

Prophet's Birthday holiday

On the approach of Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) birthday anniversary, it has been decided that Sunday 13 Rabee Al Awwal 1444 AH, corresponding to October 9, will be an official holiday for employees of units of the state's administrative apparatus and other legal entities and establishments of the private sector. The Ministry of Labour said that the employers in private sector establishments may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday - if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work - provided they compensate the workers for the holiday. – ONA



HM, UAE President hold official talks

SHAIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED THANKS HIS MAJESTY FOR WARM WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY



■ HM, UAE PRESIDENT EXCHANGE ORDERS AND MEMENTOS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), exchanged orders and commemorative gifts at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday evening on the occasion of the visit made to Oman by the UAE President. His Majesty the Sultan conferred the 'Al Said Order', Oman's most lofty accolade, on Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, in commendation for Shaikh Mohammed and in manifestation of the deep-rooted fraternal relations binding the two countries. Meanwhile, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed awarded His Majesty the 'Order of Zayed', the UAE's most magnificent decoration, in commendation of His Majesty the Sultan and in acknowledgment of the two countries' centuries-old fraternal relations. – ONA

SEE ALSO P2, 3 AND 4

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan reiterated his welcome to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed, being an eminent guest of the Sultanate of Oman, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

On his turn, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The session reviewed the deep-rooted and historical relations binding the two countries and means of promoting them to serve the Omani and Emirati peoples and meet their aspirations. The two leaders exchanged views on the regional and international developments, as well as matters of common interests.

The official session of talks was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister

TALKS SESSION
REVIEWS
DEEP-ROOTED
AND HISTORICAL
RELATIONS

DISCUSSED WAYS TO
PROMOTE TIES TO
SERVE OMANI AND
EMIRATI PEOPLES

LEADERS EXCHANGE
VIEWS ON REGIONAL,
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENTS

OMAN HAS A UNIQUE
STATUS IN THE
HEARTS OF UAE
LEADERSHIP AND
PEOPLE

ECONOMIC AND
COMMERCIAL
RELATIONS TO
CONTINUE TO GROW
AND PROSPER

UAE WILL JOIN
HANDS WITH ALL
GCC BRETHREN TO
CONSOLIDATE THE
JOINT MARCH

for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Fatik bin Fahr al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court (Head of the Mission of Honour), Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UAE.



HM, UAE President exchange orders, mementos



HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN CONFERRED THE “AL SAID ORDER”, OMAN’S MOST LOFTY ACCOLADE, ON SHAIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN, IN COMMENDATION FOR SHAIKH MOHAMMED AND IN MANIFESTATION OF THE DEEP-ROOTED FRATERNAL RELATIONS BINDING THE TWO COUNTRIES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), exchanged orders and commemorative gifts at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday on the occasion of the visit made to Oman by the UAE President.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred the “Al Said Order”, Oman’s most lofty accolade, on Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, in commendation for Sheikh Mohammed and in manifestation of the deep-rooted fraternal relations binding the two countries.

Meanwhile, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed awarded His Majesty Sultan Haitham the “Order of Zayed”, the UAE’s most magnificent decoration, in commendation of His Majesty the Sultan and in acknowledgment of the two countries’ centuries-old fraternal relations.

His Majesty the Sultan also presented Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed with a commemorative gift, which was an Omani sword. The UAE President reciprocated the gesture, presenting His Majesty the Sultan with a replica of Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque. — ONA

HM and UAE President hold official talks

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, it was attended from the UAE side by Shaikh Hazza bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Council, Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Court, Shaikh Hamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Member of Abu Dhabi Executive Council, Shaikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamad al Nahyan, Adviser of Special Affairs at the Ministry of Presidential Court, Dr Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash, Diplomatic Adviser to the UAE President,

Ali bin Mohammed al Shamsi, Deputy Secretary-General of the Supreme National Security Council, Suhail bin Mohammed al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Khalifa bin Shaheen al Marar, Minister of State, Jabr bin Mohammed al Suwaidi, Minister of State, Mohammed bin Hassan al Suwaidi, CEO of Abu Dhabi Development Holding Company (ADQ), and Mohammed bin Sultan al Suwaidi, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, and several officials.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed, UAE President, held a closed-door session. — ONA

HM hosts dinner in honour of UAE President



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace guesthouse on Tuesday in honour of Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The dinner was attended by members of the Royal Family, ministers, commanders of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police, as well as ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura, under-secretaries and some ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA



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WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 28 | 2022



Shaikh Mohammed describes Oman-UAE relations as special



MUSCAT: Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has affirmed that the historically deep-rooted relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE assume a special significance, and that these relations are a manifestation of a uniform social and cultural texture.

The UAE President pointed out that Oman-UAE relations stem from profound bonds where a broad base with

family ties overlaps with shared interests. In a statement on the occasion of the state visit he began in Oman on Tuesday, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed expressed his deep delight to be in Oman which, he said, is accorded a unique status in the hearts of UAE leadership and people. Shaikh Mohammed expressed his pride over the close fraternal relations that bind him with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The UAE President commended the sincere approach of communication pursued by the leaderships of the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman. In this context, Shaikh Mohammed recalled the special relations between the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the late Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, stressing that the current leaderships will follow suit of their predecessors' tradition. The UAE President added that "economic

and commercial relations between the two countries will continue to grow and prosper during the forthcoming period, with wide prospects for the utilisation of available resources and opportunities." Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed voiced his enthusiasm to work hand in hand with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to enhance relations along all fronts, starting with the establishment of firm grounds for future cooperation that will bring about

bounty and prosperity to the peoples of the two countries. Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed said that the UAE will join hands with all GCC brethren, on top of them Oman, to consolidate the common march of action. The UAE President said he looks forward to working more closely with His Majesty the Sultan "for the sake of peace, stability and prosperity of our region, its people and its steady growth."

— ONA



UAE President begins visit

MUSCAT: Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), arrived in Muscat on Tuesday on a two-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq led the welcoming party for the UAE President.

When the jet touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his official delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

When the guest's jet entered the Omani airspace, it was escorted by a squadron of military aircrafts till its arrival at the Royal Airport.

Along with His Majesty the Sultan, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed was received by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al

After a short break, the motorcade of the two leaders left the Royal Airport, heading to Al Alam Palace for the official and popular reception

Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court (Head of the Mission of Honour); Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UAE; Mohammed bin Sultan al Suwaidi, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman; and members of the mission of honour.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed headed to the hall, flanked by two rows of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

After a short break, the motorcade of the two leaders left the Royal Airport, heading to Al Alam Palace for the official and popular reception.

As the motorcade passed Muscat

Gate, a group of Royal Camel Corps lined both sides of the road, welcoming the guest. Then, a cavalcade from the Royal Cavalry and the RGO Cavalry escorted the motorcade till the National Museum's building. Upon the arrival of the official motorcade at the yard leading to Al Alam Palace, a popular reception was held, with the participation of more than 600 male and female citizens. A cluster of folklore bands lined the passage, chanting lyrics in a manifestation of warm welcome to the guest.

When the official motorcade arrived at the internal courtyard of Al Alam Palace, a welcoming tune was played by the RGO band, in an atmosphere of fanfare and ambiance.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied Shaikh Mohammed to the Dais of Honour where the National Anthem of the United Arab Emirates was played while

the artillery fired a twenty-one gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the UAE President, wishing them a pleasant stay. On his turn, the UAE President shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the guest proceeded to the hall where they took Arabian coffee.

The UAE President is accompanied during the visit by an official delegation comprising Shaikh Hazza bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Council; Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of

Presidential Court; Shaikh Hamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Member of Abu Dhabi Executive Council; Shaikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan; Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamad al Nahyan, Adviser of Special Affairs at the Ministry of Presidential Court; Dr Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash, Diplomatic Adviser to the UAE President; Ali bin Mohammed al Shamsi, Deputy Secretary-General of the Supreme National Security Council; Suhail bin Mohammed al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure; Khalifa bin Shaheen al Marar, Minister of State; Jabr bin Mohammed al Suwaidi, Minister of State; Mohammed bin Hassan al Suwaidi, CEO of Abu Dhabi Development Holding Company (ADQ); Mohammed bin Sultan al Suwaidi, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman; and several officials. — ONA



ROYAL COURT ADVISER ATTENDS ABE'S FUNERAL



TOKYO: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, took part in the state funeral of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, as a representative of the Sultanate of Oman. The funeral was held in Tokyo. As part of the funeral service, Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan, received Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court. During the meeting, Al Mashani conveyed condolences and sympathies of His Majesty the Sultan to the Japanese leadership and people on the demise of the former premier. On his turn, Kishida asked Shaikh Salim al Mashani to convey his appreciation and thanks for His Majesty the Sultan's noble sentiments. He also expressed his best wishes to His Majesty and the Omani people.

Safety first in tourism

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@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism organised the Oman Tourism Forum on Tuesday as part of World Tourism Day, marked this year under the theme 'Rethinking Tourism.'

His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, opened the exhibition which saw the participation of several local government and private institutions operating in the field of adventure tourism.

The forum is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and Visit Oman.

The aim of the forum is to promote the Sultanate of Oman as one of the best destinations in the world for adventure tourism, taking advantage of some of its natural resources.



Saeed al Obaidani, Director-General of Tourism Development at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, "Through this forum, we seek to raise awareness of the importance of providing security and safety requirements for operators and practitioners of adventure tourism activities, addressing procedures related to licensing and reviewing technical methods in promoting tourism for this type of activities."

Mohammed al Busaidi, Chairman of Omran, said that the forum is an opportunity for all parties to meet and discuss the development of adventure

tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Saeed bin Salim al Shanfari, CEO of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, speaking to the media, confirmed that several events had been organised at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) for the benefit of World Cup fans in coordination with Omran and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Azzan al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the MoHT for Tourism, said that spots are identified to develop adventure tourism in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence following global safety standards.

'Foreign policy based on truth, justice key to international peace'

UNITED NATIONS: Dr Mohamed al Hassan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, made a speech on behalf of Oman at the UN General Assembly on Monday.

Excellency, President Csaba Korosi, at the outset, it gives me great pleasure to extend our heartfelt congratulations to you and your country, the Republic of Hungary, on your election as President of the Seventy-Seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman would like to reassure of its readiness to work with you and other delegations to ensure successful deliberations and conclusions of the work of this session.

Let us not to miss this opportunity to extend our appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Abdullah Shahid, for his efforts while presiding over the work of the



previous session.

The Sultanate of Oman reiterates its commendations to His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Antonio Guterres, for his tireless efforts in advancing the noble causes of the organisation, developing its work methods, enhancing its effectiveness and bringing the United Nations closer to the world. We would like to assure him of the Sultanate of Oman's continued support for his efforts to achieve justice and peace in the world.

Mr President, The Sultanate of Oman pursues a well-established policy which is based on a deep

and steadfast vision and a legacy drawn from its cultural heritage and history. Therefore, it affirms the fundamentals of its foreign policy, in siding with truth and justice, strengthening positive cooperation and the bonds of friendship and contributing to the consolidation of international peace and security.

The Sultanate of Oman is convinced that establishing and maintaining peace in the world is necessary for the interest of all peoples and that it can only be preserved if it is based on firm principles of justice and solid foundations of cooperation and harmony among all nations.

We call on the international community to be guided tangibly by these references and to build partnership between countries, in accordance with the tenets of international law and customary legal practices, in order to achieve peaceful coexistence and to enhance cooperation and economic prosperity for all.



Tender NumberT-44-2022

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name

Call off agreement for Printing, Application, Removal & Reapplication of Advertisement on Mwasalat Buses.

Project Summary

The branding/advertisements are usually done on various Mwasalat vehicles which is categorized as, City buses, Inter-City buses, Mini Buses. Within the Framework of this tender, MWASALAT would like to have a qualified Contractor for Printing, Application, Removal & Reapplication of Advertisement on Buses.

Tender Fee

OMR 50 + 5% VAT. Free for Riyada Card holder.

Grade & Specialty

Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution

Tuesday, 27th September 2022

Last date for tender document distribution

Tuesday, 04th October 2022

Last date for submission

Tuesday, 18th October 2022

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00 A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenders are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C "MWASALAT" at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor), Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected

"Mwasalat" Head Quarter, Ghala, P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to tenders@mwasalat.om



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
177/2022	General Maintenance Work for Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the Wilayat of Buraimi	Companies specialized in building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the Second Degree	Monday 17-10-2022 02:00 PM	Sunday 6-11-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Wednesday 28/9/2022.

❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

Digital Educational Studio in North Al Batinah opens

SUHAR: Jusoor Foundation celebrated the inauguration of the Digital Educational Studio project implemented in the General Directorate of North Al Batinah Governorate, as part of the social investment projects implemented by Jusoor Foundation and funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale Oman.

Dr Waleed bin Talib al Hashemi, Director-General of Education in North Al Batinah Governorate, emphasised on the importance of this project in providing the educational process with digital content. Dr Al Hashemi further added that the digital content produced through the digital educational studio with its variety in terms of visual or audio educational materials contributes to supporting the curricula with interactive digital content.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)		
MOH/HQ-230/2022	Supply of Vulnerability Management Solution for MOH	06-October-2022	02-November-2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent & First Grade	R.O 25.000 Per set		
MOH/HQ-231/2022	Provision of Managed Security Operation Center Services & SIEM Solution for MOH		09-November-2022				
MOH/HQ-232/2022	Development, Implementation, Hosting, and Support of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)						
MOH/HQ-233/2022	Maintenance Works at Izki Hospital in AL Dakhliyah Governorate	02-November-2022		Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The First Grade			
MOH/HQ-234/2022	Supply & Installation of Servers for the Department of Blood Banks Services			Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent & First Grade			

Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



V-P Harris set to visit Korean DMZ after Kim’s missile test

TOKYO: US Vice-President Kamala Harris will visit the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the Koreas on Thursday in a bid to show Washington’s commitment to the South’s security, according to US and South Korean officials.

The visit, announced on Tuesday, comes days after North Korea fired a ballistic missile towards the sea and amid fears of a possible nuclear test as the Biden administration’s attempts at outreach to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have failed.

Harris’ visit, which would be the first by a senior Biden administration official, was publicly announced by South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo during a meeting with the US vice-president in Tokyo and was later confirmed by a US official.

On Monday in New York, the North Korean ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Song, accused Washington of pursuing hostile policies that were causing a “vicious cycle of tension and confrontation.”

A US aircraft carrier is in the area for joint drills with the South Korean navy this week in what Kim called an “extremely



US Vice-President Kamala Harris meets Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno to express sympathy for former Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe's death at Akasaka Palace in Tokyo. — Reuters

dangerous act” that could drive the peninsula to the brink of war.

Harris is in the region to lead a US presidential delegation to the funeral of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday.

The DMZ visit will underscore the strength of the alliance between Seoul and Washington “in the face of any threats posed” by North Korea, said the US official, who

asked not to be named discussing a trip that Harris has not officially announced.

Harris will tour the DMZ, meet with service members, receive an operational briefing from US commanders, reflect on the shared sacrifice of American and South Korean soldiers and reaffirm the “ironclad” commitment to South Korean security, the official added.

Several former US presidents, and Biden himself before he became president, have visited the DMZ, but former president Donald Trump became the first to have met a North Korean leader there when he held a third meeting with Kim Jong Un in 2019 as part of his unsuccessful effort to persuade Kim to give up his nuclear and missile programmes. — Reuters

Lebanon speaker calls for session to elect president

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s speaker Nabih Berri called on Tuesday for parliament to meet this week to elect a president to replace Michel Aoun whose term expires at the end of October.

“Berri called for a session to be held at 11 am on Thursday September 29, 2022 in order to elect a president,” a statement from his office said.

The session will mark the first attempt by lawmakers to elect a new head of state at a time when the country is in the grips of a financial crisis described by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times.

But it comes without any consensus on a replacement for Aoun amid a months-long political deadlock that has prevented the formation

of a new government since the outgoing one’s mandate expired in May.

With no compromise in sight among Lebanon’s bitterly divided politicians, it may take several sessions of parliament before a president is finally named. The post lay vacant for more than two years before Aoun was elected in 2016.

But with more than 80 per cent of the population living in poverty and the currency having lost more than 95 per cent of its value against the dollar since 2019, Lebanon can ill afford any delays.

Meanwhile, Lebanon’s parliament on Monday approved the 2022 budget, one of the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund to action a bailout for the crisis-stricken country. — AFP



Cruise service on river Ganga to start next year

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Covering a distance of more than 4,000 km through the river Ganga, India’s longest river cruise service will begin from early next year between Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh state and Bogibeel in Assam.

According to Indian Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the service being explored on the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR), and the Brahmaputra, will usher an opportunity for the people of Assam to use inland waterways to promote their trade and livelihood in tourism and cargo transportation.

To facilitate cargo movement from Bogibeel, a permanent cargo terminal is under consideration of the central and state governments. The plan is aimed at facilitating transport of cargo from local industries. The products like polymer, fertiliser and crackers would find new means of

transport after the completion of the port.

The plan has construction of two floating jetties at Bogibeel in Dibrugarh district and Guujan in Tinsukia district. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is constructing both the jetties over River Brahmaputra (National Waterways – 2 (NW-2), media reports said.

An official statement confirmed the construction of two jetties, the job for which has been given to Coastal Consolidated Structures.

“The work has been awarded to Coastal Consolidated Structures on an EPC contract mode. The two jetties are estimated to be built at a cost of INR 8.25 crore and are scheduled to be completed by February 2023,” an official statement said.

Both Assam and Varanasi have huge tourism potential. Assam offers many offbeat tourism attractions. Its greenery, wild life and sacred river are attraction for nature lovers.

Mass evacuations in Vietnam ahead of Super Typhoon Noru

HANOI: Vietnam closed airports, announced curfews and urged thousands more people evacuate on Tuesday as intensifying Typhoon Noru barrelled towards the country, two days after causing at least eight deaths and widespread flooding in the Philippines.

Hundreds of flights in Vietnam were cancelled and thousands of people started to evacuate their homes in central provinces, in anticipation of one of the most powerful storms to hit the country in 20 years.

Wind speeds could reach 183 km per hour late on Tuesday, the meteorological agency said, adding that Noru was expected to make landfall on Wednesday before weakening and heading to Thailand.

About 270,000 military personnel were placed on standby in Vietnam, as Prime



A man takes a selfie picture under his umbrella on a beach in Danang. — AFP

Minister Pham Minh Chinh urged authorities to expedite preparations.

“We don’t have much time left. The storm is intensifying so our responses must be stronger and faster,” he told an emergency meeting on Tuesday.

“Evacuation must be done as

soon as possible with top priorities being people’s lives and assets.”

The central provinces of Quang Ngai, where a major oil refinery is located, and Quang Nam, home to the World Heritage site of Hoi An, were expected to be worst hit.

Footage from state television showed people fortifying their

‘We don’t have much time left,’ says prime minister as military on standby and curfews imposed

homes with bricks and sandbags in Quang Nam province, where a curfew was imposed and more than 133,000 residents were forced to leave their homes.

Local governments ordered curfews also in the popular tourist cities of Danang and Hue.

Authorities were racing to secure the country’s coffee growing areas north of the Central Highlands region ahead of a typhoon the meteorological agency said was packing wind speeds of 134 kph to 149 kph early on Tuesday. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

US pushes for ‘constructive’ India-Pakistan ties

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said late on Monday he had discussed with his Pakistani counterpart what he called managing a responsible relationship with neighbouring India.

Blinken’s comments came after India’s defence and foreign ministers opposed a US decision to provide a support package of about \$450 million for Pakistan’s fleet of US-made F-16 fighter jets.

“In our discussions today,



we talked about the importance of managing a responsible relationship with India,” Blinken said after meeting Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, without elaborating. — Reuters

DAMASCUS

100 dead in Lebanon migrant shipwreck off Syria

Syrian authorities have recovered 100 bodies from a Lebanese migrant boat that sank off Syria last week, state media reported about one of the deadliest recent shipwrecks in the eastern Mediterranean.

The first bodies were found last Thursday and only 20 people were rescued out of as many as 150 passengers.

“The number of victims of the Lebanese boat has reached 100 people so far after another body was recovered from the sea,”



Syria’s official news agency Sana on Monday quoted the head of Syrian ports Samer Kbrasli as saying. All survivors have been discharged from hospital, SANA said. — AFP

OUAGADOUGOU

Several feared dead in Burkina Faso convoy attack

Several people are feared dead in an attack by militants on a 150-vehicle convoy taking supplies to a town in northern Burkina Faso on Monday, the army said.

Dozens of trucks were destroyed, an army statement said.

The assault took place in the commune of Gaskinde in Soum province, an area where militants linked to al Qaeda and IS have escalated attacks and seized territory since 2015.



Militants have blockaded several areas, forcing the government to resort to convoys and air drops to deliver essential goods to trapped civilians. — Reuters



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WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 28 | 2022

7

In brief

■ LONDON



WILLIAM MAKES FIRST VISIT TO WALES SINCE INHERITING NEW TITLE

Britain's heir to the throne, William, and his wife, Catherine, made their first visit to Wales since becoming the new Prince and Princess of Wales. William automatically inherited the title on the death of his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, when his father — the previous prince of Wales — became king. The visit came as media reports said William had no plans for “any kind” of investiture. King Charles III spent time learning Welsh at university before he was crowned by his mother in a televised ceremony at Caernarfon Castle in July 1969 when he was 20. — **AFP**

■ LIVERPOOL



STARMER INSISTS LABOUR FIT TO GOVERN

Labour leader Keir Starmer argued he was ready to lead Britain out of economic crisis, as a new poll gave his once-fractured party its biggest lead in two decades over the ruling Conservatives. The head of the main opposition told its annual conference that new Prime Minister Liz Truss and the Tories had “lost control of the British economy”, as the UK reels from soaring inflation, imminent recession and a weakening currency. His speech in Liverpool was met with fervent applause from the Labour rank and file after 12 years in the political wilderness and bouts of ideological infighting. — **AFP**

■ COPENHAGEN



CRISIS TEAMS CONVENE OVER RUSSIAN PIPELINE LEAKS

Crisis management teams are convening in Denmark and Sweden following the discovery of three leaks in the Nord Stream gas pipelines. Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde told the newspaper *Aftonbladet* that several ministries and government agencies were represented at the crisis talks. She had been in contact with Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod and online meetings were planned. “I don't want to speculate about (what happened),” she told the paper. “You have to be quite sure what happened and how that affects our security.” — **dpa**

MAJORITY FAVOURS JOINING RUSSIA IN FIRST VOTE RESULTS

LONDON: First partial voting results from four Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine showed majorities of more than 96 per cent in favour of becoming part of Russia after so-called referendums that Kyiv and the West have denounced as a sham.

Hastily arranged votes had taken place over five days in the four areas - Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson - that make up about 15 per cent of Ukrainian territory.

Russian-installed officials took ballot boxes from house to house in what Ukraine and the West said was an illegitimate, coercive exercise to create a legal pretext for Russia to annex the four regions.

President Vladimir Putin could then portray any Ukrainian attempt to recapture them as an attack on Russia itself.

He said last week he was willing to use nuclear weapons to defend the “territorial integrity” of Russia.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged the European Union to impose further economic sanctions on Russia to punish it for staging the votes, which he said would not change Ukraine's actions on the battlefield.

Kyiv has repeatedly warned that Russian annexation of additional territories would destroy any chance of peace talks, seven months after Russia launched its war of its neighbour. It says Ukrainians who helped



Election commission members count votes of refugees from Russian-held regions of Ukraine for a referendum at a polling station in Simferopol, Crimea. — **AFP**

Russia organise the votes will face treason charges.

The state-owned Russian news agency RIA said the initial counts showed majorities ranging from 96.97 per cent in the Kherson region, based on 14 per cent of votes counted, to 98.19 per cent in Zaporizhzhia, based on 18 per cent of the count.

The majorities in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics were just under 98 per

cent, with 14 per cent and 13 per cent respectively of votes tallied. The scale of the pro-Moscow vote came as no surprise, after voting that Ukraine said was carried out at gunpoint in many cases.

It mirrored a referendum in Crimea after Russia's seizure of the region from Ukraine in 2014, when Crimea's leaders declared a 97-per cent vote to secede from Ukraine and join Russia.

Putin said on state TV on

Tuesday that the votes were designed to protect people from what he has called the persecution of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers by Ukraine, something that Kyiv has denied.

“Saving people in all the territories where this referendum is being held is at the top of our minds and the focus of attention of our entire society and country,” he said. Moscow has acted in recent months to “Russify” areas under

Putin says the votes were designed to protect people from what he has called the persecution of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers by Ukraine

its control, including by issuing people with Russian passports and rewriting school curriculum.

The referendums were hurriedly brought forward this month after Ukraine seized the momentum on the battlefield by routing Russian forces in the northeastern Kharkiv region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was set to address a special session of the UN Security Council later on Tuesday that is focussed on Russia's internationally condemned referendums in occupied area of Ukraine. Diplomatic sources confirmed that Zelensky's address has been requested by Ukraine's UN representation. They said veto power Russia was expected to try and prevent the video message from taking place.

In similar situations, Moscow's attempts had failed. In such procedural votes, permanent members like Russia do not have the right to veto, but need to secure the approval of at least nine of the 15 council members.

— **Agencies**

Hurricane Ian rips into western Cuba, turn towards Florida

HAVANA: Hurricane Ian slammed into western Cuba on Tuesday, forcing evacuations, cutting power to hundreds of thousands of people and swamping fishing villages as it tracked northward towards Florida, where residents anxiously await the sprawling storm.

The Category 3 hurricane was about 5 miles south of the city of Pinar Del Rio, with maximum sustained winds of 125 mph, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

Ian is expected to strengthen further on Tuesday after cutting a swath through Cuba's farm country west of the capital Havana and emerging over the southeastern Gulf of Mexico, reaching Category 4 strength before it approaches the Florida west coast, the NHC said.

The Biden administration declared a public health emergency for the state of Florida on Monday, in anticipation of the storm's arrival, and said it was working with local officials to provide support.

Hurricane Ian made landfall in Cuba's Pinar del Rio province early on Tuesday, prompting officials to cut power to the entire province and evacuate 40,000 people from low-lying coastal areas, according to local media reports.

As of 6:30 am, regional broadcaster TelePinar reported an eerie calm in the city of around 145,000 people as the eye hovered over the area, but



A view shows a damaged home in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona in Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland, Canada. — **Reuters**

The Biden administration declared a public health emergency for the state of Florida in anticipation of the storm's arrival

warned of fierce winds to follow. Cuban state-run media reported strongest winds to date from Ian at 208 kmh at San Juan y Martinez, a small town on Cuba's southwest coast.

Pinar del Rio province is a lightly populated region but a top producer of farm crops and tobacco. State-run media said 33,000 tonnes of tobacco from

prior harvests had been secured ahead of the storm.

Rain and winds buffeted Havana early on Tuesday, but the city, under a tropical storm watch and preparing for a potential storm surge, looked likely to be spared the brunt of Ian's strongest winds.

The hurricane hits Cuba at a time of dire economic crisis. Hours-long blackouts had become every day events across much of Cuba - even before the storm - and shortages of food, medicine and fuel are likely to complicate efforts to recover from Ian.

The Miami-based National Hurricane Center warned of a life-threatening storm surge, flash floods and possible mudslides across western Cuba on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

Italy's far-right Meloni begins tricky govt talks

ROME: Italian far-right leader Giorgia Meloni and her allies began on Tuesday what is likely to be a weeks-long process of forming a new government, with crises looming on several fronts.

Meloni's post-fascist Brothers of Italy party, which triumphed in Sunday's elections, has no experience of power but must assemble a cross-party team to tackle sky-high inflation and energy prices, and relations with a wary Europe.

The 45-year-old is hoping to be the first woman to lead Italy as prime minister, but needs her allies, Matteo Salvini's far-right League party and former Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, for a majority in parliament.

The division of the top jobs — notably economy, foreign affairs, the defence and interior ministries — will always be political but now, more than ever, “will have to reflect areas of expertise”, the *Stampa* daily noted.

In the past, it has taken anything between four and 12 weeks for a new administration to take office.

But the first deadline for action is coming up fast, with debt-laden Italy due to submit its draft plan for next year's budget to Brussels by October 15.

President Sergio Mattarella will begin consultations on who should lead the new government only once the Senate and Chamber presidents have been elected by parliament, which meets on October 13.

With families and businesses



Leader of Italian far-right party Brothers of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, holds a placard after she delivered an address at her party's campaign headquarters in Rome. — **AFP**

struggling with huge bills aggravated by the Ukraine war, sorting out the budget will be “like scaling Everest without oxygen tanks for the new cabinet”, the *Corriere della Sera* daily said.

Meloni sought to reassure investors during the election campaign that, despite her radical past, she will be a safe pair of hands.

But the Italian ten-year bond rate increased to its highest level since October 2013 on Tuesday morning.

And the gap between German and Italian interest rates, the closely watched spread, rose above 250 points for the first time since the depths of the coronavirus pandemic in spring 2020.

The European Commission approved on Tuesday the second instalment of post-pandemic recovery funds to Italy, worth €21 billion. — **AFP**

Relationships are key for success of students



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

A warm smile can go a long way toward helping students who are struggling academically.

We have heard that rules without relationships lead to rebellion. This sentiment rings true even in our lives. Just like children, we find it difficult to heed the direction and instruction of someone with whom we have no relationship.

We have trained children to be sceptical of strangers, but if we want them to be successful in classrooms, we need to counter that with relational equity — building the value of the relationship between teacher and student over time.

Students must know that their teachers are on their team and want the best for them, rather than think of them as authority figures waiting for them to make mistakes. When teachers show genuine interest in their student's well-being, children are quick to listen, trust, and learn.

In the classroom, children find

security in their relationship with their teacher. It is vital for teachers to recognise that fostering supportive relationships with students is a fundamental part of a child's educational experience.

Here are three strategies to build that all-important relational equity and leverage it to help students thrive:

Disarm students with understanding.

When students are under performing, sometimes it is difficult for us to investigate the reason. However, breakthroughs happen when we prioritise engaging the student before jumping to conclusions.

Students often expect teachers to react to under-performance with consequences, so when a teacher does the unexpected, like reacting with empathy, compassion, and understanding, the student becomes disarmed and vulnerable in a good

THERE IS A GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF A PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION WHEN TEACHERS CONFRONT A STUDENT ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCE IN AN EMPATHIC WAY OR SURPRISE THEM WITH A SMILE

way. When teachers confront a student about their performance in an empathic way or surprise them with a smile, there is a greater likelihood of a productive conversation.

Instead of giving one-word answers and responding defensively, often students relaxes and engages in a way that leads to solutions.

Problemsolveinameaningfulway. Students tend to struggle with this skill and using underachievement as an opportunity to practice problem-

solving is highly productive. Starting by brainstorming possible solutions to the root issue and helping the students choose the solution that seems most realistic, goes a long way.

It may be that children might need help becoming efficient in their schoolwork, so they may need to learn how to use a calendar or specific interventions. Some of these issues can be solved through coaching and conversations, while others might require educators to widen the circle of support. Responding in this way helps build the relational equity that is so valuable in classrooms.

Nurture students' self-advocacy skills. When we address issues in a student's academic performance, it helps them to see it as an opportunity to strengthen their self-advocacy tool kit.

Successfully communicating with teachers is a learned skill that

sets the stage for later self-advocacy with professors and supervisors — and students do not always get the opportunity to practice that skill deliberately. Many students know that their teachers are there to help but often have no idea how to ask.

If a student is struggling in one class, the odds are that they are also struggling in other classes. Teachers can use the conversation about one class as a catalyst to address performance in other classes. Sometimes helping students write an email to their other teachers leads them to be successful in those classes — and builds their confidence.

Helping students through under-performance requires sensitivity and authenticity.

Teachers must be deliberate in supporting students' welfare. Sometimes students who struggle the most academically need just one adult in their life to be their advocate.

UK civil servants fear for jobs under Truss

ELIZABETH PIPER

LIVERPOOL: "Speaking truth unto power" has long been the motto of Britain's civil service, but now some government workers charged with offering ministers impartial advice whatever their party are fearful of their political bosses and are keeping quiet.

Some say it's been a long and slow whittling away of confidence among civil servants, or public sector officials, who for years have been accused of resisting change by elected lawmakers, particularly in the governing Conservative Party.

But it was the sacking of the top official at the finance ministry by his new boss Kwasi Kwarteng on the day that Liz Truss was appointed prime minister that sent shockwaves through a service which has already been charged with reducing numbers to save government money.

Bob Kerslake, head of the civil service between 2011 and 2014, said the sacking of Tom Scholar as permanent secretary at the Treasury broke with the convention of having officials that serve the government "whatever their political affiliations".

"(It) creates a sense of fear inside the civil service at senior level which will prevent them from giving the honest advice to ministers that they need to hear," he told Reuters. "You need the civil service to be robust and honest right from the off," said Kerslake, rejecting accusations that they have resisted change. He now serves as an independent member of the upper house of parliament, the House of Lords.

Just over two weeks after Scholar's departure, Truss's new finance minister Kwarteng launched a new fiscal policy, without the normal independent scrutiny of government spending plans, that sent markets into a tailspin and the pound to a record low against the dollar.

The civil service is a quintessentially British institution, immortalised in the 1980s TV satirical programme "Yes Minister" which chronicled the career of a hapless minister who struggled to get his policies past his supposedly impartial permanent secretary - the most senior civil servant in a government department - and who wielded the real power in the show.

It has long been seen as essential to running Britain, with government advisers considered crucial to taming some of the more exuberant ideas touted by new ministers, sometimes bluntly telling them their proposals simply will not work.

For many in the civil service and for the unions representing all government workers, Truss has signalled what could be a fundamental change — favouring partisan advice over a dispassionate assessment of policy decisions. — **Reuters**

Soviet monuments become latest target of backlash against war in Ukraine



Andrew Higgins

The writer is bureau chief for East, Central Europe based in Warsaw

Deported to Siberia by the Soviet secret police as a child and stranded there for more than a decade, Dr Juris Vidins has for years cursed the large statue of a Red Army soldier looming over the centre of his hometown in eastern Latvia.

An inscription at its base honours the Soviet "liberators" who drove out the Nazis in 1944 — and who sent his father to a prison camp and the rest of the family to a frozen wilderness.

"This was not liberation, but occupation," said Vidins, 84, glowering at the statue of a Soviet soldier cradling a machine gun.

"They liberated me from my family, they liberated us from our property and everything we had," he said. "If that is liberation, I don't want a monument to it."

After trying in vain for years to get the statue torn down, Vidins is now rejoicing that, thanks to a wave of revulsion over Russia's attack on Ukraine and everything connected with its military, he may soon see his dream come true.

Across Eastern and Central Europe, dominated by Moscow for nearly a half-century after the end of World War II, a long-running memory war over whether the Soviet Union liberated the region from fascism or enslaved it anew has reached a decisive turn, just as what had been a grinding military stalemate in Ukraine has turned significantly against Russian forces.

Statues honouring Soviet troops have in recent weeks come down or been slated for demolition in Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic, all Nato members that have rallied to help Ukraine on the battlefield with weapons and gone on the offensive at home against what they see as abhorrent tributes to Russian power.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine, justified by false claims that the country was awash with Nazis who must be crushed just as Adolf Hitler's real Nazis were, has

RUSSIA RESPONDED WITH FURY WHEN THE AUTHORITIES IN RIGA DEMOLISHED A NEARLY 260-FOOT-TALL OBELISK THAT WAS BUILT IN 1985 AS A MEMORIAL TO SOVIET SOLDIERS KILLED DURING WORLD WAR II

sapped his country's military and economic strength. Putin has also drained its most potent source of moral and political legitimacy: Russia's claim, as the Soviet Union's successor state, to the respect due the more than 25 million Soviet citizens who died fighting Hitler's Germany.

"Monuments to a foreign army that has committed terrible crimes" have "no place in a democratic society," Latvian President Egils Levits said in an interview in Riga, the country's capital.

Russia responded with fury last month when the authorities in Riga demolished a nearly 260-foot-tall obelisk that was built in 1985 as a

memorial to Soviet soldiers killed during World War II.

The Russian Foreign Ministry fired off a barrage of angry diplomatic complaints that Latvia, which has been free of domination by Moscow since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, had violated a 1994 pledge to respect war memorials. The ministry's spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, accused Baltic States of indulging in "neo-Nazi bacchanalia."

"Of course, Russia tried to intimidate us by using the same vocabulary they used during Soviet times to justify deportations and repression," Artis Pabriks, Latvia's defence minister, said in an interview. "They want to scare us."

The war in Ukraine has largely vindicated long-standing warnings by Baltic States that Russia is an aggressive power that cannot be trusted. But it has also blunted its capacity to terrify its neighbours, reducing the willingness of ethnic Russians abroad to rally publicly to Moscow's side and exposing the weaknesses of its military machine.

"If they are not crazy, they will not try to touch us militarily," said Pabriks. "Most of their troops next to us have now been sent to Ukraine," he added, referring to soldiers previously massed along Russia's western border who were redeployed. — *New York Times*



Juris Vidins, left, a Latvian doctor and politician, and Vadim Giliis, an ethnic Russian, who are friends on opposite sides of the debate over Soviet monuments, in Rezekne, Latvia.

A shift towards a digital society in Vision 2040



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Even as many countries in the world are still struggling to provide the benefits of a modern approach to digitalised governance to the people, a notable exception is the Sultanate of Oman for its transformation into a sustainable knowledge society by leveraging information and communication technologies.

It is now three decades since Oman set out on its ambitious journey. The digital Oman strategy got its approval at the beginning of 2003 as part of the country's economic vision that called for economic diversification and job creation for nationals in addition to its emphasis on e-literacy.

The strategy aimed at building a knowledge-based economy by developing world-class e-government services that will facilitate more streamlined interaction between the corporate sector, the government and the people. Digital transformation will form a significant part of the progress that the country is going to witness over the coming years thanks to Oman Vision 2040 - an ambitious roadmap for transition into a knowledge-based society under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The vision, through a number of national projects and initiatives, will not only facilitate connections between different government and private establishments to ensure data quality, but will also provide a reliable and coherent source of information, and help decision-makers monitor performance, improve the quality of services and set new goals and strategies.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WILL FORM A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE PROGRESS THAT THE COUNTRY IS GOING TO WITNESS OVER THE COMING YEARS THANKS TO OMAN VISION 2040 — AN AMBITIOUS ROADMAP FOR TRANSITION INTO A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

Accordingly, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in cooperation with all government institutions has already prepared a framework and an integrated national roadmap for the digital transformation of the government. The blueprint takes into account the

trends and future ambitions of Oman to complete the digitisation of government services and benefit from the use of emerging technologies in the empowerment and development of the working environment in the public sector, as well as working with various entities to determine the strategic direction of a thriving digital economy in keeping with the Vision's strategies.

Oman's digital economy, through which the country will be able to achieve several goals, will contribute to building and developing a prosperous digital economy responding to the requirements of the future.

In the 2020 UN e-government Survey, Oman was ranked 24th internationally and second in the Gulf and Arab in the electronic services development index, and salary. In the 50th international e-government development index, and in the Network Readiness Report, Oman ranked 44th out of 134 countries in 2020, and in the International Cybersecurity Readiness Index, Oman ranked 16th in the world out of 175 countries in 2020. According to the fourth annual edition of the Digital Quality of Life Index, the Sultanate of Oman is ranked 65th in the world in digital well-being.

The cybersecurity company Surfshark evaluated 117 countries based on five fundamental digital wellbeing pillars: Internet quality, e-governance, e-infrastructure, Internet affordability, and e-security.

Out of the five fundamental digital life pillars, Oman's best score is for e-governance (36th), while the worst score is for e-security (ranking 91st globally).

Oman's e-infrastructure services come 51st, while Internet quality and Internet affordability rank 74th and 85th, respectively. 'In the face of waging inflation, fixed broadband Internet has become less affordable worldwide for the second year in a row, prying the global digital divide even further,' stated the index report

The e-initiatives taken by the government are pretty futuristic and fairly result oriented. It is the right step, at the right time and in the right direction. It is obvious that the government intends to transform Oman into a hub for doing business in the Middle East.

The e-initiatives in Oman have already given a boost to foreign investments in the country. The e-Oman initiative has worked wonders for the country in making it more competitive and transparent!



A HIGH TIDE EVENT

Tourists walk across elevated walkways outside St Mark's Basilica on St Mark's square in Venice on Tuesday, following an "Alta Acqua" high tide event, too low to operate the MOSE Experimental Electromechanical Module that protects the city of Venice from floods, but high enough to potentially threaten St Mark's Basilica. — AFP

In Spain, politicians wage tax war ahead of elections

VALENTIN BONTEMPS

With elections a year away, the battle lines have been drawn between Spain's left-wing government and its right-wing regions who are tripping over themselves to unveil lower tax policies.

On the back burner for months, the tax issue hit the headlines last week after the leader of the southern Andalusia region decided to axe wealth tax and lower income tax in a bid to attract wealthy taxpayers.

"We were a tax hellhole but now we're the region with the second lowest taxes in Spain," boasted Juanma Moreno of the right-wing opposition Popular Party (PP) — his region trailing only Madrid, which is also held by the PP.

As one of the Western world's most decentralised nations, Spain is divided into 17 regions, whose governments have considerable autonomy and are responsible for budget management.

Moreno's remarks opened the floodgates, with many other PP-run regions announcing cuts, including Murcia, which slashed income tax, and Galicia, which is rolling back its wealth tax.

This flurry of announcements was hailed by top figures within the PP, among them the party's rising star, Madrid leader Isabel Diaz Ayuso.

"Welcome to paradise," tweeted this champion of the tax war, who last year repealed some 15 local levies in her region.

But the move has drummed up a storm of criticism within the government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, which has denounced it as economic populism ahead of regional elections in

AS ONE OF THE WESTERN WORLD'S MOST DECENTRALISED NATIONS, SPAIN IS DIVIDED INTO 17 REGIONS, WHOSE GOVERNMENTS HAVE CONSIDERABLE AUTONOMY AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR BUDGET MANAGEMENT

May and a general election expected in late 2023.

And it has raised concerns about the impact of such measures on public service funding.

Economy Minister Nadia Calvino didn't mince her words, denouncing such moves as introducing an "irresponsible, incoherent and destructive dynamic that would affect the whole country" and demanding they be reversed.

And Budget Minister Maria Jesus Montero warned it was "dangerous" to create "tax havens" within Spain.

Even Sanchez weighed in, denouncing what he called "tax gifts to the minority" and pleading for "responsible tax policies".

"There must be tax reforms that guarantee that those who have more contribute more to the public purse in order to have a much stronger welfare state," he said.

Last Thursday, the government said it would slap an "exceptional" tax on the country's richest to help pay for measures

aimed at easing the impact of spiralling inflation. And it is in favour of a greater "tax harmonisation" between the regions.

But it's a sensitive subject in Spain where the Constitution requires a certain solidarity between the regions while also guaranteeing their robust fiscal and financial autonomy on top of extending them wide-ranging powers over issues such as health and education.

"If some regions are lowering taxes, it's because legally they can," said Stella Raventos, head of AEDAF, the Spanish Association of Tax Advisors.

"Not all regions have the same policies because they don't have the same problems."

But given the risks inherent in a wholesale policy of slashing duties, "a tax harmonisation policy could be a good idea", as long as it was kept within "reasonable levels" and with upper limits, she said.

For the PP, any such move would be crossing a red line.

If there is any government "interference", there will be "a robust legal response", Andalusia's Moreno vowed, warning against any move to "centralise" fiscal policy.

For now, the government has no plans to encroach on the regions' autonomy — although it is determined to fight any "fiscal dumping" within the framework of a huge reform package aimed at making Spain's tax system more just and progressive.

Details of the tax reform, which is required by Brussels in exchange for aid channelled through its post-pandemic recovery scheme, will be released early next year. — AFP



Right-wing politician Juanma Moreno has slashed taxes in his region. — AFP

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IN SIX-GOAL RALLY ENGLAND RALLY GERMANY THRILLER

LONDON: Gareth

Southgate hopes England will
feel the benefit of being put under intense

pressure in recent days at the World Cup
after fighting back from 2-0 down to
salvage a 3-3 draw against Germany on

Monday.

The Three Lions had already been
relegated from the top tier of the
Nations League and will head to Qatar
on a six-game winless run.

The knives were being sharpened
for Southgate after his faith in Harry
Maguire backfired for two German goals
early in the second half.

Centre-back Maguire has been publicly
backed by the England boss despite being
dropped at club level by Manchester
United manager Erik ten Hag.
Ilkay Gundogan slotted home the
opener from the penalty spot after Maguire
gifted possession to Jamal Musiala and
then chopped down the Bayern Munich
midfielder. But two goals in three minutes
transformed the atmosphere around
Wembley and the scrutiny on Southgate's
position heading to Qatar.

Luke Shaw was also restored to the starting
line-up despite his lack of game time at United
and started the fightback by volleying in at the
back post. Moments later, two of Southgate's
substitutes combined to deadly effect as Bukayo
Saka set up Mason Mount to curl home.

Harry Kane looked to have completed the
turnaround from the penalty spot seven minutes
from time after Nico Schlotterbeck's challenge on
Jude Bellingham was punished following a VAR
review.

Yet, there was more drama to come as Nick Pope
spilled Serge Gnabry's shot and Havertz pounced on
the rebound to snatch Germany a point.

RELIEF FOR SOUTHGATE

Despite the disappointment of a late equaliser, there
was relief for Southgate that England's attack finally
came to life after accusations that his conservative
tactics were to blame for a lack of goals.

"The whole experience has been what we needed,"
said Southgate, who had been booed by England fans
after a 1-0 defeat to Italy in Milan on Friday. "You are
going to have pressure in a World Cup. You can try to
avoid pressure, but it's coming.

"It's better that we feel it and know how we deal
with it. The players reacted in the right way - we
showed character but a lot of quality."

The home side had plenty of chances to end their
goal drought even in a scoreless first half.

Raheem Sterling twice shot too close to
Marc-Andre ter Stegen with just the
German goalkeeper to beat, while Kane
would have had a tap in but for a
poor cross from Phil Foden.

Germany were seeking to bounce
back from their first defeat under
Hansi Flick after their hopes of
reaching the Nations League final

four were

ended by losing 1-0 at home to Hungary on Friday.

"We made individual mistakes - it can't happen that
we give away a lead like that," said a frustrated Flick.

"But we came back, that's the positive. There's some
work for us to do, but we're optimistic."

Germany came alive after the break with
Musiala, who played for England at youth level,
particularly impressive.

Dutch referee Danny Makkelie needed the
assistance of VAR to see Maguire's mistimed
challenge on Musiala as he tried to atone for his
error in giving the ball away.

Gundogan coolly slotted into the bottom
corner and it seemed game over when Havertz
arrowed home his shot from outside the box
with 23 minutes to go.

However, three goals in 11 minutes got
the England support back on side and gave
the team some impetus to build on heading
to Qatar. Any doubt over who Southgate

will start in goal against Iran on November

21 appears to over though, as long as Jordan

Pickford has recovered from a thigh injury that
kept him out of this squad. — AFP



England's Harry
Kane celebrates
scoring their
third goal.— Reuters

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE RESULTS

LEAGUE A

GROUP 3

IN LONDON

England 3 (Shaw 72, Mount 75,
Kane 83-pen) Germany 3
(Gundogan 52-pen, Havertz 67,
87)

In Budapest

Hungary 0 Italy 2 (Raspadori 27,
Dimarco 52)

LEAGUE B

GROUP 3

IN PODGORICA

Montenegro 0 Finland 2 (Antman
47, Kallman 53)

In Bucharest

Romania 4 (Man 38, Puskas 73, 86,
Ratiu 79) Bosnia and Herzegovina
1 (Dzeko 77)

LEAGUE C

GROUP 4

IN SKOPJE

North Macedonia 0 Bulgaria 1
(Despodov 50)

In Gibraltar

Gibraltar 1 (Annesley 75) Georgia
2 (Kvaratskhelia 19-pen, Tsitaishvili
48)

LEAGUE D

GROUP 2

IN SERRAVALLE, SAN MARINO

San Marino 0 Estonia 4(Henri Anier
38, 77, Teniste 56, Sappinen 66)

ITALY BEAT HUNGARY TO REACH NATIONS LEAGUE FINALS

BUDAPEST: Italy, who will miss a
second consecutive World Cup,
again found consolation in Europe
as they won 2-0 in Budapest on
Monday to edge Hungary for first
place in their Nations League
group.

Giacomo Raspadori, who
scored the winner against England
on Friday, poked the ball home
after Wilfried Gnonto had pounced
on a poor Hungarian back pass to
give Italy the lead in the 27th
minute.

"We needed these matches to
restore enthusiasm, even if the
World Cup remains an open
wound and we can not go back,"
said Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi
Donnarumma.

"We have to start again, we
have to do it for all of Italy."

Hungary, who started the final
round of games top of Group A3,
fought hard but Donnarumma
made two miraculous saves in
quick succession in the 50th
minute from Loic Nego and Adam
Szalai.

Two minutes later, Federico
Dimarco met a Bryan Cristante
cross at the back post to smash in
his first international goal and
Italy's 1,500th.

Donnarumma produced
another outstanding to keep out a
header from Callum Styles (55th).
Italy held on to follow the
Netherlands and Croatia into the
Nations League final four
scheduled for June 2023.

"We were excellent for 70
minutes, the last 20 I didn't like too
much," said Italy coach Roberto
Mancini. "We're happy, it's
important to have reached the
Nations League final four for the
second time."

Italy, who fell to a low point in
March, less than a year after their
Euro 2020 title, when they failed to
qualify for the World Cup, have
another European final tournament
to look forward to.

The defeat also brought to an
end the international career of
Hungary captain Adam Szalai, who
had said he is retiring from
international football at 34 and
received an ovation as he went off
after 75 minutes. — AFP

HOLDERS SEEB TO MEET AL NASR IN ROUND OF 16

Al Oruba face Fanja in HM Cup Round of 32



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

Four-time winners Sur will meet Al Bashayer in the His Majesty's Cup 2022-23 championship Round of 32 while Oman club will meet Ahli Sidab in a tight derby of capital city.

Defending champions Al Seeb, Al Rustaq, Al Nasr and Dhofar confirmed their place in Round of 16. Seeb will face a tough challenge in the next stage of the coveted cup as they will meet Al Nasr in a tough clash. Salalah giants Dhofar will take on the winners of Al Suwaiq vs Majees. Al Rustaq will play against the winners of Bidiyah vs Bahla.

In the other matches, Muscat will host Al Ittihad in Muscat while Al Musannah will face off Al Ittifaq in the same round. In other interesting matches of the knockout stage, Al Oruba will face Fanja while Al Suwaiq take on Majees. First division club Al Shabab will play against Nizwa. The Al Buraimi representatives will meet Ibri while Saham will take on Al Wahda. At the southern Batinah tight fixture, Al Khabourah will face off Sohar and Bidiyah will play against Bahla.

The draw for the top domestic football championship in the Sultanate of Oman was announced in a glittering event under auspices of HH Sayyid Nader bin Al Julanda al Said in presence of Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, Chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA) at Hormoz Grand hotel on Tuesday night. The draw ceremony was attended by top officials and dignitaries.

This edition of His Majesty's football Cup championship will feature participation of 28 clubs including: Seeb, Oman club, Al Suwaiq, Al Rustaq, Suhar, Al Nahda, Al Bashayer, Bahla, Al Oruba, Sur, Dhofar, Al Nasr, Al Ittihad, Al Musannah, Muscat, Al Mudhaibi, Al Ittifaq, Nizwa, Saham, Al Wahda, Ibri, Al Shabab, Al Khabourah, Majees, Fanja, Salalah, Ahli Sidab and Bidiyah.

For the first time, the competition committee at OFA decided to have one draw only as the path of draw is clear and all the winners will know the opponent teams for the forthcoming rounds. The qualification will start on October 14 while round 16 encounters will be scheduled on October 27 and 28. The quarterfinals will be played in knockout stage while the first and second leg matches will be implemented from semifinals.



South Korea's Son Heung-min celebrates his goal against Cameroon during a friendly match in Seoul on Tuesday. – AFP

SON SHINES

AS SOUTH KOREA WIN OVER CAMEROON

SEOUL: Son Heung-min scored for the second straight match on Tuesday to give South Korea a 1-0 home victory over Cameroon in their latest World Cup tune-up.

The Spurs striker headed the ball home after a shot from Kim Jin-su was deflected by goalkeeper Andre Onana in the 35th minute.

South Korea hung on for the win in front of 59,000 fans at Seoul World Cup Stadium.

On Friday, Korean skipper Son netted a free-kick in a 2-2 draw against Costa Rica.

With the World Cup less than two months away, South Korea's Portuguese coach Paulo Bento was

pleased with the workout.

"In general, we made a good game, better in the first half, when we had good chances to score," he said. "It was a good game and a fair victory," he added.

South Korea are in Group H at the World Cup with Uruguay, Ghana and Portugal.

The home side had the first attempt of the game when Lee Jae-sung's diving effort in the fifth minute forced a difficult save from Onana.

Cameroon are also Qatar-bound and they threatened in the 26th minute when Moumi Ngamaleu fired a right-footed shot over.

The visitors nearly levelled the score in the 43rd minute when Bryan Mbeumo's effort ricocheted off the body of defender Kwon Kyung-won and struck the crossbar.

South Korea had a chance to double their lead two minutes into the second half but Jeong Woo-yong's header sailed over the net.

The Cameroonians' push for an equaliser proved futile, with Olivier Ntcham sending his left-footed shot wide in the 51st minute.

Goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu helped the Koreans keep Cameroon at bay, proving up to the task when Martin Hongla tested him in the 70th minute.

Son came close to grabbing a brace with an 87th-minute free-kick but the shot landed on top of the goal netting.

Cameroon's coach Rigobert Song said he was proud of his side, who face Brazil, Serbia and Switzerland in Group G at the World Cup.

"I think we have rediscovered our fighting spirit," said Song, who saw his team lose 2-0 to Uzbekistan last week in South Korea.

"South Korea are a great team. If we hadn't played well, they would have scored more goals.

"It was a good experience for us to play such a strong team." — AFP

OCC all set for Asian Amateur chess in Muscat

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

The Oman Chess Committee (OCC) is all set to organise 2021-22 Asian Amateur Chess Championship which will be held in Muscat during September 29 until October 5 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The organising committee announced that 204 players representing 23 countries will take part in the championship and the players are from: Bahrain, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Palestine, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and hosts Sultanate of Oman.

Ahmed bin Darwish al Balushi, Chairman of OCC, affirmed



Ahmed Darwish al Balushi

that the organising committee completed all the technical and logistics preparations. "Special thanks to all the committee members and to the officials at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their support and hard work towards hosting the Asian chess event. The OCC has been awarded the rights to host the prestigious event after meeting all the requirement of the Asian Chess



Federation. Oman have a capable sporting infrastructure, logistics arrangement and the qualified human resources to host the Asian event. We are looking forward to organise a successful edition of the tournament," he added.

Many top ranking men players will attend in the Asian major chess event including Lebanon's Mahmood Masarani, Juniad Suhail from Pakistan and Awlad Ihasan from Iran. UAE's player Roudha Essa al Sarkal will lead the



top ranking players in the women's category. Palestine's Sawan Eman will be second ranked while Qatar's Salma al Khalaifi will be third seed.

The chief of OCC said the national team players will compete for the top places. The national chess team who will represent Oman in the event featured 10 players from men and women teams. Salim al Amri, Salim Shamas, Manaa al Kathiri, Ameen al Ansi, Abdulrahman al Zadjali and Anas al Darwashi will be in

the men's squad. The women's team squad comprised of Anat al Ayessai, Afraa al Balushi and Al Anood al Ghafri.

The national players are currently in domestic preparatory camp under watchful eyes of Iranian and Yemeni coaches Basheer al Qudaimi and Mersad Khuda Shash. The training sessions at Al Amal club focused on raising the technical level of the players and equipping them with updated strategies of attacking.

"We are confident of our players to show top performance in the tournament. The event will be great opportunity to develop their world ranking," he said.

The tournament format will be under FIDE laws of chess and the tournament will be played according to the Swiss system 9 rounds. Each player will have 90 minutes with the addition of 30 seconds per move starting from the first move. Default time is 30 minutes. The final ranking order of the players is determined by the number of points scored.

On the sidelines of the tournament, the organising committee will organise two competitions. The first competition is for the sporting media accounts in social media for the best media coverage of the event. The second competition is a live drawing for a caption in the tournament.

Jordan defeat Oman to lift title



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

Hosts Jordan defeated Oman 1-0 in the final clash of the Jordan International friendly tournament on Monday night. At Amman International Stadium, Ihsan Haddad scored the winner for Jordan from a penalty in the 64th minute.

Iraq finished third as they edged Syria 1-0 in the third and fourth place play-off. Syria's goal was netted by Ayman Hussein in

the 27th minute.

The four nations friendly event began on Friday with participation of Iraq, Syria, Oman and hosts Jordan teams. Oman team managed to start their campaign on successful note as they defeated Iraq 4-3 on penalties after the regulation time ended in a 1-1 draw. Jordan blanked Syria 2-0 in the opening round.

In the concluding fixture of the international friendly tournament, the first half ended in a goalless

draw after both team's strikers failed to score. Various scoring attempts missed by both teams and the hosts were the better side in the opening half and then Red Warriors pressed hard in the final quarter of the half but without goals.

In the following half, Jordan players managed to break the deadlock in the 64th minute after substitute Hamza Al Dardour was impeded inside the penalty area and then Ihsan Haddad converted

the penalty to a goal.

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic started the match with a line-up that featured Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Mohammed al Musallami, Ahmed al Khamisi, Amjad al Harthi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Harib al Saadi, Arshad al Alawi, Salah al Yahyaie, Jameel al Yahmadi, Omar al Malki and Essam al Subhi. The Croatian coach tested Yazeed al Mashani and Motaz saleh who came as substitutes.



Al Faisal to round off GT World Challenge in Barcelona

BARCELONA, SPAIN: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, German team-mate Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe's Axcil Jeffries round off their maiden season in the 2022 Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS – Endurance Cup at the final round in Barcelona this weekend.

The Al Manar Racing by HRT Mercedes-AMG GT3 crew have adapted well to the new racing discipline and currently hold fourth position in the Drivers' Championship standings, the highlight of the season thus far being their memorable Silver Cup victory at the Paul Ricard circuit in France back in early June.

The early leaders in the championship will be looking for a strong performance at the 4.7km Catalunya circuit to round off a season that has seen Benjamin Goethe, Thomas Neubauer and Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer top the standings and win the title in their Team WRT Audi R8.

The Al Manar Racing trio could still overhaul the Attempto Racing Audi R8 crew of Nicolas Scholl, Alex Aka and Marius Zug and claim the runner-up spot in the rankings.

Al Zubair said: "This is the last race of the season and I am looking forward to it. It is Barcelona and this is a track that I really enjoy as well. It's crazy to think how fast the season has gone and that we are already here after five rounds. It will be difficult, like all the other rounds of the GT World Challenge.

"But, nonetheless, we have proved that, not only the car, but the team have been quick this year and we can probably get a good result to round off the year. Hopefully, the balance of performance is on our side. Let's hope we can end the season on a strong note."

Forty-nine cars line-up at the



2022 FANATEC GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE - ENDURANCE CUP

SILVER CUP - CURRENT POSITIONS (DRIVERS):

1. Benjamin Goethe/Thomas Neubauer/Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer - 100pts
2. Nicolas Scholl/Alex Aka/Marius Zug - 68pts
3. Stuart White/Konsta Lappalainen - 58pts
4. Al Faisal al Zubair/Axcil Jeffries/Fabian Schiller - 54pts
5. Tuomas Tujula/Aurelien Panis/Cesar Gazeau/Nicolas Baert - 33pts
6. Thomas Drouet/Tommaso Mosca/Casper Stevenson - 32pts
7. Jordan Love/Alain Valente/Jannes Fittje/Juuso Puhakka - 31pts

start of the weekend's action, which gets underway for the 18 Silver Cup runners with free practice from 09.00hrs to 10.30hrs on Saturday (October 1) morning. This precedes pre-qualifying on the circuit from 13.40hrs.

The two-hour qualifying sessions fire into life at 09.00hrs on Sunday and the three-hour racing finale to the season gets the green light for a rolling start at 15.00hrs.

AL MANAR RACING TRIO HOLD FOURTH SPOT IN DRIVERS' STANDINGS



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Climate change related disasters necessitate effective insurance strategy: CMA

MUSCAT: A key seminar, titled 'Middle East and North Africa on Climate Risk Supervision and Protection Gaps', organised by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in cooperation with the Insurance and Social Reserve Control Authority of the Kingdom of Morocco, began here on Tuesday. It is being attended by representatives from the two countries, as well as insurance industry officials from the MENA region.

In opening remarks, Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of the Capital Market Authority, explained that the seminar was the culmination of cooperation between the CMA and the Insurance and Social Reserve Control Authority in Morocco. It stems from an MoU signed by the two sides in March.

Supporting the seminar are the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS), the Access to Insurance Initiative (A2II), the Sustainable Insurance Forum (SIF) and the regulatory authorities in the region.

"It is our hope that this coordination and cooperation between us will continue to ensure the exchange of experiences and capacity-building in areas related



to our regulatory and supervisory competencies," Al Salmi said.

The forum, the Executive President said, comes at a pivotal time in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as countries grapple with the effects of climate change, while at the same time adopt advanced dynamic and sustainable insurance policies to adapt to these changes and mitigate their effects.

Protection of policyholders in the Sultanate of Oman is guided by three main regulatory pillars: ensuring that insurance products and services reach all segments of society, the response of the sector or market to the needs of society and the economy, and the availability of these services and products at fair prices and high quality, he said.

These pillars form part of the Authority's strategic five-year plan (2021-2025) which, among other things, envisions a 10 per cent average annual growth in the performance of the insurance sector, in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

He pointed out that with the economic and social transformation envisaged by Oman Vision 2040 and the climate changes that the world is going through, these pillars have become more sensitive and vital, especially as the Sultanate of Oman has become one of the areas prone to natural disasters as a result of climate change, especially since 2007, and thus the insurance risks and coverage have increased.

According to Siham Ramli, Director of Communication and International Relations at the Insurance and Social Reserve Control Authority in the Kingdom of Morocco, the seminar represents a valuable opportunity to examine the roadmap of the International Association of Insurance Supervisors on climate risks, and to explore the views of regulatory bodies on the challenges facing insurance markets in the Middle East and North Africa.

She added that the symposium is an occasion to promote engagement in the activities of the Access to Insurance Initiative and the Sustainable Insurance Forum on protection gaps and climate risk monitoring, noting that the development of the insurance sector and making it able to contribute to economic development requires engaging in a strategy based on cooperation between countries.

On its first day, the seminar discussed many topics related to climate risk stewardship, and the first session touched on the regulatory challenges in the MENA region, during which many challenges were discussed such as risk-based solvency frameworks, digitisation, financial inclusion and market development, as well as common issues facing insurance markets and ways to overcome them.

The seminar will conclude today with a discussion of the role of supervisors in bridging protection gaps related to climate risks, discussing the supervisory procedures followed by insurance supervisors to increase resilience in the face of climate risks, and a workshop will be held on topics related to the customer's journey and building the capacity of supervisors. — ONA

Income tax exemption for new Omani businesses supporting economic diversification

ECONOMIC STIMULUS: New firms launched between Jan 1, 2021 and Dec 31, 2022 eligible for waiver if operating in six key sectors: Industry, Tourism, Logistics, Fisheries, Agriculture & Livestock, and Mining.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 27



Scores of newly launched Omani businesses are eligible for income tax waivers spanning a total of five years, provided the focus of their operations align with key sectors that are at the heart of the Omani government's economic diversification strategy.

The gesture stems from the Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) first announced by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on March 9, 2021 as part of a comprehensive strategy to help

mitigate the adverse impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on Omani businesses and the wider economy.

It mandated, among other things, an income tax waiver for new businesses starting operations during a two-year timeframe from January 1, 2021 to December 30, 2022.

However, the incentive is available only to businesses that advance the country's economic diversification goals, it stressed.

In guidelines issued recently by the Tax Authority, clarifying

applicability and eligibility criteria, officials noted that the newly launched businesses in question should be operating in one or more of the following sectors to qualify for income tax exemption:

- (1) Industry (as defined under the GCC's Unified Industrial Regulation),
- (2) Tourism (operating hotels and tourist villages),
- (3) Logistics (significantly sized and value adding logistics activities endorsed by the Ministry of Transport,

communications and information technology),

- (4) Fisheries (fishing, processing, farming and aquaculture related),
- (5) Agriculture & Livestock Farming (farm production and processing, and related agro-industries, and
- (6) Mining (as defined under the Mining Law).

In an advisory on the Tax Authority's latest guidelines, well-known professional services firm KPMG explained that the "exemption will be

applicable only for companies established/registered in Oman in accordance with applicable laws and those that have Oman as their main centre for management or operation".

KPMG further noted that the "exemptions are applicable only on income generated from the above-mentioned specified activities.

Companies are not permitted to carry out any other activity apart from the above to claim such a tax exemption, it said, adding that, no company can have more than one tax exemption where it is subject to multiple tax exemptions laws and regulations.

To avail themselves of the waiver, eligible companies must formally write to the Tax Authority with supporting data and documents to demonstrate that they qualify for Income Tax exemption. The request shall be made before the end of the following tax year, the Tax Authority said.

Abraj Energy Services (Abraj), a leading Omani oilfield and gas services company and a wholly-owned subsidiary of OQ, has picked National Bank of Oman, Ahli Bank of Oman and EFG Hermes Holding Co to advise on its planned initial public offering (IPO), according to Bloomberg.

The offering could raise as much as \$500 million and may happen in the first quarter of 2023 though the timing might change, the business news portal revealed in a report on Tuesday.

Abraj has not made a decision about the size of the IPO, and will update stakeholders once it has, it said. Abraj is now seeking the necessary regulatory approvals for the share sale, the report said.

Abraj is a core entity in Oman's oil and gas services sector, providing a wide range of services including drilling and work over rigs as well as fracturing, cementing and coiled tubing services.

The company features an advanced fleet of drilling rigs deploying innovative and best-in-class technology. Abraj employs over 2,000 highly qualified professionals with a 93 per cent Omanisation rate.

Abraj Energy hires banks to advise on planned IPO: Report

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

OOMCO partners with OPAL to offer benefits for petroleum operators



MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will offer all companies listed with OPAL access to the OOMCO World loyalty app which is loaded with exclusive benefits. OOMCO will also partner with OPAL to deliver campaigns, workshops and events throughout the year to bring the industry together and accelerate advances in petroleum services.

Tarik al Junaidi, CEO of OOMCO, said, “As part of OOMCO’s commitment to go ‘beyond the pump’, our partnership with OPAL adds value to the everyday lives of employees working within the petroleum industry.

“OPAL has become the voice of the industry by representing 450 members, made up of oil and gas

companies, including producers and operators, contractors and suppliers, while OOMCO continues to transform the industry by offering innovative products, providing much more than fuel, and we are very proud to introduce this new way of rewarding OPAL members.”

Abdul Rahman al Yahyai, CEO of OPAL, said, “This agreement strengthens the relationship between OOMCO and OPAL as well as the role of OPAL in enhancing the petroleum industry.

“We are delighted to offer these exclusive benefits to all member companies and their employees, and we look forward to working closely with OOMCO to maximise the impact of our campaigns and events to ensure operators in Oman remain at the forefront of national plans for economic growth.”

Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens largest showroom in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: With an impressive network of over 285 outlets spread across 10 countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the largest jewellery retailers in the world, launched its largest showroom in Abu Dhabi, UAE at Mazyad Mall, Musaffah, on September 24.

The showroom was inaugurated by Yusuf Ali M A, Vice-Chairman of Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chairman and Managing Director of Lulu Group, in the presence of K P Abdul Salam, Vice-Chairman of Malabar Group, Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Ashraf Ali M A, Executive Director of Lulu Group, Mayankutty C, Senior Director of Malabar Group, other Malabar Gold & Diamonds management team members, customers and well-wishers.

Spanning across 5000+ sq ft, the new showroom at Mazyad Mall is the brand’s 12th and largest showroom in Abu Dhabi, showcasing over 30,000 jewellery designs from 20 countries in gold, diamond, precious gemstones, and platinum, across various sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Viraa, Ethnix, Precia etc.

“The new showroom at Mazyad Mall will be our largest store in Abu Dhabi, aiming to provide our



customers with a phenomenal jewellery shopping experience. The outlet will provide a plethora of over 30,000 jewellery designs curated from over 20 countries to ensure a one-stop jewellery shopping destination for our customers in Abu Dhabi and we hope to further their shopping experience with the extra amenities, including a spacious lounge and customised jewellery designing facility,” said Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director – International Operations, Malabar

Gold & Diamonds.

The outlet houses a dedicated facility for customised jewellery designing, where customers can bring to life their dream jewellery with the assistance of profession jewellery designers and skilled artisans at a reasonable price.

The showroom also has a luxurious lounge space, facilitated to provide the customers with a comfortable shopping experience.

The new showroom houses a magnificent display of skillfully crafted jewellery in 18K, 22K and

24K, ranging from lightweight daily wear to bridal jewellery in traditional as well as contemporary designs. Considering the upcoming festive season, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also launched the Pay 10 per cent advance campaign, where customers can block the gold rate by paying 10 per cent of the total amount as an advance. At the time of purchase, if the gold rate increases, customers can purchase at the booked rate and in case it reduces, customers can purchase for the lower gold rate.

BankDhofar reaffirms commitment to implement best banking practices

MUSCAT: Central to its incessant commitment to provide an unparalleled banking experience, BankDhofar continues to implement best international practices in customer service, addressing customers’ feedback and facilitating communication access via diverse channels.

Iman bint Musallam al Amri (pictured), Head of Customer Feedback at BankDhofar, reiterated the Bank’s pledge to offer an outstanding banking experience through cutting-edge products, state-of-the-art services and customised financial solutions.

“We have been maintaining a certain level of service quality that aims at fulfilling the banking needs of our customers and matches their expectations. We take their



input prudently, thoroughly analyse their feedback and consider it while designing new products and solutions to meet their respective requirements,” she noted.

“We welcome customers’ feedback via the official channels we made available. All that is taken in consideration constructively in order to enhance the quality of our services in line with the

market demands,” Iman al Amri added.

BankDhofar customers can submit their feedback and suggestions, as well as inquiries on products and services, through the number (+968) 24791111, e-mail Care@BankDhofar.com, or via social media pages and the bank’s official website www.BankDhofar.com. Maisarah Islamic Banking Services are also approachable through phone number (+968) 24775777, e-mail Care@Maisarah-Oman.com, social media pages and the official website www.maisarah-oman.com.

BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman, manifests strong presence in Corporate Banking, Retail Banking, Treasury and Project Finance.

ahlibank wins ‘Best Bank in Oman’ award

MUSCAT: In recognition of its continuous endeavour to adopt a culture of innovation and excellence across all operations that cater to individual and corporate customers, ahlibank received the coveted ‘Best Bank in Oman’ Award at the recently concluded Arab Banks Awards and Commendations of Excellence 2022. The event was organised by the World Union of Arab Bankers (WUAB), at a high-profile award ceremony held in Istanbul, Turkey, recently.

On behalf of the bank, the award was received by Jumana al Hashmi, Deputy Head — Marketing and Corporate Communications. The prestigious award was bestowed on ahlibank in acknowledgment of its exceptional performance and substantial contribution to the local and regional banking industry. The bank achieved growth in the total revenues of retail banking services, doubled the size of its assets, expanded its branch network and recorded an increased financial performance throughout the year.

Conveying appreciation to WUAB for the top recognition and expressing the bank’s delight in the impressive win, Al Hashmi of ahlibank said, “This is, indeed, a momentous occasion for ahlibank. We are pleased to be recognised by the top banking



organisation in the Arab world; it is a validation of our growing credentials as a highly preferred bank in the country. We have found our niche in the local market in a concise period, reaping benefits from our assiduously crafted growth strategy. Our vital financial metrics and performance indicators are proof of our consistent growth and overwhelming success in meeting and exceeding our customer needs. Today, our customers are guaranteed enhanced banking experiences with our suite of innovative products and services and our strategic digital transformation drive.”

Oman Water and Wastewater Services signs pact with ODP

MUSCAT: In an effort to ensure the safety of data and information related to the company, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC), a member of Nama Group, signed an agreement with Oman Data Park (ODP) Company aims at making use of cloud services in hosting the company’s data centre and disaster recovery centre.

Based on the agreement, Oman Data Park will transfer and host the data and information of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company with high efficiency and safe manner internally within the borders of the Sultanate of Oman, while this project will contribute to raise the efficiency and

effectiveness of customer service, as well as ensure the smooth flow of business at OWWSC.

Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of OWWSC, said: “Our collaboration with Oman Data Park comes in line with our role to become through an ambitious vision and firm values a leading entity in the water and west water sectors. This passion could be reached through implementing the best international practices and advanced technologies that enhance our contribution to achieving sustainable development for the Sultanate of Oman.”

Al Zakwani added, therefore, we consider the technical interaction with Oman Data Park as a



quantum leap towards enhancing our successes in developing the water and wastewater systems and facilities by accessing the best

innovative solutions in the field of data and information hosting, which assures our provision of a sustainable, safe and reliable

service to our subscribers.

Engineer Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, stated: “We are pleased to provide our high-tech services through utilising ODP’s cloud systems services, as this step reflects the confidence of various sectors’ companies and entities in ODP’s capabilities, in particular that, Oman Data Park is hosting data and information within the Sultanate of Oman, which will strengthen the information security, and increasing the added value of cloud systems in the country.”

Al Wahaibi added, “We are also proud of this level of cooperation with Oman Water and Wastewater

Services Company, where rendering services to this company can be considered as another geographical spread for our well-known services.

“This is because OWWSC undertakes the activities of the water and wastewater sector across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman except for the Governorate of Dhofar, while it was granted the concession right for developing, design, implementing, operating and maintaining drinking water and sewage facilities in all the governorates in which it provides its services. Therefore, providing professional service to such a vital company is a qualitative leap for us by all standards.”

India’s bond inclusion will be overdue and timely

A bear market might be a good time to step onto the world stage. India’s sovereign debt is widely expected to be added to the JPMorgan Emerging Market Bond index, tracked by some \$220 billion of assets under management. It would be an overdue recognition of reforms in the world’s fifth-largest economy. Inflows may be muted at first, but that isn’t a long-term problem.

The \$1 trillion sovereign debt market is similar size-wise to Brazil’s but isn’t included in major indices because of capital controls and trading barriers.



The \$1 trillion sovereign debt market is similar size-wise to Brazil’s but isn’t included in major indices because of capital controls and trading barriers.

Only one quarter of the issues are fully accessible to overseas buyers, though the number and value of issues they can buy is steadily increasing. Overall, foreigners own less than 2 per cent of the sovereign market, compared to about 10 per cent in China and over 20 per cent in Indonesia. Inclusion might quickly shepherd over \$20 billion of passive funds that track the benchmark, assuming India gets a 10 per cent weighting, matching China and Indonesia.

Its presence would also ease a concentration problem; around 70 per cent of the benchmark is currently made up of just seven countries after Russia’s eviction earlier this year. Yet New Delhi has much to do if it wants those tracking the benchmark to take their full allocation.

India can’t do much about its diminishing relative returns, however. Its 10-year bonds are yielding about 7.4 per cent and the differential with US Treasuries has narrowed by about 130 basis points to 3.7 percentage points since February; consumer price inflation is 7 per cent.

The rupee is 9 per cent weaker against the US dollar this year, and foreign reserves have fallen almost \$90 billion as the central bank defends the currency. Deficits persist in the fiscal and current accounts. Returns are further eroded by capital gains tax. Improving access and reducing red tape will be key to luring active funds; such reforms in China helped convince foreign investors to put \$350 billion into its government fixed-income market by September 2021. — Reuters



PORSCHE RACES ONTO FRANKFURT STOCK EXCHANGE

Employees on electric sports cars at the assembly line of the Porsche production site in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany. Luxury sports carmaker Porsche will this week race onto the Frankfurt stock exchange in what is set to be one of Europe’s biggest listings in years, seeking to defy recent market turbulence. Parent company Volkswagen hopes the flotation on September 29, 2022 will raise up to 9.4 billion euros (\$9.2 billion) and are targeting a valuation of up to 75 billion euros for Porsche. — AFP

New PM Liz Truss has formidable task



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Campaigning during election is always a very tough, tiring affair as the new UK Prime Minister Liz Truss would, no doubt, have experienced this summer. But if that is difficult work, it will bear little comparison to the huge tasks that lay ahead now that she holds the highest political office in a highly challenging period in the country.

A priority would be to bring the Conservative Party back together after it became divided with supporters backing the various candidates and their policies in electing a Tory party leader.

It will be remembered that the final two candidates for the prime minister’s position, Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss disagreed profoundly about how to tackle the challenges the country faces, and their supporters as well as the supporters of the other candidates, will have divided loyalties. Truss will have to find a way to bring people together.

This is a significant period for a politician who is relatively unknown to voters. In a recent survey carried out in Wales, not one person could recall something that Truss had said or done in her career, bearing in mind she was trade minister and foreign minister prior to her present position.

First impressions can at times be long lasting in politics, if she gets the tone right, she can expect to rise well in the polls. But if she doesn’t, she may find herself struggling.

She has stated that her focus will be on economic growth as a priority with forecasts suggesting a very difficult period for the economy in the next few months.

The Bank of England which has raised the rate to 2.25 per cent last week, expects inflation to reach as high as 13 per cent in the last quarter of this year.

When Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was still in its early days, in March, and Russian gas still flowed into Europe, the Office for Budget Responsibility was projecting the largest fall in a financial year since records began in 1956. It will have got worse since. Yields on government gilts have started rising sharply and so is the cost of borrowing.

Truss’ response would be that these worries further underline the need for stronger growth. Productivity gains are therefore vital if Britain is to generate the living standards it has come to expect and the tax revenues necessary to pay for the NHS.

The new prime minister’s reform agenda will require political capital to deliver and time to bring results, at a time when the

former is in short supply and people are struggling now. Regulatory reforms will need to be passed by a House of Lords free to disregard commitments not contained in the 2019 Manifesto.

Cutting taxes the poorest do not pay will not help them with rising prices, even if it attracts jobs and incentivises investment in future.

It would seem pragmatism is required, just as it was for former PM Margaret Thatcher – whom Liz Truss likes to follow – over four decades ago. It is instructive that while Thatcher is remembered for tax cuts, the early part of her time in power was characterised by tax-raising budgets, particularly in Geoffrey Howe’s 1981 Budget that introduced new taxes on petrol, North Sea oil and a windfall tax on bank deposits.

Only a few months ago, many Tories were writing Truss off. During a period of great political volatility, she has shown herself a clever operator and a strong campaigner.

The risks she took – not resigning from Cabinet and staying close to Boris Johnson – helped her to succeed in her campaign. She will need to remain strong and determined if she is to beat the challenges she faces.

Metaverse market could reach around \$500 billion by 2030

Leading global consultancy services firm Arthur D Little (ADL) has published The Metaverse, Beyond Fantasy, the latest in a series of new reports from the company running under the ‘Blue Shift’ banner, which explore the impact of new technologies on business, society and humans. The Metaverse, Beyond Fantasy looks beyond the hype and delivers a realistic picture of the Metaverse for businesses, focusing in particular on the technologies necessary to enable it.

While the Metaverse is not a new concept, the past few years have seen a rapid acceleration of both development and adoption, driven by the convergence of three industries: gaming; collaboration and productivity tools; and social media and networks.

Yet while the size of the Metaverse market is difficult to

estimate, the report emphasises that companies should not underestimate its potential importance to their business.

The report provides a cautious, low-end forecast, which estimates that the current Metaverse market, excluding infrastructure and enabling technologies, is estimated to be worth \$50 billion. These numbers are from ADL analysis based on recent credible forecasts for AR, VR, and MR software and hardware markets across multiple consumer, enterprise, and industrial segments.

The report looks at the key enabling technologies of the Metaverse, including artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain, and provides a six-layer architectural framework for understanding the Metaverse’s current development status. While the report concludes that businesses today face a



world of unconnected proto-metaverses, with technological challenges remaining, it also urges them to take steps now to understand the current market and position themselves for the future.

Dr Albert Meige, Director of Blue Shift at Arthur D Little, comments: “The Metaverse is essentially the future version of the internet, with new technologies poised to transform online usage and business

models in the same way that the smartphone revolutionised the web. And while we are still about a decade away from a complete, fully immersive version of the Metaverse, huge opportunities already exist. The

question is, how to grasp them? “This report delivers an unprecedented analysis of the technological and business maturity of the Metaverse. And some of the conclusions it reaches differ quite widely from what

other commentators have said previously.”

Speaking at the upcoming Dubai Metaverse Assembly, Thomas Kuruvilla, Managing Partner, Arthur D Little, Middle East, said: “In an accelerating shift from the classical Web to the Metaverse, there are huge opportunities for industries in the digital economy. Businesses should not underestimate the importance and potential of the Metaverse - taking steps now to understand the current market and position themselves for the future. The new report offers a realistic picture for businesses, focusing in particular on the technologies that are necessary to realise the Metaverse.”

Considering the opportunities it is useful to segment the Metaverse market into three types: consumer, enterprise, and industrial. Many real applications for the Metaverse

already exist in most sectors for consumers, enterprises, and industry. However, these are currently implemented as proto-metaverses.

Additionally, there are current infrastructure opportunities.

Taking into account the current technological challenges that still need to be overcome, The report conservatively assumes 10%-30% new market space created by further progress in Metaverse adoption up to 2025, over and above recent forecasts.

Looking ahead, technological advances are likely to transform the quality and cost of the virtual experience and lower the barriers to adoption. The technology required to realise the Metaverse as the “future of the Internet” is not likely to be available for a decade. In the meantime, the proto-metaverse of the present still offers considerable opportunities for many industries.

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#Living_with_COVID19



Creative talks inspired by city of love

Being the favourite city to many word masters, it is not a surprise that Paris inspired Sumaya al Wahaibi by its special charm. On a street walk, she was attracted by a live session of CreativeMornings, a global network of inspiring talks, named after cities and aimed at bringing youth from all over the world together. She brought the concept to Oman... **P20**

Milan Fashion Week gripped by 90s nostalgia

TECHNICOLOUR CARGO pants, leather lumberjack shirts and guest stars such as Paris Hilton, Carla Bruni, Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss — nostalgia for the 1990s swept over the just-ended Milan Fashion Week which channelled hits by Haddaway and Alizee on the runway for the spring/summer 2023 collections. Here are a few of the trends:

CARGO PANTS REWORKED
Camouflage cargo pants — emblematic of the 1990s — were reworked in delicate fabrics and shades screaming

Florida by maisons such as Fendi, which reverted to champagne silk as well as an eye-popping orange.
Versace opted for a version in deep violet as well as in pink satin for a boss-woman look favoured by Donatella while Dolce & Gabbana revisited their classic looks including ripped jeans.
DRESSES OVER TROUSERS
Another trend that made a major comeback was the dress worn over trousers.
Miuccia Prada showed transparent gowns over pants and Fendi mirrored the



same look to showcase fluid trousers, the obi and kimono tailoring.
Paris Hilton click-clacked down the runway in a shimmering pink dress with matching veil and Carla Bruni and Naomi Campbell flaunted trench coats for Tod's.
Armani, the master of the deconstructed suits, looked to India, China and Syria for inspiration with sarong-like trousers and fluid robes and the languid silk silhouette that Giorgio is

renowned for.

SPARKLE
Tops, gowns, pants and jackets in silk and satin all went back to sparkle and shine with shades that evoked the Golden Age of Hollywood.
Master showman and flamboyant couturier Roberto Cavalli turned to ivory — the staple of bygone stars like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo — while young

prodigy Matthieu Blazy showed off exquisitely worked scarves for Bottega Veneta. Prada's undulating lines had warm colours while Versace used classic lace and black in its wedding gown.

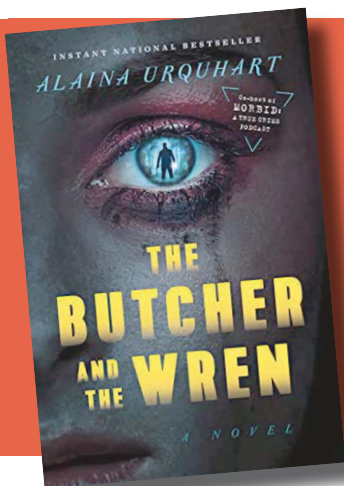
KNITTED GOWNS
Fendi and Jil Sander paraded knit gowns without motifs but with gashes in the midriff. Matthieu Blazy at Bottega Veneta had knitted jacquard dresses with trompe-l'oeil motifs inspired by futuristic Italian artists.
Fruit salad
Apples, pears, cherries both in giant and micro versions dominated along with vibrant summer shades at Benetton's pret-a-porter line.
Roberto Cavalli emblazoned grapes, palm trees and pineapples on gowns while Jeremy Scott at Moschino headlined inflation chic with inner tubes as belts on dresses and dolphin-shaped wings as glove accessories to inspire "mood buoyancy", according to Moschino.
"This symbolic uplift starts with daytime looks to stay afloat," the fashion house said.
"A direct twist on the word 'inflation' then starts to enter the relief, with pool toys, life rafts and life preservers." — **AFP**

READ

THE BUTCHER AND THE WREN

BY ALAINA URQUHART

A forensic pathologist is on the trail of a serial killer in the Louisiana bayou.



DON'T CHOOSE EXTINCTION

Frankie the Dinosaur, mascot of the United Nations Development Programme "Don't Choose Extinction" visits Times Square spreading his climate-related message in New York. — **AFP**



THE COLLECTOR

South African cosplayer Shannon Sewell, 27, dressed as the Poe Collector poses for a portrait at the 2022 Comic Con Africa, the largest pop culture, fantasy and gaming festival of the continent, in Johannesburg. — **AFP**





Vietnam's oxen race in muddy festival

THEIR STOMACHS full of eggs, beer and coconut water, Nguyen Van Liet's prized white oxen streak ahead of their rivals to the cheer of tens of thousands of spectators in Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

The bovines and their owners gathered on a hot morning in a muddy field for the annual Bay Nui ox race — a celebrated ritual of Vietnam's Khmer minority, ethnic Cambodians living mostly in the country's south.

Out of action for two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the animals — racing in pairs — appeared a little rusty, running off the tracks to the disappointment of the vast crowd.

Liet's beloved oxen couple no 03, with their big dark eyes, long legs and curvy horns, looked as gentle as any ploughing the rice fields of southern Vietnam.

But their sweet appearance belied their strength on the field.

"Of the four tournaments they have entered, they have won three," Liet proudly said before the race.

The competition — this year fought among 56 pairs of oxen — is held in An Giang province as part of the Sene Dolta festival, where the Khmer community remember their ancestors and hold a clutch of sports and art activities.

It's believed the race was once hosted by monks as an expression of gratitude to farmers who helped them plough their soil ahead of the new rice crop.

MUDDY FUN

In 2013, at a time when the average monthly income in rural areas was just \$60, Liet spent around \$700 on his young ox pair, determined to turn them into professional racers.

"As I had already raised oxen for ploughing, I could tell which ones were good and which not," Liet said, explaining he learned from his grandfather and father, who raised oxen for years to work the family's rice fields.

"A race ox must be tall, fit and flexible."

With machinery now largely doing the oxen's daily work in the Mekong Delta, many can focus on their training for months or even years before the race. They must be the perfect size — not too big and not too small — to reach their maximum speed.

To help them along, their standard fare of grass is switched out for eggs, coconut juice and beer around a month before the big day.

On the field, it's up to the drivers to get the best out of an ox.

"The oxes can distinguish between a strong and a gentle driver. A driver cannot be successful if he is more gentle than the oxes," said driver Le Minh Vuong.

As the race gathered speed, and the mud began to splatter, many could be seen using a sharp stick to prod the oxen into picking up the pace.

But the tourists were unimpressed.

"I only saw one good couple," said Lam Tai, who had travelled for the race.

"I think maybe because the oxen had been kept idle for some years. They might have lost their familiarity with the crowds and the race," he added.

The winner this year earns a Honda motorbike and a cash prize of \$890 dollars — a modest amount given the nearly \$6,000 price tag for a pair of oxen and the \$900 annual cost for feeding.

For driver Chau Duonl, the prize doesn't matter.

"It's not about money, it's fun." — **AFP**



DIGITAL TRENDS

Why 'Monkey Island' creators returned to 1990s classic game



WHEN RON GILBERT and Dave Grossman first let loose their swords, voodoo and pirates epic "The Secret of Monkey Island", it was sold on floppy disks and released for long-forgotten home PCs like the Amiga.

Three decades later, they are back at it with "Return to Monkey Island", a sequel with flashier graphics and orchestral scores that is only available as a download.

"Back in 1990 we had an office and we were all in there all day long sharing space," Grossman said in a joint interview with Gilbert.

"Now we're all remote — and not even just because of the pandemic, we're going to be remote anyway."

The two men worked together on the first two editions of the game, released in 1990 and 1991, before the group disbanded and went their separate ways.

The second edition ended on a cliffhanger that has never been resolved, with the hero, Guybrush Threepwood, facing off against his nemesis LeChuck.

And the secret alluded to in the title of the original was never divulged.

It has kept fans on tenterhooks ever since and gave Gilbert and Grossman a reason to come back to the franchise 30 years later.

"I think there's unfinished business for Guybrush because he never found the secret, and I think there's unfinished business for Dave and I as well," said Gilbert.

COLOURED BY NOSTALGIA

The fan fervour around last Monday's release showed just how strong the feelings still were for a game with blocky graphics and text prompts.

Although most of the reaction was positive, some took exception to the cartoon aesthetic of the new game and vented on social media — something 1990s creators did not have to contend with.

"Adventure game fans have always been very nice and I felt like they kind of turned a little bit," said Gilbert.

"It does affect you on some level but it's not going to change how we think about the game at all."

Slick graphics were never the appeal of "Monkey Island" — instead players solved puzzles and riddles and advanced through strange landscapes with surreal humour and pop-culture nods aplenty.

It largely set the template for adventure games that were to follow, but the "Monkey Island" franchise petered out with a few later entries published without the involvement of Gilbert.

Although the pair are polite about these subsequent editions — "we would never pooh-pooh the canon", said Gilbert — their new game picks up the story where the 1991 game ended.

But before they could even start thinking of the story, they had to negotiate licensing the rights to the game from Disney.

"It was a long process, just because lawyers get involved and then everything takes a long time," said Gilbert. A core team of 25 people then spent two years beavering away on the game, dealing not only with the rigours of game design but also 30 years of expectation among fans.

"Their memories are unrealistically coloured by nostalgia," said Grossman. "That makes a sort of an unreachable goal for us."

Instead, they decided to make a game that they themselves would enjoy.

GOLDEN AGE

Despite beginning their careers when the gaming industry was still in its infancy, Gilbert and Grossman are still hugely inspired by the current landscape.

"Nearly anyone can just get three friends together and make a game in their garage, go on the Internet and find an audience for it," said Grossman, calling it "the golden age of video games".

Their original 1990s games have already found a second life in this golden age through apps and online emulators.

And both creators are quietly confident that "Monkey Island" will continue in some form in the future. "I think we should do one of these about every 10 or 15 years," said Grossman.

"Yeah, see you in 2035," replied Gilbert. — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

LITERATURE

First edition
'Harry Potter'
hardback to be
sold for up to
£150,000

LONDON: A first edition hardback copy of "Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone" is expected to fetch up to £150,000 (\$161,775) when it goes under the hammer in November.

The book will be sold alongside franchise star Daniel Radcliffe's "Hero Wand" from the 2001 film, which is estimated to go for up to £30,000.

Both items form part of an auction organized by film and TV memorabilia company Propstore, which will include treasures from numerous blockbuster franchises.

Over 1,500 lots will be sold during the auction, due to take place from November 3-6, with the total value estimated in excess of £11million.

Among the most highly valued items include actor Christopher Reeve's complete costume from the Superman franchise (from 1978-87), which is estimated at between £250,000 and £500,000.

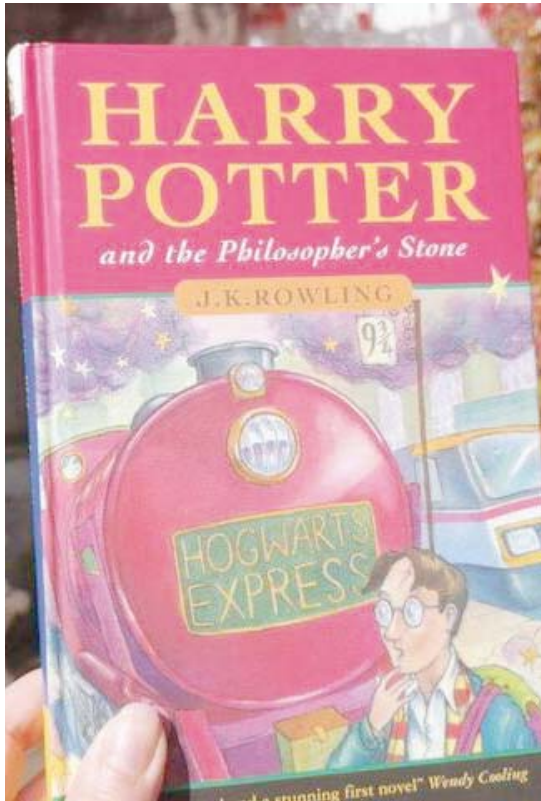
Dave Prowse's screen-matched Darth Vader gloves from the 1977 sci-fi classic "Star Wars: A New Hope" are estimated between £150,000 and £250,000.

The live auction will be held at Bafta 195 Piccadilly, in central London, as well as online or via telephone for global bidding.

Props from the James Bond, Marvel and DC franchises will also be available, as will items from other classic films including the "Shawshank Redemption" and "Gladiator."

Stephen Lane, Propstore chief executive, said: "Following our Los Angeles Entertainment Memorabilia Live Auction in June, which saw some of our best ever auction results, we're thrilled to be back again with another incredible sale."

"Featuring a collection over 1,500 lots, we have an amazing array of content, ranging from 'Fraggle Rock' to 'Friday The 13th' — there really is something for everyone." — **dpa**



ENTERTAINMENT

When movie fan-art becomes the real thing



IT'S A HOBBY that can turn into the real thing — some fan-art film posters are so good that they end up in galleries or even earn the artist a chance to work with Hollywood's biggest names.

That has been the case for Belgian artist Laurent Durieux, 52, whose pastel-toned, retro posters have their own fan base, including film-makers.

vision," he said at the Annecy Animation Festival, for which he designed the poster and where he presented his works.

"I'm saying the same thing but in a slightly left-field way. I'm looking for elements that the director, and especially the PR, have not highlighted," he added.

"The big difference is that my posters don't have to

Or for "The Shining", he opted for a tricycle featuring the number 237 — a reference to the forbidden room that is instantly recognisable to fans of the classic horror by Stanley Kubrick.

His silkscreen prints take up to three months to make and sell for around \$100 a piece, but some have since been resold for up to \$7,000.

Durieux is far from the



Durieux remembers falling out of his chair when he received a congratulatory email from Steven Spielberg for his reimagined version of the "Jaws" poster.

It was a bold move to offer a new take on one of cinema's most iconic images, but his version is a classic example of fan-art, which often makes playful, subtle references to the movie.

Rather than the terrifying shark of the original, Durieux shows a peaceful beach scene with just a hint of the danger provided by the shark fin shape on a parasol.

"I like to tell my own version of the film, while being respectful of the director's

worry about real marketing."

Commissioned by Coppola A letter from Spielberg was one thing, but another legendary director, Francis Ford Coppola, went one better by actually using Durieux's design as the cover art for the re-release of "Apocalypse Now".

"We worked hand in hand. He was a real fan," said Durieux.

His take on 1969 classic French film "The Swimming Pool" was similarly used for its re-release last year.

All his posters contain neat insider references, such as the fire station that doubles as a ghost trap for "Ghostbusters".

only artist to create his alternative posters — "fan art" is a popular genre on Instagram under hashtags such as #AlternativeMoviePosters or #altposter.

The best examples have shown up in well-established galleries from Brooklyn to Paris, while a Texas-based store, Mondo, specialises in the sector and commissioned many of Durieux's works.

A dedicated auction in July at Heritage Auctions in the United States brought in more than \$100,000. Thanks to their quality and carefully limited editions, they have become "true works of art", said Hope Grubbs, a manager at the auction house. — **AFP**

AUCTION

Rare pink diamond to go under hammer in Geneva



THE FORTUNE PINK, an exceptionally rare giant gemstone, will be auctioned in Geneva in November when it is expected to go for up to \$35 million (36 million euros), auctioneers said on Monday.

At over 18 carats, the vividly coloured gem is the largest pear-shaped pink diamond of its quality ever to be offered for sale at auction, the Christie's auction house said.

The diamond, which goes under the hammer for the first time on November 8, has been estimated at between \$25 million and

Berden, Christie's senior jewellery specialist, said.

"It's a beautiful stone, it's extremely rare to find a pink diamond, vivid pink diamond, of this size," she said.

"The colour saturation of this stone is... so difficult to find in nature, and then when you find a crystal... with that weight, with that colour, and a very good clarity, that's just really rare."

"I wouldn't know where to find another one at this moment."

While the Fortune Pink is the largest vivid pink pear-



\$35 million.

The sparkling pink teardrop-formed stone, which has been mounted on a ring flanked by a large white diamond on either side, weighs exactly 18.18 carats.

Christie's highlighted that this was considered a lucky number in Asia, where it signifies "definite prosperity", saying it expected the diamond to "garner interest from collectors across the globe."

"Weighing in at an auspicious 18.18 carats... the weight in fact brings luck to the new owner," Angela

shaped diamond to go to auction, larger cushion-shaped pink diamonds have previously gone under the hammer.

In 2018, Christie's sold the 18.96-carat Winston Pink Legacy, which raked in over \$50 million — the highest per-carat price ever paid for a stone of its kind.

The giant Raj Pink diamond, weighing a full 37.3 carats, meanwhile, failed to sell at a Sotheby's auction a year earlier, where it had been estimated at up to \$30 million. — **AFP**



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WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 28 | 2022

Creative talks inspired by city of love

By Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami

Why do you think that Paris has always been renowned as one of the most romantic places worldwide? Possibly, most people who haven't been to Paris know the city from the different movies or series, that they have watched on TV. In many movies, Paris stands as a synonym for love and romance; hence, people had the impression of Paris as the City of Love. The Eiffel Tower, in particular, what does it have to do with love and romance? Nobody understands it until one stands in front of it! Perhaps, the view of this unique landmark is what brings romantic enchantment to its visitors.

Yes, thousands of lovers from all over the world have sworn their love at the Pont des Arts bridge, where countless love locks were placed. Though these locks have been removed at some time, many lovers still go there to swear their eternal love! This signifies the fact that such a place is where love starts and gets its covenant. As a matter of fact, it has been attributed that Paris is the city of love even for birds and the city in which one loves to live. Victor Hugo, a French romantic writer, said "Breathe Paris in; it feeds the soul". Paris will always be Paris!

If truth be told, Paris has gone beyond being commonly the city of love, romance, fashion, perfumes and cosmetics. It is a place that exists in the hearts and minds of all who have been touched in some way by its magical attraction. The historic streets and artistic atmosphere inspired writers and artists to pro-

duce some of the world's greatest works of literature. As it is the city of love, Paris is a place of culture, philosophy and literature as well. Audrey Hepburn, a British actress and fashion icon were right to claim "Paris is always a good idea".

Being the favourite city to many word masters, it is not a surprise that Paris inspired Sumaya al Wahaibi by its special charm to the heart and mind alike. On a street walk, she was attracted by a live session of CreativeMornings, a global network of inspiring talks, named after cities and aimed at bringing youth from all over the world together. All its sessions are conducted under one theme based on an annual plan shared worldwide.

The CreativeMornings initiative was first introduced in 2008 in New York in the USA and currently is spread in 60 countries around the world. Muscat is one of the lucky cities to host this outstanding initiative.

Being inspired and attracted by CreativeMornings, Sumaya applied to the global network to bring the experience to Oman and made it possible by end of 2019. Hence, she managed to conduct the kick-off session of CreativeMornings Muscat Chapter in January 2020 and from April 2020 until July 2021 continued online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The monthly sessions and workshops touch on various topics on youth-related issues, sports, health, economy and other spheres of life.

CreativeMornings Muscat Chapter, founded by Sumaya al Wahaibi, is backed by a group of volunteers. All are tirelessly contributing to the success of this initiative

locally since its inspection two years back. Attending any of these sessions, which are conducted in different parts of the country, is subject to pre-registration. Despite the Chapter's maturity, all its sessions have been very well received, attracting a remarkable crowd of people. "This series of insightful knowledge-sharing sessions bring inspirational talks delivered by experts in various fields, targeting youth, students and public too", Sumaya stated.

"The philosophy of CreativeMornings states that everyone is creative and inspiring! It mirrors the belief in the power of community, face-to-face connections, sharing expertise and learning from others. Its sessions attract people who are passionate and confident that they will inspire one another, and stimulate change among individuals and groups in neighbourhoods and cities", she explained.

On the sideline of the monthly sessions, CreativeMornings Muscat Chapter introduced and supported different awareness campaigns and training programmes targeting mostly youth. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth introduced the "Purple Thought" training programme, aimed at promoting creative industries and cultural heritage concepts as well as entrepreneurship and digital arts through training workshops. This programme, which attracted 15 Omani youth of the age group (18 -30), was endorsed and supported by the Chapter. Further, CreativeMornings Muscat Chapter joins hands with different government and private bodies to commemorate various occasions and events via a range of activities.



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