energy source. His research suggests that hydrogen could serve as a viable solution to meet the world's escalating energy demands in the coming years.

However, the key to realising this potential lies in developing safe, cost-efficient, and compact hydrogen storage methods.

One of the primary focuses of Al Rizeiqi's research was to determine if Oman's geology held the technical potential for hydrogen storage. The investigation involved identifying suitable geological deposits in Oman and analysing salt caverns for their suitability for hydrogen storage.

The findings from this comprehensive study are illuminating. Deep aquifers were



deemed unsuitable for hydrogen storage due to factors such as the absence of large sedimentary basins and lack of prior project experiences.

Depleted reservoirs require further study before deployment due to the absence of prior projects in this category.

In contrast, salt basins emerged as favourable candidates for underground hydrogen storage. Oman boasts substantial salt basins, and salt caverns have a proven track record of securely containing hydrogen. The key criteria for

assessing salt deposits include depth, salt thickness, and the size of the salt dome. Notably, two salt domes, in Qarn Shamah and Qarn Alam, were identified as having significant potential.

The symposium also featured Pascal Bayloq, CEO of Geostock, who shared valuable insights from the Hystories project. The Hystories project, a groundbreaking endeavour in underground energy storage, primarily focused on hydrogen and ammonia. Bayloq's discussion emphasised the

importance of evaluating both the technical and economic aspects of these storage solutions.

The Hystories project sought to address the critical need for secure, efficient, and sustainable energy storage methods. Hydrogen and ammonia are emerging as key players in this arena due to their versatility and environmental benefits.

Evaluating the technical and economic feasibility of these storage solutions is vital for their widespread adoption.

Oman's participation in discussions surrounding underground energy storage, particularly in the context of hydrogen and ammonia, underscores its commitment to innovation and sustainability in the energy sector. As the global demand for clean energy solutions continues to rise, Oman is positioning itself as a hub for cutting-edge research and development in this field.

The event was held at Grand Hormuz Muscat and moderated by Vivian Wood, Project Manager of Birba Energy Services. Abdullah al Harthy, Founder and Executive Chairman of Birba Energy Services delivered the closing speech and thanked all the organisers and participants in the event.



Alizz Islamic Bank wins corporate website of the year award

MUSCAT: With a strong belief in enhancing the online customer experience, Alizz Islamic Bank recently launched its new corporate website.

The site, which can be navigated with ease via desktop, tablet or mobile device, offers customers and visitors a unique user experience. The new website is a testament of Alizz Islamic Bank's commitment towards enhancing customer experience and focusing on digital transformation.

In recognition of the profound transformation of new website the bank was felicitated with the award for 'Corporate Website of the Year' at the OERLive DX Excellence Awards. The award was received by Adam al Jabry, Unit Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications, Velimir Stanojevic, Head of Alternative Channels and Yarab al Zadjali, Manager of Alternative Channels on behalf of the bank. The new Alizz Islamic Bank

website is dynamic and fully responsive making it easy to navigate on a wide range of web browsers and portable devices.

The website also introduces a web version of the Alizz Islamic Bank chatbot which was previously launched on WhatsApp and the bank's official Instagram account.

Ali al Mani, Chief Executive Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank said "The new Alizz Islamic Bank website reflects the exceptional customer experience and high standards that we strive to deliver as part of our business objective.

We are continuously enhancing all customer touch points and working on benchmarking with the best practice focusing on excellence in customer service at a whole new level.

Communication methods are changing, with people engaging companies more through non-traditional, more immediate digital channels.

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO), participated as a Strategic Partner at the OER Live DX Oman 2023, the premier Digital Transformation Conference, which took place on the 13th of September 2023 at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

NBO's participation was a success, as the bank was also honoured with the prestigious "Leaders in Digital Transformation Award".

This title recognised NBO's role in driving digital transformation in Oman's financial sector and its dedication to delivering digital banking solutions that keep up with the latest technologies and offers customers a seamless experience that meet their needs.

During the conference, Dr Ali al Shekeili, Assistant General Manager – Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, delivered a compelling presentation that shed light on NBO's extensive digital capabilities.

His insights and expertise demonstrated NBO's keenness to delivering progressive digital banking solutions that cater to the evolving needs of its customers. Dr Ali's contributions were met with great acclaim, underscoring NBO's thought leadership in the digital space and its commitment

to staying at the forefront of technological advancements.

Furthermore, Dr Ali lent his expertise to a thought-provoking panel discussion titled "Emerging Technologies – Navigating Opportunities and Risks", which delved into the transformative potential of emerging technologies.

The panel discussed how technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Robotics, 3D printing, Drones and Virtual Reality are combining in transformative ways to redefine various aspects of life, work and business operations.

They highlighted strategies to harness these enabling technologies to improve scalability, address business challenges, enhance resilience and accelerate product development.

It also emphasised the importance of assessing organisational and national preparedness in adopting emerging tech, creating new customer experiences, identifying areas where these technologies could add maximum value and navigating digital risks and threats.

This discussion was particularly relevant in fostering innovation in line with Oman's Vision 2040 plan.



Reflecting on the participation, Dr Ali al Shekeili remarked, "Our partnership with OER Live DX Oman 2023 was a success on multiple fronts.

It provided us with an exceptional platform to showcase NBO's digital expertise and our focal role in shaping the digital future of Oman's financial

landscape.

Receiving the 'Leaders in Digital Transformation Award' further validates our steadfastness to excellence in digital banking.

We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions, share insights and collaborate with industry leaders and experts."

ahlibank's additional rights issue oversubscribed by 1.44 times

MUSCAT: ahlibank, a leading financial institution committed to delivering excellence in banking and financial services, is pleased to announce the resounding success of its recent rights issue.

The issuance of an additional 400 million ordinary shares at 126 bz per share, which included issue expenses of 1bz per share, was oversubscribed by 1.44 times.

This reflects the strong confidence and support of the bank's valued shareholders.

Subsequently, the issuance led to an increase in ahlibank's paid-up capital from RO 194.9 million to RO 244.9 million, accompanied by enhancements in CET-1 ratio and capital adequacy.

The additional share capital equips ahlibank with sufficient room to pursue its growth objectives with an increased net worth, therefore strengthening its market position.

Commenting on the rights issue, Said bint Abdullah al Hatmi,



CEO of ahlibank remarked, "This year has been filled with many significant developments for ahlibank and we are immensely gratified with the trust and confidence placed in us by our shareholders. We would like to thank them for their valued participation in the rights issue."

"The successful rights issue provides the Bank with the necessary impetus to pursue its objectives and we look forward to executing the next phase of our growth plans," Al Hatmi added.

As of June 30, 2023, ahlibank's total assets recorded a 4.5% growth, reaching RO 3.2 billion.

Customer deposits increased by 9.0%, reaching RO 2.4 billion, while net loans and financing grew by 6.8%, reaching RO 2.7 billion compared to the same period in 2022.

The Bank's operating income rose by 9.7%, reaching RO 49 million as of the end of June 2023.

Net Profit for H1 2023 at RO 19.9 million increased by 26.2%, primarily due to higher net interest income and fee income.

Oman Broadband receives ISO recognition

MUSCAT: Oman Broadband Company has obtained international recognition from International Organisation For Standardisation by receiving three ISO certifications, through which it approves the accomplishment of a comprehensive management system.

The QHSE team in the Division of Enterprise Performance made that achievement, and it enhances the core values of the institution represented in reliability, efficiency, cooperation, responsibility, and innovation.

The company has received ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System Certification, ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety, and ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management System.

This international recognition reflects the commitment of Oman Broadband to international standards and demonstrates its excellence, sustainability, and stakeholder confidence.

Obtaining these prestigious certifications accentuates the company's firm commitment to provide outstanding service and

maintaining a safe, healthy, and sustainable work environment, and is also another notable achievement that boosts Oman Broadband's position in ITHCA Group and the ICT sector.

Obtaining ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System Certification is an acknowledgment to the company's commitment to a customer-centred, quality assurance and continuous improvement approach.

This certification is also evidence of the continuous pursuit of efficiency and reliability in all business operations.

Attaining ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety is a global standard for health management systems and occupational safety, demonstrating the company's commitment to providing a safer and healthier work environment.

It also emphasises responsibility towards employees, stakeholders and society overall.

ISO 14001:2015 certification for the environmental management system, confirms the dedication to managing environmental responsibilities

effectively, in line with the company's commitment to sustainability.

In this respect, Eng Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Broadband, assures the numerous implications of these achievements, as it enhances the company's reputation and prioritises quality, health, safety, and environment.

Such achievements can distinguish us in a vital and competitive sector and would lead to improving operational efficiency, through the alignment of our operation with ISO standards, Al Wahaibi added.

He noted that the company can also identify areas of improvement and implement strategies to reduce costs and enhance productivity.

The operational efficiency would probably enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, as these certifications will guarantee adherence to the sector's legal requirements and regulations.

Al Wahaibi mentioned that the certifications not only reduce the risks of legal cases, but also illustrate to stakeholders that we are a trustworthy and reliable partner.

Live it up with Lincoln luxury with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Owning a Lincoln luxury vehicle is now even more exciting with exclusive benefits. The benefits include service 5 years / 100,000 kms and 1 year registration. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom Wattayah.)

The Lincoln range in Oman includes the all-new Corsair and the Navigator. One of the largest luxury family SUVs – the Navigator offers impressive space, exceptional luxury and advanced features.

The Lincoln Navigator is

equipped with a twin-turbo V6 engine that can produce 440 horsepower and provides smooth power whenever you need it, delivered through a 10-speed transmission.

The Navigator combines modern luxury with advanced technology. Navigator's lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride. The Navigator is equipped with a clean and uncluttered interior layout, with a simple, soothing ambience. At night, interior ambient lights



sequentially illuminate each of the SUV's three rows. During the day, a panoramic roof fills the cabin with natural light. Inside, spaciousness comes in all three rows, including storage in each to keep the cabin clean and organised.

Occupants can enjoy available Revel Ultima audio with 28 speakers that work in concert with Navigator's interior design and acoustics. Standard SYNC 4 enables clients to manage audio, phone, navigation and more from the vehicle touch screen or steering wheel-mounted controls.

Second-row passengers have their own audio and climate control, while third-row seats feature power recline capability.

Customers wishing to own their dream Lincoln with exclusive benefits are encouraged to visit their nearest Lincoln showroom.

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Publicly traded firms showcase net zero strategies

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

Affirming its own commitment to advancing sustainability goals, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recently hosted a discussion that spotlighted the strategies of two prominent listed firms Abraj Energy Services and Renaissance Services in the respective decarbonisation of their operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

The discussion came on the heels of MSX's recent publication of reporting guidelines for listed companies that must publicly share information — which is voluntary at present, but is set to

become mandatory in two years — about their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) performance.

Dr Lamyia Harub, Sustainability Project Manager at Abraj Energy Services, shed light on the company's commitment to sustainability and active engagement in ESG activities. She emphasised the significance of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and robust governance practices within the energy sector.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO of Renaissance Services, outlined the firm's innovative Net Zero Initiative in the Oil and Gas Industry. The company's goal, he



said, is to significantly reduce its carbon footprint, thereby setting a remarkable example for other MSX-listed companies.

In his presentation, Thomas detailed a comprehensive plan to reduce emissions and share its emission reduction data in

alignment with the expectations of MSX investors and the broader MSX community.

Thomas emphasised that embracing sustainability is an ethical obligation and a strategic investment, especially for companies listed on the MSX. Renaissance Services strategically focuses on energy efficiency, cleaner energy sources and ethical conduct, aligning its corporate strategy with global sustainability objectives, he noted.

Thomas stressed the importance of collaboration in his address, highlighting MSX's unique position as a hub for sustainable cooperation among energy sector companies.

Acknowledging the environmental challenges often associated with oil and gas businesses, Renaissance Services' Net Zero Initiative invites cross-industry partnerships, knowledge sharing and the co-creation of sustainable solutions.

As it expands, Renaissance is determined to reduce its carbon footprint while maintaining financial success, he stated. Welcoming MSX's initiative to launch a platform for ESG reporting by listed companies, Thomas said the move will enable public traded firms to pursue a greener, more sustainable future that aligns with the expectations of MSX investors and stakeholders.



The Women-Waste-Climate Nexus: Why investing in women is vital to combating the global waste crisis



DELILA KHALED

My presentation at the ISWA World Congress will serve as a call to action for policymakers, practitioners, donors, governments, academia and the private sector to invest in women's advancement in the resource recovery and waste management sector to accelerate progress on the climate goals.

With support from the Royal Academy of Engineering's Engineering X initiative, I have developed a business case for increasing investment in women-led climate innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership in the sector, while elucidating the link between the global waste crisis and climate change.

With the goal of moving this issue higher up the global

agenda, I assert that women bring unique contributions and value addition at all levels of the sector — as professionals, entrepreneurs, investors and informal recyclers — and in the context of the triple planetary crisis (climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss) we cannot afford to let this potential go unrealised. Improvements in waste management, resource recovery and a shift to a circular economy can yield a 20-per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, but achieving this goal is a long shot without women at the table.

Most of the nascent but burgeoning attention around women-led climate action and a just transition focuses on energy, agriculture and water.

Meanwhile, recycling and waste management — the bedrocks of a circular economy and central to the mitigation of ocean, land and air pollution — are often overlooked and poorly understood.

The initiatives that do focus on women in the waste sector tend to concentrate almost entirely on plastics recycling at the informal and small enterprise levels.

This narrow vision minimises women's potential and fails to recognise the growth-oriented women entrepreneurs already driving innovative, homegrown circular waste solutions — from bioplastics and waste-to-energy to e-waste recycling and even automobile circularity.

To tap the full potential of women to transform resource recovery and waste management and advance circular economy solutions, efforts to engender the industry and to unlock climate finance for women entrepreneurs must be intentional, broader and more ambitious.

The author is Principal at ImpaXus. To learn more, join Delila Khaled during the ISWA World Congress in Muscat, at the Women of Waste Task Force's special session on October 31 at 15:10.

To delve deeper into the topics of resource efficiency, the circular economy, and their pivotal roles in driving sustainable development, we invite you to register for ISWA Congress 2023 today. Secure your spot now by visiting our registration page at <https://www.iswa2023.com/registration/>

Salalah forum calls for comprehensive guide on strategic project governance



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 13

A forum on "Strategic Project Governance" concluded in Dhofar Governorate yesterday, September 13, with a set of recommendations for improving the governance of strategic projects. The recommendations committee, which was composed of experts from academia, government and the private sector, concluded that there is a need for a comprehensive guide for implementing governance in strategic projects.

This guide should encompass standards, guidelines, policies, work procedures and performance measurement indicators to assist project departments.

The committee also recommended that governance principles be incorporated into various levels of education to cultivate a generation well-versed in governance principles and their practical application. They also called for the promotion of awareness, a culture of governance and values

of accountability across different institutions.

In addition, the committee recommended that digital governance be prioritised and that its implementation and evaluation be included in strategic projects.

They also called for the establishment of an environment conducive to the sustainability of digital transformation, including the provision of necessary infrastructure.

Finally, the committee recommended that collaboration and partnerships be strengthened among diverse institutions and organisations involved in governance to facilitate the swift implementation and dissemination of a culture of good governance.

The recommendations come at a time when there is a growing emphasis on good governance in all aspects of society. The implementation of these recommendations would help to ensure that strategic projects are effectively managed and that the benefits of these projects are maximised.

Health insurance accounts for 35.4% of gross premiums in Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), will host the annual Middle East Health Insurance Conference 2023 for the third time in a row later this month. Organised by the Middle East Insurance Review, the forum will take place from September 24-26, 2023 with wide participation from regional and international stakeholder institutions.

This year's conference will discuss issues related to risk management in health insurance and mitigating fraud and abuse of health benefits, as they have a negative impact on the quality and cost of insurance and health services.

The Authority's keenness to host the forum stems from the strong growth of the healthcare insurance market in Oman in recent years. Health insurance currently accounts for the largest insurance segment, with 35.4 per cent of the gross insurance premiums, surpassing all other insurance segments. Gross direct premiums generated by health insurance activity increased by 16.9 per cent to RO 191.517 million in 2022, compared to RO 163.866 in 2021.

Conference deliberations will include a review of the realities of the health insurance market in the Sultanate of Oman and its level of regulatory and supervisory development, in addition to the technological developments and the qualitative shift that the Dhamani electronic platform will bring about in the local market.

SMEDA seeks to foster start-up entrepreneurship at SQU

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 13

The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SME) organised an entrepreneurship and investment workshop on September 12 at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to help educate students about the four fundamental stages in the life cycle of startup companies.

During the workshop, participants learned how to manage their resources to pursue specific opportunities effectively, often involving calculated risks, to achieve



financial, ethical and dual rewards. This insightful event also highlighted

the various facets of entrepreneurship, including Business Entrepreneurship, which focuses on launching and managing commercial ventures; Social Entrepreneurship, which is dedicated to creating positive societal impacts alongside financial gains; and Corporate Entrepreneurship, fostering innovation within established organisations.

The process of innovation and business growth, as outlined by the SME Authority at SQU, begins with the ideation phase. This marks the birth of an idea through contemplation and reflection. It could involve improving an existing concept

with a unique twist or creating a new product or service.

Following the birth of the idea, the development stage comes into play. This phase encompasses formulating a plan for organisational change and improvement, covering aspects ranging from institutional architecture to individual roles. It entails configuring systems, behaviours and mechanisms that define the company's position and environment.

Once the organisation is consistently profitable, holds a firm market position and has earned the trust of its customers, it embarks on the launch stage. The

company is faced with a strategic choice: either expand its operations or sell them off for a substantial sum.

If the decision is made to expand, the growth stage commences. This is a critical juncture, as it secures the company's future and ensures its expansion. However, it also comes with its share of risks, and the dangers of over-expansion should be noticed.

This model, as detailed in the SMEDA presentation, provides a roadmap for start-ups navigating the challenging landscape of business growth and development.

Social responsibility and sustainable development



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

The Omani Forum for Partnership and Social Responsibility, which was held recently in Salalah, is considered one of the most successful forums in terms of the quality of the presenters who participated in the event.

It focused on the principles of the United Nations Global Compact and issues of responsibility and sustainable development.

The conference was attended by many officials representing various Gulf, Arab and international economic and social organizations in the fields of development and partnership in social responsibility and sustainability.

Among the working papers presented was a presentation titled “Nimaati” (meaning ‘My Grace’) delivered by Hadeel bint Ahmed al Sabtiyah, an advisor at the International Islamic Charitable Organization in Kuwait.

The paper talks about food waste in the State of Kuwait and other countries in the region, amid widespread evidence of poor families desperate for food in the same region.

Launched in 2021, the Nimaati initiative aims to achieve one of the Sustainable Development Goals to reduce the per capita share of global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by half, and slash nutritional losses.

The Kuwaiti initiative also carries a religious slogan entitled

LAUNCHED IN 2021, THE NIMAATI INITIATIVE AIMS TO ACHIEVE ONE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO REDUCE THE PER CAPITA SHARE OF GLOBAL FOOD WASTE AT THE RETAIL AND CONSUMER LEVELS BY HALF, AND SLASH NUTRITIONAL LOSSES.

“Preserve it from disappearing,” as grace shies away from those who manipulate and squander it.

The aim of the initiative is to meet the needs of poor families in the State of Kuwait by preparing and distributing hampers containing a variety of food items catering to the diverse food requirements of these recipients.

The ‘My Nimmati’ initiative aims to divert an estimated 100,000 tonnes of perfectly good food away from dumpsters in Kuwait annually and channel these supplies to families that need them. Environmental health and hygiene issues linked to the disposal of food waste are preempted as well.

In its most recent campaign, the “Nimaati” initiative helped salvage around 1,000 tonnes of

food waste, which was channelled to some 1,376 needy family. A total of 34,410 food hampers were distributed during this campaign.

The total cost of salvaged foodstuff amounted to 1.654 million Kuwaiti dinars. An estimated 1,500 volunteers, supported by a number of specialist food companies, participated in the drive as part of their CSR commitments.

A total of over 100 companies and restaurants took part in the Nimmati initiative as well.

Guided by the success of the Nimmati initiative in Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman could also consider launching a similar project to help reduce food waste, especially in the holy month of Ramadhan, when the amounts of wasted foodstuff almost double.

How global currencies end



BARRY EICHENGREEN

The writer, Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, is a former senior policy adviser at the International Monetary Fund.

Is the dollar poised to lose its dominance of global economic and financial transactions? Many commentators apparently think so.

Russia obviously hopes they are right, given that it has been shut out of the United States’ banking system and suspended from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).

China evidently wants to help the process along by encouraging countries to undertake transactions in renminbi. And Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has called for the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to create a common currency as an alternative to the dollar.

Russia’s shift away from the dollar, which got underway following its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, was prompted by the fear – and then the fact – of US sanctions.

More than a few commentators have since warned that other countries, witnessing US “weaponisation” of the dollar, will follow the Kremlin’s example.

China’s renminbi internationalisation campaign reflects not only tensions with the US, but also a desire to project power internationally, with the drive for economic and financial self-sufficiency reflected in other aspects of Chinese policy as well.

The dollar’s singular pre-eminence, in this view, is unlikely to survive a world dominated by two large economies at loggerheads, only one of which benefits from the dollar’s “exorbitant privilege.”

Similarly, Lula’s common-



Saudi riyal, Chinese yuan, Turkish lira, UK pound, US dollar, euro and Jordanian dinar banknotes are seen in this illustration. – Reuters

currency campaign reflects the view that the rising power and influence of the BRICS can no longer be denied, and that they deserve a seat at the top monetary table, whether the US agrees or not.

So, do these global geopolitical developments augur the end of dollar dominance? History – at least twentieth-century history – suggests not. To be sure, this history confirms that international currency status can be lost.

But whether that happens depends on the actions of the issuing country, not simply on geopolitical circumstances beyond its control.

To a significant extent, the twentieth-century history of global currency status is a history of the British pound sterling, the leading global currency of the preceding century.

Britain emerged from World War I economically and financially weakened.

It had lost skilled manpower, sold off assets to finance the war effort, and now faced intense competition from other economies.

Importantly, Britain had incurred a public debt on the order of 130 per cent of GDP, which was six times prewar levels.

That raised questions about whether the country would maintain the value of its obligations or, alternatively, inflate them away, as Germany, France, and Italy eventually did.

Yet even though the dollar had emerged as a competitor by the early 1920s, sterling’s international status was successfully maintained.

A decision was taken by Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill, with broad support from the political class, to focus on this objective.

Prices were pushed back down toward prewar levels, permitting earlier exchange rates against gold and the dollar to be restored.

Painful steps were considered, and in some cases taken, to limit public spending.

These policies came at a cost to British competitiveness and hence to output and employment.

But this sacrifice was accepted in the interest of reestablishing sterling’s role in the global economy – a goal that financial

leaders regarded as being in their self-interest, and that imperialists saw as necessary for maintaining Britain’s geopolitical reach.

As a result, the currency’s international role survived even in the turbulent 1930s, when it remained the pivot of the sterling area, the British-led currency zone. The United Kingdom emerged from World War II even more heavily indebted. In addition, it now had an overriding commitment to full employment, implying very different policies toward sterling.

The currency was devalued in 1949 in an effort to reconcile demand stimulus and full employment with external balance.

The disorderly liquidation of sterling balances by other central banks and governments was prevented with exchange controls and commercial threats.

Such measures were antithetical to international currency status.

Contrary to the textbook view of ongoing competition between sterling and the dollar, scholars such as Maylis Avaro show that the shift away from sterling was

already well underway in the aftermath of WWII.

At this point, geopolitics intervened. When the UK participated in an invasion of Egypt in 1956 to seize control of the Suez Canal and sterling crashed, US President Dwight Eisenhower’s administration refused to help until Britain withdrew its forces.

This diminished sterling’s global stature once and for all. But these geopolitical events only validated a decline and fall that was already a fait accompli.

The fundamental lesson, then, is that the issuer of an incumbent international currency has it within its power to defend or neglect that status.

Thus, whether the dollar retains its global role will depend not simply on US relations with Russia, China, or the BRICS.

Rather, it will hinge on whether the US brings its soaring debts under control, avoids another unproductive debt-ceiling showdown, and gets its economic and political act together more generally.

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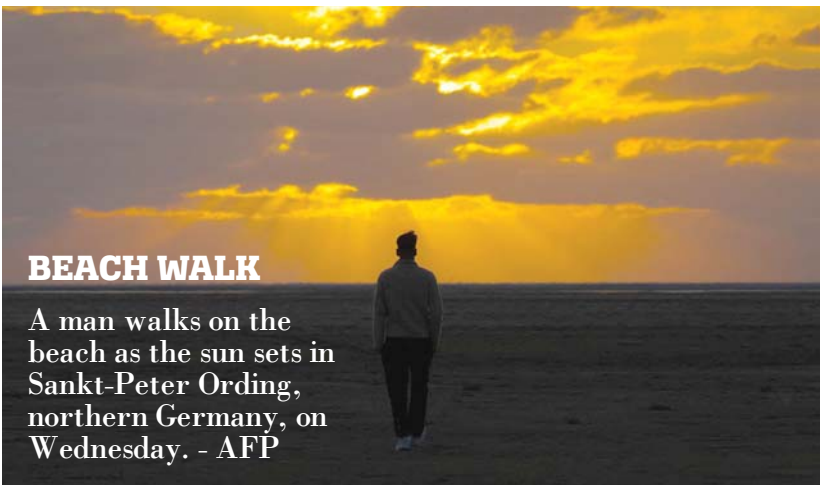
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BEACH WALK

A man walks on the beach as the sun sets in Sankt-Peter Ording, northern Germany, on Wednesday. - AFP



WALKING

Carved walking sticks are seen at the World Sheep Dog Trials in Dromore, Northern Ireland, on Wednesday. - Reuters



FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

Indigenous woman attends the third March of Indigenous Women, in defence of women's rights, local indigenous people and the environment in Brasilia, Brazil, on Wednesday. - Reuters



A GATHERING

Palestinian protesters gather during a demonstration along the border fence with Israel, east of Gaza City, to mark Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, on Wednesday. - AFP



A GIANT ONE

A Giant Indian Urubau named Varapau stands next to a child, Gabriel Pereira, one year and 9 months old, at the Avicultura Gigante, in Formosa, Goias State, Brazil. - Reuters

art & life

THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 14, 2023 | SAFAR 28, 1445 AH

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Qadisha Cave stores the subterranean wonders of Lebanon

BY KHALID ABDUL MALIK

LEBANON IS A COUNTRY blessed with spectacular caves. The Middle East's first caving club, established in 1951, resides in the heart of it. I recently had the privilege of embarking on a spelunking adventure guided by the seasoned experts of the Speleo Club du Liban.

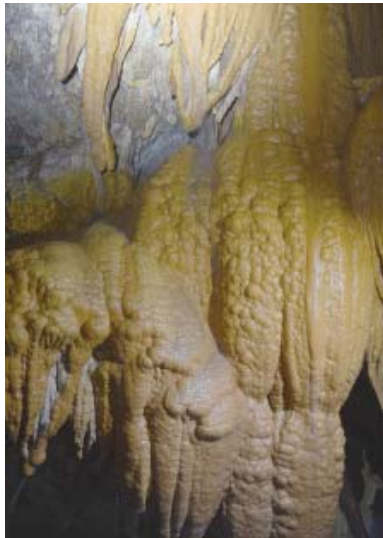
The visionary founders of this club — Lionel Gorra, Albert Anavy, Raymond Khawam and Sami Karkabi — set out on a mission to promote speleological activities, encompassing both scientific exploration and sports-related pursuits within caves.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the honour of joining Johnny Tok, the club's current president, on a remarkable journey to the Qadisha cave. Nestled in northern Lebanon, near the picturesque village of Bcharre, known as the hometown of the celebrated poet Khalil Gibran, this cave shares its home with the ancient cedars of Lebanon, often referred to as "The Cedars of God."

Qadisha cave is a masterpiece sculpted by the artistry of water flowing from the snow-clad peaks of Mount Lebanon, rising to an impressive elevation of 3,088 metres above sea level. The abundance of water flow within the cave renders it inaccessible during the winter and spring months due to the high water levels within the cave system.

The journey of exploration within the Qadisha cave began with the Speleo Club du Liban in the 1980s. Still, it wasn't until 2004 that the club embarked on further expeditions, meticulously mapping the cave and gaining deeper insights into its geological evolution.

The cave's historical significance traces back to 1903 when Father Youhanna Barakat Rahmé stumbled upon its entrance while tracing the course of the Qadicha River upstream. Although Father Rahmé commenced exploration,



he was soon deterred by the challenging underground terrain and the biting cold drafts. It wasn't until 1924 that Father Mtanios Geagea and Hanna

Geagea resumed the journey, venturing some 750 metres deep. In 1926, a passage was ingeniously constructed, allowing the first 200 metres of the cave to be

opened to the public.

In 1931, engineer Tanios Abou Chahine produced the cave's maiden topographic plan, with the first photographs captured



by the lens of photographer Harmédian. The cave's interior is a treasure trove of speleothems, including enchanting stalactites, stalagmites, draperies, and mesmerising cave pearls, all testaments to nature's intricate artistry.

Recent developments have transformed the cave into a welcoming destination for visitors. Johnny Tok, an architect and passionate caver from Bcharre, played a pivotal role in collaborating with the village municipality to bring this project to fruition.

While the visitor trail spans roughly 180 metres, the cave system's total development extends no less than 1,000 metres. My expedition with Johnny was a unique privilege. The icy water, registering around 7 degrees Celsius, required me to wade through freezing depths to access some of the cave's most enchanting chambers. The breathtaking formations I encountered made the chilling plunge more than worthwhile.

The Qadisha cave officially opened its doors to the public on August 3, 2020, welcoming visitors from May to October. The cave has since become a popular

destination, attracting an estimated 2,000 visitors each month.

The waters flowing from the cave also serve a practical purpose, contributing to electricity generation as they merge into Wadi Qannoubine, also known as "the Holy Valley." This sacred valley has provided solace and refuge to early Christian monastic communities for centuries and has also drawn Muslim spiritualists and Sufis in search of meditation and solitude.

The historical significance of the Qadisha Valley is profound. Its natural caves have served as shelters and burial grounds since the Paleolithic period. The Holy Valley has been a sanctuary for those seeking solitude for centuries, hosting continuous monastic communities since the early days of Christianity.

Notably, a team of speleologists from the GERSL scientific organisation uncovered eight remarkably preserved natural mummies, dating back to around 1283 AD, in the 'Asi-al Hadath' cave. This remarkable discovery was accompanied by many artifacts, shedding light on the valley's rich history.

Flowing through the valley for 35 kilometres, Nahr Qadisha originates from the Qadisha cave, just below the Forest of the Cedars of God. The valley's cliffs, often exceeding 1,000 metres in height, house numerous caves, many of which are challenging to access. The most breathtaking stretch of the valley spans approximately 20 kilometres between Bcharre and the village of Tourza to the west.

Lebanon's Qadisha Valley, with its remarkable caves and rich history, stands as a testament to the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and the enduring human quest for spiritual connection and exploration. My journey through this captivating landscape left an indelible mark, and I hope many more adventurers can experience its wonders in the future.



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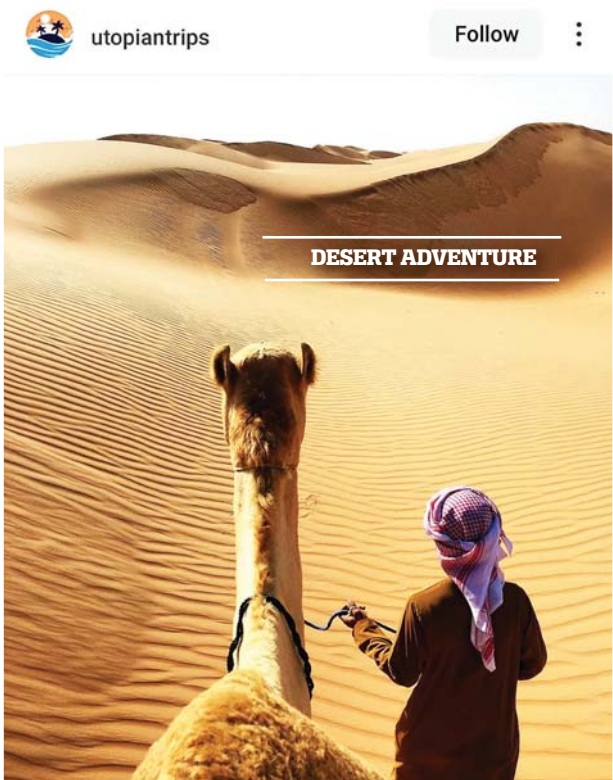
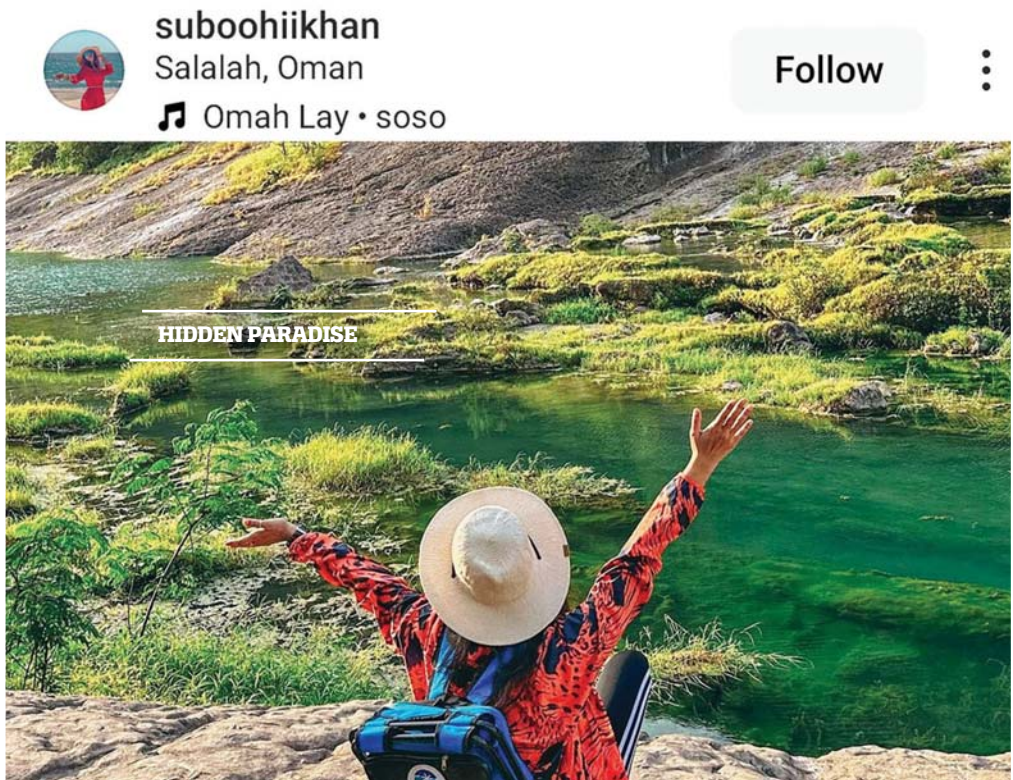
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Savoy dynasty daily life on display with Geneva auction

PORCELAIN FIGURINES, a white faux-leather sofa and a foosball table: these are among the items in a House of Savoy auction, providing a rare glimpse into the everyday life of royals.

More than 200 objects are going under the hammer this week, drawn from the former Geneva home of Vittorio Emanuele of Savoy – the son of the last king of Italy, Umberto II – and his wife Marina.

Royal aficionados may be interested in a delicate 18th century tea cup, a modernist game of chess, or two motorcycles owned by the couple's 51-year-old son, Emanuele Filiberto of

Savoy.

A portion of the lots are being sold off online until September 18, while others will feature in an in-person auction two days later hosted by the Geneva Encheres auction house.

In all, the objects being sold by the couple are expected to fetch between 100,000 and 150,000 Swiss francs (\$112,000-\$168,000).

But Cyril Duval, a partner at Geneva Encheres, said the value estimates were not really important, since the collection was more about "falling in love".

This auction, he said, "makes it pos-



sible for collectors to obtain certain objects they may have dreamt about after seeing them in magazines or on the screen".

The collection comprises of historical memorabilia and some household items from the villa the Savoy family had built in the 1970s in Vesenaz, on the outskirts of Geneva.

Vittorio Emanuele is the 86-year-old head of the House of Savoy, whose family was forced to leave Italy after the monarchy was abolished in 1946.

ROCK AND ROLL

Among the items for sale is "a 19th

century dinner set used during a ball hosted by Queen Victoria in London City Hall", Duval said.

There are also objects linked to the Savoy family heritage, including engraved silver coat of arms and porcelain figurines, but also bronze statues recalling the modernist interior style of the Geneva villa.

The collection also includes items that are "much more pop", Duval said.

He highlighted one of the two motorcycles, a 1941 Indian Sport Scout, with an asking price of 15,000-20,000 Swiss francs (\$16,800-\$22,400).

"It belonged to crown prince

Emanuele Filiberto, a 20th century rock and roll prince with tattooed arms," he said.

The grandson of Italy's last king, who is married to French actress Clotilde Courau, enjoyed riding his motorcycles with Johnny Hallyday, the late French rock legend, he added.

Duval explained that the auction was taking place after "the prince and princess left and sold" the Geneva villa this year, opting to stay in their residence in the luxury Swiss ski resort town of Gstaad instead.

Vittorio Emanuele was born in Naples in 1937, less than a decade before the monarchy ended and his family was forced to leave Italy.

He and other male heirs of the Savoy family were sent into exile because his grandfather Vittorio Emanuele III had collaborated with the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini on anti-Jewish laws during World War II.

Vittorio Emanuele III abdicated in May 1946 after 46 years on the throne, and his son Umberto II succeeded him, but only for a month before a June referendum abolished the monarchy.

The Italian parliament only ended a constitutional ban on the House of Savoy's male heirs returning to Italy in 2002, after Vittorio Emanuele and Emanuele Filiberto swore loyalty to the republic, but they have continued living mainly in Switzerland. — AFP

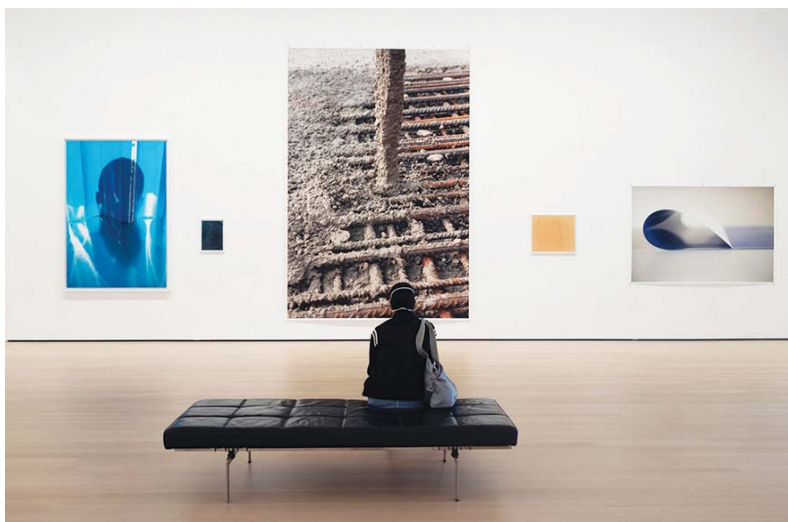
ART

German artist Wolfgang Tillmans follows MoMA success with new show

A NEW SOLO exhibition of the work of German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans has opened in Manhattan's Chelsea neighbourhood following his exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

"Wolfgang Tillmans: Fold Me" is to run at the David Zwirner Gallery until October 14. It follows a major retrospective of his work at MoMA in the autumn of last year.

The rooms felt like an "extension of my studio" Tillmans said during a preview of the exhibition, his fourth solo exhibition at the



gallery, which is regarded as one of the world's most successful.

The exhibition shows a film alongside still photos. Zwirner, who is also German, first opened his New York gallery in 1993 in the SoHo neighbourhood. The gallery currently has four New York locations and also has galleries in Los Angeles, London, Paris and Hong Kong.

"Wolfgang Tillmans: To look without fear" was a considerable

success at the MoMA, New York's renowned Museum of Modern Art. It is currently being exhibited in Toronto and will move to San Francisco in mid-November.

Tillmans, 55, is one of Germany's best known artists. He has received several major awards, including Britain's Turner Prize. US magazine Time this year listed him as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. — dpa

ENTERTAINMENT

Lil Nas X thrills Toronto fans as film fest looks at music

LIL NAS X brought his megawatt smile and star power to Toronto for the world premiere of a documentary tracking his meteoric rise – one of several movies spotlighting the music industry at North America's biggest film festival.

Movies about legendary singer Paul Simon and Canadian rock group Nickelback also got their debut screenings over the weekend at the Toronto International Film Festival.

But the 24-year-old Lil Nas X – who rocketed to fame with viral country rap hit "Old Town Road" and has since become an icon for the LGBTQ community – captured all the attention when he stepped onto the red carpet late on Saturday.

The artist and his entourage joined fans in the audience for "Lil Nas X: Long Live Montero," which combines footage from his first tour and confessional interviews to explain his breakthrough and watch



him navigate his monumental fame.

In the film, the Grammy-winning Georgia native, born Montero Lamar Hill, also explains his decision to openly embrace his queerness in the wake of the blistering success of "Old Town Road," and how it affected his loved ones and his music.

"I felt like coming out was very important if I wanted to progress," Lil Nas X says in the film.

On the red carpet, co-director Zac

Manuel emphasised the singer's wider societal influence as an out and proud Black man defying stereotypes with his massive, quirky social media presence and his embrace of edgy fashion.

"I think it's so important to see just a different spectrum of what queerness and Blackness and masculinity looks like, and to be comfortable in that vision, I think, is something that he's bringing to audiences," Manuel said.

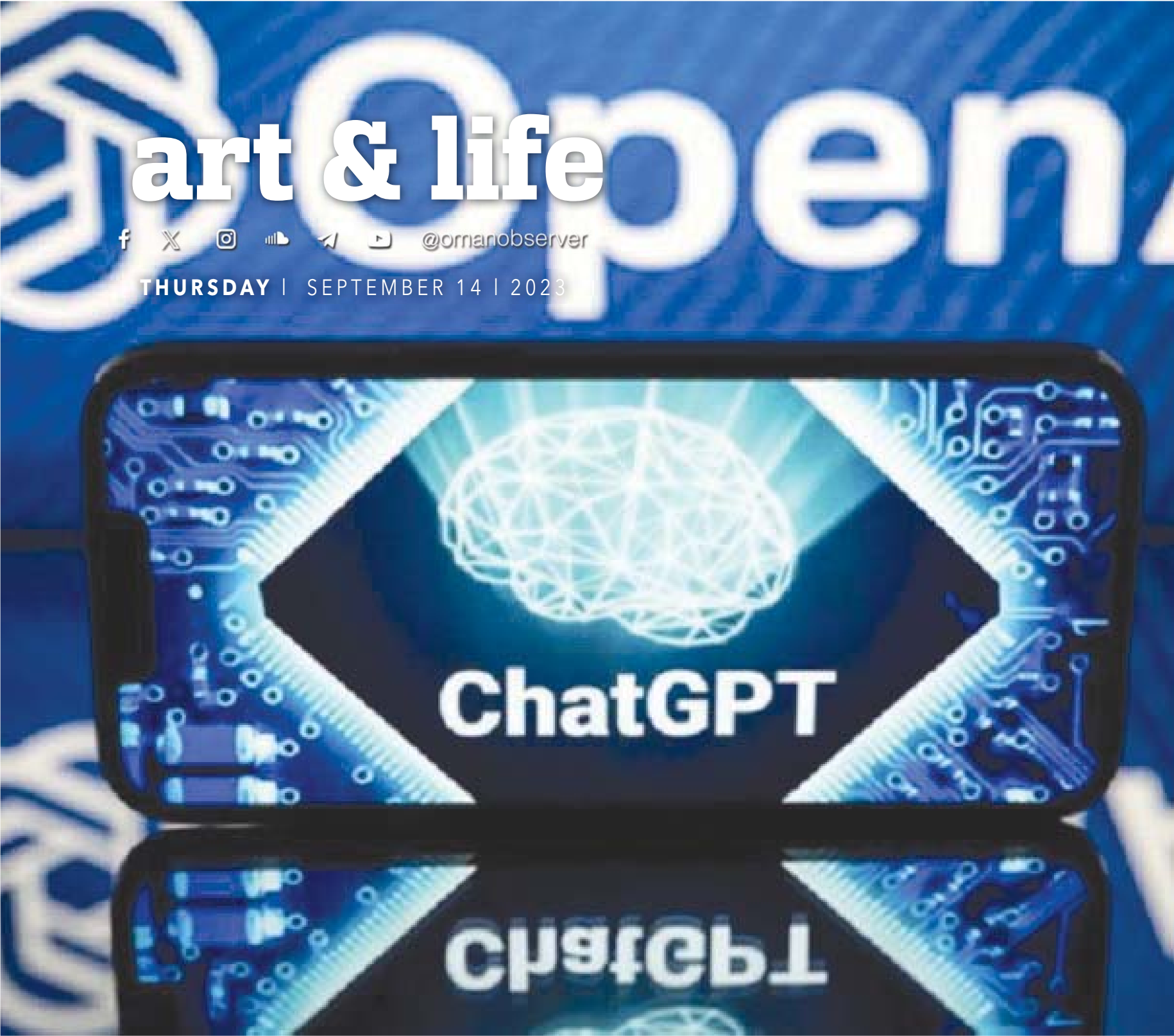
In the post-screening question and answer session, Lil Nas X offered this to his cheering fans: "My biggest advice is: do that thing you're most afraid to do."

Saturday's late-night screening started 30 minutes late after a security issue. TIFF's vice president of communications Judy Lung said police briefly looked into "a general threat" nearby that was "not directed at the film or the artist."

Toronto police said in a statement on Sunday that "a passerby uttered a threat towards private security," also stressing it was not specific.

But Variety, citing an unnamed source, said a bomb threat was called in by someone who specifically targeted the rapper for being Black and queer.

Lil Nas X's agents did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment. — AFP



TECHNOLOGY

ChatGPT diagnoses ER patients ‘like a human doctor’: Study

Artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT diagnosed patients rushed to emergency at least as well as doctors and in some cases outperformed them, Dutch researchers have found, saying AI could “revolutionise the medical field”. But the report published on Wednesday also stressed ER doctors needn’t hang up their scrubs just yet, with the chatbot potentially able to speed up diagnosis but not replace human medical judgement and experience. Scientists examined 30 cases treated in an emergency service in the Netherlands in 2022, feeding in anonymised patient history, lab tests and the doctors’ own observations to ChatGPT, asking it to provide five possible diagnoses. They then compared the chatbot’s shortlist to the same five diagnoses suggested by ER doctors with access to the same information, then cross-checked with the correct diagnosis in each case. Doctors had the correct diagnosis in the top five in 87 percent of cases, compared to 97 per cent for ChatGPT version 3.5 and 87 per cent for version 4.0. “Simply put, this indicates that ChatGPT was able to suggest medical diagnoses much like a human doctor would,” said Hidde ten Berg, from the emergency medicine department at the Netherlands’ Jeroen Bosch Hospital. Co-author Steef Kurstjens said the survey did not indicate that computers could one day be running the ER, but that AI can play a vital role in

assisting under-pressure medics. “The key point is that the chatbot doesn’t replace the physician but it can help in providing a diagnosis and it can maybe come up with ideas the doctor hasn’t thought of,” Kurstjens said. Large language models such as ChatGPT are not designed as medical devices, he stressed, and there would also be privacy concerns about feeding confidential and sensitive medical data into a chatbot. And as in other fields, ChatGPT showed some limitations. The chatbot’s reasoning was “at times medically implausible or inconsistent, which can lead to misinformation or incorrect diagnosis, with significant implications,” the report noted. The scientists also admitted some shortcomings with the research. The sample size was small, with 30

DOCTORS HAD THE CORRECT DIAGNOSIS IN THE TOP FIVE IN 87 PERCENT OF CASES, COMPARED TO 97 PER CENT FOR CHATGPT VERSION 3.5 AND 87 PER CENT FOR VERSION 4.0

cases examined. In addition, only relatively simple cases were looked at, with patients presenting a single primary complaint. It was not clear how well the chatbot would fare with more complex cases. “The efficacy of ChatGPT in providing multiple distinct diagnoses for patients with complex or rare diseases remains unverified.” Sometimes the chatbot did not provide the correct diagnosis in its top five possibilities, Kurstjens explained, notably in the case of an abdominal aneurysm, a potentially life-threatening complication where the aorta artery swells up. The only consolation for ChatGPT: in that case the doctor got it wrong too. The report sets out what it calls the medical “bloopers” the chatbot made, for example diagnosing anaemia (low haemoglobin levels in the blood) in a patient with a normal haemoglobin count. “It’s vital to remember that ChatGPT is not a medical device and there are concerns over privacy when using ChatGPT with medical data,” concluded ten Berg. “However, there is potential here for saving time and reducing waiting times in the emergency department. The benefit of using artificial intelligence could be in supporting doctors with less experience, or it could help in spotting rare diseases,” he added. The findings -- published in the medical journal Annals of Emergency Medicine -- will be presented at the European Emergency Medicine Congress (EUSEM) 2023 in Barcelona. — AFP

THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



Shaddad al Musalmy

Oman’s rich culture remains intact despite development

IN SPITE OF the development that Oman has seen during the last decades, the way of life of Omanis remains largely traditional and in accordance with Islamic values. This is evident if one looks at the way they dress, eat, celebrate and most importantly their charming and hospitable behaviours. The Omani culture owes much to the geography of the country. The cultural heartland lies in the interior while Oman’s presence on the Indian Ocean has fostered a long maritime tradition, which has enriched the culture. In Oman, the extended family is the basic social unit, headed by its eldest male member. And even though sexes are traditionally segregated, men and women now work together in private and government offices but wear distinctive clothing. The dishdasha, an ankle-length, usually white robe, worn with either an embroidered skullcap or a turban, has been the standard male attire and still is. The dishdasha has been and still is the Omani traditional as well as official dress code. We are glad that our tradition in this regard still remains intact and this is evident when we see people either in office or outside wearing dishdashas. Khanjar is also another wear that Omanis feel proud of. It is the traditional dagger that all Omani men wore and still wear on formal occasions. Women commonly wear colourful dresses with ankle-length trousers underneath. But this is changing due to the modern designs

THE DISHDASHA HAS BEEN AND STILL IS THE OMANI TRADITIONAL AS WELL AS OFFICIAL DRESS CODE. WE ARE GLAD THAT OUR TRADITION IN THIS REGARD STILL REMAINS INTACT

but obviously keeping their bodies fully covered hence keeping the Islamic values alive. Qahwa (Omani coffee) is both an important beverage and the focus of everyday social interaction mostly among men. Qahwa has been an important part of our culture for generations and no social interaction is complete without it. In fact, the new generation has done away with other traditional ways of life but not qahwa and it continues to be an important part of our culture. Dates are also important to the diet and to the ritual of hospitality in Oman. Equally important is Halwa, a sweet confection based on clarified butter, sugar and spices. Both are served to guests with qahwa and this ritual has been there forever in Oman for the old and younger generations. Although the dominant cultural group in Oman is Arab, the culture has been very tolerant of other groups and Oman has not seen any ethnic, sectarian, or linguistic conflicts and all the people of Oman consider themselves as one and this is a very unique feeling. As far as how Omanis live their daily lives, most Omani homes have formal rooms for men and their visitors, while women generally socialise in each other’s private quarters and when people meet for any occasions like births, marriages and deaths, the gatherings are marked by clear gendered space. Marriage rituals entail elaborate celebrations for women only, for men only, and, when space is open, with segregated sitting areas. On all occasions, food is always served. In general, Omanis are polite and upon meeting, greetings are exchanged before a discussion can ensue. It is considered rude to just engage in the conversation before greetings and I am glad that this trend has been there even for the younger generation and I hope it continues as it shows how Omanis are respectful before anything else. Foreigners in Oman are generally made to feel very welcome, although in return they would be expected to abide by Omani cultural norms. Visitors who come to Oman feel safe and I can make out that they enjoy Omani culture more than anything else and the better part of it they respect it even though it is very different from theirs. Humbleness of local people here also makes them feel at home. Till next, enjoy Omani hospitality.

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He’s currently one of Oman Observer’s senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.