

Represented by the Ministry of Health, the Sultanate of Oman has received the 2023 Excellence Award from the World Health Organisation (WHO). The award was conferred on Oman in appreciation for the country's constant efforts in combating non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The achievement constitutes a step forward in Oman's drive to meet sustainable development goals. **DETAILS ON P5**



MUSCAT

SAYYID BILARAB TO OPEN ‘RABT’ PROJECT

HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said will preside on Thursday over the opening of a strategic project undertaken by Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), named ‘Rabt’. The launch ceremony will take place at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhy, CEO of OETC, said that Rabt project constitutes a basic pillar in the electricity sector. The project will be carried out in two phases, the first of which comprises five stations, he added. Al Rumhy said that the first phase of the project connects Al Wusta Governorate to the master grid.

RNO CELEBRATES SAF DAY, RETIREES DAY



The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Wednesday marked the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Day, which falls on December 11 every year, and the Retirees Day, which falls on December 7 every year. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. **SEE ALSO P3**

GENEVA

GAZA SITUATION ‘HELL ON EARTH’

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees warned on Wednesday that the people of Gaza were “running out of time and options” as Israel’s war grinds on. “They face bombardment, deprivation and disease in an ever-shrinking space,” UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini told the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva. Lazzarini described the situation in Gaza as “hell on earth”. People in the Palestinian territory were “facing the darkest chapter of their history since 1948, and it has been a painful history”, he said. Now in its third month, the bloodiest-ever war broke out on October 7, killed around 1,200 people. Israel’s relentless bombardment and ground operation in Gaza has left the territory in ruins, killing 18,400 people, many of them are children. **SEE ALSO P7**

HM arrives in Singapore on state visit

VISIT UNDERSCORES ADVANCED RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Republic of Singapore on Wednesday.

HIS MAJESTY TO HOLD TALKS WITH SINGAPORE PRESIDENT

VISIT UNDERSCORES ADVANCED TIES BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

SINGAPOREAN FIRMS KEEN ON OMAN’S GREEN HYDROGEN PROJECTS

OMAN A SIGNIFICANT PARTNER FOR SINGAPORE IN BILATERAL TRADE

SINGAPORE: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Republic of Singapore on Wednesday on a three-day state visit.

His Majesty was received upon his arrival at Singapore Changi Airport by Dr Mohamad Maliki bin Osman, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office (Head of the Mission of Honour), a number of Singaporean officials and members of the Sultanate of Oman’s Embassy in Singapore.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied by an officials high-ranking delegation.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left Muscat for the Republic of Singapore on a three-day state visit, during which he will hold meeting with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam of Singapore.

The visit, made in response to an invitation by the Singaporean President, underscores the advanced relations between the two countries. His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash’shura, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, and other dignitaries.

— ONA (SEE ALSO P2)

1,716 students graduate from SQU

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of the 34th batch of students, on Wednesday.

The graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Al FadhI bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, at the university’s open theatre.

A total of 1,716 students graduated from colleges of Humanities, Law, Education, Economics and Political Science, Arts and Social Sciences.

Among the graduates were doctoral degree holders who graduated from a number of colleges including the College of Arts and Social Sciences (11 graduates), the College of Education (8 graduates). This is in addition to graduates with Master’s degrees from the College of Arts and Social



Sciences (93 graduates), the College of Economics and Political Science (52 graduates), the College of Education (97 graduates) and the College of Law (33 graduates).

Graduates with Bachelor’s degrees from the College of Arts and Social Sciences were 448, the College of Economics and Political Science 439, the College of Education 365 graduates and the College of Law 170 graduates. — ONA

Oman, UAE review bilateral relations

ABU DHABI: Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, on Wednesday received at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Theyazin conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Shaikh Mohammed and the UAE people.

On his turn, the UAE President asked HH Sayyid Theyazin to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

The meeting reviewed the fraternal relations binding the two countries. The two sides also touched on a set of matters of mutual interests.

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, accompanied by HH



Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, visited the Louvre museum in Abu Dhabi.

The tour covered the museum’s permanent galleries and exhibitions that displayed a selection of artworks. HH Sayyid Theyazin and HH Shaikh Khalid viewed the exquisite architectural design of the museum that portrayed harmony of structural elements and water surroundings. — ONA



HM ARRIVES IN SINGAPORE



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Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin bin Salim al Shraiqi, Inspector

General of Police and Customs, Lt.Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad bin Sultan al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsin al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Ja'aboub Commander of the Sultan's Special Force.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan

is accompanied by an official high-ranking delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi,

Minister of Energy and Minerals, Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry and Minister Plenipotentiary Anwar Ahmed Muqaibal, Charge d'affaires of the Sultanate of Oman's embassy in the Republic of Singapore.

May Allah the Almighty guard His Majesty the Sultan in his travel and grant him good health, wellbeing and success in all his endeavours to realise the good of his people. — ONA



Sayyid Theyazin visits Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, accompanied by HH Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, visited the Louvre museum in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

The tour covered the museum's permanent galleries and exhibitions that displayed a selection of artworks. HH Sayyid Theyazin and HH Shaikh Khalid viewed the exquisite architectural design of the museum that portrayed harmony of structural elements and water surroundings. Distinctive features of the Louvre include the elaborate interplay of lights, reflections and palm trees in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi that evoke the rich architectural heritage of the region.

HH Sayyid Theyazin expressed his delight at visiting the Louvre Abu Dhabi and exploring its artefacts, notably the antiques that reflect the region's heritage and authenticity.

HH Sayyid Theyazin and HH Shaikh Khalid also visited the Abrahamic Family House, which houses three places of worship. They toured the civilisational and cultural landmark. Then, they viewed the Abrahamic Family House's message on coexistence, peace and human fraternity. — ONA



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RNO celebrates SAF Day, Retirees Day



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. — ONA



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The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

The celebration took place at Said bin Sultan Naval Base. It began with a military salute to the chief guest. The RNO

band played the Royal Anthem. This was followed by a practical demonstration with the participation of RNO vessels, the maritime reconnaissance aircrafts and the assistance of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) and the Sultan's Special Force (SSF).

The celebration reflected the high capabilities and skills possessed by RNO personnel.

At the conclusion of the celebration, the chief guest and attendees toured

an exhibition held on the sidelines of the ceremony. The exhibition showcased the roles and tasks carried out by the RNO in protecting the homeland and safeguarding its accomplishments.

The event was attended by current commanders of SAF and other military and security units, some members of the State Council, veteran commanders, senior officers, retired RNO servicemen and some invitees. — ONA

Tenders worth RO 156m awarded

MUSCAT: The Tender Board today awarded tenders and approved additional complementary tasks for development projects in various fields, to the tune of RO 156,325,551.

The endorsement took place during the Tender Board's 6th

meeting of 2023, chaired by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Chairman of the Tender Board.

The tenders included the establishment of Al Nama Hospital in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate (worth RO 56.050

million, Samayil Hospital in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (RO 45,841,461) and the supply of surgical materials (RO 16,986,052) and the dualisation of Sultan Qaboos Road in Dhofar Governorate (RO 16,327,398).

— ONA



1,716 students graduate from Sultan Qaboos University



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of the 34th batch of students, on Wednesday. The graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers at the university's open theatre. A total of 1,716 students graduated from colleges of Humanities, Law, Education, Economics and Political Science, Arts and Social Sciences. — ONA



KABEER YOUSUF
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The Royal visit to Singapore will give a boost to the ongoing efforts of the Sultanate of Oman and Singapore and Oman in their approach to have low-carbon alternatives and energy efficiency solutions. Both aim to enhance the expertise of local companies and expedite the adoption of sustainable practices.

Singapore is intrigued by Oman's commitment to developing the renewable energy sector, including ambitious plans for hydrogen, solar, and wind projects aligned with Oman's National Energy Strategy. This strategy targets deriving 30 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030. A spokesperson from the Singapore Embassy in Oman highlighted Oman's transformative economic agenda, including Oman Vision 2040, focusing on economic diversification through initiatives like smart cities, digitisation, energy transition, green hydrogen development, agri-food, and tourism.

Several Singaporean companies have expressed interest in Oman's green hydrogen and ammonia projects. Sembcorp Jinko Shine SAOC, a joint venture between Sembcorp and Jinko, secured the bid for the development of Manah II, a 500MW PV solar plant, contributing significantly to Oman's goal of achieving 30 per cent renewable energy in its electricity mix by 2030. This project, valued at around \$400 million, is the largest of its kind globally in terms of capacity and is set to be operational by October 2024.

Regarding bilateral trade, Oman has been a significant partner for Singapore. In 2022, Oman ranked Singapore's 7th largest trading partner in the MENA region and 55th globally, with total bilateral trade amounting to \$51.36 billion. The sectors involved include transport, construction,

professional services, energy, and oil and gas. Noteworthy projects include SembCorp's partnership for an Independent Water and Power Plant and ST Marine's contract to build offshore patrol vessels for the Royal Navy of Oman.

Singaporean entities also express interest in supporting Oman's water needs for hydrogen production, leveraging Singapore's expertise in water treatment, with companies like SembCorp, Liquinex, and Century Water actively exploring solutions. Additionally, Oman seeks knowledge exchange in modern fishing farming techniques, opening opportunities for collaboration with Singaporean players such as Blue Aqua.

Collaborations between the Aquaculture Innovation Centre in Temasek Polytechnic and Sultan Qaboos University have been initiated in aquaculture, focusing on training, education, and research exchange programmes. Singapore's Seafood Industries Association is exploring opportunities in Oman, particularly in food sourcing and joint investment.

Singapore can serve as Oman's gateway to Southeast Asia and East Asia, as evidenced by the presence of Omani companies like Bank Muscat, OQ Group, and Asyad Shipping in Singapore.

The collaboration extends to areas such as civil aviation, environment and urban development, and information and communication technology, facilitated through the Regional Institute for Infrastructure Development (RIID) and the Civil Service College.

As Oman continues its economic diversification and sustainability efforts, the collaboration between Singapore and Oman holds promise across various sectors, fostering mutual growth and development.

A joint approach towards low-carbon alternatives



Oman-Singapore travel connectivity looks to grow with increasing demand

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The aerial distance between Muscat International Airport (MCT) in Oman and Singapore Changi Airport (SIN) spans approximately 6,267 kilometres.

It is not a new destination for travellers from Oman as in the past. Omani merchants and sailors had arrived in Singapore's ancient port with wooden dhows. It is 5,000 kilometres by sea, as the wooden ship Jewel of Muscat proved it in 2010.

The countries have historical ties dating back to Omani merchants and sailors arriving at the ancient port of Singapore via wooden dhows. The maritime connection between Oman and Singapore, reminiscent of the Silk Road, saw a revival in the second

century, and the Sultanate of Oman in the present millennium not only resurrected maritime routes but also showcased indigenous boat-building skills through the remarkable nail-less dhow, Jewel of Muscat.

Muscat Street, a symbolic reminder of the historical ties between Oman and Singapore, echoes bustling trade from the 1800s to the early 1900s. In the Kampong Glam area, Muscat Street has been adorned with arches, wall paintings, and aesthetic touches inspired by Oman's rich maritime heritage.

While Omani passport holders enjoy a visa-free short-term stay of 30 days in Singapore, Singaporean passport holders visiting Oman can stay for up to 14 days for tourism purposes, provided they have confirmed



Muscat Street, a symbolic reminder of the historical ties between Oman and Singapore, echoes bustling trade from the 1800s

hotel reservations and return tickets.

Singapore stands out globally as a finance, technology, and medical tourism hub, ranking second in the medical tourism index. Conversely, Oman, with tourism as a key diversification

pillar, invites visitors to experience its unique blend of culture, environment, heritage, and renowned hospitality.

Tourist flows from Oman to Singapore experienced a notable dip in 2009 but rebounded strongly in 2010, with consistent

growth until stabilisation in 2013-2015. Subsequently, there was a significant surge in 2016, and since then, the trend has been steady growth.

Recent data from September 2023 reveals 828,315 visitors to Singapore, compared to 1,056,102 the previous month. While this represents a decline, Singapore has historically seen fluctuations, with a record high of 1,397,737 in August 2019 and a low of 1,732 in September 2020.

Beyond tourism, the collaboration between Oman and Singapore extends to education, training, and qualification programmes, marked by numerous agreements and memoranda of understanding. Singapore's prestigious health institutions have actively offered

fellowship programmes to Omani doctors.

Moreover, scholarships such as the Royal Society International Exchange Programme and NUS President's Graduate Fellowship are available for Omani students in Singapore. This educational exchange strengthens the bonds between the two nations.

Given these historical ties, growing tourism, and deepening cooperation, the question arises: Should there be more flights and direct airline connections between Muscat and Singapore? The answer lies in the increasing demand. As bilateral relations continue to flourish, enhancing air connectivity will boost tourism and facilitate more seamless collaboration and cultural exchange between these two nations.



Draft law to protect bank deposits tabled at Ash’shura



The agenda encompassed several significant items among them the draft law regulating wildlife trade and approval of the draft law protecting bank deposits

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Majlis Ash'shura convened its third regular session to deliberate on a range of crucial topics outlined in its agenda. Khalid al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, emphasised the Majlis's commitment to contribute to the formulation of development plans and programmes aligned with state institutions.

This approach, he asserted, would have a positive impact on achieving stability and prosperity in various development sectors.

The agenda for the third regular session of the first annual session of the tenth term (2023-2027) encompassed several significant items. Among them were discussions on the draft law regulating wildlife trade, approval of the draft law protecting bank deposits, review and approval of the work plans of the permanent committees of the Majlis, examination and approval of the axes of ministerial



statements, deliberation on the proposal to amend the names of permanent committees, and consideration of strengthening social housing programmes based on the recommendations of the Social Services and Development Committee.

Additionally, the session involved the nomination of members for the seats of the Arab Parliament and the Union of Councils of Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The members also discussed the proposal to add a provision to the internal regulations of the Majlis in accordance with Article (174).

One notable point of discussion was the draft law on the protection of bank deposits submitted to the Majlis by the government. According to Article (47) of the Majlis of Oman Law, such draft laws are subject to approval or amendment by the Majlis before being submitted to the Sultan for ratification. Following extensive discussions, opinions, and

proposals, the Majlis Ash'shura approved the draft law protecting bank deposits. The Economic and Financial Committee and the Legislative and Legal Committee played vital roles in reviewing the draft law's economic, financial, and legal aspects.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura, highlighted that ministerial statements proposed for the first annual session were thoroughly discussed, in line with Article (69) of the Law. Work plans of the Majlis's permanent committees for the session were also reviewed and approved.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Planning expressed willingness to strengthen social housing programmes to support low-income citizens and social security families. The session addressed this programme's goals, implementation plans, and regulatory frameworks, emphasising the identification of beneficiaries.

Oman, China explore boosting relations

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs met on Wednesday with Li Chen, Ambassador for China-Arab States Cooperation Forum Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of the People's Democratic Republic of China.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations. They also exchanged views on cooperation areas within the framework of the Arab-China Cooperation Forum.

Moreover, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by



The two sides exchanged views on cooperation areas within the framework of the Arab-China Cooperation Forum. – **ONA**

Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman, Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Saif al Hosni, Head of the Asia-Pacific Department, Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Department and several officials from both sides.

Oman wins award in combating non-communicable diseases

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Health, the Sultanate of Oman has received the 2023 Excellence Award from the World Health Organization (WHO). The award was conferred on Oman in appreciation for the country's constant efforts in combating non-communicable diseases.

The achievement constitutes a step forward in Oman's drive to meet sustainable development goals. It also highlights the Health Ministry's success in promoting different health fields as part of the Renewed Renaissance march. It places Oman in the ranks of developed countries.



The award was presented by Dr Jean Jabour, representative of the World Health Organisation office in Oman to Dr Badria bint Mohsen al Rashidiyah, Director General of Primary Health Care at the Ministry of Health. – **ONA**

The award was presented by Dr Jean Jabour, representative of the World Health Organisation office in the Sultanate of Oman.

It was received by Dr Badria bint Mohsen al Rashidiyah, Director General of Primary Health Care at the Ministry of Health. — **ONA**

Oman participates in opening of Global Refugee Forum in Geneva

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the opening of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, held in Geneva.

Oman's delegation in the forum, which runs till 15 December, was headed by Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representatives of Oman to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva.

The forum is held every four years and it is considered the biggest global gathering on the topic of refugees. It aims to support practical



implementation of goals stipulated in the UN Refugee Convention.

Moreover, the forum's agenda include several open sessions and a number of high-ranking sessions. — **ONA**

Higher education ministry organises tech summit

KABEER YOUSUF
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Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) organised OMREN Technology Summit 2023 under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of various decision makers, policy makers, government officials, experts and researchers from across the region on Wednesday.

OMREN is the official research and education network in the Sultanate of Oman and the gateway to access similar global networks which works to build research capacity and local capabilities in various scientific fields in implementation of the national strategic objectives for research in

the Sultanate of Oman.

A day-long event, the first of its kind gathering of the global research and education community aimed at exchanging knowledge and success stories, identifying solutions, exploring business opportunities, discussing current challenges, and improving services, besides achieving the goals of connection, collaboration and innovation.

The summit was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The summit is a gathering of OMREN with the global research and education community to exchange knowledge and success stories, identify solutions, explore business opportunities, discuss current challenges, improve services, and achieve the goals of connection, collaboration and innovation.



The summit was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. – **ONA**

The full-day event consisted of an expansive line-up of stellar speakers, case studies, panel discussions, engaging discussions, and diverse presentations aimed at providing access to a wealth of industry-leading knowledge, sharing best practices and

experiences, spotlighting trends, and exchanging information with actionable takeaways.

During the summit, there were three keynote speakers including "Promoting Entrepreneurship Culture in Higher Education Institutions" by Dr Maen Al

Qatamin, Founder and Chairman of EntreViable, "Technology Localization and Investment in Education" by Dr Nasser al Fanna, Director of the Office of Technical Programmes at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and "The Role of Local and International Partnerships in Enhancing Research Productivity and Quality" by Dr Issa bin Salem al Shabibi, Assist Director for Research and Innovation Programmes Department at MoHERI.

The summit also included three panel discussions tilted "Entrepreneurship and the Expected Role of Higher Education Institutions", "Pioneering Experiences in Implementing Modern Technologies in Education" and "Scientific Research and Innovation: Opportunities and

Challenges".

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation gave a speech in which she stated that OMREN is one of the most prominent success stories achieved by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and it is an example of the values of effective and continuous cooperation with the network's multilateral team in the various stages of the network from its inception until it reaches global status. She added that OMREN is considered the bridge that connects the education sector to the various fields of research and to renewable knowledge in its various branches and from its various sources. The network is built on three pillars, which are connection, collaboration and innovation.



Climate summit adopts world’s-first ‘transition’ from fossil fuels



We have helped restore faith and trust in multilateralism, and we have shown that humanity can come together

SULTAN AL JABER
COP28 president

DUBAI: Nearly 200 nations meeting in Dubai on Wednesday approved a first-ever call for the world to transition away from fossil fuels, tackling the top culprit of climate change after years of avoidance although at-risk countries said far more action was needed.

After 13 days of talks and several sleepless nights in a country built on oil wealth, the Emirati president of the COP28 summit quickly banged a gavel to signal consensus among 194 countries and the European Union.

“You did step up, you showed flexibility, you put common interest ahead of self-interest,” said COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber, whose role as head of the United Arab Emirates’ national oil company had raised suspicion among many environmentalists.

Describing the deal as bringing “transformational change”, Jaber said: “We have helped restore faith and trust in multilateralism, and we have shown that humanity can come together.”

EU climate chief Wopke Hoekstra called the agreement “long, long overdue”, saying it had taken nearly 30 years of climate meetings to “arrive at the beginning of the



COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber (C) applauds among other officials before a plenary session during the United Nations climate summit in Dubai. – AFP

end of fossil fuels”.

Toughening language from an earlier draft that was roundly denounced by environmentalists, the agreement calls for “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner”.

It asks for greater action “in this critical decade” and recommitts to no net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 in hopes of meeting the increasingly elusive goal of checking warming at 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

The planet has already warmed by 1.2 degrees and scientists say 2023 was likely the warmest in 100,000 years, as storms, droughts and lethal wildfires expand around the world.

The text stopped short of backing appeals during the summit for a “phase-out” of oil, gas and coal, which together account for around three-quarters of the emissions responsible for the planetary crisis.

The agreement also made more explicit the near-term goals in the goal of ending net emissions by 2050.

It called for the world to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 43 per cent by 2030 compared with 2019 levels.

The agreement tackles only fossil use in energy, not in industrial areas such as production of plastics and fertiliser.

The deal backs a phase-down of “unabated” coal power — meaning it preserves a role for the dirty but politically sensitive energy source if there is use of carbon capture technology, panned by many environmentalists as unproven. — AFP

Dutch and Koreans vow stronger chip ties



Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte (R) and South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol give a press conference following their meeting in The Hague. – AFP

THE HAGUE: The leaders of South Korea and the Netherlands vowed on Wednesday to bolster co-operation in the critical semiconductor sector, amid growing tensions between China and the West over the technology.

The two countries, which host some of the world's top tech companies, such as ASML and Samsung, pledged to forge a “semiconductor alliance” involving businesses, researchers and universities.

Semiconductor chips are the linchpin of the global economy, powering everything from the smartphone in your pocket to your car, but they have also emerged as a geopolitical battleground.

Several Western powers have imposed restrictions on exporting advanced chip-making equipment to China, fearing its use to develop high-tech weaponry.

Beijing has described this as “technological terrorism”.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told reporters: “We both have thriving technology sectors that are well matched.”

— AFP

Hungary, Brussels lock horns before decision on Ukraine

BRUSSELS: Hungary and the European Union's executive locked horns on Wednesday over Ukraine's bid to join the wealthy bloc, aggravating a dispute that could hold up Kyiv's membership drive and was set to overshadow an EU summit.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban reaffirmed his opposition to offering neighbouring Ukraine fast-track accession at this week's summit, saying parliament this would not serve the interests of Hungary or the 27-member EU.

Raising the stakes, the executive European Commission reminded Hungary it had still not taken the final step needed to unlock billions of euros in funds, frozen over concerns that Orban has damaged democratic checks and balances in his country.

Orban has threatened to veto proposals to allow Kyiv to start accession talks and to receive substantial financial and military aid from the EU budget.

Hungary, an EU member since 2004, later published further judicial reforms in its official journal. An EU official said the Commission was expected to unlock funds later in the day.

With both sides digging in their heels, Ukraine's hopes of securing much-needed financial and military assistance to fight Russian forces hung in the balance.



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban attends the European Union leaders summit, in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters file photo

Orban told parliament that starting talks with Ukraine to let it into the bloc one day was an idea that “at the moment is absurd, ridiculous and not serious.”

His comments contrasted sharply with remarks by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to the European Parliament.

“We must give Ukraine what it needs to be strong today so that it can be stronger tomorrow at the table when it is negotiating a long-lasting and just peace for Ukraine,” she said.

Orban has threatened to veto proposals to allow Kyiv to start accession talks and to receive substantial financial and military aid from the EU budget.

Kyiv wants to join the EU and build alliances with the West as it distances itself further from

Moscow, while 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) of economic support and 20 billion euros for Ukraine's military would be vital for its war effort.

Ukraine is worried that Western military support may be dwindling nearly two years after Russia's full-scale attack, and President Volodymyr Zelenskiy visited Washington this week to try to press Kyiv's case for more aid.

He said during a visit to Oslo that Kyiv had done what was asked of it on the path to EU accession talks, and that Hungary had no reason to block Ukraine's accession drive.

“From our side we have been very constructive. We have done absolutely everything, we completed the recommendations of the European Union,” Zelenskiy said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Coalition reaches deal to end budget crisis

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition clinched a last-minute budget deal, preventing a political crisis from spiralling out of control after a constitutional court ruling upended its spending plans. After adopting an emergency budget for 2023, Scholz and his junior coalition partners battled for weeks before finally finding an agreement for 2024 early on Wednesday. The coalition's new plans will allow Germany to keep to its funding commitments for Ukraine



Germany will also reinstate its debt brake rule, which is enshrined in national law and prevents the state from borrowing more than 0.35 per cent of annual GDP to cover a structural deficit, barring exceptional circumstances.

— AFP

BAKU

Armenia, Azerbaijan exchange war prisoners

Armenia and Azerbaijan swapped prisoners of war, their first step towards normalisation since peace talks stalled after Baku recaptured the long-disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

On Wednesday, “Azerbaijan freed 32 Armenian military, Armenia freed two Azerbaijani military,” Azerbaijan's state commission for prisoners of war said in a statement.

It added that “the exchange took place at the Gazakh sector



of the Azerbaijani-Armenian state border.”

“Armenian soldiers were handed to Armenia after the International Committee of the Red Cross examined their health and made a positive conclusion,” the statement said.

— AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq parliament postpones speaker election

Iraq's parliament postponed until further notice its planned vote for a new speaker on Wednesday, local media reported, with MPs focused on local elections.

Official news agency INA reported that lawmakers were too busy with provincial elections due next Monday, and cancelled the vote on a new speaker.

Elections and appointments to the highest posts are often arduous affairs that can last months, punctuated by interminable negotiations and



fiercely debated agreements.

On Monday, Iraq will hold elections for 15 of 18 provincial councils, the first in a decade.

Regional governments control budgets for health, transport, education and infrastructure projects in the oil-rich nation.

— AFP



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Gaza

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Israel suffers worst combat losses, diplomatic isolation

CAIRO: Israel announced its worst combat losses for more than a month on Wednesday after an ambush in the ruins of Gaza City, and faced growing diplomatic isolation as civilian deaths mounted and a humanitarian catastrophe worsened.

Intense fighting was under way simultaneously in the north and south of the enclave, a day after the United Nations demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. US President Joe Biden said Israel's "indiscriminate" bombing of civilians was costing international support.

Warplanes again bombed the length of Gaza and aid officials said the arrival of rainy winter weather worsened the conditions for hundreds of thousands of families sleeping rough in makeshift tents. The vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people have already been made homeless.

Israeli forces have besieged the enclave and laid much of it to waste, with more than 18,000 people confirmed killed according to Palestinian health authorities, and many thousands more feared lost in the rubble or beyond the reach of ambulances.

In Rafah, at the southern end of the Strip where hundreds of thousands of people have sought shelter, the bodies of a family killed in an overnight air strike were being laid out in the rain in bloodied white shrouds, including several small children. One, only the size of a newborn, was wrapped in a pink blanket.

Since a week-long truce collapsed at the start of December, Israeli forces have extended their ground campaign from the northern Gaza Strip into the south with the storming of the main



This picture shows the damages following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP



Israeli soldiers are briefed as they prepare to return to the Gaza Strip, near the border area in southern Israel. — AFP

southern city of Khan Younis.

Meanwhile, fighting has only intensified amid the rubble of the north, where Israel had previously claimed its military objectives had been largely met.

Israel reported ten of its

soldiers killed in the past 24 hours, including a full colonel commanding a forward base and a lieutenant-colonel commanding a regiment. It was the worst one-day loss since 15 were killed on October 31.

Israel reported ten of its soldiers killed in the past 24 hours, including a full colonel commanding a forward base and a lieutenant-colonel commanding a regiment

Most of the deaths came in the Shejaiya district of Gaza City in the north, where troops were ambushed trying to rescue another group of soldiers who had attacked fighters in a building, the military said.

In the north, heavy fighting has also taken place in the Jabaliya district, where Gaza health officials say Israeli forces have besieged and stormed a hospital and detained and abused medical staff.

— Reuters

Palestinian health ministry says out of children's vaccines



An Israeli soldier aims his weapon as Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances wait. — AFP

GAZA: Gaza's health ministry said on Wednesday it had exhausted its supply of children's vaccines and warned of "catastrophic health repercussions".

The announcement came more than two months into the Israeli war in Gaza as international aid organisations have warned about the dire conditions in the crowded Palestinian territory.

The ministry did not specify which vaccinations had run out, and its claim could not be independently verified.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Palestinian territories, Lynn Hastings, said that Unicef was looking into the issue. "Vaccinations are one of the priority items that we are trying to bring in to ensure that we are able to continue with the vaccine campaign," Hastings told journalists at an online briefing without elaborating.

Tedros Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organization, warned on Sunday that "Gaza's health system is on its knees and collapsing," with 14 of 36 hospitals only partially functioning and supplies running low.

"The risk is expected to worsen with the deteriorating situation and approaching winter conditions," he said.

The Gaza health ministry called on international institutions to deliver urgently needed vaccines "to prevent disaster".

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees warned on Wednesday that the people of Gaza were "running out of time and options" as Israel's war against Hamas grinds on.

"They face bombardment, deprivation and disease in an ever shrinking space," Philippe Lazzarini told the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, adding that Gazans were "facing the darkest chapter of their history since 1948, and it has been a painful history".

The health ministry in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday said the death toll from the war in the Palestinian territory had risen to at least 18,608. — AFP

Tents flooded as Gaza rain worsens misery of displaced families

RAFAH: Strong wind and heavy rain in Gaza overnight on Wednesday brought even worse misery to displaced families, tearing and flooding flimsy tents, drenching clothes and blankets and making everyone cold.

At a tent camp in Rafah, located on sandy terrain strewn with rubbish, people were trying to recover from a horrible night, carrying buckets of sand to cover puddles inside or just outside their tents, and hanging up soggy clothes.

Some families are making tents with tarpaulins or thin, see-through plastic made to protect goods, not provide shelter for people. Many tents have no ground-sheets, so people spent the night huddling on wet sand.

"It is torn and water poured on us. We were drenched," said Ramadan Mohadad, a middle-aged man who was trying to fix his family's shelter fashioned from strips of plywood and a thin plastic sheet.

Mohadad's white t-shirt with stripes had large wet patches around the collar and on both shoulders.

"We tried as much as we could to protect ourselves so water would not get through but rain got in ... This plastic does not protect people



Palestinians walk under the rain at a camp for displaced people in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

sleeping under it," he said.

Rips were visible in other families' plastic shelters, and some

showed puddles inside. One family had placed a cement block at the entrance to act as a sort of dam, as

well as smaller bricks inside that looked like stepping stones.

Yasmin Mhani said she had

woken up in the night to find her youngest child, who is seven-months old, soaking wet. Her

Some families are making tents with tarpaulins or thin, see-through plastic made to protect goods, not provide shelter for people.

family of five are sharing a single blanket after their home was destroyed by an Israeli air strike and they lost one of the children, as well as all their possessions.

"Our house was destroyed, our child was martyred and I remain facing it all. This is the fifth place we have had to move to, fleeing from one place to another, with nothing but a t-shirt on," she said, hanging wet clothes outside her tent.

People have been arriving Rafah in growing numbers to seek refuge from intense fighting, now raging in both the north and south.

Inas, a 38-year-old mother of five, said she and her family had been forced to flee four times since the war started — first from the Twam area in northern Gaza City to the Tel-al-Hawa neighbourhood, then to Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, then to the city of Khan Younis and now to Rafah.

— Reuters

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generations. This opens broader horizons for these partners and strengthen the relationship between officials and young people in their field of expertise, as well as foster trust between the parties that serves future approaches.

There is no doubt that these discussions are very important because they help broaden the scope of consultation, exchange of opinions, and keep a proper dialogue going about the future of the relevant sectors and how they can support the development of the nation. This will inevitably lead to bridging any potential gaps between the partners.

This is exactly what the minister's meeting with the students depicted. In discussing the future of the tourism sector and the opportunities available for its development, the minister and the students demonstrated a deep level of relationship characterised by kindness and affectation. This meeting reflected our future aspirations for this significant industry. The meeting had many indications for achieving gains in terms of understanding the significance of the sector and its distinctive features, as well as raising awareness of its importance and contribution to the GDP.

The meeting was also an example of how hosting large events could be beneficial. These questions and many others show to what extent the students have knowledge about the foundations of the tourism sector and ways of advancing it. The minister

THE MEETING
HELD BY THE
MINISTER OF
HERITAGE AND
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LIGHT ON
VARIOUS ASPECTS

responded favourably to this, and promised that the gathering will be held every year to hear the students' insightful ideas and explore their perspectives. These insights have shed light on some of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's areas of concern and aspirations to develop the sector based on numerous factors, such as preparedness and providing many attractions to satisfy visitors, and many other foundations that form the cornerstones of the Sultanate of Oman's tourism industry.

I was quite astonished and impressed by the exhibition accompanying the meeting. The exhibition, which was organised by the Oman Tourism College, presented the projects and initiatives of the students in the tourism sector. This is an important addition to the sector, whether by taking advantage of the old neighbourhoods or exhibiting all the miniature components of each governorate at a single venue where all services are available, as well as cable cars, and other ideas promoted by the Najm Initiative.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Ministry of Labour, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and others are participating in this initiative by adopting some self-employment initiatives for tourism projects and developing them in real life, where students presented creative ideas that constitute an important addition to the tourism sector. These creative ideas could be possibly implemented on the ground.

MAI YAGHI

Many Gazans already lived in poverty before the war. Now, even those with money have found the conflict to be a terrible equaliser as they hunt in vain for shelter and basic supplies.

Since fleeing to the south of Gaza, Mohammed al Mahdun, 36, has been looking for an apartment in Rafah near the Egyptian border for his two young children and 11 members of his extended family.

He would happily spend \$1,000 a month — a small fortune by Gazan standards — but nothing is available.

“We’re not looking for anything fancy... but money has become meaningless,” Mahdun, an accountant, said.

Mahdun and his family fled Gaza City after their house was hit by an Israeli strike, he said.

With no fuel available, they had to leave their car behind and had no time to grab belongings. Mahdun eventually bought two items of winter clothing for three times the normal price.

“We came here on a journey of suffering and humiliation that is indescribable and impossible to forget. All the money in the world cannot compensate for what we went through,” he said.

“I feel helpless when my son asks me for something. He wants chocolate and crisps and I would pay any price to buy them for him, but it’s just not available. How will a child understand that the problem doesn’t come from me?”

Gazans have been fleeing south in their tens of thousands by any means necessary — car, truck, horse-drawn cart, or on foot — turning Rafah into a sea of tents and makeshift shelters of wood and plastic sheeting.

There is no end in sight for the war, which began with Hamas’s unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7, triggering an Israeli air and ground offensive that has left Gaza in ruins and killed more than 18,400 people according to the health ministry.

Conditions for the poor have been powerfully documented by aid groups.

— AFP

Dr. Barbara Glaser

Ulrike Koltermann
is an experienced
journalist with AFP

THE OVERNIGHT
CONNECTION
RETURNS NINE
YEARS AFTER THE
PREVIOUS SERVICE
WAS STOPPED —
ALTHOUGH LIKE
MANY NIGHT TRAINS
IT IS RELYING ON
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EVEN

A new sleeper service between Berlin and Paris arrived in the French capital on Tuesday, reflecting a growing drive for night trains as an alternative to short-haul flights.

The 14-hour nocturnal trip from the German to the French capital is to run three times a week, and is scheduled to become daily from October next year.

The connection is operated by French and German national train operators SNCF and Deutsche Bahn, while the rolling stock is provided by Austrian train company OeBB, whose "Nightjet" trains already criss-cross central Europe.

The maiden voyage left from Berlin's main station with government ministers from Paris and Berlin as well as the chiefs of the train companies in attendance to wave it off.

The overnight connection returns nine years after the previous service was stopped — although like many night trains it is relying on government subsidies to break even.

"It's a new era for the night train alliance," German Transport Minister Volker Wessing said in Berlin.

The train pulled out of Berlin 10 minutes behind schedule at 8:28 pm on Monday and arrived in Paris 15 minutes late at 10:39 AM.

French Transport Minister Clemen Beaune, who spent the night on the train, told waiting reporters in Paris that the trip had been "magnificent".

"This Berlin-Paris service is a symbol that we need at the moment," he said, "because we need positive, ecological and European projects".

There are currently no direct daytime train services between Paris and Berlin.

If passengers accept one change, they can make the journey in under 8.5 hours in the daytime.



The train conductor reacts during the launch of the Berlin-Paris night 'train night-jet' at the main station in Berlin, on Wednesday. – **AFP**

Passengers on the Austrian-provided Nightjet trains can choose between ordinary seats, six-bunk cabins and sleeper cars with private compartments for one, two or three passengers.

"It's great to get on a train and wake up in Paris," said Annika Volz, an ambassador for the Franco-German Youth Office that organises cultural exchanges between both countries.

"It's a strong, sustainable symbol for German-French relations," she said.

Volz said she was undeterred by cramped six-bunk compartments, saying: "space is tight in aeroplanes, too," she said. One-way ticket prices start at just under 30 euros (\$33), a low price point meant to stimulate demand and possible only thanks to subsidies.

Despite generating excitement beyond the ranks of rail enthusiasts, night trains remain an unreliably profitable business for operators. In

France, many lines are kept going by subsidies, with no less than 10 million euros a year going into the Berlin link. The sector has experienced a renaissance as passengers and policy makers look for a cleaner alternative to air travel.

In 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron set the aim of opening 10 new sleeper services by 2030, with the results already visible. As well as the Berlin link, several new connections between Paris and peripheral destinations in mainland France have already begun operation.

Some 100 million euros have been invested by the French government to revive the network and ready new carriages for service. For clients, the climate benefits and charm of train travel have proven a draw.

In 2023, around 215,000 passengers took the night train to their destination, a 15-per cent increase on the previous year.

Boycott in a knife edge situation

The spread of boycott campaigns on the Internet against brands or Western companies supporting Israel's actions against Palestinians demonstrates an awareness of political consumption in which people express their opinions through their wallets.

As it appears, the campaigns are at a popular level, with tech-savvy youth creating dedicated websites and smartphone apps that identify brands and products. Activists even called for a worldwide comprehensive halt to services. It is a punitive act with a media-oriented approach since the pressure groups rely on the low-level effort of social media to engage consumers around the globe.

It shows how digital social movements attach political messages to brands and products, and how corporate image becomes hostage, willingly or not. In the past, there have been calls against Danish, French, and Swedish products, among others.

Product boycotts are typically motivated by socio-political factors. The history of consumer protests can be traced back to the British Tea political rallies of the 1770s, when the British government taxed American colonies since most of the government debts grew while fighting wars on the colonists' behalf. In 1824, there were calls for a sugar boycott in anti-slavery campaigns.

Contemporary consumer boycotts are considered an economic weapon, and this type of manifestation is not new to the Middle East and possibly not even feasible for economic and political reasons.

Cross-corporate ownership can make boycotts a little trickier. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for some companies coming out and saying they are either a franchise or that they are not supporting or donating to Israel's government, and therefore adjusting their public dialogue.

Just to refresh the memory, from the end of 1998 to early 2000, the Arab boycott of American products as a protest against the United States' support for Israel grew in strength. The target brands haven't changed much since, with Starbucks, MacDonald's,



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CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER BOYCOTTS ARE CONSIDERED AN ECONOMIC WEAPON

Burger King, Pampers, and other familiar brands still listed. An article by Nancy Turck in Foreign Affairs, dated 1977, said, "For over 30 years, members of the League of Arab States have engaged in a boycott of Israel... to discourage directly or indirectly contributing to Israel's economic and military strengths." It continued, "For most of its existence, the boycott has been practically dormant."

It is not part of this opinion piece to look into the Palestinian-led organisation BDS-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, strategies, discourse, and political movement against Israel.

However, it is good to keep in mind that since 1945, there have been many initiatives against Israel, its allies, and companies doing business with Israel. The various phases of the boycotts were largely institutional.

Following the Oslo Peace Accords, in 1994, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) ended its participation in the Arab boycott against Israel. Trade and cooperation agreements have been signed with countries defending their policy of separating trade from politics.

In an unsettling scenario, multinational corporations may cancel, downsize, or postpone their investments in the region. Foreign investment is greatly needed in several Arab countries to boost their foreign exchange reserves and create job opportunities. That said, state foreign relations tend to remain calm despite the social media drumbeat on boycotts.

Now, would the international business community pledge action against Israel, as it did against Russia? Has the war in Ukraine come to an end as a result of the sanctions and boycotts imposed on Russian businesses?

Product boycotts can be economically harmful if done face-to-face, but not so much when there is a growing use of Internet shopping. Keep an eye on the delivery men!

The calls can gain widespread popular support, but will they get the results they want? Or, as on many previous occasions, fall dormant? Political consumer activism in a knife-edge situation is complex.

NATIVITY SCENE IN SAND!



People visit the Belen de Arena (Sand Nativity Scene) on Las Canteras beach in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on Wednesday. The sand nativity scene of Las Palmas dates back to 2006. Since then, every year a different theme is chosen to shape this ephemeral nativity scene. This year's edition brings together 9 sand-sculptors who have created eight Christmas scenes. In one of them, depicting "The flight into Egypt" gospel, the artist dedicates it to the people enduring the harsh impact of the war in Gaza. – AFP

Developing countries should reject American-style protectionism

For nearly 50 years after the end of World War II, the United States led the effort to liberalise global trade through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). In 1994, the US rallied 123 countries to sign a multilateral treaty establishing the World Trade Organisation, which subsumed GATT while expanding its scope to cover services trade and intellectual property.

Paradoxically, America's current industrial policy poses an existential threat to the multilateral trading system it worked so hard to build. In Washington, there is now a bipartisan consensus that the WTO has failed to defend America's vital economic interests and inadvertently created a formidable geopolitical rival by allowing China to take advantage of the system. This realisation has led both Democratic and Republican administrations to take steps that have shaken the foundations of the institution the US helped found.

Since 2016, the US has refused to approve new judges to the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body and blocked the reappointment of those whose terms have expired. By December 2019, the DSB was reduced to a single member, below the minimum of three



Arvind Panagariya, a former vice chairman of the National Institution for Transforming India and a former chief economist of the Asia Development Bank

THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE WORLD ECONOMY POSES AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION AND THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM THAT HAS FUELLED THE GLOBAL ECONOMY'S GROWTH FOR THE PAST HALF-CENTURY

required to adjudicate cases. Consequently, there is currently no effective mechanism to resolve trade disputes among WTO members, significantly increasing the likelihood that member countries will adopt policies that violate their legal obligations.

Unsurprisingly, the US itself is a serial violator. In 2018, as the DSB effectively stopped functioning, then-President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on imported washing machines and solar panels. Shortly thereafter, the Trump administration announced additional tariffs on aluminium, steel, and a wide range of Chinese goods.

Instead of lifting Trump's tariffs, US President Joe Biden has erected additional trade barriers by adopting industrial policies that include \$1 trillion in production subsidies for semiconductors, electric vehicles, and offshore wind power. Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, which resulted in massive Western economic sanctions against Russia, has further complicated an already uncertain outlook for global trade. Moreover, Trump has vowed to impose a universal tariff of 10 per

cent on most imports should he return to the White House in 2025.

So far, these developments have not significantly slowed international trade. Global merchandise exports have rebounded impressively from the Covid-19 pandemic, climbing to \$25 trillion in 2022 from \$22 trillion in 2021 and \$19.5 trillion in 2018. The economic impact of US tariffs and the retaliatory measures imposed by America's trading partners has been relatively

minor. While importers of steel, aluminium, and Chinese goods have suffered, US merchandise trade — even with China — has remained robust. Most importantly, the US economy has continued to grow rapidly, owing to its huge and highly competitive domestic market.

The same cannot be said of most developing countries. Barring a few exceptions, such as South Korea and Singapore, the developing world embraced trade

openness only after the WTO's establishment. Consequently, domestic support for outward-oriented policies in those countries remains fragile.

Under these circumstances, America's shift towards protectionism undermines open trade in two significant ways. First, it nurtures a protectionist mindset. When the US, the world's leading proponent of trade liberalisation, adopts protectionist measures, it signals to other countries that they might also gain from such an approach and could encourage them to revert to development strategies centred on import-substitution industrialisation.

Second, leaders in developing countries often face political pressures to respond to US tariffs that are viewed as detrimental to their exports. India, for example, retaliated against Trump's steel and aluminium tariffs by imposing its own tariffs on US imports. The fact that even a major economy like India lacks the market power to damage the US economy, or that the costs of such retaliatory tariffs will fall mostly on its citizens, appears to matter little.

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America's shift towards protectionism undermines open trade in two significant ways.

sport



Oman Olympic 49er squad

Oman’s Olympic 49er squad aims to secure Paris 2024 qualification

OMANI TEAM EYES GOLD IN ASIAN SAILING CHAMPIONSHIPS IN THAILAND

MUSCAT: Oman Sail’s Olympic 49er squad has arrived in Chon Buri, Thailand, to prepare for the Asian Sailing Championships where they will be aiming to secure Olympic qualification for Oman at Paris 2024. The pairs of Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi, and Abdulrahman al Maashari and Ahmed al Hassani have been training in Thailand for a month under the supervision of Team Leader Hashim al Rashdi to acclimatise and run through technical and tactical aspects of the race.

The Asian Sailing Championships also serve as the Asian Continental Olympic Qualifier for the Paris 2024 Games and brings together sailors from across Asia for the chance to claim a place for their nation. Racing begins at the Royal Varuna Yacht Club in Pattaya, Chon Buri, on December 13 with 12 races scheduled across five days followed by one medal race for the top 10 sailors in the 49er event.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail’s



Hashim al Rashdi

Head Coach Performance and Team Leader, said, “Qualification for the Olympic Games has been Oman Sail’s long-term goal since our inception, and we are now very close to achieving this milestone. We are aiming for gold in the Asian Sailing Championships and will start the first race with confidence that the meticulous preparation can see the team perform to the best of their abilities.”

Musab al Hadi added, “we are all aware of how important this would be for our nation, for our coaches, for Oman Sail and for our families. Our training camps have focused on how the boats perform in these conditions and have given us extra insight ahead of racing. All four of the team are excellent sailors with a lot of experience in the 49er, and when the races begin, we will all be aiming to use everything we have learned to confirm our place at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.”

In total, 18 nations will compete at the Asian Sailing Championships across ILCA 6, ILCA 7, 49er, 49erFX, 470 and Nacra 17 classes, as well as sailors from four non-Asian nations. The event carries five Olympic places, including one in the 49er event.

The Asian Sailing Championships and Asian Continental Qualifier have been organised by the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand under the supervision of World Sailing, the Asian Sailing Federation and the Sports Authority of Thailand.



Intense training to shape Red Warriors for 2024 Asian Cup



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

The Oman national football team players are through their fourth day of the domestic preparatory camp in Muscat which started on Monday. As many as four training sessions were completed by the Red Warriors till now including morning and evening training sessions that varied from fitness, physical and tactical exercises.

The chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA) attended the training session on Tuesday which began with a brief speech by head coach Branko Ivankovic who encouraged the players to deliver their best performance in the forthcoming assignments. Also, he requested from the players to raise their learning output during the preparatory period these days and utilise all the technical lessons ahead of the

major events.

The warm-up exercises kicked off in the beginning of the training session under supervision of the fitness coach. Later, the players went to execute different technical and tactical sessions that shaped the players readiness for the upcoming assignments. The training session ended by an internal match among the players who were split into two teams.

Following the completion of internal warm-up gathering, the delegation of national team will travel to the UAE to complete the second phase of the preparatory camp on Friday. The forthcoming preparatory external camp in the UAE will feature two crucial friendly matches, first against China on December 29, and second against the UAE on January 6. Both matches are set to shape the team’s readiness for



the upcoming main assignments namely 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar next January and the Preliminary Joint Qualification (Round 2) for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027.

OMAN PROBABLES: Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushaidi, Bilal al Balushi, Amjad al Harthy, Mahmoud al Mushaifri, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ali al

Busaidy, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Mohammed al Amri, Ghanim al Habshi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Musab al Maamari, Tamim al Balushi, Harib al Saadi, Naser al Rawahi, Moutaz Abd Rabuh, Zaher al Aghbari, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri, Arshad al Alawi, Abdullah al Mushaifri, Salah al Yahyaei, Abdullah Fawaz, Jameel al Yahmadi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Omar al Malki and Esam al Subhi.

Russell makes dazzling return



Andre Russell (R) of West Indies hits 6 as Jos Buttler (L) of England watches during the first T20I at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados. — AFP

BRIDGETOWN: Veteran all-rounder Andre Russell made a dazzling return to international cricket to help West Indies cruise to a four-wicket victory over England in the opening Twenty20 international in Barbados on Tuesday.

Handed a shock recall after a two-year absence, Russell shone with bat and ball at Kensington Oval as the home side reached the victory target with ease to finish on 172-6 from 18.1 overs.

The 35-year-old Russell was the pick of the West Indies bowlers with three wickets for 19 runs off four overs as world champions England were all out for 171.

Russell, alongside skipper Rovman Powell, who was unbeaten on 31, then produced a quick-fire 29 not out to see West Indies home after a mid-innings wobble threatened to allow England back into the contest.

Russell's innings off just 14 balls included two fours and two sixes, including a monstrous six out of the ground over midwicket off Adil Rashid.

West Indies blasted 14 sixes throughout the innings, including two huge swipes from opener Kyle Mayers early on which also flew out of the ground.

Russell later slashed a sublime shot over backward point off Sam Curran for four runs to seal

victory and a superb individual performance.

"Life is so funny," man-of-the-match Russell said.

"Since when I got selected for the West Indies team I've been dreaming for two weeks now — and I was dreaming of being man of the match."

England skipper Jos Buttler was left to rue the tourists' inability to cash in on a strong start to their innings which included a 77-run opening partnership.

"From the position we were in, we were looking for a score of 200," said Buttler, who scored 39 while fellow opener Phil Salt put on a stylish 40 off 20 balls.

"We want to keep pushing the

boundaries and trying to be as positive as we can.

"But it's about finding ways to keep scoring in that manner, getting those extra 20, 25 runs in an unfashionable way."

The second game of the series takes place in Grenada on Thursday. —AFP

BRIEF SCORES
England 171 all out in 19.3 overs (P Salt 40, J Buttler 39, L Livingstone 27; A Russell 3-19, A Joseph 3-54)
West Indies 172-6: (K Mayers 35, S Hope 36, R Powell 31 not out, A Russell 29 not out; R Ahmed 3-39, A Rashid 2-25)
Result: West Indies win by four wickets
Series: West Indies lead five-match series 1-0

ABL Task, Earn Trust, Bangladesh CC, Modern Muscat win

MUSCAT: ABL Task beat Mani's CT on Friday in the B Division League 2023-24 powered by Al Ansari Group of Companies LLC at Al Amerat's Municipality Ground 2.

Mani's CT were bundled down to 163 courtesy Aneermon and Nobish picking three wickets each. Abdul Qadir was the top-scorer for Mani's CT scoring 49 runs. In reply, Nidhin Mohan's scintillating start scoring 67 helped ABL Task get over the line with ease.

In another match, Earn Trust thumped Landmark Group on Friday in the C Division League 2023-24 powered by Credit Oman LLC at Municipality Ground 2.

Mustansar Hussain's trailblazing 89 eliminated the opposition bowling as Earn Trust CT posted a total of 185 in 20 overs. Ajay Kumar picked three wickets for Landmark Group. In reply, Landmark Group were restricted to 128 courtesy of Zaheer Abbas and Nilesh Gadekar's economic spells picking two scalps each.

Elsewhere, Bangladesh CC edged past Waves Engineering on Friday in the E Division League 2023-24 powered by Credit Oman LLC at Al Amerat's Municipality Ground 3.

Shahid Hussain and Mohammed Ovaidullah's hit 33 runs each to help Bangladesh CC post a total of 123 in 20 overs. Mohammed Tayub picked four



Mohd Ovaidullah Khan of Bangladesh CC.

wickets for Waves Engg. In reply, Mohammed Tayub scored 44 but couldn't get past the target after some disciplined bowling from Bangladesh CC as Mohammed Ovaidullah picked two wickets to restrict Waves Engineering by five runs.

Also on Friday, Modern Muscat Mountains-B beat Arjaj International by a single run in the G Division 2023-24 at OAC 3 in Seeb.

BRIEF SCORES

Mani's CT 163 all out in 29.3 overs (Abdul Qadir 49 (48b); Nobish 3-25, Aneermon 3-28) lost to ABL Task 166-3 in 26.2 overs (Nidhin Mohan 67 (58b) by 7 wickets.

Earn Trust CT 185-5 in 20 overs (Mustansar Hussain 89 (49b); Ajay Kumar 3-22) beat Landmark Group 128-7 in 20 overs (Fahim Uddin 40 (39b); Zaheer Abbas 2-17, Nilesh Gadekar 2-26) by 57 runs.

Bangladesh CC 123 all out in 19.2 overs (Shahid Hossain 33 (20b); Mohammed Tayub 4-20) beat Waves Engineering 118-7 in 20 overs (Mohammed Tayub 44 (45b); Ovaidullah Khan 2-24) by 5 runs.

Modern Muscat Mountains-B 159-9 in 20 overs (Mohan Rajendran 41 (36b); Abdul Shakeer 4-30) beat Arjaj International 158-7 in 20 overs (Anoop Vinodia 45 (37b); Kashif Rasool 3-19) by 1 run.

South Africa beat India by 5 wickets in second T20



South Africa's Marco Jansen (C) catches the ball dismissing India's Suryakumar Yadav (R) during the second T20 match in Gqeberha. — AFP

GQEBERHA, South Africa: Suryakumar Yadav and Rinku Singh hit rapid half-centuries for India but South Africa chased down an adjusted target to win the second Twenty20 international by five wickets at St George's Park in Gqeberha on Tuesday.

India, sent in to bat, were 180 for seven when rain ended the innings with three balls remaining in their 20 overs.

After a delay of almost an hour, South Africa were set to make 152 off 15 overs. Led by a hard-hit 49 off 27 balls by opener Reeza Hendricks, South Africa won with seven balls to spare. They took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series after the first match in Durban was rained off.

South African captain Aiden Markram admitted that the conditions favoured his team. Rain fell in the lead-up to the match before returning at the end of the Indian innings.

"The second bit of rain helped us. The ball skidded on a bit and also affected the outfield," said Markram.

Indian captain Suryakumar hit 56 off 36 balls and Singh was unbeaten with a career-best 68 off 39 deliveries.

Suryakumar went out to bat with the total on six for two after two overs. Both openers, Yashavi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill, were dismissed without scoring.

The precarious situation did not deter the captain and Tilak Varma (29) from going on the attack against some erratic bowling. They added 49 off 25 balls. Suryakumar and Singh then put on 70 off 49 balls.

Markram said the Indian assault meant he had to be strategic with the way he handled the bowlers, with player of the match Tabraiz Shamsi bowling his left-arm wrist spin in three spells to take one for 18. — AFP

Dominant Seeb secure win against Oman Club

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Seeb Club emerged triumphant over the Oman Club with an impressive score of 103-32. The match, held at the secondary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, was part of the second round of the Oman Basketball League 2023-24 season.

The Seeb team, under the guidance of national coach Kazem al Balushi, was able to devise a solid plan that enabled them to excel both defensively and offensively, thanks to the high concentration of their players and their field experience. Standout players for Seeb included USA professional player Press Jonathan, Rashid al Zehabi, Al Waqas al Hinai and Abdulrahman al Shuaibi.

The game kicked off with Seeb taking an early lead, securing a two-point advantage through a shot under the basket by Ahmed al Maamari. Despite efforts from Oman Club, Seeb continued to dominate, scoring six points through Marwan al Haddidi and Press.

Then, Oman Club managed to score two points while Seeb extended their lead by adding four points through players Press and Ahmed Al Maamari, bringing the score to 12-2.

Seeb continued their attack and pressure on Oman Club, adding 15 points through Marwan al Haddidi, Press, Abdulraza al



Battashi and Mazen al Haddidi. Meanwhile, Oman Club added seven points through Ayman al Sharqi and Hussain al Kindi. The first quarter ended with Seeb leading Oman Club 27-9.

In the second quarter, Seeb continued with the same playing style, taking advantage of the clear lack of concentration from Oman Club's players.

Seeb kept scoring points and widening the gap, with Rashid al Zehabi scoring the first two points and his teammate Press adding five points, including a three-point

shot and two free throws, bringing Seeb's lead to 32-9. Seeb continued their game and dominance both defensively and offensively, adding 18 points, while Oman Club added four points. The first half ended with Seeb leading Oman Club 50-13.

In the third quarter, Seeb maintained its offensive superiority, adding 26 points, while Oman Club scored only six points. The third quarter ended with Seeb leading Oman Club 76-19.

The fourth quarter saw no change as Seeb continued their

dominance. Their players scored more points, widening the gap with fast attacks and high concentration. Seeb added 27 points, while Oman Club scored 13 points. The match ended with Seeb winning against Oman Club with a score of 103-32.

The match was officiated by referee Rashid al Mashifri as the first referee, Ali al Salmani as the second referee and Mazen al Hallali as the third referee. On the table were Amal al Khabouri, Rayan al Dhahbouni and Sharifa al Zadjali.

TOOTHLESS MAN UTD SLIDE OUT OF CL

F C C O P E N H A G E N , N A P O L I Q U A L I F Y F O R L A S T 1 6



Bayern Munich's French forward Kingsley Coman scores the opening goal during the Uefa Champions League Group A match between Manchester United and FC Bayern Munich at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, north west England. – AFP

PARIS: Manchester United crashed out of the Champions League on Tuesday and failed to even secure the consolation of a Europa League spot as Bayern Munich won 1-0 at Old Trafford.

United were toothless as Harry Kane and his Bayern teammates only needed one penetrating move to create Kingsley Coman's winning goal.

They finish bottom of Group A as FC Copenhagen took the second qualifying spot behind Bayern following their 1-0 win over Galatasaray in front of a delirious Danish crowd.

The defeat is sure to heap more pressure on United manager Erik ten Hag, but the damage to his side was done earlier in the season when they failed to win three of their four games against Copenhagen and Galatasaray.

"We didn't lose the campaign

today. We had some good performances and also we made mistakes and individual errors from players," Ten Hag said.

"Today the performance was good, we didn't deserve to lose but we lost the game. The players gave everything."

Kane meanwhile said he believes Bayern can make a strong run as they seek a seventh European crown in his first season in Germany.

"We have the ability to go far in this competition," the England captain said.

"We have to keep improving. I feel we have another level we can achieve. That is the ambition, to go and win the Champions League."

DANISH JOY

In contrast to the gloom in Manchester, there was joy in the Danish capital as FC Copenhagen qualified for the

“

We have to keep improving. I feel we have another level we can achieve. That is the ambition, to go and win the Champions League

HARRY KANE
Bayern Munich striker

last 16 of the Champions League for just the second time in their history.

Lukas Lerager's 58th minute goal was enough to see off Galatasaray as the Danish side overcame the odds in a group few pundits had expected them to progress from.

"I think it is an extraordinary achievement that a Danish team can advance. The group was so strong and full of so many world stars," Copenhagen coach Jacob Neestrup said.

Reigning Italian champions Napoli secured their place in the knockout phase by beating Sporting Braga 2-0 at home, with newly crowned African Player of the Year Victor Osimhen completing the job after Serdar Saatci's own goal.

Napoli finished second behind Group C winners Real Madrid, who had already won the group even before they beat Union Berlin 3-2 in the German capital.

Kevin Volland put Union ahead, but Joselu scored twice for Real and although Alex Kral equalised, Dani Ceballos notched the winner for the 14-time European champions in the 89th minute.

Last year's beaten finalists Inter Milan finished second after a goalless draw with Group D winners Real Sociedad.

In the early matches, a much-changed Arsenal were held 1-1 at Dutch league leaders PSV Eindhoven but still top Group B.

Eddie Nketiah fired a low shot into the corner to put Arsenal ahead, but Yorbe Vertessen curled in an equaliser.

Sevilla finished bottom of that group after Lens scored a late winner in a 2-1 victory in northern France.

It means the Spanish side won't even have the chance to add to their seven Europa League titles, with Lens grabbing third place in the group and a Europa League place.

Benfica also secured a late ticket to the Europa League after they beat Salzburg 3-1 in Austria to clinch third place in Group D. — AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON TUESDAY:	
GROUP A	
In Copenhagen	FC Copenhagen (DEN) 1 (Lerager 58)
	Galatasaray (TUR) 0
In Manchester, England	Manchester United (ENG) 0 Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Coman 70)
GROUP B	
In Lens, France	Lens (FRA) 2 (Frankowski 63-pen, Fulgini 90+6) Sevilla (ESP) 1 (Ramos 79-pen)
In Eindhoven, Netherlands	PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Vertessen 50) Arsenal (ENG) 1 (Nketiah 42)
GROUP C	
In Berlin	Union Berlin (GER) 2 (Volland 45+1, Kral 85) Real Madrid (ESP) 3 (Joselu 61, 72, Ceballos 89)
In Naples, Italy	Napoli (ITA) 2 (Saatci 9-og, Osimhen 33) Sporting Braga (POR) 0
GROUP D	
In Salzburg, Austria	Salzburg (AUT) 1 (Susic 57) Benfica (POR) 3 (Di Maria 32, Rafa 45+1, Cabral 90+2)
In Milan, Italy	Inter Milan (ITA) 0 Real Sociedad (ESP) 0

Italy and Juve icon Chiellini calls time on playing career

MILAN: Giorgio Chiellini brought the curtain down on a trophy-packed career on Tuesday after the Italy icon announced his retirement from football.

Former Italy and Juventus defender Chiellini revealed he would be hanging up his boots at the age of 39 in a short post on social media accompanied by a video showing the highlights of his 23 years in the professional game.

"You have been the most beautiful and intense journey of my life. You have been my everything," Chiellini wrote.

"With you I have travelled a unique and unforgettable path. But now it is time to start new chapters, face new challenges and write further important and exciting pages of life."

Chiellini ended his career at Los Angeles FC in the Major Soccer League — his final match Saturday's MLS Cup final defeat to Columbus Crew — but he is

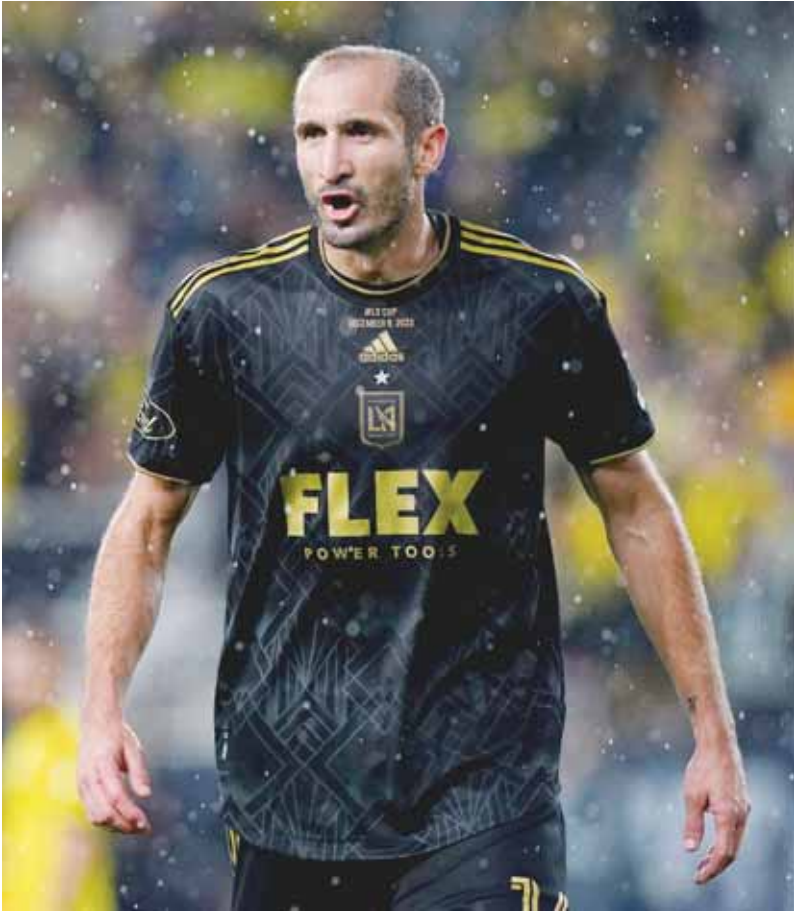
best known for his exploits with Juventus and his country.

After joining Juve in 2005, Chiellini eventually became a cornerstone of the so-called 'BBC' defence alongside Andrea Barzagli and Leonardo Bonucci.

That defensive trio were key to propelling Juve back to domestic dominance after years in the doldrums following the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal which exploded in the run-up to the 2006 World Cup.

Chiellini won nine consecutive Serie A titles between 2012 and 2020 and reached two Champions League finals with the Turin giants, who honoured him on social media with the message "Warrior, captain, champion. Thanks for everything big Giorgio!"

Juve also posted a video depicting helicopters lifting a giant Juve jersey, emblazoned with 'Chiellini' and his squad number three, from the pitch at the club's Allianz Stadium.



Los Angeles FC defender Giorgio Chiellini (14) in action against the Columbus Crew in the 2023 MLS Cup championship game at Lower.com Field in Columbus, Ohio, USA, on December 9. — USA Today Sports

ITALY HERO

Chiellini became a national hero after captaining Italy to triumph at Euro 2020, where under Roberto Mancini the Azzurri roared back from apparent footballing oblivion following their failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

A series of gutsy defensive displays in the latter stages of the continent-wide tournament culminated with a thrilling penalty shoot-out win over England in the final at Wembley.

The photo of him dragging back a scampering Bukayo Saka became one of the iconic images from the Euro for the Italians, who saw in Chiellini the continuation of a long tradition of rugged defenders who do whatever it takes to win.

However, Chiellini quit international football last year after 117 international caps and his country failing to reach a second straight World Cup.

In truth he had a mixed

Italy career, reaching the Euro 2012 final — where Italy were outclassed by Spain, losing 4-0 — but having a difficult time at World Cup finals.

Italy exited in the group stage both in 2010 — when they were the defending champions — and 2014 before slumping to a historic play-off defeat to Sweden in 2017 which cost them a place in the 2018 tournament.

Chiellini also suffered the ignominy of being bitten by Luis Suarez as Italy exited behind Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2014.

His final Italy appearance came in the 2022 'Finalissima' match with Copa America champions Argentina, a few weeks after ending 17 years at Juve.

He played the final two seasons of his career in the US with LAFC, where he won the 2022 MLS Cup before conceding the title at the weekend. — AFP



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Abraj Energy and TotalEnergies unite to unlock gas reserves of Oman Block 12



Sergio Giorgi (left), Oman Country Chair of TotalEnergies and Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services sign the partnership agreement.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Abraj Energy Services, a leading oil and gas service provider in Oman, has forged a strategic partnership agreement with TotalEnergies, a prominent global multi-energy company, to provide drilling services for the latter's Block 12's concession area in central Oman.

The partnership agreement was formally signed by Eng Saif al Hamhami, the CEO of Abraj Energy Services, and Sergio Giorgi, the Oman Country Chair of TotalEnergies.

By joining forces, Abraj Energy Services and TotalEnergies aim to redefine industry standards, leveraging Abraj's extensive drilling and well services expertise honed since 2006, along with TotalEnergies' global recognition and proficiency.

The primary objective of this partnership is to ensure the successful execution of key gas exploration wells within Oman's Block 12.

With a remarkable 16 years of experience serving the country's energy sector, Abraj holds a significant market share of 28% in drilling and 15% in key well services, solidifying its position as a pioneer in the field.

Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, highlighted the strategic importance of the partnership with TotalEnergies. He emphasised that this collaboration not only signifies TotalEnergies' entry into the Omani market as operators but also underscores Oman's prowess in attracting foreign investment.

Al Hamhami further emphasised Abraj's competitive advantage in delivering internationally recognised drilling and well maintenance services. The partnership is poised to enhance Oman's oil and gas potential, bolster national energy security, and foster economic growth.

Sergio Giorgi, TotalEnergies'

Oman Country Chair, expressed his enthusiasm about the significant milestone this partnership represents in TotalEnergies' journey in Oman.

He emphasised the longstanding presence of TotalEnergies in the Sultanate of Oman since 1937 and the increased footprint they have achieved over the past two years.

In 2021, TotalEnergies produced the equivalent of 38,000 barrels of oil per day through their participation in two assets, PDO and Oman LNG.

The following year, they plan to expand their participation to five upstream assets, including Block 12, targeting an estimated production of 62,000 barrels of oil per day. Giorgi also highlighted their commitment to reducing carbon intensity emissions while actively expanding into renewables and oil and gas trading.

Giorgi acknowledged the crucial role played by the authorities, partners, and service companies like Abraj in fuelling TotalEnergies' success in Oman. He explained that their collective efforts within Block 12 extend beyond performing 3D seismic surveys and drilling exploration wells.

Their overarching vision is centred around discovering untapped gas resources, which will be vital in sustaining Oman's long-term capacity to export gas. This partnership aims to unleash new gas reserves, create employment opportunities, and bolster Oman's standing as a reliable and strategic partner in the global energy market.

Unveiling new gas reserves aligns perfectly with TotalEnergies' commitment to sustainable energy practices while effectively addressing the growing global energy demand. Giorgi emphasised that partnering with Abraj Energy Services, a leading Omani company, is the ideal way to embark on this journey.

Oman sets up new firm to develop gH2 common infrastructure

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Hydrom, the orchestrator and master planner of Oman's green hydrogen industry, has announced the incorporation of a new company, provisionally named 'InfraCo', to set up common infrastructure that will be shared by developers of green hydrogen (gH2) projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking on the second day of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) Conference, Managing Director of Hydrom, Eng Abdulaziz al Shaithani, revealed that the establishment of a shared infrastructure is key to developing a fully integrated hydrogen ecosystem in Oman.

According to Al Shaithani, the shared infrastructure sites will support a number of green hydrogen projects slated to come up in Al Wusta and Dhofar Governorates. To date, agreements for six such projects have been signed.

The shared infrastructure sites will entail three key aspects: electricity interconnection to production sites, the supply of desalinated water to production sites and the transportation of hydrogen to ports and free zones.



A new company has been incorporated to oversee the establishment of shared infrastructure for green hydrogen projects.

Al Shaithani shared that OQ Gas Networks will be responsible for managing hydrogen pipelines, while Nama Water Services and Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) have both been nominated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to oversee water networks and electricity connectivity respectively.

Responsibility for overseeing the desalination component will be assigned at a later date, he noted.

Hydrom is committed

to "to deliver the common infrastructure before the first production of hydrogen" by 2029, he said.

The common infrastructure project is expected to be completed in three main phases, the official explained. It starts with the Preliminary Front End Engineering and Design phase (Pre-FEED), which will be led and incubated by Hydrom, taking into consideration the input of various stakeholders in the green hydrogen industry in Oman.

The second phase will involve the Front End Engineering and Design phase and the Final Investment Decision stage. This will be followed by the construction of the shared infrastructure sites, due for completion by 2029.

Earlier on Tuesday, Hydrom recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Asyad Group, the global integrated logistics group of Oman, to "establish a logistics infrastructure for green hydrogen".

Oman makes rapid strides in setting up green hydrogen ecosystem: Hydrom

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Oman's ambitious strides in the development of green hydrogen projects were unveiled at the Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategic Forum 2023 held here on December 12, 2023.

Eng Abdulaziz al Shaithani, Managing Director of Hydrom, highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's robust experience in engineering optimisation within the energy sector.

Emphasising the role of green hydrogen in diversifying Oman's revenue streams, Al Shaithani revealed that over 33% of government revenue currently depends on oil and gas.

However, the visionary shift toward green hydrogen aims to alter this landscape significantly. Al Shaithani outlined the journey embarked upon by Oman, allocating vast territories and engaging citizens in a monumental initiative.

The managing director



Hydrom assumed a pivotal role as an orchestrator, incubator, coordinator, and advisor, facilitating a seamless integration of diverse elements in Oman's green hydrogen landscape.

ENG ABDULAZIZ AL SHAITHANI
Managing Director, Hydrom

reflected on the accomplishments achieved in just one year, marking a stark contrast to the mere aspirations discussed in the previous year's forum.

Oman successfully conducted large-scale auctions, signing five projects and surpassing 94% of their set targets for 2030.

With a keen focus on sustainability, Al Shaithani detailed Oman's aspirations, aiming to produce 1.1 to 1.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030, escalating to 8.5 million tonnes by 2050.

The intricate timeline, starting from the first auction to the current developments, showcased Oman's rapid strides in establishing a green hydrogen ecosystem.

To orchestrate this intricate ecosystem, Al Shaithani identified six pillars—policies, regulations, supply chain, demand, infrastructure, and capacity, and skills.

Hydrom assumed a pivotal role as an orchestrator, incubator,

coordinator, and advisor, facilitating a seamless integration of diverse elements in Oman's green hydrogen landscape.

The presentation concluded with a visual representation of the auction system, depicting the offered blocks, infrastructure provision, and downstream integration.

Al Shaithani emphasised the importance of partnerships, inviting developers, financial partners, industrial players, and infrastructure developers to contribute to Oman's green hydrogen vision.

Oman's strategic advantages, including political stability, advanced technology, and access to infrastructure, were highlighted as key elements for success.

Al Shaithani envisaged not just the production of green hydrogen but the creation of an entire ecosystem—a centre of excellence positioning Oman at the forefront of the global green hydrogen revolution.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds procures 100% traceable ‘RandPure’ gold

MUSCAT: One of the most significant challenges confronting the gold and diamond industry is the assurance of complete adherence to ethical and sustainable sourcing.

Accredited by the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA), Rand Refinery is one of the world’s leading gold and silver refiners and the only referee status Refiner in the southern hemisphere, making significant contributions towards setting industry standards with their 100 per cent traceable and certified ‘RandPure’ Gold. Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 13 countries, has partnered with Rand Refinery, to procure ‘RandPure’ gold, positioning itself once again as a major proponent of responsible business practices in the jewellery trade.

Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, received the first shipment of RandPure gold from Rand Refinery CEO Praveen Bajinath, in the presence of Rand Refinery CFO, Dean Subramanian and other senior officials from Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

RandPure gold is 100% ethically sourced, with completely traceable origins. Procured exclusively from Rand Refinery’s Securities Exchange listed mines, the raw materials are processed in a segregated production line.

“Sustainability and responsible business practices have formed the core of our operations at Malabar



Shamlal Ahamed received the first shipment of RandPure gold from Rand Refinery CEO Praveen Bajinath.

Gold & Diamonds. Through our association with Rand Refinery and procurement of RandPure gold, we are reaffirming our commitment towards responsible and ethical sourcing by opting for gold that meets the strictest industry norms,” Commented Malabar Group Chairman, M P Ahammed.

“We take our responsibilities very seriously. We have a century-long tradition of putting people, products, and the planet first and are known to exercise the highest level of rigour, well beyond the LBMA requirements. Throughout our history, we have contributed to building a robust mine-to-market value chain in Africa,” says Mr

Bajinath CEO Of Rand Refinery.

“Our volume of due diligence puts pressure on suppliers to improve practices and is a deterrent to anyone that wants to contaminate our supply chain”, he continued.

The traceability of RandPure Gold is subjected to an annual audit that is in adherence to conflict zone regulations and guidance from reputable organisations like the World Gold Council, LBMA, and OECD.

Shamlal Ahamed, MD- International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds said: “The significance of sustainability gains additional prominence in the aftermath of COP 28, hosted by the

UAE, where pivotal sustainability goals were established. The acquisition of RandPure gold serves as further evidence of our commitment as a conscientious jeweller, and the heightened levels of accountability associated with this pledge ensure our steadfast dedication to ethical sourcing.”

“Through our partnership with Rand Refinery, we aspire to establish a commendable precedent within the industry, encouraging other organisations to play their role in reshaping the gold supply chain with increased transparency, accountability, and ethical standards”, commented Malabar Group Vice-Chairman, Abdul Salam K P.



A participant drives a Tiggo 8 Pro Max SUV during the event.

Chery showcases impressive vehicles at exclusive meet

MUSCAT: At an exclusive meet held for key opinion leaders and customers, Saud Bahwan Group exhibited the latest Chery vehicles.

The event held at the Oman Automobile Association, offered the invitees a first-hand experience about how the latest introductions are technologically advanced and attractively designed.

The vehicles included the Tiggo 8 Pro Max SUV, Tiggo 4 Pro SUV and the Arizzo 6 Pro sedan.

The event uniquely highlighted the brand’s commitment to high standards of quality, performance and a range of advanced features and technology.

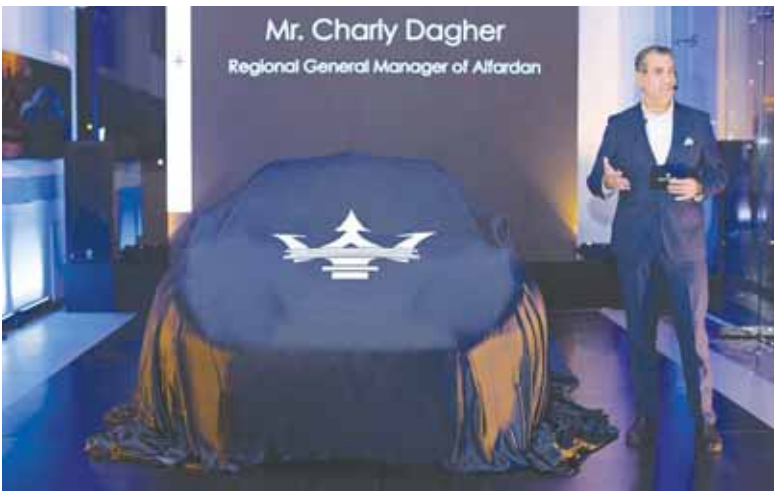
Throughout the event, the invitees gained deep insights about Chery’s passion for heightened ownership experiences, their advancements in engineering and technology and how each Chery vehicle along with Saud Bahwan Group support is ready to offer fantastic experiences on every drive.

Recently, Chery vehicles were ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50 list jointly released by Kantar and Google.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM (IQS). For more details please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>

In Oman, Chery will soon be launched by Saud Bahwan Group.

Alfardan Motors launches the new Maserati GranTurismo



MUSCAT: Alfardan Motors, Oman’s official Maserati importer-dealer, unveiled the latest iteration of one of the brand’s icons, the new Maserati GranTurismo, marking a new chapter in a story that began 75 years ago with the Maserati A6 1500.

The GranTurismo coupé combines the high performance of a sports car comfortable for travelling long distances with a powerful internal combustion engine. It represents a benchmark, embodying the concept of “The Others Just Travel”.

Hamdy Elshantoury, General Manager at Maserati Middle East and Africa, said: “The return of the icon, the new GranTurismo, marks a triumphant comeback for Maserati, blending heritage with innovation, embodying the Brand’s commitment to luxury performance.

More than a car, it is a lifestyle, designed to exceed expectations

and setting a new standard in the automotive world.”

Charly Dagher, Regional General Manager of Alfardan said: “With the unveiling of the reimagined Maserati GranTurismo in Oman, a new chapter unfolds in Maserati’s illustrious 75-year narrative. Long considered the DNA of Maserati, the iconic GranTurismo sets the pinnacle of timeless design and elegance. This updated marvel integrates cutting-edge technology with captivating aesthetics, exceeding all expectations.

Those with a passion for Maserati in Oman can now experience the formidable power of the Modena and Trofeo engines. And for those who look to the future, the forthcoming 100% electric Folgore variant promises a surge of excitement.

Available in the Modena and Trofeo versions through Alfardan Motors showroom in Oman.

Gheras Endowment Investment Fund concludes its marketing tours

MUSCAT: The marketing tours for the subscription to the Gheras Endowment Investment Fund were concluded yesterday, organised by the marketing committee of Gheras Fund in several governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

These visits witnessed extensive interaction from representatives of endowments and those interested in endowments.

The speakers in the sessions covered various topics, including introducing the fund, its objectives, investment methods, and subscription procedures. They also discussed



The visits witness extensive interaction from representatives of endowments.

the mechanisms for capital preservation and risk reduction, as well as the fund’s compliance

with Islamic Sharia.

The management of the Gheras Endowment Investment Fund also commended the efforts of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in organising and coordinating the meetings in the wilayats of Nizwa, Salalah, Sohar, Ibra, and Al Seeb.

It is worth mentioning that the prospectus of the Gharas Fund has been approved by the Capital Market Authority, and the subscription period for the fund will be from 3-7 Jumada al-Akhirah 1445 H corresponding to December 17-21, 2023.

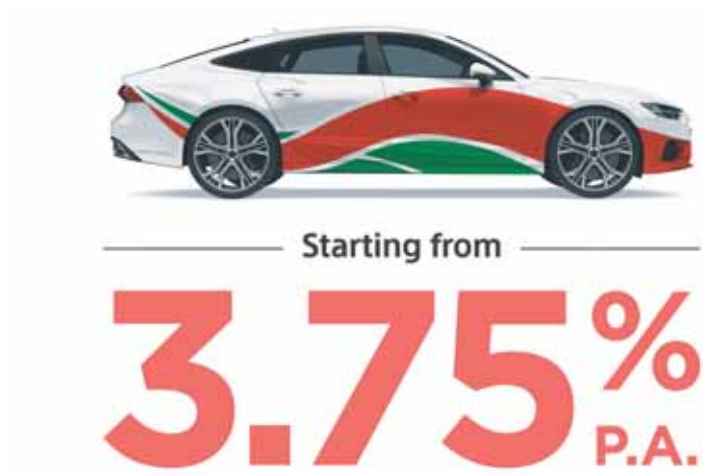
Discounted rate for Sayyarati auto loan from Bank Muscat receives big turnout

MUSCAT: The exclusive offer for Sayyarati auto loan by Bank Muscat continues to attract attentions of customers wishing to purchase their dream car. The offer is only available for a limited period ending December 2023.

It includes a discounted rate starting from 3.75% on new and pre-owned cars, waiver of fee on credit cards for the first year, and a free third-party motor insurance for used cars.

Besides, Asalah priority Banking customers will have a further discounted rate starting from 4.75% for a maximum loan tenure of 60 months. Omani nationals employed in government, quasi - government, Tier 1 companies will get a loan tenure up to 10 years, while those working in Tier 2 companies, will get a loan tenure up to 7 years.

The offer also applies to expatriates working in



government, quasi - government, Tier 1 companies who will get a tenure period up to 8 years.

To make it easier for customers to take advantage of the benefits offered by financing products, they can now also apply through Internet and Mobile Banking.

On this special occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al-Mashani, General Manager –

Products, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat offers are designed to cater customers’ various needs. ‘Sayyarati’ is one of the popular financing products that always witness great turnout among customers for its exceptional and exclusive features on new and pre-owned vehicles.

We are glad that this offer is well-received by customers who are benefiting from exclusive deals

by auto agents and showrooms. Such offers reflect Bank Muscat’s keenness to provide unique products with new features and competitive interest rates on ongoing basis.

I would like to thank all customers for their continued confidence in the services and products of the bank. I also urge every one to take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy a distinctive banking experience.”

With a fast turnaround time and absolutely no need for post-dated cheques, the feature-rich auto finance can be obtained within the shortest possible time through Mobile Banking or the Internet banking.

The service is also available in Sayyarati Centres in Salalah and Wattayah as well as Bank Muscat branches located across Oman. Loans will be offered for both new and pre-owned cars.

3rd Green Hydrogen Summit opens in Muscat

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

The 3rd Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) Conference commenced yesterday, December 13, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center under the auspices of Dr Khamis al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Follow-Up Unit.

In a statement, Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, underscored the significance of the conference.

“This summit provides an excellent opportunity for exchanging experiences and knowledge, attracting investment opportunities in the sector, and paving the way for the road-map we have set for the future of renewable and sustainable energy.”

He added: “Green hydrogen plays a crucial role in the energy transition, alongside its role in energy security and boosting the national economy. Therefore, in Oman, we are working to accelerate the regulation and adoption of green hydrogen



Mohsin al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals

production projects, looking forward to producing one million tons by 2030.”

The first day of the conference included panels discussing topics including: Oman’s green hydrogen mission, a global hydrogen review, green hydrogen policies, regulations and certification, green hydrogen markets, and hydrogen production at scale.

In addition, an Energy Executive Circle Leaders summit, held in the evening, featured national energy transition strategies. The two-day conference is also accompanied by

a parallel exhibition, and ongoing technical workshops.

The summit witnessed the signing of multiple key agreements in the field of green hydrogen.

Most notable is the agreement to establish the first green hydrogen plant in the Dhofar Governorate with an expected production capacity of 1 million tonnes of green ammonia and 175,000 tons of green hydrogen per year.

Oman is targeting an output of 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030, hoping to scale that up to 7.5 or 8.0 million tonnes by 2050.



The project is one of the strategic and significant initiatives in the sector.

OETC to mark completion of Phase one of ‘Rabt’ project

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham al Said, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) will celebrate the inauguration of Phase 1 of the strategic interconnection project ‘Rabt’ on Thursday, December 14, 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC).

The event will be attended by a number of dignitaries including OETC’s Board of Directors and the executive management of the company, representatives from Nama Holding, along with delegates from various government and private entities, as well as engineers, consultants, and contractors.

This project is considered one of the strategic and significant initiatives in the electricity sector, divided into two phases, with the first phase comprising 5 grid stations and 400 kV overhead transmission lines with a length of 660 km. The project aims to achieve several objectives, including enhancing the sustainability, availability, and reliability of the electricity

transmission network throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

Additionally, it aims to reduce operational costs, contribute to carbon emissions reduction, improve economic growth, and attract foreign investments, aligning with the national goals of Oman Vision 2040 to enhance developmental progress in all fields.

It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate of Oman’s network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

Agreement signed to accelerate deployment of clean technologies

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and First Carbon Investments (FCI) announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to accelerate the deployment of new clean technologies in MENA.

The MoU was signed by Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB, and Peter Ellen, CEO of FCI, in advance of COP28 UAE. Under the terms of the MoU, OAB will explore financing projects identified by FCI to advance purchase carbon credits that help accelerate the viability of new green fuels such as hydrogen, ammonia and biofuels.

In 2024, global commitments to the next wave of green energy sources will exceed \$200bn. FCI has developed a platform to accelerate the viability of new green technologies destined to support global efforts of limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB, said: “This partnership marks a significant milestone in our efforts in promoting the shift towards sustainable energy systems.

We look forward to collaborating together to develop and finance projects that will have a tangible and positive impact on the



Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB

energy industry, the wider global community and more specifically the lives of the people of Oman.”

Peter Ellen, CEO of FCI, said: “We are excited to partner with Oman Arab Bank to support our platform for accelerating clean technologies at scale. OAB is a leading bank in Oman with a strong track record of supporting sustainable development. We look forward to working together to develop financing opportunities which will accelerate new clean tech projects that will help reduce carbon emissions and create a more sustainable future.”

Chairman of FCI, Prof John Wright added, “As a veteran banking leader, I commend OAB’s vision and leadership at a time when the spotlight is on the region with COP28”.

The signing of the MoU between OAB and FCI is a significant development for Oman’s clean energy and sustainability sector.

FDO, subsidiaries adopt procedural tools for records management

MUSCAT: Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and its subsidiaries have officially approved procedural tools for records management in collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority. This is in accordance with the Document and Archives Law issued under Royal Decree No. (2007/60).

The law aims to empower organisations to preserve and manage their records in accordance with the best administrative practices, ensuring efficient retrieval, preservation, in line with retention schedules.

The signing of these procedural tools ensure speed in referencing and the availability of records, in addition to, placing the documents within the context of their origin and compiling them into files based on relevant topics to protect them, and ensuring the preservation of the individuals and groups rights.

It also guarantees the adaptability and expansion of the classification system development.

Fisheries Development Oman and its subsidiaries, in collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority, have developed a document managementsysteminaccordance with legal requirements. This system encompasses all types of documents that reflect the tasks and activities undertaken by the organisation.

Additionally, it includes a classification system for these documents by assigning a single classification code to each record related to a specific subject in order to ensure the swift search and retrieval of records.

The system also includes records retention schedules, which determine the legal duration for preserving records and whether they should be disposed of or permanently stored by the National Records and Archives Authority.

This will contribute to empowering Fisheries Development Oman and its subsidiaries to manage their records in accordance with best practices, to ensure quality and effective business operations.



Officials sign the procedural tools for records management document.

GCC unions explore formation of Gulf labour organisation

MUSCAT: The 3rd Forum of Gulf Companies and Labour Committees, organised by the General Union of Workers of the Sultanate of Oman, concluded here on Wednesday, December 13, 2023.

The two-day forum was attended by representatives from labour unions, committees, and working women’s groups across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – including the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait.

The forum focused on supporting cooperation between unions and committees, with the aim of securing safe and decent work environments, advancing



Representatives pose for a photo after the event.

social welfare, and building a regional trade union organisation.

This organisation would advocate for improved work conditions, facilitate tripartite dialogue, and contribute to boosting worker productivity

and living standards. Participants underscored the importance of collaborating to address challenges arising from economic disruptions. The need for workers to develop new skills, adapt to emerging technologies,

and embrace regional economic integration was emphasised.

The forum also acknowledged the region’s unique labour market characteristics and the importance of upholding international labour standards while finding solutions tailored to the GCC context. The forum lauded the progress made in institutionalising social dialogue across the GCC and highlighted recent parliamentary reforms in social security systems.

This commitment to dialogue and innovation was seen as crucial for safeguarding worker rights and improving workplace conditions.

The heads and representatives agreed to explore the formation of a united Gulf labour organisation to

provide a platform for consultation and coordination on worker issues.

Additionally, the General Union of Workers of the Sultanate of Oman’s labour organisation structure was reviewed and approved, with the exception of the National Committee for Labour Committees in Saudi Arabia.

Representatives discussed strategies to encourage women’s participation in industrial work, address associated challenges, and enhance cooperation between committees.

An action plan for 2024-2025 was approved, focusing on identifying best practices and developing initiatives to support women’s career paths in different

GCC countries.

The forum acknowledged the need to develop strong national regulatory frameworks for the private sector’s labour market, particularly in the context of evolving work patterns and emerging technologies like green technology, self-employment opportunities, and artificial intelligence.

The importance of coordinating labour organisations within the GCC and collaborating at Arab and regional forums to defend worker interests was also highlighted. The forum concluded with an agreement for Bahrain’s trade unions to host the 4th edition in Manama during the Q4 2024.

Opportunity Oman: Strategic partnership with India



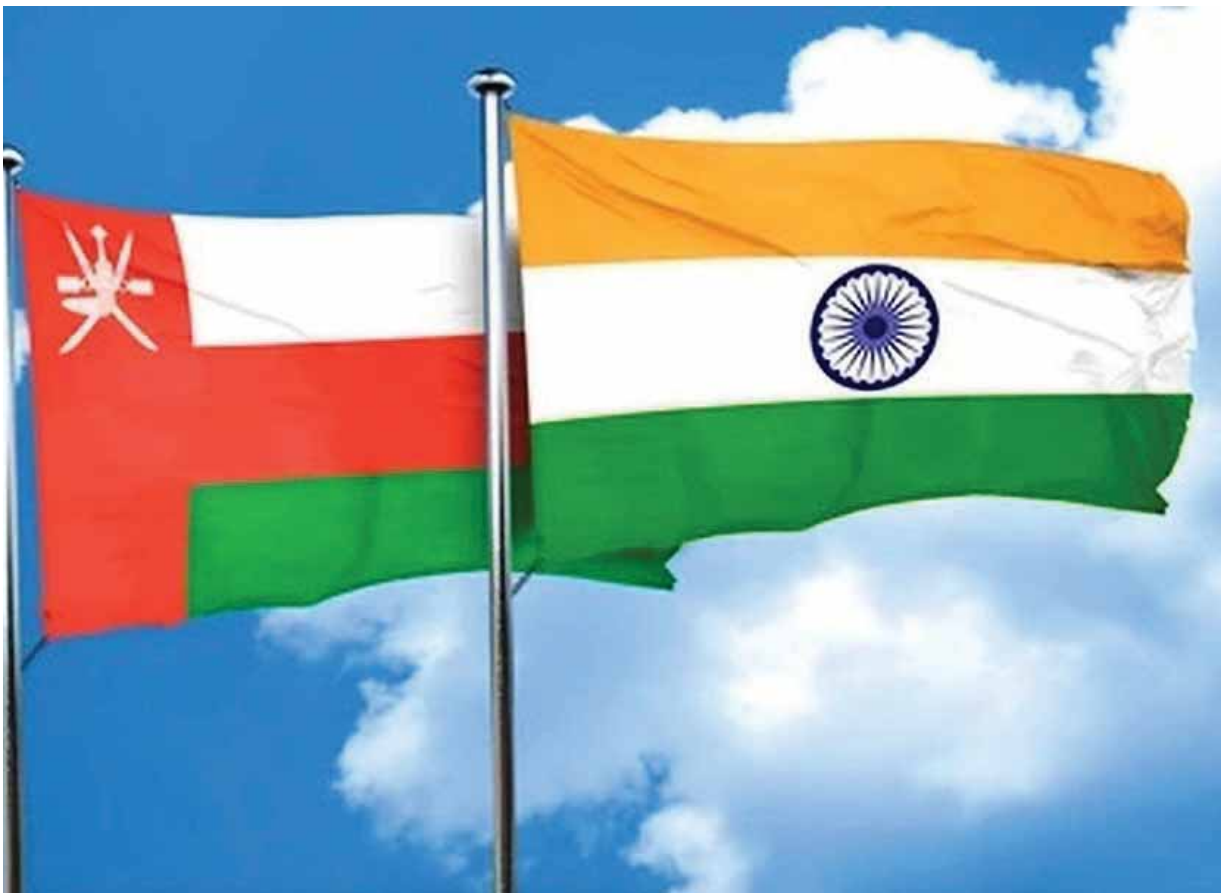
DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED AL BALUSHI

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THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN OMAN AND INDIA IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THEIR SHARED PROSPERITY. BILATERAL TRADE HAS WITNESSED A REMARKABLE SURGE, REACHING A STAGGERING \$12.388 BILLION IN 2022-2023.

India and Oman, two nations bound by history, geography, and shared cultural heritage, have cultivated a strategic partnership that stands as a testament to their enduring ties. The roots of the India-Oman relationship run deep, dating back at least 5,000 years. Trade routes flourished across the Arabian Sea, fostering cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. Oman's strategic location on the Indian Ocean made it a crucial trading hub, and Indian merchants played a vital role in its economy. This rich history continues to inform the present, serving as a foundation for a strong and multifaceted partnership. The economic partnership between Oman and India is a shining example of their shared prosperity. Bilateral trade has witnessed a remarkable surge, reaching a staggering \$12.388 billion in 2022-2023. Over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures stand testament to the flourishing investment ties, with a combined estimated investment exceeding \$7.5 billion. The Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF) further strengthens economic ties, gearing up to inject a significant \$300 million into India's burgeoning growth sectors. **Spectrum of opportunities:** This strategic partnership presents a vast array of opportunities for businesses, investors, and entrepreneurs across diverse sectors:

- Investment opportunities: Oman's strategic location offers access to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) markets, while India's booming economy presents a fertile



ground for investments. The third tranche of OIJIF investments in India underscores the confidence in India's economic prospects.

- Trade expansion: Simplifying trade procedures, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing connectivity will further bolster trade expansion. Oman's strategic location and India's vast consumer base create an ideal environment for businesses to flourish.
- Cultural and educational exchange: Cultural initiatives like yoga, film productions, and educational partnerships can foster stronger people-to-people connections, enriching the lives of both communities.

Benefits for Omani businesses and investors: Omani businesses can benefit from:

- Diversification of investments: Opportunities to invest in various sectors within

India, including healthcare, education, manufacturing, and technology.

- Access to Indian markets: Tapping into India's expansive consumer base and offering their products and services in a thriving market.
- Collaborative ventures: Joint ventures with Indian enterprises can leverage local expertise and India's vast market potential, creating mutually beneficial outcomes.

Benefits for Indian businesses, investors, and SMEs: Indian stakeholders stand to gain from:

- Strategic location: Oman serves as a gateway to the GCC and Middle East markets, offering Indian companies a strategic foothold in the region.
- Resource access: Access to Oman's abundant mineral resources, including rare earth

minerals crucial for diverse industries.

- Export opportunities: Exploring Oman as a gateway to GCC markets, leveraging the preferential trade agreements that Oman holds with its neighbouring countries.

Key areas of business opportunities: Several sectors hold immense potential for collaboration and growth:

- Energy: Oman's abundant energy resources complement India's burgeoning energy needs, offering vast opportunities in exploration, refining, and petrochemicals.
- Infrastructure: India's ambitious infrastructure projects align seamlessly with Oman's expertise in construction and development. Collaborative ventures can stimulate infrastructure growth in both nations.

- Information technology: Collaboration in software development, data analytics, and cybersecurity can leverage India's IT capabilities to support Oman's diversification efforts.
- Healthcare: Partnerships can augment medical services and medical tourism offerings, benefiting both countries' healthcare sectors.

Path forward: To unlock the full potential of this strategic partnership, critical steps must be taken:

- Trade facilitation: Simplifying customs procedures, lowering tariffs, and addressing non-tariff barriers can ensure smoother trade flows.
- Investment Promotion: Actively promoting investment opportunities through policy reforms and incentives can attract investors from both nations.
- Skill development: Collaborative initiatives can bridge the gap in human resource requirements and prepare individuals for the future workforce.
- Infrastructure development: Enhancing connectivity through superior infrastructure, including ports and logistics, will facilitate trade and investment.

The India-Oman strategic partnership, grounded in historical ties and propelled by economic cooperation, presents a multitude of opportunities for businesses, investors, and entrepreneurs. Through collaboration and joint ventures, both nations can achieve shared prosperity and solidify their positions as key players in the global economic landscape. The time is ripe to seize this boundless opportunity and embark on a journey of mutual growth and success.

Oil market comfortably supplied after Opec+ cuts

JOHN KEMP

Current crude oil prices appear to be in line with market fundamentals, to the evident frustration of biggest oil producer Saudi Arabia and its Opec+ partners trying to push them higher, which suggests their efforts may be in vain for now. Despite multiple rounds of Opec+ production cuts since the fourth quarter of 2022, global petroleum stocks are close to the long-term average, while futures prices and calendar spreads are only slightly below average. Commercial inventories of crude and refined products in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) totalled 2,841 million barrels at the end of October 2023. OECD commercial stocks were just 19 million barrels (-1 per cent or -0.13 standard deviations) below the ten-year seasonal average, with the deficit narrowing from 218 million barrels in March 2022. Production restraint by Saudi Arabia and its Opec+ allies has been more than offset by output growth from US shale firms and other sources as well as softer growth in consumption. With inventories almost

exactly in line with their long-term average, futures prices would be expected to be near to their long-term average as well, which has been the case. Front-month Brent futures averaged \$89 per barrel in October 2023, in the 58th percentile for all months since the start of the century, and only slightly above the long-term average of \$82, after adjusting for inflation. Since then, front-month prices have fallen to an average of \$76 (42nd percentile) so far in December 2023 as traders anticipate the market will be over-supplied with inventories rising in the first few months of 2024. The slump in prices has been accompanied by a breakdown in the calendar spreads, as traders anticipate crude will remain readily available, replacing earlier fears about shortages. Brent's six-month spread has fallen into an average backwardation of 26 cents per barrel from more than \$5 in September 2023. While prices are understandably disappointing for producers hoping to be rewarded for production cuts, they are not obviously out of line with a market that remains comfortably supplied with plentiful inventories. — Reuters

Public debt and the conditions of private sector institutions



HAIDER AL LAWATI haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

The Sultanate of Oman continues to pay the public debt, which over the past four years recorded a significant decline. This led to an improvement in the country's credit rating, but resulted in a contraction in the activities and work of large Omani commercial institutions and companies due to the decline in the implementation of the number of annual government

projects. The state's financial commitment to public debt has led to an improvement in the level of Oman's credit rating due to the steps taken by the government in this regard that aimed at economic reform on the one hand, and controlling public spending, in addition to exploiting additional revenues to pay the debt on the other hand. This debt is expected to decline further in the coming years. In general, the public debt is borne by every individual in society, and it is a burden on the shoulders of every individual. Governments are committed to paying it regardless of their economic and financial circumstances. Failure to pay it creates major problems for governments and members of society as well, which prompts governments to allocate a large portion of annual financial revenues to pay it. Oman's recent credit rating level, according to Moody's, was raised from "Ba2" to "Ba1," and the future outlook was changed from positive to stable, which gives the government and institutions a greater opportunity to obtain loans and finance large projects whenever they wish, and

guarantees the rights of creditors. The improvement of the Omani government's financial policies will contribute to strengthening the country's financial position, while the government is making strenuous efforts towards enhancing economic diversification and stimulating internal investments. The Omani government's commitment and direction in paying the public debt since 2019 has led to an improvement in the credit rating, but this has had a negative impact on the business of the private sector, which still feels that the total value of establishing large economic projects has decreased greatly, and the movement of economic circulation has slowed down which led to a decline in the business of large companies and institutions, the bankruptcy of some of them, and the dismissal of a number of Omanis working for them, especially transportation and contracting companies, and others. This also led to the deportation of a large number of expatriate workers who were working in these institutions, and thus the real estate, tourism and retail sectors were affected by the decline in the business of these

large commercial institutions. Over the past years, the government has adopted ambitious plans for the Omani economy and economic diversification within the framework of Oman Vision 2040 to make good use of financial resources and human competencies in the coming period. The implementation of the social protection policy comes within this framework in order to enable the various segments of Omani society to obtain additional monetary financial resources, which will enhance the financial capabilities of families and Omani society, and lead to greater movement of the Omani economy and private sector businesses, in addition to enhancing aspects of individual savings of the people. The discovery of new quantities of oil and gas and the exploitation of other natural resources will enhance the country's annual revenues and achieve more financial surpluses, which will help enhance payments on public debt amounts so that Oman will be able, in the next few years, to establish huge projects and enhance other aspects of the economy.

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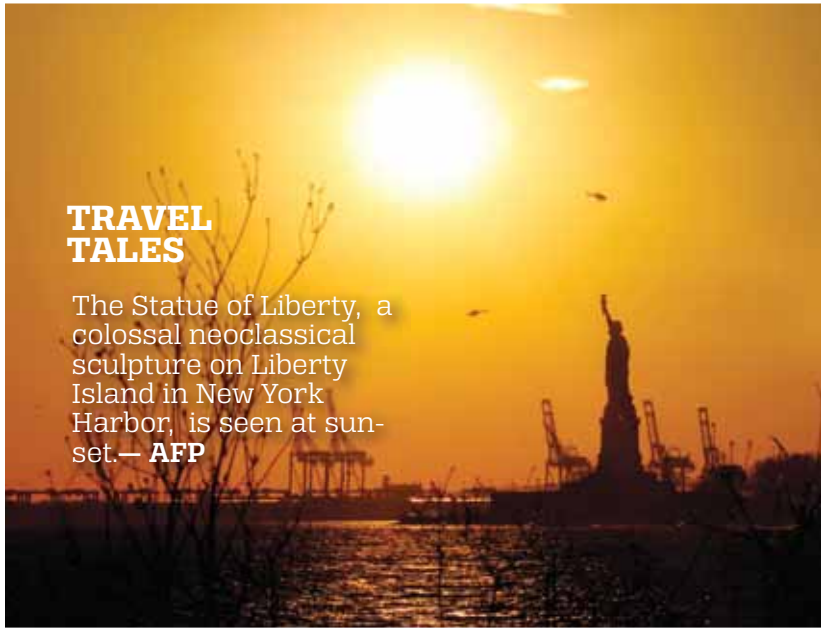
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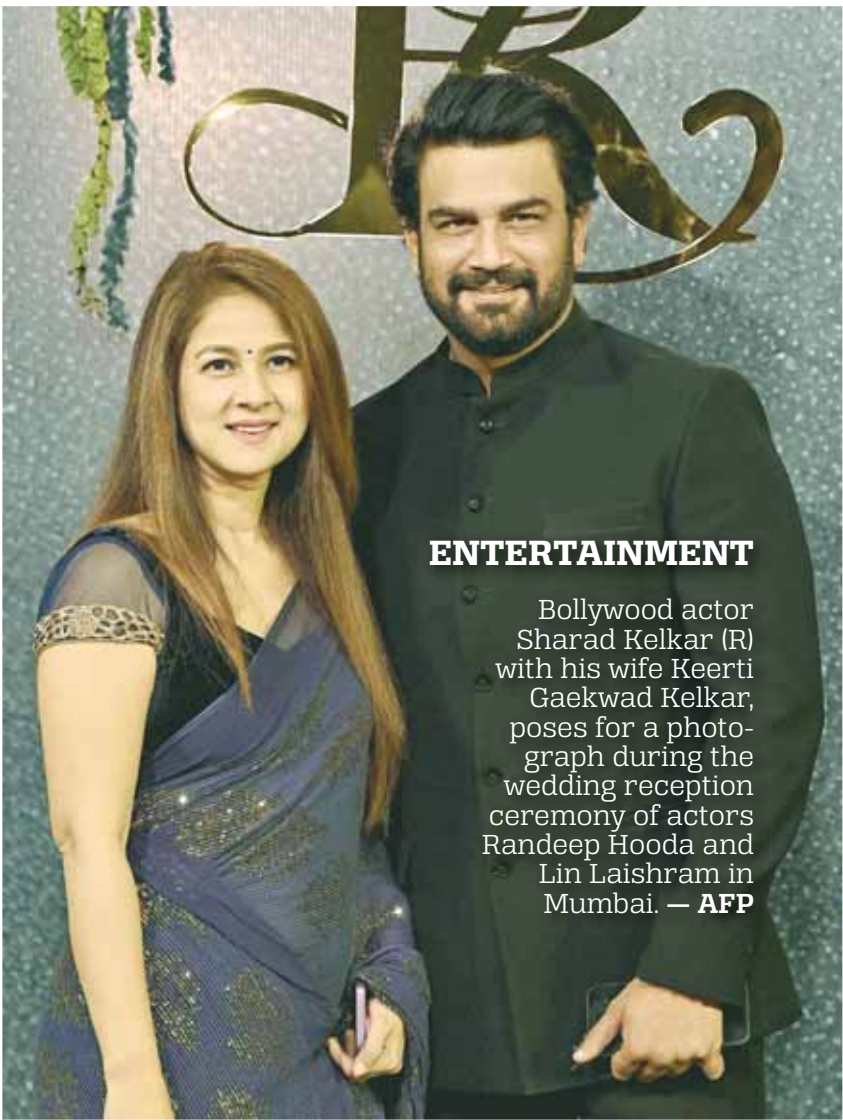




ENVIRONMENT
A worker collects oil after it spilled over the backwater at Ennore creek in the aftermath of Cyclone Michaung, on the outskirts of Chennai. — AFP



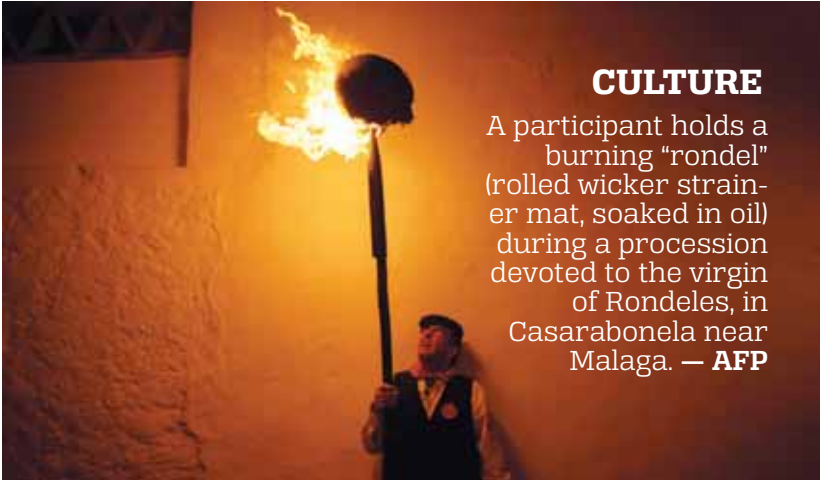
TRAVEL TALES
The Statue of Liberty, a colossal neoclassical sculpture on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, is seen at sunset. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Bollywood actor Sharad Kelkar (R) with his wife Keerti Gaekwad Kelkar, poses for a photograph during the wedding reception ceremony of actors Randeep Hooda and Lin Laishram in Mumbai. — AFP



CLIMATE
COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber attends a plenary session during the United Nations climate summit in Dubai. — AFP



CULTURE
A participant holds a burning "rondel" (rolled wicker strainer mat, soaked in oil) during a procession devoted to the virgin of Rondeles, in Casarabonela near Malaga. — AFP

art & life

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Elevating Omani food as a world must-try

The launch of Omani Food and Culinary Arts Tourism is a well-applauded initiative because of its goal of showcasing Omani dishes to a wider audience at the same time highlighting the dishes' unique blend of local ingredients, traditional methods, and cultural influences... **P20**

CHANGING WORLD

Warmest Arctic summer caused by accelerating climate change

SUMMER SURFACE AIR temperatures in 2023 were the warmest ever observed in the Arctic as a result of accelerating human-caused climate change, an official report card published on Tuesday said.

The average temperature from the months of July-September was 43 degrees Fahrenheit (6.4 Celsius), the highest since record-keeping began in 1900.

"The overriding message from this year's report card is that the time for action is now," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration administrator Rick Spinrad said in a statement.

"We as a nation and global community must dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are driving these changes."

Average summer temperatures have been rising 0.31 F (0.17 C) per decade. Overall, it was the Arctic's sixth warmest year, at 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-7 C).

Now in its 18th year, the NOAA Arctic Report Card is the work of 82 authors across 13 countries.

Observations from this year's report emphasise an ongoing trend line of warming sea and air temperatures, decreasing snow cover, diminishing sea ice, and continued melting



of the Greenland Ice Sheet.

But the year also brought high impact events that had the "clear signature" of climate change, for exam-

ple the Canadian Arctic experienced its worst wildfire season on record, causing the evacuation of 20,000 people from the town of Yellowknife in August.

Also in August, a glacial lake near Juneau, Alaska burst through its dam, causing massive flooding and property damage along the Mendenhall River, as a result of two decades of glacial thinning.

The long term warming trend has a variety of uneven impacts across ecosystems and food webs that people rely upon.

For example, sockeye salmon reached a record-high abundance in Bristol Bay, Alaska in the years 2021 and 2022.

The species, a staple of commercial

fisheries, has thrived under warmer waters, which allow juveniles to grow faster in lakes and increase their odds of survival when they reach the ocean.

On the other hand, chinook and chum salmon have drastically declined following heat waves that negatively impact their growth rates, contributing to smaller adults.

Another chapter of the report examines subsea permafrost, a field that is relatively little known, even among scientists — though potentially an important source of greenhouse gas emissions.

As the world emerged from the last ice age, rising ocean waters in the Arctic covered permafrost, transforming it into subsea permafrost over thousands of years.

"An estimated 2.5 million km2 of subsea permafrost remains today, but it continues to thaw due to the original ocean inundation event and more recent, rapid Arctic warming," the report said. — **AFP**

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‘Dance is beautiful’: Kenyan slum reaches for ballet stars

BRAVIAN MISE HITS A series of grand jetes -- leaping like a gazelle across the cramped living room -- and pirouettes during an exhaustive rehearsal at his home in a Kenyan slum.

The 13-year-old has been practising ballet for four years and is among a hundred or so children who have been rehearsing for months to perform Tchaikovsky's Christmastime favourite "The Nutcracker" in Kenya's capital Nairobi.

The famous ballet tells the story of young Clara, who receives a painted wooden nutcracker shaped like a soldier for Christmas.

At night, the toy comes to life and fights against a mice invasion until the nutcracker-turned-prince defeats the evil mouse king and carries the little girl to his magical kingdom far, far away.

"I had never heard of this ballet before performing in it," Bravian says, a smile plastered on his face.

"I love dancing, I dance because it's beautiful."

Before the curtains open, dancers are put through their paces by Cooper Rust, an alumnus of the

School of American Ballet, and director of Dance Centre Kenya -- a non-profit giving lessons to underprivileged youngsters in the city.

"It is important to show the world that ballet is not just for one type of person," the American instructor, a former professional ballerina, said.

"Ballet is about skill and talent, and drive and passion, not socio-economic background."

LOFTY DREAMS

Despite Kenya's burgeoning dance scene, the country does not host a professional ballet company.

"We are getting there," counters Rust.

But a lot needs to be done, and funding is a constant problem.

At the Nairobi National Theatre, the young troupe made up of children aged between seven and 17 executes perfect arabesques to live music by a Kenyan orchestra.

For nearly two hours, they dominate the stage, working their way through an assemblage of colourful costumes and accessories.

By the time they execute the famous Russian dance, the crowd is

utterly won over.

A beaming Bravian savours the moment. Nothing predestined his journey to the stage.

The schoolboy lives with his brother, sister and parents in Kuwinda, a ramshackle shanty town west of Nairobi. He, like around 50 other children, receives grants to buy dance accessories and his transport to rehearsals is catered for -- which would be unaffordable otherwise.

An inspiration Bravian does his daily exercises in a small room, undisturbed by the loud music from a nearby bar.

"It's much harder for children who come from poor backgrounds, they have to work harder to succeed," Bravian's mother, Rehema Mwikali said, watching admiringly as her son danced.

"I am so proud of him, he will make it."

Despite the difficulties, Bravian is optimistic: "One day I will be a professional dancer."

But the young dancers have a long way to go.

More than a thousand children

have enrolled in Dance Centre Kenya since it started in 2015 but only one -- Joel Kioko, who now lives in the United States -- has gone professional.

But Rust is determined to change that.

"Our school is not even nine years old, and it takes 10 years to train a dancer," said Rust, expressing optimism that other students will also go pro. Many of the youngsters hope to one day join the ranks of hallowed ballet stars.

Lavender Orisa, who received a scholarship last year to study at the English National Ballet School in London, grew up in the Nairobi slum of Kibera.

"Coming from Kibera, it was impossible for me to imagine one day dancing in London," said the 17-year-old, who is now back in Nairobi to finish high school.

"People tell me I am an inspiration to them," she said.

She already has a major supporter in Rust, who said her student has the potential to pursue an "international career in ballet". -- AFP

FASHION

Zara drops clothing ad after Gaza war uproar

FACING MOUNTING CALLS for a boycott, Spanish fashion brand Zara has withdrawn a controversial advertising campaign featuring body bags after it sparked online fury over its similarity to war-torn Gaza.

Addressing the controversy on Tuesday, Zara -- which is owned by Spain's Inditex, the world's biggest fashion retailer -- denied the claims but nonetheless removed the controversial images from its website.

"Unfortunately, some customers felt offended by these images, which have now been removed, and saw in them something far from what was intended when they were created," said a Zara statement published online. In one of the images, an anaemic-looking model holds what appears to be a body wrapped in plastic over one shoulder, while in another the shrouded shape lies at her feet as she stands on a set featuring chunks of rubble, broken walls and other signs of destruction.



The campaign sparked a furious backlash on social media where many said it was deliberately poking fun at the devastation in Gaza where Israel has waged a vast campaign since the October 7 Hamas attacks.

One message on X, formerly Twitter, superimposed a picture of a Gazan mother embracing the body of a child wrapped in a white shroud, with many users calling for a boycott of the brand.

In response, Zara said its advertising campaign "was conceived in July and photographed in September".

The idea, it said, was to present "a series of images of unfinished sculptures in a sculptor's studio and was created with the sole purpose of showcasing craft-made garments in an artistic context".

It expressed regret for the "misunderstanding" and reiterated its "deep respect towards everyone".

At the start of the Gaza war, Inditex said it was temporarily closing its 84 Zara shops in Israel until further notice.

The war began on October 7 when Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapping some 240 others, according to an Israeli count.

Israel has hit back with a massive military assault on Gaza that its Hamas-run health ministry says has now killed more than 18,400 people, including thousands of women and children. -- AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Berlin film festival names new head

THE BERLINALE FILM festival on Tuesday named Tricia Tuttle, the former head of the BFI London Film Festival, as its new director as it prepares for a slimmed-down 2024 edition.

Tuttle, 53, will take the reins from Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian, who have co-led the festival for the last four years, from April 2024.

The Berlinale, which will run February 15-25, ranks with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top three film festivals and serves as an early annual launchpad for the film industry.

German Culture Minister Claudia Roth, who led a committee in charge of the appointment, said Tuttle had impressed with her "very clear and very structured ideas about the artistic perspectives of



the Berlinale".

"She is absolutely the right choice for all of us to lead the Berlinale into a very successful future," Roth said.

US-born Tuttle worked at the British Film Institute for 10 years, most recently as head of festivals.

She then joined the UK's National Film and Television School where she taught in the directing department.

Tuttle said she had been attending the Berlinale since the late 1990s and had "so many brilliant memories of coming to the festival",

which she described as "a hugely important meeting place for the world's film industry".

"The Berlinale is an expression of this incredible city which is playful and spiky and passionate about art and ideas," she said.

The Berlinale in July announced a "more focused" programme for 2024, citing cost increases.

The total number of films will be reduced to around 200, from 287 in 2023.

Rissenbeek and Chatrian have co-led the festival since 2020, navigating an online edition in 2021 and a hybrid version in 2022.

Roth announced in August that they would be replaced by a single director.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper said it hoped Tuttle would "bring a little more Hollywood glamour back to Berlin -- urgently needed after lean years".

Kenyan-Mexican actor Lupita Nyong'o will head up the jury at the 74th Berlinale, selecting the winners of the Golden and Silver Bear top prizes. -- AFP

