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33 HOTEL PROPERTIES TO LAUNCH IN OMAN DURING 2023: REPORT



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NEOLITHIC VILLAGE DISCOVERED IN FRANCE AFTER 150 YEARS OF RESEARCH



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BRISK STARTS FOR ALCARAZ, MEDVEDEV



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KYRGYZSTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic on the occasion of his country's Independence Day anniversary. In his cable, Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Japarov and the people of Kyrgyzstan. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF MALAYSIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah of Malaysia on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, wishing the friendly people of Malaysia further progress and welfare. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Christine Kangaloo of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on her country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Kangaloo and the friendly people of her country. — ONA



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40 PROJECTS TO BOOST FOOD SECURITY

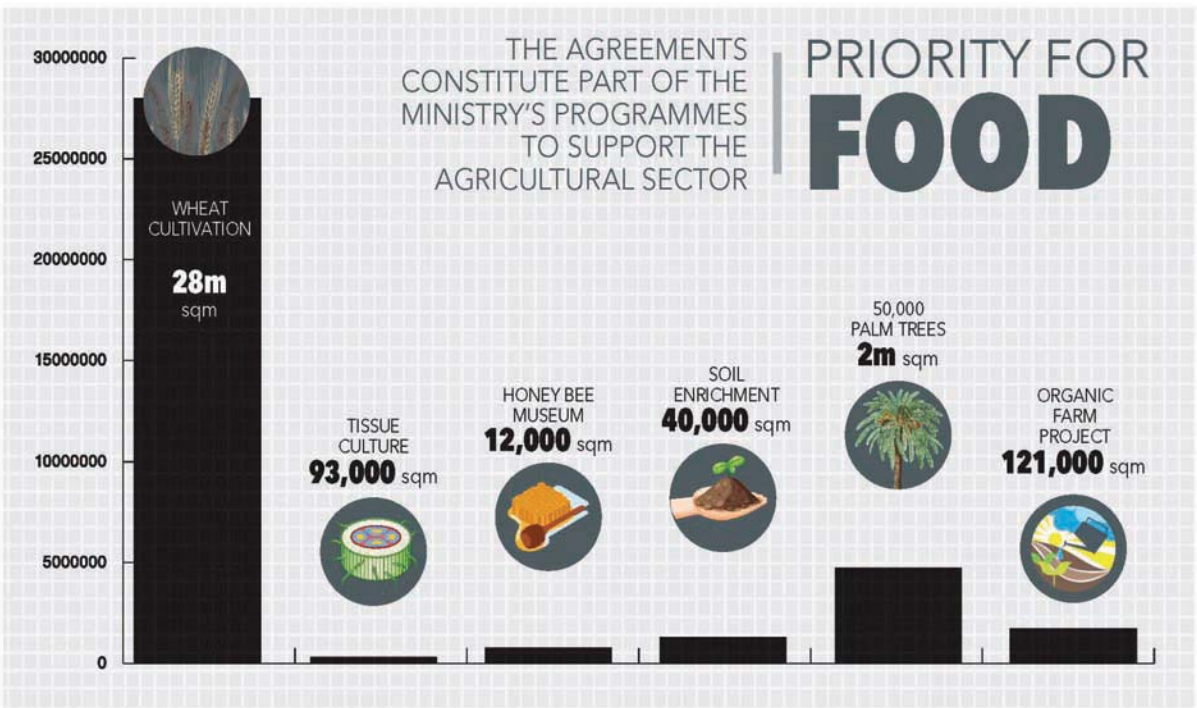
QASIM AL MAASHANI/ONA
SALALAH, AUG 30

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Wednesday signed 40 usufructs to carry out food security and wheat production projects in the Governorate of Dhofar.

The agreements constitute part of the ministry's programmes to support the agricultural sector in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The agreements were signed by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The agreements included 37 contracts for wheat cultivation



in Al Najd agricultural district in Dhofar Governorate, on an area of 28 million sqm to the tune of RO 5.5 million. This is in addition to the three contracts covering tissue

culture and plant nurseries in the wilayats of Salalah and Barka. These had an investment value of RO 3.5 million and they cover a total area of about 93,000 sqm.

So far in 2023, a total of 30 usufruct contracts worth about RO 1,050,000 were signed for investment in farming lands affiliated to the Office of Al Najd

Agricultural Area Development. They deal with a total area of about 1,260,000 sqm.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning signed 6 usufruct contracts to establish agricultural projects in four governorates. The contracts had a total value of more than RO 32 million and the projects cover an area of more than 3 million sqm.

In the Governorate of Al Batinah South, a contract was signed to establish a honey bee museum in the Wilayat of Barka on an area of more than 12,000 sqm.

The contract, worth RO 1,250,000, provides for the setting up of an exhibition, museum and honey bee institute with different integrate sections, including main trees that provide a suitable habitat for the honey bees.

SEE ALSO P13



BOOMING ROSE BUSINESS

The production of perfumes and essential oils at the Business and Incubators Centre of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, from its opening until the end of the first half of 2023, stood at 60,000 bottles of distilled white rose water, spray and frankincense, locally known as (Luban) water spray. **DETAILS ON P3**

Military coup in Gabon, president under house arrest

LIBREVILLE: Rebel officers in Gabon on Wednesday announced they had seized power following disputed elections in which President Ali Bongo Ondimba, whose family has ruled the oil-rich state for more than 55 years, had been declared winner.

The claimed takeover sparked condemnation from the African Union (AU) and alarm from Nigeria over "contagious autocracy" in a continent where the military have seized power in five other countries since 2020.

Bongo, 64, who took over from his father Omar in 2009, was placed under house arrest and one of his sons arrested for treason, the coup leaders said.

In a dramatic pre-dawn address, a group of officers declared "all the institutions of the republic" had been dissolved, the election results cancelled and the borders closed. "Today, the country is going through a serious institutional, political, economic and social crisis," according to the statement. **SEE ALSO P6**



Residents gesture and hold a Gabon national flag as they celebrate in Libreville on Wednesday. — AFP

Medical team treats fetus thyroid congenital deficiency



MUSCAT: A specialised team from the Royal Hospital and Al Nahda Hospital succeeded in conducting a complex operation on a fetus suffering from a tumour that led to congenital hypothyroidism during pregnancy.

The team comprised consultants, specialists and nursing staff from the two hospitals' departments of obstetrics and gynaecology, intensive care for premature babies and ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat).

Dr Shamsa bint Mohammed al Hinaiyah, Consultant in Embryology, Pregnancy and

Childbirth at the Royal Hospital, told Oman News Agency (ONA), that the operation required the insertion of a ventilator tube after surgically pulling out the head.

She added the operation was scheduled and studied carefully, noting that, after birth, the newborn was transferred to the intensive care unit (ICU) where the baby showed stable signs of life.

Dr Shamsa pointed out that the team followed up on the baby's condition and performed TV and radiological scans to ensure the case's diagnosis as congenital hypothyroidism.

She noted that the baby

received appropriate treatment for about a month and was later discharged by the ICU in good condition, while the endocrinology department maintained regular follow-up of the condition.

Dr Alia bint Yousef al Madhaniyah, Consultant in pregnancy and obstetrics and director of the obstetrics and gynaecology department at the Royal Hospital, said that three successful operations were conducted after this rare occurrence, thanks to the timely response and cooperation of Al Nahda Hospital's ENT department. — ONA



Forum highlights strategies for responsible citizenship, identity

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 30

The 3rd Gulf Forum on Family Policies, themed ‘Practicing Responsible Citizenship and Identity in the GCC Countries’, concluded in Salalah on Wednesday. The three-day event explored key public policies and successful social strategies related to citizenship, identity, family, community cohesion, and stability in the Gulf region.

The forum generated several recommendations aimed at strengthening social policies and solidifying responsible citizenship and identity across GCC nations.

One notable proposal was to reinforce and promote values such as loyalty, belonging, and national identity. These principles foster social cohesion and stability, underscoring the importance of ongoing cooperation, knowledge exchange, and experience sharing among GCC nations.

The forum also emphasised



the need to revitalise responsible media, particularly on new media platforms. Encouraging purposeful content and raising awareness about preventive measures are essential for preserving the authentic Gulf, Arab, and Islamic identity. The media’s role in boosting cultural and national awareness, supporting artistic productions that highlight citizenship and identity, and adapting educational curricula to encompass Arab history and cultural heritage was

also highlighted.

In addition, the forum recommended strengthening student exchange programmes between Arab countries to promote understanding and respect.

It stressed nurturing patriotic sentiment in new generations through the national educational system and enhancing the role of civil society organisations and the private sector in implementing social policies. These actions aim to spread the concepts of loyalty,

belonging, and national identity.

The forum underscored the importance of supporting research and studies that explore citizenship and identity in the Gulf region. It advised encouraging collaboration between universities and research centres to exchange insights on these matters at regional levels. Lastly, delegate proposed a Gulf-focused study on the challenges faced by families in the digital realm, with the goal of identifying and addressing these issues for a safer digital experience.

Temperatures in Sharqiyah South to come down

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Oman Met Office has announced the mountainous areas of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah North likely to be affected by downward winds, which may reach higher than 35 knots.

A rain alert has also been issued for areas across the mountainous Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North and Al Sharqiyah North governorates.

The expected rainfall is between 10-25, and the downdraft wind ranges between 20-35 knots.

Be cautious, says Oman Met Office, due to dust

rising and flash floods.

While monsoon cloud activity and drizzle were experienced in Dhofar, moderate temperatures were recorded in the coastal areas of Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta. Ras al Hadd recorded a maximum of 26, Masirah 29 and Al Duqm 36 degrees Celsius.

Earlier, Oman Met Office had warned about The potential for low clouds and fog to form during the late night and early morning period, accompanied by a decrease in the level of horizontal visibility, which had begun from Sunday evening and to last until Wednesday on the coasts of the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman (Al Batinah South and North, Musandam and Muscat) with chances of occasional light rain.



OMAN WINS ACCOLADES AT ARAB THEATER FESTIVAL

MUSCAT: Al Bun Theatre troupe has won the best script, best direction and best supporting actor awards at the 14th edition of Loyalty for the Arab Theater Festival, held in Tunisia. — ONA

Six injured in Samayil commercial centre fire



MUSCAT: Six people were injured as the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDA) in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate managed to control a fire that broke out in a commercial centre in the Wilayat of Samayil. The team was able to evacuate people from the building. Emergency care was provided to the injured (moderate and light injuries) and they were taken to the hospital.

ICCA Middle East Summit 2023 kicks off



MUSCAT: The Middle East version of the International Congress and Convention Association’s (ICCA) meeting, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat on Wednesday.

At the two-day event, held under the theme ‘Forging a Collective Path to a Prosperous Future’, Oman is represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. More than 120 local and regional experts are taking part in

the meeting.

By showcasing successful experiences and future thinking about the conference sector, the summit explores various opportunities and paves the way for startups to learn about this sector.

The meeting focuses on the unexploited potential of emerging investment destinations and means of expanding the scope of entrepreneurship. It also outlines the economic impact and revenues gained from the

conference tourism sector.

Khalid bin Waleed al Zadjali, Director of Oman Office of Conferences at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that Oman’s hosting of this meeting underscores the country’s keenness on establishing a high-level sector for hosting events.

Oman is looking forward to developing the conference sector locally and regionally and forging strong partnership with the ICCA, he added.

For his part, Said bin Salim

al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, said that Oman has developed proper infrastructure to attract event tourism. An example of this infrastructure is Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, which provides spacious grounds and large halls fully equipped to host high-level events, he added.

The meeting was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidi, Under-secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism. — ONA

Restoration work of Harat Al Shurafa in full swing

MUSCAT: In an attempt to keep craftsmanship alive and develop it into a tourist landmark, locals and community organisations have exerted tireless efforts to preserve historic buildings and neighbourhoods in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi.

Harat Al Shurafa, one of the accessible historic neighbourhoods in the wilayat, has triggered locals to revive the place and turn it into a tourist attraction that would boost tourism.

The Harat, which comprises a number of old houses and a masjid, is undergoing restoration works.





MoE implements programme in English language

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, represented by the Human Sciences Curricula Department, is implementing the training programme for the third and fourth grade curricula from the English language series 'Team Together Oman'. The programme continues for five days and targets English language trainers.

The programme aims to introduce participants to the

third and fourth grade curricula of the international series, the most important contents of the two curricula and their features. It also aims to provide participants with the necessary skills to teach the two curricula to the target group of first-year teachers in training programmes in the various educational governorates.

Dr Moza bint Hamdan al Muqbali, an English language trainer in North Al Batinah

Governorate, spoke about her participation in the programme. "Our benefit from the programme lies mostly in forming a deep understanding of the principles on which the new curriculum is based, and the mechanisms of its application with young learners. On the other hand, the programme relied in its implementation on a group of large number of training activities," she said.

Amr bin Amer al Diffai, assistant trainer at the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate Educational Training Centre, said: "The programme for the third and fourth grades comes as a continuation of the programme that began last year. It provides an overview of the new curriculum and the strategies it contains to enhance the learning process for students and facilitate the delivery of content and language.

Sultanate of Oman to take part in COP28

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The Sultanate of Oman will take part in the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), which will take place from November 30 to December 12 in Dubai.

Oman's participation in the global conference undermines its commitment to environmental protection and to the most pressing global challenges of our time. It ensures a transparent and inclusive process in the lead-up to COP28.

The upcoming COP28 Presidency will hold open consultations on thematic areas and sequencing, inviting inputs from the broad mix of stakeholders to attend the conference during the fortnight of the event.

The Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP28), which will be held at the Expo City Dubai, aims at uniting the world towards agreement on bold, practical and ambitious solutions to global environmental issues and builds upon the previous successes and paves the way for future ambition to tackle the global challenge of climate change effectively.

The United Nations

Climate Change Conferences are yearly conferences held in the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which serve as the formal meeting of the UNFCCC parties (Conference of the Parties, COP) to assess progress in dealing with climate change.

The COP28 also aims to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol to establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in 2005. Since then, the conferences have also served as the "Conference of the Parties Serving as the Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol" (CMP).

The conference also allows parties to the convention, not parties to the protocol, to participate in protocol-related meetings as observers. From 2011 to 2015, the meetings were used to negotiate the Paris Agreement as part of the Durban platform, which created a general path towards climate action.

Since the first UN Climate Change Conference, which was held in 1995 in Berlin, various countries have hosted the Global Summit.



DID YOU KNOW OMAN WAS ONCE CLOSE TO EQUATOR?

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The Sultanate of Oman has gone through many climatic conditions. Learning this part of history means understanding the earth and its movements and plates shifting. This history is narrated at the Oman Across Ages Museum located in Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

At that time, Oman was covered by ice and could have been near the equator. The story goes back to 700 million years ago. The official explanation by the Museum say: "The moving ice sheets brought together rock fragments from different regions of the earth. Although Oman was located near the equator

700 million years ago, it was covered by ice, suggesting that the earth's surface was entirely or nearly entirely frozen."

The diamictite found in Mirbat is from 700 million years ago. But dating back further to 800 is the granite found in Mirbat. "And this explains the forming of the Arabian plate," states the Museum.

Granite is among Oman's oldest rocks. The Museum explains that it was created by the slow crystallisation of magma beneath the earth's surface. They consist mainly of quartz, feldspar and mica. According to the experts, this combination usually gives granite a red, pink or grey colour in which dark mineral grains are visible. Around 700 million years ago, the earth saw the

appearance of the first organisms.

Bacteria were the first form of life on earth. Emerging in shallow waters around 700 million years ago, they formed mats and domes - stromatolites.

Bacteria produced oxygen and thus created the conditions needed for the rise of multi-celled organisms. The sample of the bacterial mat is also sampled at the Museum. The proof of the glazier actions is a boulder found in Al Huqf dated 32 million years ago.

This boulder features grooves and lines caused by the grinding action of glaciers as they carved their way across the landscape millions of years ago when Oman was close to the South Pole!

Jabal Akhdhar business centre produces 60,000 aroma bottles

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The production of perfumes and essential oils at the Business and Incubators Centre of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) in Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, from its opening until the end of the first half of 2023, amounted to about 60,000 bottles of distilled white rose water, spray and frankincense, locally known as (Luban) water spray.

Al Azhar bin Saif al Zakwani, a technician at the ASMED Business and Incubators Centre in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, said: "The processes of manufacturing aromatics go through several stages, starting with harvesting products and placing them in the distillation device, then the process of condensing the aromatic substance begins, after which the distilled water is left. The distilled product will be cooled for one day, and on the next day, it is bottled and marketed." He explained that there is a study



to open new production lines for other products, including Myrtus communis water, locally known as "Yas", Coleus amboinicus water, locally known as "Zamuta", Tapiscia water, locally known as "Alalan", clove and cinnamon water, among others.

He added, "The centre includes

a number of departments, including a training hall for distilling aromatic plants and extracting essential oils, a training department for entrepreneurs and craftsmen, and the Omani Craftsmen House to display the centre's and craftsmen's products (oils, perfumes, textiles, pottery,



silver, etc.), in addition to housing 2,700 rose trees of various varieties." He pointed out that aromatic plants, such as roses and frankincense, are distilled in the centre. He further said that the profession of distilling aromatic plants is one of the developed craft industries that benefit

environmentally from nature's plants.

He added that ASMED is keen to improve its mechanisms and various production processes that depend on seasonal crops, such as roses, including permanent distillation of frankincense oil and water. He affirmed that the

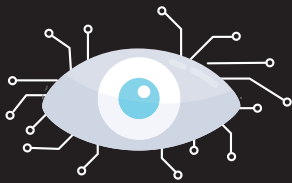


profession of distillation is a source of income for many craftsmen.

Al Zakwani said that products of the ASMED Business and Incubators Centre are sold in many local and foreign markets as popular local products, in addition to presenting them as souvenirs. — ONA



UNDER THE SHADOW OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



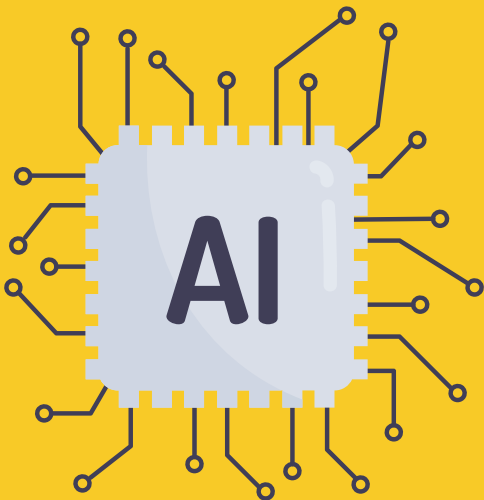
KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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No other generation has seen as much transition as the generation of those who are in their 50s or late 60s. They came across changes in the academic syllabus from traditional to modern, and when they hit the job market, computerisation came as the biggest challenge of the century; then came the Internet, mobile phones, smartphones, and the latest in the line is Artificial Intelligence (AI). The transformation of Artificial Intelligence from conference room discussions to everyone’s screens is as fast as its ability to perform tasks.

“No wonder a technology launched on November 30, 2022, grabbed everybody’s attention. More than its advantages, people are worried about the job losses it can cause across the sectors. It is performing secretarial jobs, writing letters, making proposals and many other things, which otherwise would have taken long hours to prepare,” said Vir Vijay, an IT professional and Director of Provise Integrated Solutions.

He, however, highlighted some of the central questions and concerns surrounding the impact of AI on society and the economy. The potential effects of AI on productivity, economic growth, inequality, and the role of humans are complex and multifaceted.

“Experts in the field claim AI has the potential to boost productivity and economic growth significantly. By automating routine and repetitive tasks, AI can free up human



labour for more creative and strategic work. It can also enhance decision-making through data analysis and predictive capabilities. However, freeing human labour can also create a transition because people can’t be trained in AI so early and so quickly,” he said.

Data interpretation is another issue. The extent to which AI will drive economic growth depends on factors such as the level of AI adoption, the rate of technological advancement, and the ability of businesses and governments to integrate AI effectively into existing processes. All these are time-consuming processes, but it seems the AI is in a hurry to grab everything.

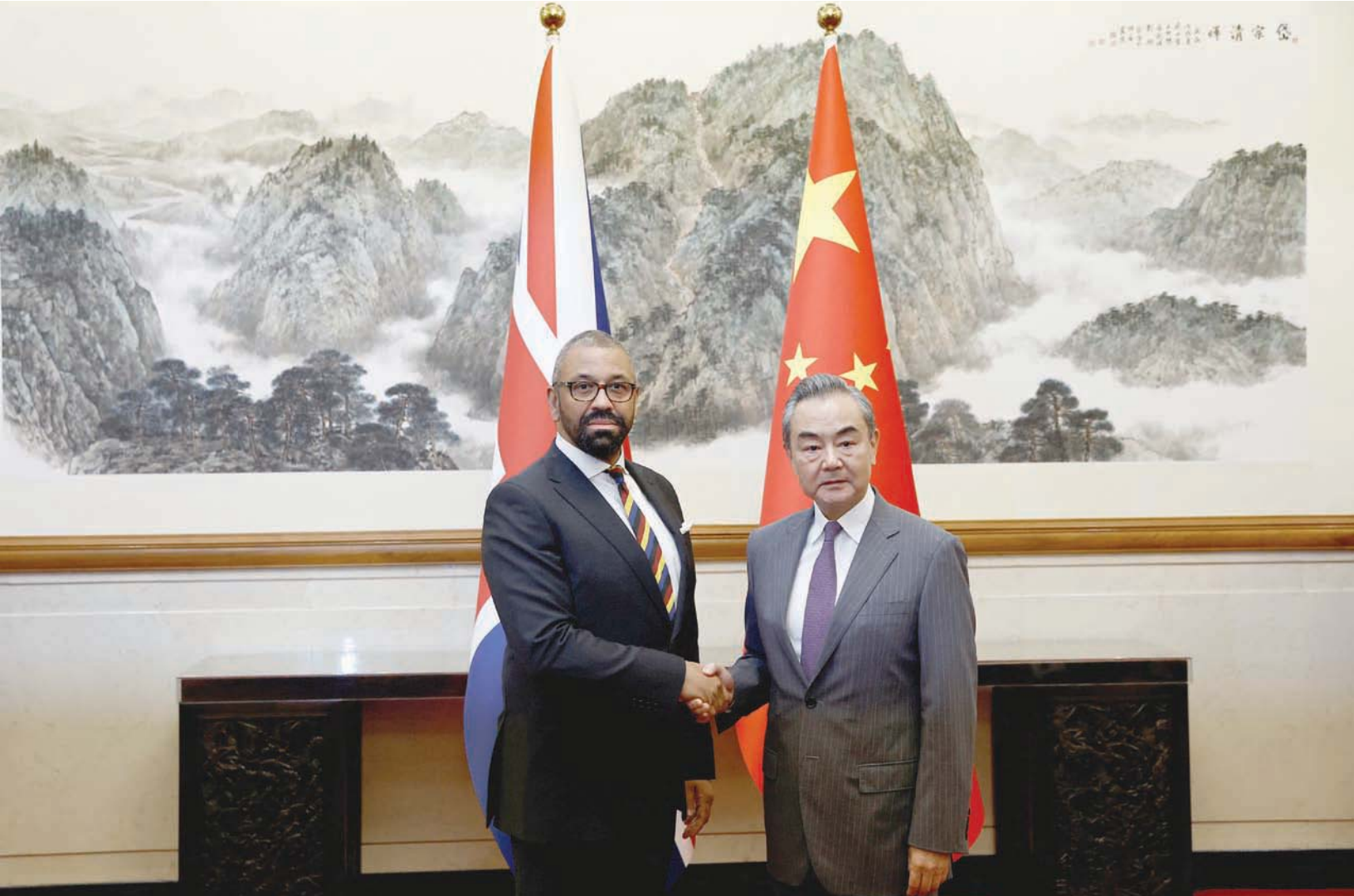
The rapid advancement of AI also raises ethical and social questions. These include concerns about biases in AI systems, potential job displacement, privacy issues related to data collection, and the concentration of power among tech giants. Addressing these concerns will be essential for shaping a future where AI benefits society.

Dr Harish Kumar, a General practitioner with many years of experience in Oman, has genuine concerns. “We are hearing much about intelligence and practising as much as possible. Medical science has benefitted a lot. Till now things are under control because the intelligence and experts are working in coordination. There are chances of misuse if there is lack of coordination and things go into wrong hands.”

He, however, said every change brings some transition for which people have to prepare and act accordingly. “Only time will tell the real direction of the Artificial Intelligence,” he said.



China, Britain make tentative steps to repair relations



British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shake hands before a meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. – Reuters

BEIJING: China and Britain made tentative steps to repair relations on Wednesday, with Beijing promising better ties if both showed “mutual respect” and London saying it wants to keep lines of communication open, including between the countries’ leaders.

Foreign minister James Cleverly is the first senior British minister in five years to visit China, a trip he hopes will reset ties between the two countries after years of tension over security, investment and human rights.

The foreign secretary has argued it would be a mistake to isolate the world’s second-largest economy, but some Conservative lawmakers say the trip looks like an expression of British weakness.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi welcomed Cleverly and said both countries should move forward, rather than retreating, particularly in working together to boost the global economy.

“I believe that as long as both

I believe that as long as both sides adhere to mutual respect, equal treatment, view each other’s development objectively, and enhance mutual understanding and trust, Sino-British relations will be able to eliminate all unnecessary interference and obstacles

WANG YI
Chinese Foreign Minister

sides adhere to mutual respect, equal treatment, view each other’s development objectively, and enhance mutual understanding and trust, Sino-British relations will be able to eliminate all unnecessary interference and obstacles,” Wang said during the meeting’s opening remarks in front of reporters.

Cleverly responded by saying he appreciated having the ability to raise points of disagreement, telling Wang he appreciated him

listening to them “carefully and professionally,” but he also wanted to raise opportunities.

“It is important for us to maintain these channels of communication at our level as minister-to-minister, ministers in upper government departments,” he said. “And, of course ultimately, it is important for our prime minister and your president to have the opportunity to speak directly as well.”

A possible meeting between

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak could come at the G20 summit in India next month, but the British leader told broadcasters his schedule for the meeting had yet to be finalised.

Sunak, under pressure from lawmakers — including former Prime Minister Liz Truss — who want London to toughen its policy on China and to declare the country a threat to British national security, defended his approach.

“It’s perfectly possible to engage with China at the same time as being very robust in standing up for our interests and our values,” Sunak said.

The foreign ministry said in a statement that Cleverly had raised issues such as what he described as the damage caused by the Beijing-imposed National Security Law in Hong Kong, called for the lifting of sanctions on some British lawmakers, and emphasised the importance of peace and stability.

— Reuters

IMF warns climate shocks may increase conflict deaths

NAIROBI: Climate change threatens to exacerbate conflict in fragile nations across the globe and lead to increased deaths, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a report published on Wednesday.

While climate shocks alone may not trigger new unrest, the Washington-based IMF said, they “significantly worsen conflict, compounding fragility” such as hunger, poverty and displacement.

By 2060, conflict deaths could increase by 8.5 per cent as a share of the population in so-called fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS), and by up to 14 per cent in those nations facing an extreme increase in temperatures.

In all, 39 countries that are home to nearly one billion people and 43 per cent of the world’s poor are classified as FCS by the World Bank.

More than half of these nations, which are disproportionately burdened by climate change, are in Africa.

Over 50 million more people in these countries could be driven into hunger by 2060 due to lower food production combined with higher prices.

The IMF said it was vital that leaders gathering next week in Kenya for the first African Climate Summit come up with solutions for vulnerable nations.

“Each year, three times more people are affected by natural disasters in fragile states than in other countries. Disasters in fragile states displace more than twice the share of the population in other countries,” the blog said.

The IMF said that by 2040, these nations could face 61 days a year of temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius on average — four times more than other countries.

“Extreme heat, along with the more frequent extreme weather events that come with it, will endanger human health and hurt productivity and jobs in key sectors such as agriculture and construction.”

The September 4-6 summit in Nairobi aims to address the urgent climate challenges facing the continent of 1.4 billion people and comes ahead of the next round of UN climate talks in the United Arab Emirates in November and December.

“In the lead-up to COP28 in Dubai, it is essential to consider climate and conflict together,” International Crisis Group senior analyst Nazanine Moshiri said ahead of the summit.

“We only need to consider the situation in the Horn of Africa, where climate change and conflict feeds further instability with five consecutive poor rainy seasons, unprecedented floods and the world’s worst food emergency,” Morishi added. — AFP



The Horn of Africa has been hit by the worst drought in four decades. — AFP file photo

US Space Force looks to boost allied tracking of N Korea missiles

SEOUL: The US and South Korean militaries want to more closely integrate their systems for tracking North Korean missile launches, an effort that may soon see more cooperation with Japan as well, US Space Force officials said on Wednesday.

Led by a small contingent of US Space Force personnel — the branch’s first official component set up overseas — the allies see closer space integration as key to better tracking North Korean threats and responding to a conflict.

US President Joe Biden agreed with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at an Aug. 18 summit that by the end of this year the three countries would share North Korea missile warning data in real time.

The exact details of that trilateral cooperation are being worked out at higher levels, Space Force

officials told reporters at a briefing at Osan Air Base, south of Seoul.

“My understanding is there are future bilateral agreements and possibly trilateral agreements that are in the works, especially on the missile warning piece... with sharing that data,” said Major Matt Taylor, deputy commander of US Space Forces — Korea.

There are gatherings planned for personnel to collaborate and share processes and procedures, he said.

“None of those details and have been refined or decided at this point but those discussions are being had,” Taylor added.

So far the Space Force component in South Korea, which began operating in December, has focused on closer integration with the South Koreans and ensuring that US troops there have more access to space-based assets, the officials said.

Missile tracking data, including information from the US Space-based Infrared System (SBIRS), which can detect missile launches, is already being automatically shared with US allies through early warning systems, said Master Sergeant Shawn Stafford.

South Korea and Japan rely mostly on land and sea-based radars to track launches, but South Korean Air Force Space Operation Squadron commander Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jong Ha said that adding space-based capabilities would provide a “3D” view of the threats.

Given South Korea’s push to develop more anti-ballistic missile systems, gaining data from US and possibly Japanese systems would help it detect targets, said Tal Inbar, a missile and space expert with Israel’s Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies.

— Reuters



US Air Force B-1B bombers and South Korean Air Force F-35A take part in a joint air drill, South Korea. — Reuters file photo



Gabon officers declare military coup, President Bongo detained



People celebrate in support of the putschists in the street of Libreville, Gabon. — Reuters

LIBREVILLE: Military officers in oil-producing Gabon said they had seized power on Wednesday and had put President Ali Bongo under house arrest, stepping in minutes after the Central African state's election body announced he had won a third term.

The officers who said they represented the armed forces declared on television that the election results were cancelled, borders were closed and state institutions were dissolved, after a tense vote without international observers that was set to extend the Bongo family's more than half century in power.

Hundreds of people celebrated the military's intervention, while

France, Gabon's former colonial ruler which has troops stationed in the African nation, condemned the coup. In another statement, the officers said they had detained Bongo, who took over in 2009 from his father Omar, who had ruled since 1967.

Opponents say the family has done little to share the state's oil and mining wealth with its 2.3 million people. Violent unrest had broken out after Bongo's disputed 2016 election win and there was a foiled coup attempt in 2019.

The Gabon officers, calling themselves The Committee of Transition and the Restoration of Institutions, said the country faced "a severe institutional, political,

economic and social crisis". They said the August 26 vote was not credible.

It was not clear who was leading the coup, but television images showed a man in fatigues and a green beret held aloft by soldiers shouting "Oligui president", a possible reference to Brice Oligui Nguema, the head of Gabon's Republican Guard.

Despite the brief sound of gunfire in the capital shortly after the officers made their first announcement, the streets of Libreville were calm until celebrations erupted. Police officers fanned out to guard major city intersections.

Bongo, 64, was last seen in

public casting his vote on Saturday. Before the vote, he had been seen in public looking healthier than more frail television appearances after he suffered a stroke in 2019.

"We condemn the military coup and recall our commitment to free and transparent elections," French government spokesman Olivier Veran said.

The coup creates more uncertainty for France's presence in the region. France has about 350 troops in Gabon. Its forces have been kicked out of Mali and Burkina Faso after coups there in the last two years. China called for a peaceful resolution and Russia said it hoped for a swift return to stability. — **Reuters**

Floods drown hope in Pakistan's Punjab villages

OKARA: The coursing floods in eastern Pakistan first swallowed corn crop, then the cattle that fed on it. Swaths of Pakistan's breadbasket were inundated this month, with at least 130,000 people evacuated, after the Sutlej river burst its banks and spilled over hundreds of villages and thousands of acres.

People retreated to the roof to escape the rising water, before fleeing for their lives by boat.

"We didn't bring any of our belongings with us, everything we own is abandoned back there," said Bibi, who guesses her age in the 30s, from a relief camp inside a school in Mandi Ahmedabad, a village in eastern Punjab province.

With the water slowly receding, a ramshackle armada of 40 boats makes twice-daily food and aid deliveries to 80 water-bound villages where men perch on roofs guarding sodden possessions.

The floodwaters are still some

2.4 metres deep, and the boats skim past the tops of waterlogged corn stalks blanched by the sun.

Mud houses lie in ruins, with tumbled walls pooled in stagnant water, in Falak De Bheni, a village surrounded by drowned fields of sesame and rice.

"I don't want to plant a crop here next year, my heart can't bear it," Muhammad Tufail, 38, said as he stood at his ruined door surveying the damage.

More than 175 people were killed in Pakistan in rain-related incidents since the monsoon season began in late June, mainly due to electrocution and buildings collapsing, emergency services have reported.

Large tracts of rural Pakistan were ruined by record monsoon floods last summer that scientists linked to climate change and from which it is still recovering.

A third of the country was submerged and 1,700 people were killed, while eight million were displaced. — **AFP**



This photograph shows an aerial view of a village wrecked by floods in the Okara district of Punjab. — AFP

Japan PM eats 'safe' Fukushima fish, "Not toxic" says IAEA

TOKYO: Japan's prime minister ate what he called "safe and delicious" fish from Fukushima on Wednesday, days after wastewater was released from the area's crippled nuclear plant into the Pacific.

A video clip showing Fumio Kishida eating Fukushima fish, published on social media by his office, comes after China banned all seafood imports from its neighbour following the discharge that began on August 24.

"This is very good," Kishida said as he chewed on a slice of flounder sashimi, calling on viewers to enjoy "safe and delicious" Japanese seafood to support the northeastern region.

Meanwhile, the tritium concentration in wastewater being released from Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant is under expected

levels and poses no risk to the population, the head of the UN atomic watchdog said.

"So far we have been able to confirm that the first releases of these waters do not contain any radionuclide at levels that would be harmful," Rafael Grossi said during a visit to Stockholm.

Twelve years after one of the world's worst nuclear accidents, Japan began releasing the wastewater into the Pacific Ocean last week, as it gradually discharges around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several decades.

"The beginning has been according to what we were expecting... but we will continue to monitor... until the last drop is released," Grossi said.

The IAEA said on August 24 that its independent analysis of



Police and security personnel stand outside the entrance of the Japanese embassy in Beijing. — AFP

the tritium concentration in the diluted water being discharged was "far below the operational limit of 1,500 becquerels per litre."

The discharge, equivalent to more than 500 Olympic swimming

pools, is expected to take decades and will allow engineers to start removing highly dangerous

radioactive fuel from three wrecked reactors.

Bricks and eggs have been thrown at Japanese schools and consulates in China and Tokyo has advised its nationals there to keep a low profile. Businesses in Japan have also been swamped with nuisance calls from Chinese numbers. Kishida was expected to visit Tokyo's main Toyosu fish market on Thursday to sample more Fukushima fish.

Japan has demanded that China — its biggest market for fish — drop its ban on seafood imports while warning it will complain to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Kishida's government is also reportedly planning a package of financial aid for the fishing industry while also helping it find new export markets. — **AFP**

GOMA

10 die in anti-UN demo in DR Congo

At least 10 people were killed on Wednesday in eastern DR Congo after soldiers attempted to stop a religious sect's planned anti-UN protest, in the latest violence in the conflict-torn region.

Local authorities in the eastern Congolese city of Goma banned the protest.

Leaders of the sect said on Tuesday that they had nonetheless identified the homes of UN officials in the city and were prepared to loot them.

Early on Wednesday,



Congolese soldiers descended on a radio station and place of worship in Goma, killing six people, according to Moleka Maregane, who is in charge of security for the sect. Hospital workers said that 33 people were injured, with three later succumbing to their wounds. — **AFP**

DUSHANBE

Toll from heavy rains rises to 21

At least 21 people have died following torrential rains in Tajikistan, authorities said on Wednesday, the latest natural disaster to hit the mountainous Central Asian country.

The deaths were reported in three towns not far from the capital Dushanbe, after heavy rains on Sunday and Monday triggered flooding, landslides and mudflows. A spokesperson from the Committee for Emergency Situations said that "there are 21 dead", up from a previous toll of



13 on Monday.

In February, dozens of avalanches as well as landslides and rockfalls struck Upper Badakhshan, an autonomous region in the south bordering Afghanistan, China and Kyrgyzstan that is surrounded by the Pamir Mountains. — **AFP**

BUENOS AIRES

Bird flu kills scores of sea lions in Argentina

Scores of sea lions have died from bird flu in Argentina, officials said, as an unprecedented global outbreak continues to infect mammals, raising fears it could spread more easily among humans.

Animal health authorities have recently reported dead sea lions in several locations along Argentina's extensive Atlantic coast, from just south of the capital Buenos Aires to Santa Cruz. Another "50 dead specimens have been counted...



with symptoms compatible with avian influenza," read a statement from a Patagonian environmental authority.

Authorities have asked the population to avoid beaches along Argentina's roughly 5,000-kilometre coastline where cases have been reported. — **AFP**



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



TURKISH FM TO VISIT RUSSIA ON THURSDAY

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will host his Turkish counterpart for a two-day visit beginning on Thursday, Moscow has announced, after Ankara's top diplomat held talks with Ukrainian officials last week.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also due to visit Russia soon for talks with President Vladimir Putin on reviving a deal allowing safe grain shipments across the Black Sea. Maria Zakharova, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman, told reporters that Lavrov and Hakan Fidan would discuss "the situation in the region, particularly in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Transcaucasia". — AFP

■ GENEVA



GLOBAL FUND SECURES HIV TREATMENT PRICE

The Global Fund announced on Wednesday a deal with generic pharmaceutical manufacturers to significantly slash the price of a cutting-edge HIV drug, in a move it said would save lives.

The Global Fund, a partnership set up in 2002 to battle AIDS, said the agreement would make it possible to provide the advanced pill known as TLD for under \$45 per person per year. "This improved pricing will allow governments in resource-limited settings to expand access to critical HIV services," it said in a statement.

The World Health Organization has recommended it as the preferred first-line HIV treatment for adults and adolescents, since it rapidly suppresses the virus, has fewer side effects and is easy to take.

■ MADRID



PARTY LEADERS MEET FOR NEW GOVERNMENT

A meeting between the heads of the two main parties in Spain has, as expected, brought no progress in the difficult search for a new government.

Speaking after the meeting on Wednesday, opposition leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo of the People's Party said he had found that Socialist caretaker Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez "would rather make pacts with separatists" than agree "a grand state pact" with him.

A month later, Feijóo was mandated by King Felipe VI to form a government, although he has little chance of getting enough support from other parties. — dpa

Ukrainian drones strike six Russian regions, destroy planes at airfield

KYIV: Ukrainian drones struck targets in at least six regions deep within Russia on Wednesday, including an airfield where they destroyed military transport planes, in one of the broadest volleys yet of Kyiv's campaign to turn the tables on Moscow.

Russian officials described attacks on targets in the Pskov, Bryansk, Kaluga, Orlov, Ryazan and Moscow regions. The Russian foreign ministry said the attacks would "not go unpunished" and the drones could not have reached so far into Russian territory without Western help.

In Pskov, in northern Russia more than 600 km from Ukraine, a huge fire erupted at a military airfield that garrisons elite paratroopers. Tass news agency reported at least four giant Il-76 transport planes were damaged, two of which had "burst into flames".

The attacks coincided with Russia's most severe air strikes on Ukraine's capital for months. Authorities in Kyiv reported at least two people had been killed as debris from intercepted missiles fell in four locations.

In Russia, the governor of Pskov posted video on Telegram showing a huge fire with the sounds of sirens and an explosion at the air base.

Moscow said it had thwarted all the attacks on Russia. Russia typically describes all Ukrainian drone strikes as unsuccessful,



Firefighters take a break while trying to extinguish a fire in a building that was damaged following a missile attack in a village outside Kyiv. — AFP

regardless of the damage on the ground.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was working out where the drones were launched from to prevent further strikes. President Vladimir Putin had been informed immediately, as would be the case in any such "massive attacks", Peskov said.

Kyiv confirmed the Russian planes had been destroyed in Pskov, without commenting on the nature of the incident.

Ukraine's Western allies generally forbid Kyiv from using weapons they supply to attack Russia but say Kyiv has a right to carry out such strikes with its own weapons.

Among the other attacks in Russia, Moscow said Ukrainian drones had tried to attack a TV tower over the Bryansk region. No casualties were reported.

Moscow also said its aircraft had destroyed four Ukrainian fast-attack boats carrying up to 50 paratroopers on the Black Sea and its forces had repelled attacks by

enemy drones. Reuters could not independently confirm this.

Attacks on Russia in recent weeks, including repeated drone strikes on central Moscow, have brought the war home to many Russians for the first time, even as Ukrainians have spent the past year and a half in constant peril from air strikes. — Reuters

Macron meets opposition chiefs to break French political deadlock

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron met leaders of all of France's political parties on Wednesday, including his most bitter opponents, outside Paris in a bid to break the deadlock of a hung parliament.

Deprived of an absolute majority in the National Assembly lower house since last year's parliamentary elections, Macron said he wanted a "frank, honest and direct discussion" aimed at "acting together" for the benefit of voters.

In a letter inviting party bosses from the hard left to far right, Macron vowed to work together on writing new laws and "if need be" organising referendums — a rare political tool that has previously backfired.

"We're here with no illusions, but with determination," said Manuel Bompard, coordinator of the hard-left France Unbowed, as he and other left-wing leaders from the NUPES alliance arrived on Wednesday afternoon.

The talks are set to unfold behind closed doors with participants surrendering their phones.

One idea under discussion is the government organising what has been dubbed a "preferendum" — a non-binding public consultation that would offer voters multiple choice questions on issues.

Traditional one-question, yes-or-no referendums have in the past seen voters seek to censure the president himself, tripping up Francois Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac on European issues in 1992 and 2005.



President of French far-right party Rassemblement National (RN), Jordan Bardella speaks to the press as he arrives at the Maison d'Education of the Legion of Honor in Saint-Denis, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP

"By asking several questions, people may vent on one of them and respond on the issues on all the others," government spokesman Olivier Veran said.

Conservatives and the far right have already called for referendums on immigration while the NUPES alliance of left parties wants voters to have a direct say on Macron's already-passed controversial pension changes.

Macron's Renaissance party would prefer a referendum with "between three and five questions", including on institutional reform.

The political leaders are meeting in Saint-Denis just outside Paris, a poor suburb hit

by riots in late June and early July over the police shooting of a teenager of Algerian origin during a traffic stop.

Two roundtables will cover international affairs and possible institutional reforms, with a later dinner covering the problems highlighted by the riots: education, integration, inequality and "authority", the president's Elysee Palace office said.

Macron's centrist minority government appears to have run out of road with its strategy of bill-by-bill alliances and use of an unpopular mechanism to ram laws through without a vote, especially to pass contested pension changes earlier this year. — AFP

Category 3 Hurricane Idalia slams ashore at Florida's Big Bend

FLORIDA: Hurricane Idalia made landfall in Florida as an "extremely dangerous" Category 3 storm on Wednesday after millions of residents evacuated or hunkered down in homes and shelters in anticipation of a life-threatening storm surge.

Drawing strength from the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters, Idalia unleashed destructive winds and torrential downpours that were forecast to cause coastal flooding up to 4.88 m deep along the state's Gulf Coast.

Idalia came ashore at 7:45 am at Keaton Beach, an ocean-front community of 13,000 people in Taylor County, about 121 km southeast of Tallahassee, the state capital. The town lies in the centre of the Big Bend region, where the state's northern panhandle curves into the Florida Peninsula.

"It's just ripping through Taylor County now. Hope all is safe," County Commissioner Jamie English said. "Winds gusting. Terrible power outages all over. Debris flying everywhere."

Video footage from Keaton Beach posted on social media platform X by storm chaser Sidney Grimmert showed heavy downpours and trees whipping in the wind as an electrical line sparked along the side of a roadway.

Overnight, Idalia attained "an extremely dangerous Category 4 intensity" on the five-step Saffir-Simpson wind scale on its way to landfall in Florida on Wednesday morning, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) in Miami said.

Sparsely populated compared with the Tampa-St Petersburg area to the south, the Big Bend features a marshy coast, threaded with freshwater springs and rivers, and a cluster of small offshore islands forming Cedar Key.

Early on Wednesday morning, storm winds were knocking bent palm tree tops against Ken Wood's house in Dunedin, near Tampa and 185 miles south of landfall.

Most of Florida's 21 million residents, and many in the adjacent states of Georgia and South Carolina, were under hurricane warnings and other storm-related advisories. State emergency declarations were issued in all three.

Florida's Gulf Coast, southeastern Georgia and eastern parts of North and South Carolina could face 10 to 20 cm of rain through Thursday, the hurricane centre warned.

Officials said the storm's most dangerous feature would be a powerful surge of wind-driven surf that is expected to flood barrier islands and other low-lying areas along the coast. Surge warnings were posted for hundreds of miles of shoreline, from Sarasota to the sport fishing haven of Indian Pass at the western end of Apalachicola Bay. — Reuters



People move debris off a highway in Cross City, Florida. — AFP

The plastic puzzle...

Plastic pollution on the human heart! Plastic in the bloodstream! We are more contaminated than we realise. Who is to be responsible for the shreds of plastic found in my piece of bread?

Either poor quality production or a lack of hygiene means someone is accountable. Within legality, it is a complex issue; within medical findings, studies are limited. The wheel of finger-pointing is more like Russian roulette.

The majority of us tend to accept whatever is put into the food we buy without questioning it. Even if we are slightly annoyed when we discover a piece of plastic in food or drink, we don't dwell on it. We just move on. We are normalising poor quality and safety in food production and processing.

Can I file a lawsuit if I find plastic in my food? This is a valid question, but the answer is not straightforward unless you can prove it has caused physical or health harm. Even so, it would be a tiresome and drawn-out battle, and the most likely reward would be a complimentary lunch or refill.

The beginning of the plastic era has been recorded as being in 1839, with the discovery of polystyrene. This was followed by Alexander Parkes in 1856, who created the first man-made plastic using organic material derived from cellulose that, once heated, could be molded and retain its shape when cooled. Since then, a wide range of items, from the telephone in the 1930s to radio receivers in 1935 to everything from car manufacture to medical supplies, have been made using plastic materials.

Videos of plastic debris on beaches and dead turtles from ingesting it are often posted on social media, but images of plastic debris inside bread, drinks, and other foods are scarce. Though there is a large body of research on wildlife consumption of plastic, there is little data on human absorption of plastic particles.

A recently published medical study, Detection of Various Microplastics in



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THE BEGINNING OF THE PLASTIC ERA HAS BEEN RECORDED AS BEING IN 1839, WITH THE DISCOVERY OF POLYSTYRENE

Patients Undergoing Cardiac Surgery, revealed that tiny toxic particles of the plastic shed, called microplastics, had been found. Microplastic specimens were collected from 15 cardiac surgery patients. Nine types of microplastics were also detected in pre- and postoperative blood samples.

It is widely known that particles of plastic can be detected in rain, air, water and the bloodstream. Additionally, microplastics were also detected in human breast milk, bottled water, etc.

If we consider the amount of plastic we ingest, one would think we are already walking credit cards, as the World Wide Fund puts it. According to the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), an average person could be consuming approximately 5 grammes of plastic every week.

Single-use plastics (SUPs), invented for the modern “throwaway society,” are intended to be used only once. It became popular in the 1960s to cut labour costs and the energy required to clean traditional cutlery. SUPs are being increasingly produced and used mostly as packaging or consumables, such as shopping bags or disposable tableware. The Covid-19 pandemic has had growing environmental consequences related to plastic use and follow-up waste. Even before the pandemic, the management of plastic waste was considered a major environmental issue.

Some areas of plastic have become prioritised in political debates, such as the use of plastic bags and ocean pollution, and then they receive scientific and media attention, but everything else is a fragment of a serious issue. Often, there are scholarly articles on plastic pollution's impact on the environment, but the public health agenda as a human health hazard hardly enters the agenda.

There is not zero risk in the food production and bottling processes, and that means that people managing these areas need to have scientific knowledge of food safety and hygiene. The issue deserves better attention.

SUN AND THE UMBRELLAS!



The sun shines through umbrellas as shoppers walk through Prince Bishops Place in Durham, northeast England, on Wednesday. – AFP

Deterrence is not enough in Northeast Asia

In August, the leaders of the United States, South Korea, and Japan met at Camp David for their first trilateral summit. The resulting agreement to deepen military and intelligence cooperation has steered Northeast Asian geopolitics into uncharted territory.

In view of the rising threat from North Korea, deteriorating ties with China, and Russia's war on Ukraine, US President Joe Biden's administration has pursued a bold and systematic regional strategy. Multilateral coalitions like this one, the reinvigorated Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the US), and the relatively new AUKUS arrangement (comprising Australia, the United Kingdom and the US) augment the traditional hub-and-spoke model of security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, with the US at the centre of each.

From the US perspective, the strained relationship between South Korea (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) and Japan — America's most important allies in East Asia — has long been a strategic obstacle. Since he was Barack Obama's vice-president, Biden has been eager to help the two countries — long at odds over historical disputes and territorial issues — mend fences.

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol's audacious decision early in his presidency to normalise ROK-Japan relations offered Biden a rare opportunity. Specifically, Yoon decided in March not to seek money



Yoon Young-kwan

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THE NEW SECURITY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN REFLECTS THE SHIFTING SANDS OF REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS, ESPECIALLY HEIGHTENED CONCERNS ABOUT NORTH KOREA AND CHINA

from Japan to compensate South Korean victims of forced labour during World War II — a proposal that, at the time, only 35 per cent of Koreans supported and around 59 per cent opposed.

Forging closer ties with Japan is crucial for Yoon to achieve his foreign-policy goal of making South Korea a pivotal global player. Former South Korean president Park Geun-hye, for example, struggled to pursue her ambitious Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative while maintaining a hostile relationship with such a large and important neighbour. Whether Yoon can smooth over their differences and cement more positive bilateral ties remains to be seen.

China and North Korea will likely push back against the effort to institutionalise cooperation between the US, South Korea and Japan. But, to reach its full potential, this new deterrence structure must be accompanied by an openness to dialogue with both countries.

To guard against misunderstandings and prevent further escalation of the situation in Taiwan, the US must step up its efforts to reestablish military communication channels with China. Likewise, South Korea and the US, supported by Japan, should communicate to North Korea that they are ready and willing to engage in diplomatic dialogue; the enhanced trilateral

deterrence posture envisioned at Camp David will not achieve regional peace on its own.

The most formidable challenge to the US-ROK-Japan partnership, however, is domestic political pressure, especially in South Korea. Critics of Yoon's decision to thaw relations with Japan believe that the president is naive and that South Korea is paying dearly for joining this group while getting very little in return. For Yoon, convincing these naysayers will be critical to the success of his presidency: his margin of victory in the presidential election was just 0.74 per cent, and after almost 16 months in office, his approval rating stands at only 37.6 per cent.

There are three ways that the US and Japan could help South Korea solve this challenge. First, while strengthened security

cooperation is certainly an important foreign-policy achievement, the group must accelerate the implementation of their agreements on economic and technological assistance. Making visible progress on these fronts and delivering tangible benefits to Yoon's critics could help shift public opinion towards a more favourable view of the new partnership.

Second, if China continues to engage in coercive commercial diplomacy against South Korea, the US response will matter a great deal to South Koreans. Former US president Donald Trump's administration did nothing when China sanctioned South Korea for its deployment of a US Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence anti-missile system in 2016. Whether the three countries

can act together on this issue will be a key factor in deciding the group's future. Moreover, the Biden administration could also turn South Korean public opinion against the US-ROK-Japan security agreement if it enacts more legislation that discriminates against foreign companies, as both the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act do.

Third, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida must be proactive in improving ties with South Korea. While Kishida has been cooperative, many believe that his actions are not commensurate with the political risks taken by Yoon. They also fear that inappropriate, and often crude, comments about Japan's long occupation of South Korea made by some members of Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party could undermine Yoon's attempt to extend an olive branch.

The challenge of winning over public opinion in South Korea pales in comparison to the risks for the region if Trump wins the US presidential election in 2024. In that case, the infant US-ROK-Japan partnership may have no future. To solidify his diplomatic achievements and to prevent a policy reversal in Northeast Asia, Biden must fully implement every aspect of the agreements reached at Camp David before next November.



US President Joe Biden's administration is pursuing a bold and systematic regional strategy.

sport

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PICS BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI

Pakistan edge India in hockey5s thriller

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Pakistan beat India 5-4 in a nail-biting contest of Men's Hockey5s Asia Cup in Salalah on Wednesday.

With their third straight win in the Elite group, Pakistan cemented their place on the top of the table with nine points from three matches. Although Malaysia also have nine points from three matches, Pakistan command a superior goal difference (35) compared to Malaysia's 25.

Pakistan's goal rush against Japan (26-1) helped them in leading the charts. In their second match on Wednesday, Pakistan thumped Bangladesh 15-6.

At the Sultan Qaboos Youth Centre hockey turf, Pakistan surged ahead in the opening minutes when star striker Arshad Liaqat struck back to back goals in second and third minutes.

Zikriya Hayat stunned the Indians with a third goal in the fifth minute as Pakistan took a 3-0 lead.

India tried to come back into the match but their moves lacked precision. Finally, Gurjot Singh broke the shackles to score India's



first goal in the 12th minute.

Pakistan, who controlled the game, then struck another goal through Abdul Rehman to push India at 4-1 in the next minute itself.

Pakistan led at half-time 4-1.

In the second-half, India showed a more organised performance much to the relief of

the sizeable supporters gathered at the Salalah stadium.

Maninder Singh reduced the deficit in the 17th minute to 4-2.

Mohammed Raheel hit the target in the 21st minute to make it 4-3 for India.

Rana Abdul then struck a crucial goal in the 26th minute to keep the match beyond India's



reach at 5-3.

India earned a 'Challenge' in the final stages and Maninder Singh was successful in his attempt with the score at 5-4.

India, with two wins and a defeat, are third with six points in the group.

India started with a 15-1 thrashing of Bangladesh on

Tuesday.

On Wednesday, India outclassed Oman 12-2 to post their second win.

Mohammed Raheel, Maninder Singh and Pawan Rajbhar scored three goals each. Jugraj Singh netted a brace while Sukhvinder also entered the scoresheets to complete India's 12 goals.

For the hosts, Fahad al Lawati and Rashad al Fazari were on target.

MALAYSIA SHINE

Earlier, Malaysia earned their third straight win.

Malaysia now have nine points from three matches. They beat hosts Oman 10-4 in their opening match late on Tuesday.

In the second match on Wednesday, Malaysia were too good for Japan as they prevailed 18-2. Malaysians led 9-2 at the break.

In their next match, Malaysia outclassed Bangladesh 10-5 to go top of the Elite group temporarily.

IRAN ON TOP

In the Challenger group, Iran raced to the top of the table with their third consecutive win.

Iran started with their opening 7-2 win against Hong Kong on Tuesday.

They continued the form on Wednesday, edging out Indonesia 5-3 in the morning and later outsmarting Kazakhstan 12-8 in the evening.

In other matches, Kazakhstan thumped Afghanistan 19-3 and Hong Kong beat Afghanistan 12-7 in the Challenger group.

Azam, Ahmed hit tons as Pakistan crush Nepal in Asia Cup

MULTAN, Pakistan: World number one batter Babar Azam and Iftikhar Ahmed scored punishing hundreds as Pakistan annihilated Nepal by 238 runs in the opening game of the Asia Cup in Multan on Wednesday.

Skipper Azam smashed a 131-ball 151 for his 19th ODI hundred while Ahmed scored an unbeaten 109 in 71 balls for his first as Pakistan piled up 342-6 in 50 overs.

The home team then bundled out Nepal for a mere 104 in 23.4 overs with leg-spinner Shadab Khan taking 4-27 while the pace duo of Haris Rauf took 2-16 and Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-27.

Only Sompal Kami (28), Aarif Sheikh (26) and Gulsan Jha (13) made it into double figures as they struggled against Pakistan's

much-vaunted bowling attack.

The win gives Pakistan, who rose to world number one in the ODI rankings last week, an ideal start and tune up for the high profile clash against arch-rivals India in Palallekele on Saturday.

The Asia Cup is being played on a hybrid model this year with Pakistan hosting four matches and Sri Lanka nine after India refused to tour Pakistan because of political tensions.

Pakistan, India and Nepal are in Group A while title-holders Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in Group B.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh meet in Palallekele on Thursday.

Nepal, playing in the Asia Cup for the first time, had bowled well to keep the home team down to 124-4 in the 28th over but were



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (L) and Iftikhar Ahmed run between the wickets during the Asia Cup 2023 match between Pakistan and Nepal at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan on Wednesday. – AFP

The home team bundled out Nepal for a mere 104 in 23.4 overs with leg-spinner Shadab Khan taking 4-27 while pace duo of Rauf and Afridi took two wickets each

clueless in the final overs against the onslaught from Azam and Ahmed. The pair added a robust 214 off 131 balls for the fifth wicket, which took Pakistan to a formidable total.

Azam cracked 14 boundaries and four sixes while Ahmed hit 11 boundaries and four sixes, helping Pakistan to 129 runs in the last 10 overs including 67 in

the final five. Azam was dropped on 55 when Karan Chhetri put down a caught-and-bowled chance, while Nepal's ground fielding also often faltered.

Pakistan lost opener Fakhar Zaman for 14 in the sixth over, while Imam-ul-Haq was run out for five to leave Pakistan tottering at 25-2. Azam added 86 for the third wicket with Mohammad Rizwan (44) before Rizwan was also run out. Agha Salman fell for five, leaving Azam and Ahmed to mount a rescue operation. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 342-6 in 50 overs (Babar Azam 151, Iftikhar Ahmed 109 not out, Mohammad Rizwan 44) v Nepal 104 in 23.4 overs (Shadab Khan 4-27)

RESULT: Pakistan won by 238 runs

PLAYING THURSDAY: Sri Lanka v Bangladesh, Palallekele



BRANKO CALLS UP OMAN PROBABLES FOR DOMESTIC CAMP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

A total of 24 probables have been called up for the upcoming short camp of Oman national senior football team during September 1 to 7 in Muscat. The announcement of the squad and unveiling the team's preparatory programme took place on Wednesday in a press meet at City Seasons Hotel in presence of Oman's head coach Branko Ivankovic and media representatives.

Ivankovic told the media reporters that Oman team will have two significant events represented by the preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar assignment.

"The format of the Fifa World Cup 2026 qualifiers had changed as eight teams will see their attendance in the next edition of the 2026 Fifa World Cup. Our dream is to secure one of the direct Asian slots to the World Cup despite the difficulty as all the Asian teams will have the same target. In November, we will commence our campaign in the qualifiers. I am very optimistic in our team players," he said.

Oman, ranked 72nd in the world, will face Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Chinese Taipei/Timor Leste in Group D of the joint qualifiers.

The Croatia coach said that



the second assignment of the team will be taking part in the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar. "The team will vie for top show in this edition of the Asian Cup. The players will enter to a comprehensive preparatory plan ahead of the Asian event. The domestic competitions and presence of Oman's clubs in AFC Cup will assist in shaping the readiness of the team players for the forthcoming key events. I can fully understand the clubs' requirement for their players, but I hope there will be a mutual understanding between both of us. The preparatory programme will be focused in



September while full month of October will be dedicated for clubs whereas in November the qualifiers matches will begin. The positive thing in this season was the early start of the top-tier league as it was started on August 17," he added.



The Red Warriors will have their challenge at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals in January 2024 at Group F which comprised Asian favourites Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan.

The 69-year-old coach disclosed

that Oman team will play two crucial fixtures in September as they will meet Palestine in Muscat on September 6 while they will meet USA, ranked 11th in the world, on September 12 in Minnesota, USA.

Commenting on missing some key names in the squad namely Mohammed al Musallami, Al Mundher al Alawi, Amjad al Harthy, Arshad al Alawi, Yazeed al Mashani, Hatim al Roushdi, Mazin al Harrasi, Sameh al Hamrashdi and others, coach Ivankovic said that majority of these players are having injuries and some of them lately signed and joined their clubs.

"I had discussion with Musallami as well as the OFA chairman. Musallami requested some more time to revise his decision on international football retirement. He is a valuable player in the squad and served the team for more than 13 years. He is an actual leader on the field and we need him in the team. Hopefully he will be back to the team soon," he said.

Responding to an inquiry on the preparatory plan whether it is adequate, the head coach answered, "I need all the players as much as I can but finally we have to respect their commitment with their respective clubs. We will try to utilise the agreed period for the training sessions of the team and I am looking forward for a collaboration from the domestic clubs," he ended.

OMAN PROBABLES: Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faye al Rushedi, Mahmood al Mushefiri, Ahmed al Kaabi, Motaz Saleh, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi, Ahmed al Matroushi, Fahmi Said, Juma al Habsi, Musab al Mamari, Tamim al Balushi, Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyaei, Zaher al Aghbari, Abdulrahman al Mushefiri, Ali al Hinai, Abdullah Fawaz, Jameel al Yahmadi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Ahmed al Adawi, Omar al Malki and Issam al Subhi.

Indian teen chess wizard Pragg given hero's welcome

CHENNAI, India: India's teen chess prodigy Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa arrived home to celebration on Wednesday, with media jostling to catch a glimpse of the newly minted star who faced international No 1 Magnus Carlsen in the World Cup final.

Popularly known as 'Pragg', the 18-year-old is the youngest player to reach a chess World Cup final, held last week in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

Pragg finished with the silver after losing to Carlsen in a nail-biting tie-break at the International Chess Federation (FIDE) final. He earned praise from chess legend Garry Kasparov who said Pragg was "very tenacious in difficult positions".

On Wednesday, Pragg was greeted by hordes of supporters who handed him bouquets of flowers and sweets as he emerged from the airport in his home city of Chennai in southern India.

"I am very happy to see so many people have come to receive me... it feels really great," he said, as he stood shyly waving from the sunroof of a car, with a purple and gold scarf draped around his neck. Such adulation is usually reserved in India for cricket stars, who enjoy celebrity status. The son of a bank employee and a housewife, the grandmaster has been playing the sport since he was four.

MOTHER'S COOKING

Pragg's success has been fuelled by the cooking of his mother Nagalakshmi, who accompanies him on chess tournaments with pots and southern Indian seasonings to make his favourite meal of rice and spicy rasam or sambhar soup.

Nagalakshmi told the



India's chess grandmaster and silver medalist Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa, responds to a television media personnel as he is welcomed upon his return from the FIDE Chess World Cup in Baku, at the Chennai International airport. — AFP

ChessBase India news site on Tuesday that she had made rice and sambhar for Pragg at the FIDE World Rapid Team Championship in Dusseldorf, Germany, that followed the Baku event.

Pragg's first coach S Thiagarajan, who began teaching him at age four, said his student was always dedicated.

"He was always a bright student and a jovial child," Thiagarajan, who coached him at his academy until he was 10, said.

"He used to be in the academy every day from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, at times staying longer — and I would give him homework which would take at least three hours to finish," he said.

In 2018 — aged just 12 years, 10 months and 13 days — Pragg became the world's then second-youngest chess grandmaster.

Chess has gained in popularity in India in the past two decades after Vishwanathan Anand became the country's first grandmaster aged 18 in 1988 and dominated the game in the 2000s.

— AFP

Oxy Ultra Marathon set to elevate mountain sports

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Oxy Ultra Marathon, to be held in collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oxy Oman, will kickstart on December 7 until December 9.

The press conference unveiling the event's specifics took place at the Intercontinental in the presence of Mohammed bin Ahmed al Amri, Director-General of the General Directorate of Sports Activities at the Ministry. The chief guest also launched the logo for the marathon.

Zayana bint Abdullah al Yarubiyah, Director of the Department of Specific Bodies at the Ministry, conveyed the Ministry's commitment to diversifying its portfolio of events, activities and programmes. This approach aligns with broader trends and aims to nurture the abundant sporting talents within the Sultanate of Oman.

"The Ministry's fervour for combining sports and entertainment is evident in its dedicated efforts to promote this emerging discipline. Mountain running has recently captured the community's interest, becoming a focal point for the exploration of Oman's captivating landscapes while indulging in physical activity," Al Yarubi added.

It is against this backdrop that the Ministry has chosen to orchestrate the Oxy Ultra Marathon. By doing so, it seeks to spotlight a sport that resonates with a wide array of age groups and societal segments.

The marathon seamlessly combines leisure, competition and exercise, presenting itself as an outlet for both mountain marathon enthusiasts and those



devoted to physical challenges.

Al Yarubi underlined the meticulous selection of the race track in Wadi Al Khoud in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. The choice stems from the track's accessibility and diverse terrain, offering suitable pathways for this specific type of sport. Beyond competition, the marathon's journey aims to introduce the multitude of paths that define Oman's topography.

Acknowledging the significance of the private sector, Al Yarubi emphasised its pivotal role in fortifying the sports landscape. The partnership between the Ministry and Occidental stands as a model of collaboration, reinforcing the government-private sector nexus and boosting sports-related endeavours.

The first edition saw the participation of 1,000 competitors representing 23 countries. These competitors served as media ambassadors for the Sultanate of Oman, promoting it through sharing their experiences on their social media profiles and speaking about the race among their friends.

CEO of MGE, Mohammed



bin Khalfan al Obaidani, outlined the marathon's multifaceted structure. The event is designed to encompass various races, including a 10-kilometre open race embracing participants of all ages, and distinct runs tailored to different age groups of children. There will be a race dedicated to individuals with disabilities, opening a 50-kilometre race for the female category and hosting accompanying events during the three days of the race.

Al Obaidani highlighted the creation of a special village surrounding the race venue, offering a blend of entertainment, culture and sports. This vibrant space is set to provide participants and families with an enriching and enjoyable experience.

In an effort to integrate sports within the education landscape, Al Obaidani revealed ongoing



collaborations with the Ministry of Education and the School Union.

This partnership aims to cultivate an athletic generation through the promotion of sports like mountain running. With gratitude, Al Obaidani acknowledged the strategic partnership between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Occidental. This tie-up, he noted, is poised to yield substantial long-term value for the local sports ecosystem.

The Oxy Ultra Marathon emerges as a landmark sporting event that draws running and endurance enthusiasts from across Oman and beyond. Beyond its competitive edge, the event aspires to cast the spotlight on Muscat Governorate and position it as a prominent hub for mountain sports within Oman.



BRISK STARTS FOR **ALCARAZ**, **MEDVEDEV**

NEW YORK: Carlos Alcaraz launched the defence of his US Open crown with a brisk victory after his opponent suffered an injury on Tuesday as third seed Daniil Medvedev strolled into the second round with a quick-fire win.

Alcaraz, returning to the same Arthur Ashe Stadium court where he lifted his first Grand Slam as a teenager a year ago, was always in control after Germany's Dominik Koepfer rolled his left ankle badly in the opening game.

Koepfer tried to continue despite being in obvious discomfort, but finally called it quits while trailing 3-2 in the second set after dropping the first 6-2.

"That's not the best way to get through into another round," said world number one Alcaraz. "But I have to say on my side I was playing great."

Alcaraz, who faces Lloyd Harris of South Africa in the second round, is on course to face 2021 US Open champion Medvedev in the semifinals.

Medvedev opened his account on Tuesday with a 6-1, 6-1, 6-0 thrashing of Hungary's Attila Balazs in just 74 minutes.

The Russian will face Australia's Christopher O'Connell in the second round on Thursday for a spot in the last 32. "That's probably the fastest three-set match I played," Medvedev said after his blistering demolition of Balazs.

While Alcaraz and Medvedev cruised into the second round, Karen Khachanov — a semifinalist at last year's US Open — was on the wrong end of a first-round upset. The 11th-seeded Russian was bounced out in straight sets by American world No 89 Michael Mmoh, losing 6-2, 6-4, 6-2.

Germany's 12th seed Alexander Zverev, a beaten finalist at Flushing Meadows in 2020, never looked in danger of following Khachanov out of the tournament, registering a 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 win over Australia's Aleksandar Vukic. Jannik Sinner, the Italian sixth seed, trounced Yannick Hanfmann of Germany 6-3, 6-1, 6-1.

In other men's games on Tuesday, British veteran Andy Murray downed France's Corentin Moutet 6-2, 7-5, 6-3, in a match that saw a bungled attempt to use the US Open's new video review technology for the first time.

Chair umpire Louise Azemar Engzell attempted to deploy the system after Moutet requested a review following a double-bounce call. The umpire was forced to abandon the attempt however after discovering officials were unable to properly access footage of the incident. "I don't know how the technology works," Murray said. "But it obviously didn't go to plan in a pretty important moment of the match. So, yeah, it would be good if they could get that fixed."

Meanwhile, China sealed a notable first when Wu Yibing beat Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 3-6, 6-4, 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 to join compatriot Zhang Zhizhen in the second round.

It is the first time in tennis's Open era that two Chinese men have reached the second round of the same Grand Slam tournament.

AILING JABEUR ADVANCES

In the women's draw, another semifinalist from 2022 also made an early exit, with French seventh seed Caroline Garcia slumping to a 6-4, 6-1 reverse against Chinese qualifier Wang Yafan.

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, the reigning Australian Open champion, progressed with a 6-3, 6-2

win over Ukraine-born Belgian Maryna Zanevska.

The end of the match was tinged with controversy as Zanevska declined to shake hands with Sabalenka in protest at Belarus's military support of Russia's war of Ukraine.

"I know I'm representing Belgium but all my family are in Ukraine," Zanevska said.

"I have family fighting on the frontline. And I think if I shake her hand it would be the same as spitting in the face of them."

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, desperate to land her first Grand Slam title after losing in three major championship finals in 2022 and 2023, survived a medical scare before scraping past Colombia's Camila Osorio.

The 29-year-old fifth seed looked out of sorts throughout her 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) win, at one stage in the opening set complaining of breathing difficulties before taking an extended medical time-out.

Jabeur has played only one tournament since being upset in last month's Wimbledon final by unseeded Czech Marketa Vondrousova.

Vondrousova, seeded ninth in New York, cruised into the second round on Tuesday with a 6-3, 6-0 win over South Korean qualifier Han Na-Lae.

Third seed Jessica Pegula meanwhile kept home hopes alive with a clinical 6-2, 6-2 defeat of Italy's Camila Giorgi.

— AFP



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrates her win over Colombia's Camila Osorio during the US Open women's singles first round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP



Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka serves to Belgium's Maryna Zanevska during the US Open tournament women's singles first round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP



Jessica Pegula of the US hits a return to Italy's Camila Giorgi during their US Open women's singles first round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York. — AFP



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Contracts signed to boost Oman’s food security

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 30

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) signed on Tuesday, August 30, as many as 40 contracts worth RO 9 million in total investments to boost food security in the Sultanate of Oman.

The contracts were signed by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, in the presence of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar and Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The list includes 37 contracts for the development of agricultural

projects in Dhofar Governorate, primarily related to the cultivation of wheat in the Najd Agricultural Zone over an aggregate area of 28 million square metres with a combined investment of RO 5.5 million.

A further three contracts relate to the development of textile agriculture and nurseries with an investment value of RO 3.5 million covering a total area of 93 thousand square meters.

The signing of these contracts is part of the MoHUP’s efforts to support the agricultural sector in the Sultanate of Oman and to diversify sources of food.

It is also a testament to the strong partnership between the



MoHUP and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Sultan bin Mohammed al Ghafri, Director of Dhofar (MoHUP) told the Observer that the Ministry aims to harness the government’s agricultural and farming potential with a view to strengthening Dhofar’s contribution to national food security objectives.

In the process, the local economy will be significantly

boosted while employment generation efforts will get strong impetus as well, he said.

Al Ghafri said that the projects will help to increase the production of wheat and other food crops, thereby reducing the country’s dependence on imports, while creating jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in the agricultural sector.

Importantly, the MoHUP is committed to working with all stakeholders to achieve its food security goals.

These partnerships are essential to ensuring that Oman has a sustainable and secure food supply for generations to come, he noted.

Chinese cities ease mortgage rules to revive property sector

BEIJING: Two of China’s biggest cities eased mortgage curbs and the country’s top banks flagged mounting risks from the deepening property sector turmoil on Wednesday, as Beijing ramps up efforts to shore up the sputtering economy.

Guangzhou, China’s fifth biggest city, and the tech hub of Shenzhen said that mortgage curbs would be eased, allowing home buyers to enjoy preferential loans for first-home purchases regardless of their previous credit record.

The moves comes after Chinese authorities called on cities to broaden the definition of first-home mortgage as part of a string of other measures to revive the troubled property market, which accounts for roughly a quarter of the economy. In other support measures, some Chinese state-owned banks are also expected to lower interest rates on existing mortgages, three sources familiar with the matter said on Tuesday, in the first such cut since the global financial crisis. Beijing hopes the reduction in mortgage payments will help revive consumer demand for property.

Those measures are, however, adding to concerns about the impact on Chinese banks. Two of China’s biggest banks - Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd (ICBC) and Bank of China (BoC) - reported sluggish profit growth and shrinking profit margins for the first half.

— Reuters

Strong potential for growth of MICE tourism sector in Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The regional meetings of the International Association of Associations and Conferences in the Middle East began yesterday, August 30, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center in Muscat.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is hosting the event under the theme “Forging a Common Path for a Promising Future,” with the participation of more than 120 local and regional experts over the span of two days.

Khalid bin Walid al Zadjali, Director of Oman Convention Bureau at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said the meeting underscores the Sultanate of Oman’s interest in developing a high-level sector for hosting events, looking forward to developing this sector locally and regionally and building a partnership with the International Association of Associations and Conferences.



The Oman Convention Bureau, he said, is in charge of carrying out plans and programmes for this sector and working with all parties to put the Sultanate of Oman on the map of the world for attracting exhibitions and conferences in all their forms.

He also emphasised that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is keen on developing and enhancing the conference sector in

Oman and achieving the desired goals by attracting regional and international specialised conferences.

In 2022, MICE (Meetings, incentives, conferences & exhibitions) events in the GCC attracted over 12 million visitors through major exhibitions and events.

MICE events organised by the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center) during Q4 2022 generated around RO 9.31 million in knock-on benefits to the tourism sector and national economy.

More than 10,000 foreign delegates attended events at OCEC during Q4 2022, staying an average of 5.5 days in Oman, and spending around RO 169.4/day.

OCEC also predicted that in Q4 2023 there will be roughly 50 events and 300,000 attendees.

In comparison, 70 events were organised in the fourth quarter of 2022 with more than 500,000 attendees. Of this number, 46 were corporate events, 10 were exhibitions, 7 were live events, 4 were graduation ceremonies and three were conferences.

Oman LNG signs pacts to supply LNG to Shell and OQ Trading

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Oman LNG has penned two binding term-sheet agreements to supply LNG to Shell International Trading Middle East FZE and to OQ Trading. The signings took place in Muscat yesterday, August 30, in the presence of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Per the agreement, Oman LNG is expected to supply 0.8 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of liquefied natural gas to Shell International Trading Middle East FZE for 10 years starting from 2025, and 0.75 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) for 4 years starting from 2026.

With these latest agreements, Oman LNG has committed to 10.4 mtpa of its output so far this year, covering a total commitment of 80 mtpa over a period of 10 years.

The agreements were signed by the Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, Hamed al Numani, and Senior Vice President and Country Chair Oman Shell, Walid Hadi. Representing OQ Trading was Wail al Jamali, Chief Executive Officer.

Speaking on the signing, CEO of Oman LNG, Hamed al Naamany, shared the following: “The term sheet agreements contribute to global energy security and sustain our position as a trusted supplier of reliable energy, where it facilitates business opportunities, and complements our objectives to establish partnerships and add value to the local economy. Additionally, this Global Marketing Campaign comes as an exceptional milestone in Oman LNG’s rather stellar history despite the unprecedented volatile markets due to the geopolitical events and post Covid challenges.”

Earlier this year, Shell



International Trading Middle East FZE signed a term sheet for the offtake of 0.8 million ton per annum (mtpa) of LNG from Oman LNG, for a period of ten years starting from 2025, making the corporation the biggest “off-taker from Oman LNG beyond 2024”.

Senior Vice President and

Country Chair, Oman Shell, Walid Hadi, shared the following remarks, “Shell is proud of the role it has played in Oman LNG to date, as a shareholder and a technical advisor since its inception. We are proud that we will now become Oman LNG’s largest LNG purchaser as well as its largest private shareholder.

This additional off-take term sheet signifies our deep commitment to continue pulling on all levers of Oman’s energy system to address the pressing trilemma of sustainability, affordability, and security. Simultaneously, it serves as a pivotal step in the evolution of our hydrocarbon enterprise, steering it toward a future

characterised by both low carbon emissions and financial viability.”

CEO of OQT, Wail al Jamali, added: “As the international energy and commodity trading vehicle of the Government of Oman, we are delighted to add this strategic off-take to our portfolio. The execution of this term sheet represents the first long-term agreement between our two organizations following many years of cooperation. We are committed to developing a strong, sustainable relationships for the long-term benefit of our respective shareholders and the Sultanate of Oman”.

Earlier this month, Oman LNG penned an agreement to supply one million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of liquefied natural gas to German firm Secure Energy for Europe (SEFE) in what has been referred to as the first LNG agreement between the two nations.

NBO, through its Islamic banking window “Muzn”, signs a strategic finance agreement with Oman REIT Fund

MUSCAT: Fulfilling the diverse financial needs of customers across all segments, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has entered into a facility agreement with the Oman REIT Fund (Oman REIT), an Omani Real Estate Investment Fund, listed on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The signing ceremony took place at NBO's head office in al Athaiba Abdullah al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO and Mustafa Salman, Chairman of the Board of Oman REIT, signed the agreement in the presence of senior officials from both entities and FIM Partners Muscat SPC, which serves as Oman REIT's asset manager.

Under the agreement, NBO will provide a new long-term Sharia-compliant financing of O 30 Million to Oman REIT through its Islamic Banking window, Muzn Islamic Banking.

This customised financing facility aims to support the REIT's real estate investment activities and contribute to the overall growth of the company.

Speaking on the partnership, Abdullah al Hinai said, “We are delighted to collaborate with



Oman REIT. The agreement underscores NBO's steadfast dedication to establishing reliable and value-centric partnerships with local organisations.

Through this collaboration, both parties aim to achieve mutually beneficial goals that actively contribute to Oman's progress.

The bank will persist in its efforts to design tailor-made products that unlock opportunities and stimulate progress for all.”

Speaking on the collaboration, Mustafa Salman said, “We are

thrilled to join hands with NBO and Muzn Islamic Banking.

This deal will provide Oman REIT with the financial and operational flexibility to further expand its portfolio and enhance its overall performance by deploying the facility into resilient and yield accretive properties.

It will be a strong contributor to the growth and depth of the Omani institutional real estate sector. Undoubtedly, such strategic partnerships are pivotal in strengthening private sector contribution and generating in-

country value.”

Fares Bou Atme, Director-Real Estate at FIM Partners added, “We are very pleased with the transaction and look forward to be working with the team at NBO.

It is a further testimony to our continued commitment to the REIT's business plan and will allow Oman REIT to further diversify its portfolio and further enhance returns to its investors, whilst increasing cash flow predictability. We have already deployed 25 per cent of the facility into the acquisition of the Nesto Wadi

Kabir transaction, which we are very pleased with, and have built a strong pipeline of performing and high yielding assets, in which we intend to deploy the remainder of the facility.”

This deal reinforces NBO's and Muzn's Islamic Banking Window capabilities and expertise in structuring innovative, tailor-made Sharia-compliant financing solutions, underpinned by the bank's thorough due diligence and credit assessment methods.

Moreover, the agreement reaffirms NBO's commitment

to supporting businesses across various sectors, with a special focus on making banking more convenient, accessible and enjoyable for all customers.

Since its establishment in 1973 as Oman's first local bank, NBO has remained committed to creating genuine value and advancing through new possibilities for Oman and its people.

Through its Islamic window, Muzn, NBO has consistently offered a comprehensive suite of Sharia-compliant products and personalised services designed to provide a seamless experience for local organisations and enhance their business returns.

Oman REIT's portfolio consists of a portfolio of diversified real estate properties across office, retail, logistics and residential segments and has currently reached c. O 56m in asset value.

Oman REIT's is managed by FIM Partners Muscat SPC, a subsidiary of FIM Partners, which brings north of 15 years of investment management and \$3 billion of assets under management with offices in Dubai, Muscat, Riyadh and London.

Alizz Islamic Bank appoints Ali Al Mani as Chief Executive Officer

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Alizz Islamic Bank announced the appointment of Ali al Mani as the Bank's Chief Executive Officer. Ali al Mani has over 22 years of experience in the Finance and Banking industry in both Islamic and Conventional banks, with expertise across areas of Corporate Banking, Retail Banking, Operations, Finance, Project Management and Technology.

He has held various leadership positions at major local banks and prior to joining alizz Islamic Bank, al Mani was the Deputy CEO of National Finance Company overseeing the performance of one of the largest finance companies in Oman. Ali al Mani holds a Master's degree in Innovation,



Leadership and Management from York University, United Kingdom. He also has a Bachelors of Arts in Computer Applications & Internet from the University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom, in addition to a number of specialised qualifications in Banking and Finance.

3D design and animation programme celebrates graduation of 30 participants in Al Batinah North

SU HAR : 30 young participants celebrated their graduation from Jusoor Foundation Programme for Youth Capacity Building “San'ah” yesterday in Suhar, Al Batinah North, under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaitani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North as well as a number of walis and directors

of government and private institutions in the governorate.

Jaber bin Sulaiman al Busaidy, Executive Manager of Jusoor Foundation, stated that the programme was implemented in line with the Oman Vision 2040, as the programme aimed to create a knowledge society that is capable of innovating solutions in several fields and to create a local culture of new future disciplines.

Al Busaidy added that the programme, which was funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium, and Vale Oman, delivered a specialised



training programme in 3D design and animation, targeting 30 youth participants from Al Batinah North Governorate in three batches, with a total of (80) training hours for each batch.

Thus, the programme achieves

its objectives by qualifying the participants through intensive practical training sessions and supporting them by providing very advanced computers that enable them to continue the learning journey and start a business to earn income and create job opportunities in the market.

The ceremony included a visual presentation of the training stages experienced by the participants in the programme, which combined theoretical education with practical training.

Sohar International partners with PayMate to empower local businesses with B2B payments solution

MUSCAT: Further supporting and complementing Oman's supply chain ecosystem, Sohar International has partnered with PayMate India SPC, a B2B payments and solutions provider, to digitise, automate, and streamline business-to-business (B2B) payments using bank-issued corporate credit cards.

By leveraging PayMate's full-stack proprietary B2B payment automation solutions, Sohar International offers corporate and SME clients the ability to utilise bank-issued Visa corporate credit cards for supplier payouts.

This enables clients to maximise their already assigned credit limits, allowing them to make supplier payouts before the due dates without depleting their cash reserves. Furthermore, clients can extend their days' payables outstanding, utilising the funds for strategic business growth.

Commenting on this strategic partnership, Khalil bin Salim al

Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer at Sohar International, said “There is a massive opportunity to digitise payments in Oman through cards, and with our corporate credit card offering in place, we continue to work towards introducing platforms on which our cards can be used.

This partnership will help us achieve that goal and enable us to route supplier payouts, collections, and other corporate expenses through the card rails, ultimately contributing significantly to B2B payment volume growth in the country.”

The collaboration between Sohar International and PayMate offers a strategic partnership aimed at facilitating the seamless settlement of corporate card payments directly into suppliers' bank accounts.

It provides detailed reports, prompt reconciliation, and clear visibility into cash flows.



Moreover, the PayMate platform gives full control with configurable approval workflows and APIs for ERP integration with existing legacy systems.

All payouts can be made on an ad hoc basis or via a bulk upload option, allowing for the processing of multiple payments in a single transaction, making the process

efficient and flexible.

Payment collections from retailers, distributors, and suppliers will also be made easy with the platform's link-based collections feature, with corporate credit cards as a payment instrument option.

Rakesh Khanna, Chief Commercial Officer, PayMate, said “We at PayMate are very excited to announce our partnership with Sohar International to offer B2B payment solutions to corporates in Oman. Together, we will enable customers to use their bank-issued Visa corporate credit cards for B2B payables and receivables. Our partnership with Sohar will enable the local business CFOs and finance managers to improve their overall working capital and efficiencies in their payables and receivables process thereby providing better cash flow visibility.

The Oman B2B market is at the cusp of a digital revolution,

with businesses leading the pack in adoption. According to Global Data, the Oman cards and payments market was valued at \$12 billion in 2022 and is expected to achieve a CAGR of more than 14 per cent from 2022-2026.

Sohar International has demonstrated outstanding performance in its digital transformation journey, showcasing a strong dedication to customer-centricity.

The bank has effectively embodied this commitment through a range of innovative initiatives within the banking sector.

By continuously enhancing its product and service portfolio, it seeks to support local businesses and contribute to the socio-economic goals of the country. Through various such initiatives, Sohar International believes in making banking a winning journey for the people of Oman.



OETC commissions RO 19 million Suwayhat GS

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) — a member of Nama Group — has officially commissioned the 400/132 kV Suwayhat grid station, a significant milestone in the national infrastructure project, Rabt.

The project, worth more than RO 19 million, promises to bring a robust and stable electricity supply to Al Wusta Governorate and regions associated with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The Suwayhat grid station is a major part of the Rabt project, a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing Oman's electricity transmission network.

The project enhances the reliability of the power supply, meeting the growing demand for electricity in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly in the Al Wusta Governorate and areas connected to PDO.

The grid station's commissioning marks a significant step in Oman's efforts to strengthen its power infrastructure.

The Suwayhat grid station project includes overhead line (OHL) extensions from Barik Grid Station to Suwayhat Grid Station spanning 128 km, and from Suwayhat to Duqm Grid Station covering 197 km. These extensions will help enhance the power supply's

continuity and reliability.

The newly commissioned grid station and its associated overhead lines come at a time when Oman is keen on developing its infrastructure to support economic development and diversification.

The project aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to create a sustainable and diversified economy by broadening the energy sector's base and improving the availability and reliability of the power supply.

The Rabt project and the commissioning of the Suwayhat grid station are expected to have significant economic implications.

They will support the expansion of existing industries, attract new investments, promote economic diversification and create job opportunities. The improved power supply could also contribute to enhancing the quality of life in Al Wusta Governorate and other PDO-associated regions.

Moreover, the Rabt project's successful implementation will further enhance the Sultanate of Oman's reputation as a reliable and attractive destination for investment in the energy sector. This development is also expected to positively impact the country's goal of transitioning to cleaner and more efficient energy sources.



Investments in Oman's green hydrogen common-use infra seen at \$5 bn

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, chaired a meeting on Tuesday of top officials overseeing the delivery of multi-billion dollar worth common-use infrastructure that will serve as a lifeline for mega-scale green hydrogen projects slated for implementation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Investments in the common utilities infrastructure are estimated at \$5 billion encompassing three core components: electricity transmission; desalination and pipeline networks for water and wastewater; and hydrogen pipelines.

Also necessary to support the storage and export of green hydrogen and its derivatives are investments in tankage and storage capacity, dedicated jetties and related facilities.

"The (meeting) shed light on the shared infrastructure framework



development and outlined the programme's direction for the future," said Hydrom, the independent orchestrator and master-planner of Oman's green hydrogen industry, in a post.

As part of its remit, Hydrom — a subsidiary of state-owned Energy Development Oman (EDO) — is strategising the development of common utilities infrastructure designed to make it attractive and cost-competitive for international investors to produce green hydrogen — the

zero carbon fuel at the heart of Oman's green energy future.

Over the past couple of months, Hydrom has signed agreements with international developers and their partners (including some of the biggest names in the energy industry worldwide), collectively targeting the production of 1 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2030, with a combined investment of a staggering \$30 billion.

In its role as master-planner, Hydrom is enlisting the support of an array of government and public sector agencies, national utility operators, specialist service providers and developers in a collaborative effort to map out the common utility requirements of this future industry.

In June, it announced plans for the formation of an advisory body comprising representatives of all key stakeholders investing in this new sector.

These common utilities will include, among other

components, pipelines for the transportation of ultrapure desalinated water for electricity, potable water and wastewater, and potential hydrogen gas, in addition to electrical networks, specialised storage capacity for hydrogen, ammonia and methanol, and so on.

Designated 'National Champions', such as OQ Gas Networks, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Nama Water Services, and Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), among others, are expected to play a critical role in the development and operation of some of these components.

Present at Tuesday's meeting were top officials representing key stakeholders, including Energy Development Oman (EDO), Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), OQ Group, Centralised Utilities Company (Marafiq), Asyad Group, Oman Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Nama Group and others.

33 hotel properties to launch in Oman during 2023: Report

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

As many as 33 hotel properties, offering an estimated 6,792 hotel rooms, are anticipated to launch across the Sultanate of Oman during 2023, according to a key report.

This growth in hotel capacity will boost tourism and contribute to Oman's overall development effort to expand capacity in the hospitality sector, said Lodging Econometrics (LE), a leading US-based provider of global hotel industry intelligence.

The Middle East continues to demonstrate consistent pipeline development in the second quarter of 2023, with the largest project count since Q1 2020, says LE in its latest overview. A total of 597 projects offering 146,521 rooms make up the overall pipeline, which is up 10 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, year on year. Middle East countries with the



greatest number of projects in the construction pipeline at the Q2 are led by Saudi Arabia, with an all-time high of 276 projects and 72,144 rooms.

Currently in the Middle East, projects under construction as of the end of the second quarter include 330 projects and 90,619 rooms.

The number of projects with

23,909 rooms that are expected to break ground over the next 12 months climbed by 17 per cent year over year to 102 projects. The number of projects in the early stages of development climbed 31 per cent year over year, hitting its highest level since 2008, and is now at 165 projects/31,993 rooms.

Saudi Arabia led the Middle East nations with the most

projects in the pipeline at the end of the second quarter, with an all-time high of 276 projects and 72,144 rooms.

With 106 projects and 27,921 rooms, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) comes next, followed by Egypt with 91 projects and 20,814 rooms, Qatar with 43 projects and 10,267 rooms, and Oman with 33 projects and 6,792 rooms.

Salalah workshop appeals for coordination in boosting energy, water efficiency

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 30

The General Secretariat of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held a workshop on electrical and water rationalisation, which began in Salalah here on August 30, 2023.

The two-day workshop was coordinated and supervised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), and Nama Group represented by Nama Dhofar Services.

The workshop covered four main themes: Reviewing modern projects and technologies related to rationalising and improving energy and water efficiency; discussing technical specifications and standards related to the field

of rationalisation; reviewing the challenges faced and successful experiences in the field of rationalising and improving the efficiency of energy and water use; and discussing awareness programmes and social responsibility in the energy and water sector.

The workshop was attended by experts and specialists from various entities and institutions in the GCC countries.

The participants discussed the challenges and opportunities related to rationalising electricity and water consumption, and reviewed innovative strategies and techniques that can contribute to improving the eco-efficiency of power generation and water use operations.

They also discussed future

ambitions and development plans for the application of these technologies and innovations.

The workshop concluded with a call for further cooperation and coordination between the GCC countries in the field of electrical and water rationalisation.

The participants agreed to continue their efforts to raise awareness of the importance of this issue and to promote the adoption of sustainable practices.

The workshop was a valuable opportunity for the GCC countries to exchange experiences and knowledge in the field of electrical and water rationalisation. It is also a step towards achieving the GCC's common goal of preserving and sustaining its natural resources for future generations.



Omani Insurance Industry: Opportunities and Challenges (Part I)



MURTADHA M J
IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI
Entrepreneur & Insurance
Expert

Like any business, insurance and reinsurance are practiced in a world of change. The last few years have witnessed unprecedented changes in the types of risks that the insurance industry is called upon to handle, in the organisation of insurance and reinsurance markets, and in the economic, social and political environments in which Insurers and Reinsurers have to operate. Such changes present new challenges and opportunities to insurance industries, and not least to reinsurers.

The ability to understand the implications of change and to respond to them depends upon a sound knowledge of the principles that lie behind practice. It must not be thought that an understanding of the principles will provide clean-cut answer to practical issues. The world's financial markets have experienced unprecedented volatility, financial institutions and indeed countries in the world over have been impacted. Past performance is not necessary a guide to future performance. What

may have been manageable before was clearly not manageable now! The Capital Market Authority (CMA) of the Sultanate of Oman continues issuing insurance market reports on annual basis, proceeding from the awareness of the importance of modern statistical data and comprehensiveness in the decision-making sound and rational policy – making. The Insurance Market Index for 2021-2022 editions 2023 was published recently

Insurance contribution to GDP

Oman's total population now exceeds 5 million inhabitants with a significant increase in the total assets value. The Insurance industry's contribution to the Omani Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 was 1.23 per cent, compared with 1.45 per cent in 2021 and 1.87 per cent in 2020. Insurance & Reinsurance is becoming a "National Security Industry".

The earnings of insurance companies in Oman and GCC are dependent to a large extent on the reinsurance commission and direct insurance receive as a

significant portion of the business is not retained i.e. fronting insurance transactions and proportional reinsurance treaties. A very high proportion of the premium is ceded to the foreign reinsurer abroad in the most cases (business out flow) to the foreign companies in the foreign countries. This is a big challenge. This is illustrated and described in insurance market index published by the CMA edition 2023.

A- Gross Written Premium, Premium Retention & Claims Paid.

I. Oman Market Gross written premium (GWP) in the year 2022 was RO 541.326 million compared to RO 479,857million in the year 2021. (Increase by 12.8 per cent). GWP in the year 2020 was RO 465.895 million. Compared with amount RO 486.582 million in the year 2019 (Decreased by 4.3 per cent).

II. Premium retention ratio of insurance companies in the year 2022 was 55.7 per cent of GWP, compared with 55.5 per cent in the year 2021. In year 2020 premium retention ratio was 56.52 per cent of GWP

III. Total claims amount paid by Insurance Companies in the year 2022 was RO 317.035 million. Ratio to GWP as 59 per cent. Compared to the amount paid RO 289.834 million in the year 2021 (Increased by 9.4 per cent). Ratio to GWP was 60 per cent and 62 per cent in year 2020

Health & Motor Insurance class of business is continuing dominating the market insurance index.

B- Health Insurance

I. Last year 2022 Health Insurance GWP amount RO 191.517 million. Ratio to the GWP was 35 per cent. In the year 2021 Health Insurance GWP amount RO 163.866 million. Ratio to the GWP was 34 per cent and in the year 2020 GWP amount RO 155.193 million. Ratio to the GWP was 33 per cent.

II. Health Insurance class of business market retained premium in the year 2022 was 79 per cent of GWP; in the year 2021 was 76 per cent in the year 2020 was 74 per cent.

III. Health Insurance Claims paid in the year 2022 amount RO 146.538 million. Ratio to the GWP

was 76.5 per cent. In the year 2021 claims paid amount RO 120,123. Ratio to the GWP was 73.3 per cent and in the year 2020 claims amount paid RO 120.749 million. Ratio to the GWP was 77.8 per cent

B- Motor Insurance

I. Last year 2022 Motor Insurance GWP amount RO 106.543 million. Ratio to the GWP was 19.7 per cent. In the year 2021 GWP amount RO 102.598 million. Ratio to the GWP 21.4 per cent. In the year 2020 GWP amount RO 113.364 million. Ratio to GWP was 24.3 per cent

II. Motor Insurance class of business market retained premium ratio to the GWP in the year 2022 was 90.66 per cent compared to 91.2 per cent in the year 2021 and 90.1 per cent in the year 2020.

III. Motor Insurance class of business Gross claims amount paid in the year 2022 was RO 82.649 million (Ratio to GWP was 77.6 per cent). Compared to year 2021 was RO 78.150 million. Ratio to GWP was 76.2 per cent and compared to year 2020 was RO 67.728 million. Ratio to GWP 59.7 per cent. (To be continued...)

Re-evaluating the fish companies

Although the fisheries sector is of great importance in the Omani economy, the government and the private sector have not benefited from this sector during the past years, as we see in other maritime countries. The existence of the Omani Fish Company since 1988 did not produce good results for the local economy, if the government had not spent on it to cover its annual losses as one of the subsidiaries of the Omani Investment Authority.

From this standpoint, the OIA began during the last period to re-evaluate the losing companies, and lay out new plans for them to launch them again in several sectors including fish and other promising ones. This helps in providing more business for Omanis as well as expatriates.

Recently, the Authority began to support its new companies, including the establishment of the "Oman Fish Development Company", which was launched in 2019.

Today, this company includes many subsidiary companies under the new umbrella, including the losing "Oman Fish Company", in addition to other companies specialised in fish farming sector and the marine products.

They will have new production process and integration among them in exporting the products to the markets, besides increasing the yield of fish industries, enhancing their commercial aspects, and investing in profitable projects that can show their economic value to investors.

Also, the aim of establishing this company is to seek to explore and invest in more local



HAIDER ABDUL REDHA
AL-LAWATI
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THE PRESENCE OF OMAN FISH COMPANY IN ITS VARIOUS SUBSIDIARIES WILL INCREASE THE COUNTRY'S COMPETITIVENESS IN THE GLOBAL MARKETS AS WELL AS STRENGTHEN AND STIMULATE THE OMANI ECONOMY BY CREATING ATTRACTIVE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTORS, OPENING WIDER AREAS FOR LOCAL SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES, AND ENHANCING THEIR ADDED VALUE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.



and international opportunities in this sector, and to work to enhance the profitability and sustainability of this important sector on a global scale.

The presence of Oman Fish Company in its various subsidiaries will increase the country's competitiveness in the global markets as well as strengthen and stimulate the Omani economy by creating attractive investment opportunities for investors, opening wider areas for local small and medium enterprises, and enhancing their added value

at the local level.

The company is also working today to achieve sustainability by nurturing and developing its local workforce with the aim of creating local economic leaders and technical experts.

Recently the company has been supported by a specialised fishing vessel imported from Spain, the "Aquila" vessel, which was designed according to the highest international standards in order to practice sustainable fishing and benefit from Omani pelagic fish that breed in the local seas and the Indian Ocean.

This ship will work on catching different types of tuna fish in international waters while maintaining the highest levels of quality in the field of marine fishing, which will enhance the Sultanate of Oman's position for investment in the fish sector, and as an attractive investment destination for local and international investors. This step also helps to improve the fishing potential of the Omani fisherman, who still relies on the usual daily catch of small fish through simple fishing tools.

The development projects of

the Oman Fish Company aim at the sustainable exploitation of the fish wealth resources in the Omani seas and to enhance the capabilities of the younger generations to enter this rich sector, and to specialise in those important fields, taking advantage of Oman's maritime history.

This makes the Sultanate of Oman to become one of the important countries in the delivery of fish to neighbouring countries, Arab and foreign countries of various fish products with high-quality ones.

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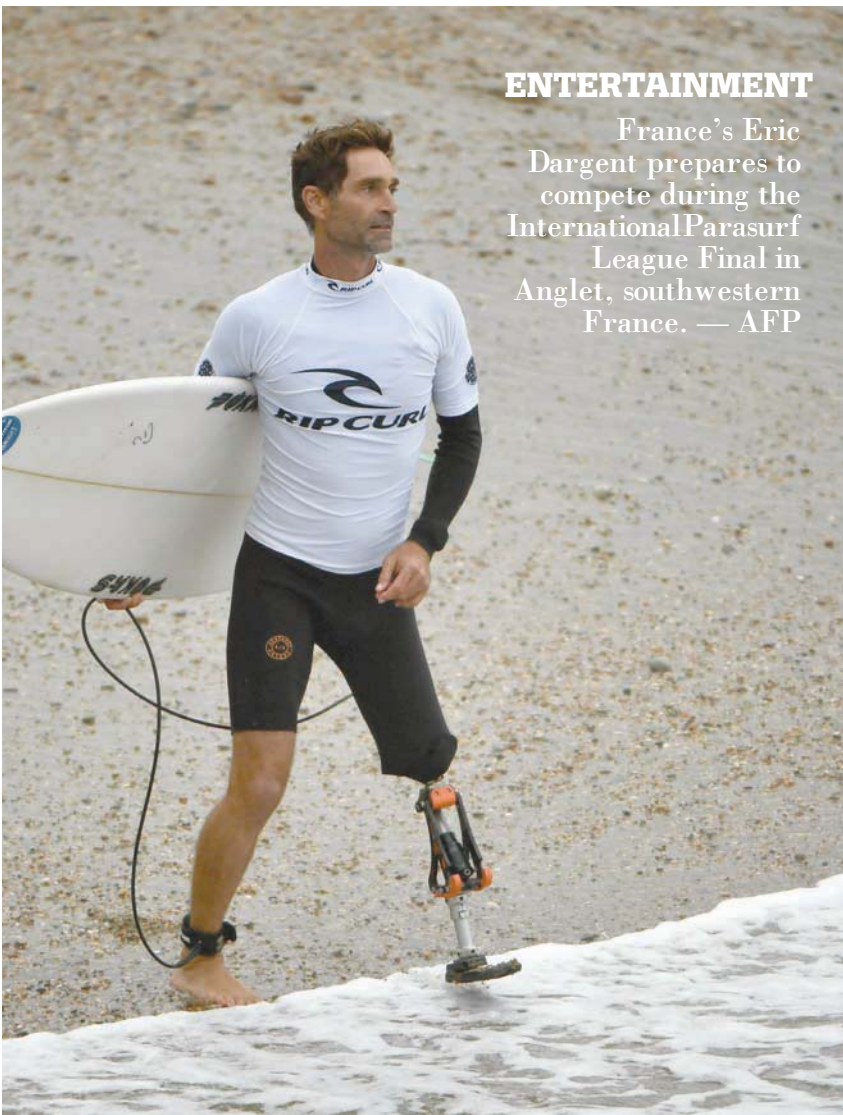
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MUSIC
British band “Foals” performs on stage during the 20th edition of the Rock en Seine music festival in Saint-Cloud, south-western Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
A school student looks on as a vendor sells self-made caps of animal figurines along a street in Mumbai. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
France's Eric Dargent prepares to compete during the International Parasurf League Final in Anglet, southwestern France. — AFP



WEATHER
People ride a bicycle through a flooded street in Havana, during the passage of tropical storm Idalia. — AFP



FASHION
A model displays a creation from the 2024 spring/summer collection by Chinese-American designer EJ Sheyang during Tokyo Fashion Week in Tokyo. — AFP

art & life

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A reddish-orange ball lights up skies

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
PHOTOS BY SAID AL HASHMI

The second super-moon of August, a celestial delight for stargazers and astronomy lovers, unfolded over Oman skies on Wednesday.

According to astronomers, the supermoon from August 30 to 31 will be the closest, largest, and brightest full supermoon of 2023. At that time, the moon will be 357,343 kilometres from earth.

Mahmoud al Amri, a member of the Omani Astronomical Society, said: “We see the moon in giant size when it is at the closest point in its orbit around the earth. As the moon revolves around the earth in an elliptical orbit, the distance between the moon and the earth changes during the month. The moon passes once at the closest point in its orbit around the

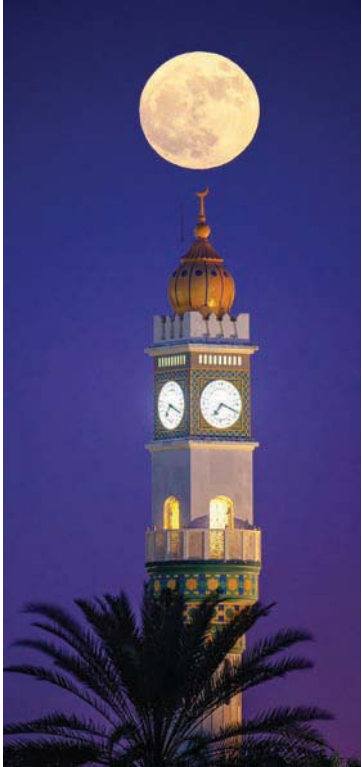


earth and again at the farthest point in its orbit. For this reason, the size and brightness of the moon var-



ies according to its location from these two points.”

Oman witnessed the giant moon phenomenon two times



this August, the moon had become a full moon at the beginning and end of this month which coincided with



Mahmoud al Amri, a member of the Omani Astronomical Society

the middle of the two Hijri months of Muharram and Safar.

Al Amri said the best time to monitor and photograph this astronomical phenomenon is at the sunrise or sunset. During this time we see the difference in its size and brightness. He said it is difficult to distinguish this differ-

ence when it becomes high in the sky.

The moon's colour at sunrise will be reddish or orange due to dust in the atmosphere scattering the white light and just colours of the red spectrum that we see remain. Once it changes the location, it will retain the usual silvery white colour.

So, whether you're a seasoned stargazer or just a lay person curious about the wonders of the cosmos, this night offers a truly extraordinary viewing experience for the moon's luminous appearance. Take out your telescopes and cameras, and find a clear, open area away from city lights for the best possible view of this extraordinary event. If you don't have any of the gear, you can watch it with Oman Astronomical Society's telescopes at Al Araimi Boulevard tonight from 7 pm to 10 pm. Be ready to be awestruck by the celestial spectacle.



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19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Salalah, Oman

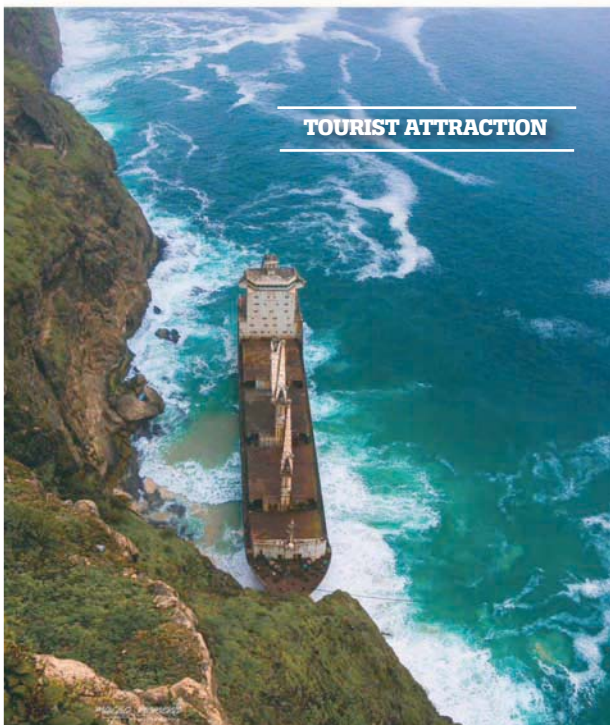
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Hollywood strike saps glamour from 80th Venice Film Festival

A HISTORIC HOLLYWOOD STRIKE robbed the Venice Film Festival of some of its usual glitz as it launched its 80th edition on Wednesday, but a raft of big-name — and controversial — directors are keeping the film world buzzing.

The world's longest-running film fest was due to start with "Challengers", a tennis romance with one of the biggest stars of her generation, Zendaya.

But it was replaced at the last minute by an Italian war drama, "Comandante", due to the ongoing strike by Hollywood actors and writers — primarily over pay and the threat of AI — that has barred them from publicity work.

The rest of the line-up was largely unaffected and a string of Oscar hopefuls have pressed ahead with Venice premieres, albeit in the absence of acting talent to light up the red carpet.

Emma Stone will not be present for the highly anticipated "Poor Things", in which she plays a Frankenstein-like creature. Nor will Bradley Cooper, who directs and stars in "Maestro" about the legendary conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein.

US media have reported that Adam Driver will show up for "Ferrari". The biopic from director Michael Mann ("Heat") got an exemption from the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) because it was made outside the studio system.

Jessica Chastain is also expected for the premiere of "Memory" towards the end of the festival, according to Variety. It is her first outing since her Oscar-winning turn in "The Eyes of Tammy Faye".

All are competing for the top prize Golden Lion, to be awarded on September 9 by a jury led by Damien Chazelle, director of "La La Land".

Other attention-grabbing entries include Sofia Coppola's "Priscilla",

about Elvis Presley's wife, and "The Killer" by David Fincher, who returns to the Lido two decades after "Fight Club" was famously booed at the festival only to become a cult hit in later years.

DON'T UNDERSTAND THE 'HOSTILITY'

With less star gossip, a lot of attention risks being absorbed by the inclusion of Woody Allen with "Coup de Chance" (his 50th film and first in French) and Roman Polanski with "The Palace", both in the out-of-competition section.

Allen, 87, was investigated for an alleged assault on his adopted daughter and cleared by police in the 1990s, but that has not been enough for many in the MeToo era, and he has been effectively blackballed by Hollywood.

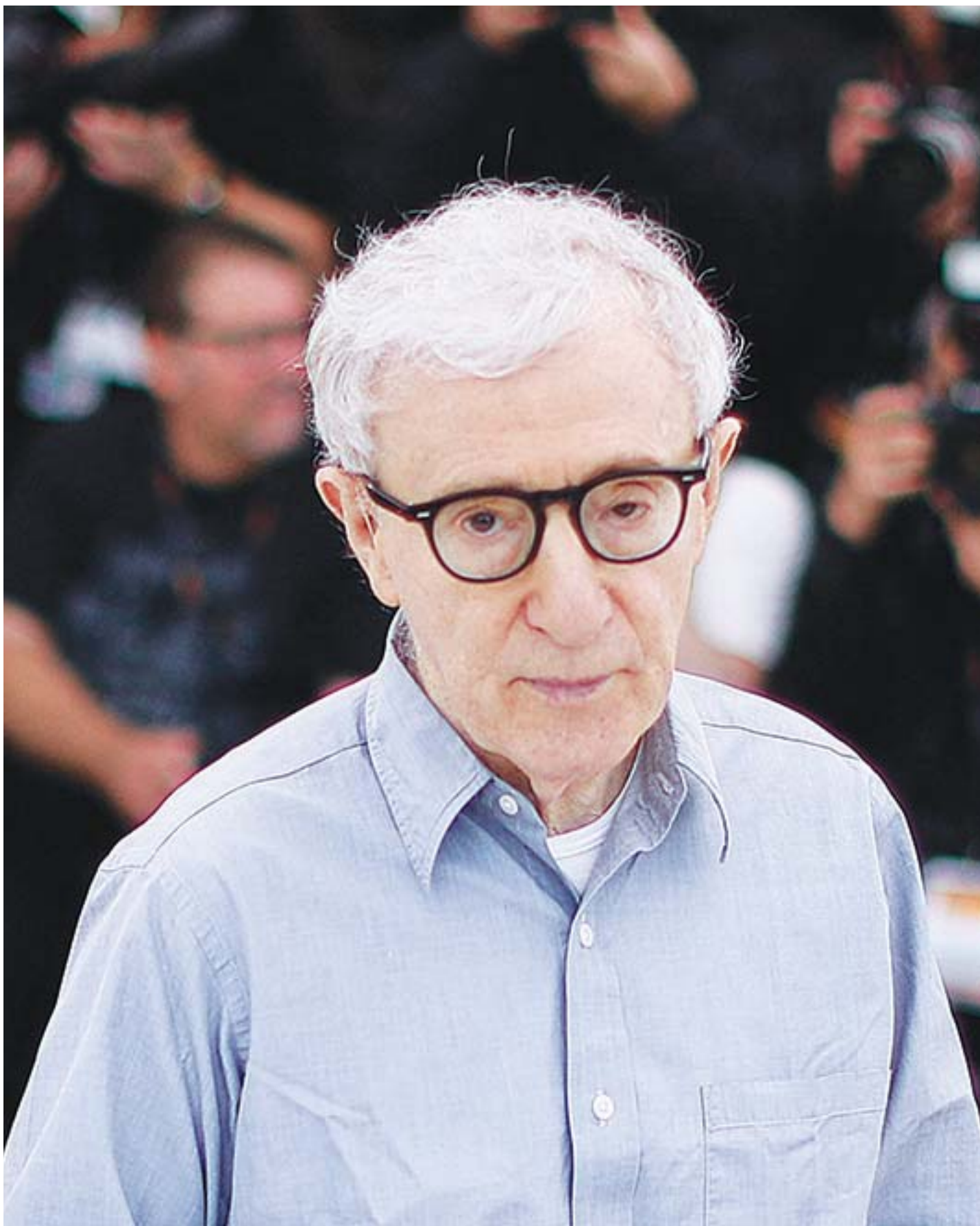
Festival director Alberto Barbera defended Allen's inclusion, saying: "He has been completely absolved. Twenty-five years have passed and, for me, the hostility towards him, especially in the United States, is absolutely incomprehensible."

Polanski, 90, remains a fugitive from the United States over a conviction for raping a minor in the 1970s. The victim has long since forgiven him, but he faces other assault allegations.

The festival says he is not attending. Barbera acknowledged it was more complex with Polanski but said: "The history of art is full of artists who were criminals, and we nonetheless continue to admire their work."

There are also out-of-competition premieres for a 40-minute Wes Anderson film, "The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar", based on a Roald Dahl tale, and a new feature from indie favourite Richard Linklater, "Hit Man".

"The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial", the final film from William Friedkin ("The Exorcist"), who died this month at 87, is also playing out of competition. —**AFP**



FASHION

Kashmir mulled as Miss World host

Miss World beauty contest organisers say they are considering holding the pageant in Indian-administered Kashmir as part of a month-long series of events across India.

India is now promoting tourism in the region -- home to spectacular mountain scenery -- and more than a million Indian citizens visited last year.

Miss World Organisation chair Julia Morley said that India will host a month-long series of events for the annual international beauty

pageant from November to December, with hopes to host part of the schedule in Kashmir.

"This is a blessed place for tourism," Morley told reporters while on a visit to Srinagar on Monday, the region's main city.

In a later statement issued on Tuesday, Jamil Saidi, chairman of Indian event organisation company PME Entertainment, said the location of the final contest had not been decided.

"The venue for the finale is to be finalised and will be announced officially at a later date", Saidi said, adding that the official schedule of events across India had not been decided.

Miss World organisers say the contest "celebrates the beauty, intellect, and humanitarian efforts of women".

Competitors will take part in "talent showcases, sports challenges and charitable



initiatives" to shortlist participants before the grand finale in December, the organisation said.

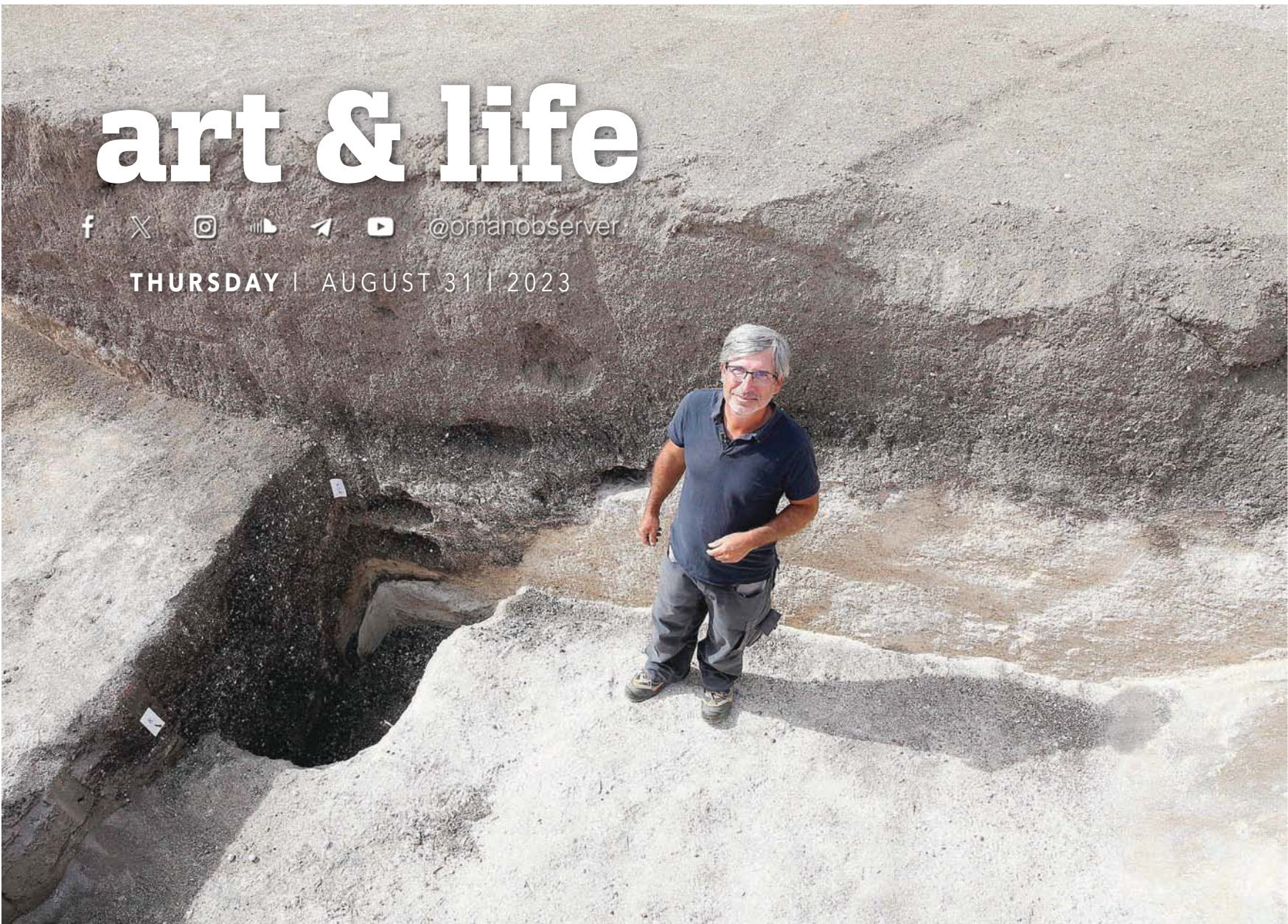
The pageant has in the past sparked protests from critics who say it perpetuates the objectification of women and contributes to a beauty industry that pressures women to appear a certain way.

In May, India hosted a G20 tourism meeting in Srinagar under tight security in a bid to show that what officials call "normalcy and peace."

Miss World 2022 Karolina Bielawska said she was stunned by Kashmir's scenery.

"I cannot wait to welcome 140 nations, and all my friends and family, to bring them here to India and to show them places like Kashmir, like Delhi, Mumbai... you have so many beautiful places", the Polish model said on Monday.

— **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

Neolithic village discovered in France after 150 years of research



ARCHAEOLOGISTS WORKING a vast Neolithic site in northeast France have uncovered what they say is the last piece of the puzzle — traces of a permanent settlement.

The settlement was unearthed at the vast Neolithic site of Marais de Saint-Gond, giving rare insights into its social organisation 150 years after the first flints were discovered.

"This is the last piece of the jigsaw we were missing," said Remi Martineau, a researcher at France's national centre for scientific research (CNRS), who located the village with his team this summer.

In Marais de Saint-Gond in northeastern France, 15 large flint mines have already been identified on 450 hectares, as well as 135 hypogeum — constructed underground chambers.

Five megalithic covered alleys, ten polishers for axes and fields cultivated by controlled burns have also been located since flints were first discovered a century and a half ago.

This new discovery makes it possible to pass a milestone in the understanding of "the economic, societal and territorial organisation of the Neolithic", Martineau said, adding that there is "no equivalent" in all of Europe.

The village was discovered when a ditch for the installation of a palisade was identi-

fied in the commune Val-des-Marais around 136 kilometres (84 miles) from Paris.

The prehistoric enclosure was circling a hill, enclosing an estimated area of one hectare (2.5 acres), according to the archaeological evaluations.

In the process, an apse building was cleared, near a large rubbish pit some 20 metres in diameter, along with wells.

"The site was completely structured," said Martineau.

"The foundations of our society are already there."

These successive discoveries are the result of a research programme started 20 years ago, led by the CNRS.

The last campaign, which brought together CNRS, the joint laboratory Artheis, the University of Bourgogne Franche-Comte and the culture ministry, involved 50 people including researchers from France and abroad, as well as 20 "excavators", mainly archaeology students.

They have also unearthed a tiny oval object made of mother-of-pearl — a true "museum piece", according to Martineau.

It is pierced with two holes in the centre and is a likely ancestor of the button, which dates to 3,400 to 3,300 years ago.

Given its well-preserved state, researchers hope that the rest of the site will be equally well-preserved if more excavations are conducted in the future. — **AFP**



THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



Shaddad al Musalmy

Litter not please; bin your garbage responsibly

The issue of random littering is growing bigger every day due to the careless behaviour of some individuals who tend to throw waste either randomly in public places or outside the trash bins.

Despite all of the efforts by the authorities to spread awareness to minimise the bad behaviours, some people continue practicing random littering not caring for the environment, the waste workers efforts, and their own health. Please let us have some respect for the men who toil daily making our cities clean.

be'ah, the governmental entity responsible for solid waste management in Oman, has had many campaigns seeking to spread environmental awareness to stop littering and is now studying modernising the system of legislation related to public cleanliness.

The company has conducted several awareness campaigns to reduce dumping of waste in various regions and has been modernising the system of legislation related to public cleanliness and waste management to reduce this phenomenon and spread awareness among the community.

I have noticed many bins with trash scattered around them. We need to keep our beautiful Oman clean. The government is spending a lot of money just to collect and process waste, so, in order to appreciate its efforts towards conserv-

THE GOVERNMENT IS SPENDING A LOT OF MONEY JUST TO COLLECT AND PROCESS WASTE, SO, IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE ITS EFFORTS TOWARDS CONSERVING OUR ENVIRONMENT, THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE MORE RESPONSIBLE.

ing our environment, the community should be more responsible.

Another issue of concern is that those who dispose waste inside the trash bins, most of the time do not close the lids leaving it open which causes many issues like bad odours attracting stray animals which usually scatter the waste.

Until the concerned authorities take strict action against the people who use trash bins irresponsibly, the situation is set to remain the same. There is a need for harsher measures to deal with wrong doers.

The practice of littering has increased noticeably in recent times in many public places and residential neighbourhoods despite easy and widespread access to specially designated containers of all sizes.

The municipality has adopted a number of solutions in recent times, including intensifying awareness drives, the direct transfer of waste from some neighbourhoods, and the use of open containers for the ease of throwing waste into them.

Authorities have reiterated that people need to be more sensible towards the issue of littering and are looking forward to increasing awareness among the people to help us spread the messages across.

So, litter not please and bin your garbage responsibly for the sake of those men who spend their nights cleaning up our cities as everyone else is in the comfort of their beds.

Till next, keep your city clean.

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