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OQGN OUTLINES
5-YEAR PLAN TO GROW
PIPELINE NETWORK



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THE ENCHANTING
LOTUS GARDEN
OF WADI SHAB



P12

GOOD
DAY FOR
DJOKOVIC



MUSCAT

**HM GREETINGS TO
PRESIDENT OF BRAZIL**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the Federal Republic of Brazil, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness for President Da Silva. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of Brazil further progress and prosperity. — ONA

**OIA INVESTS IN
OUR NEXT ENERGY**

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced its investment in the US-based company 'Our Next Energy (ONE)', which specialises in innovative battery technology for Electric Vehicles (EVs) and energy storage. This step comes in continuation of OIA's efforts to diversify its international investment portfolio and achieve optimal benefit for Oman in terms of return on investment and sustainable investments that align with Oman's commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.

DETAILS ON P13



WEEKEND
READ

A WEEKLY DIGITAL SERVICE FROM
OMAN OBSERVER

omanobserver.om

A RISE IN SCENTED CREATIONS
OF JABAL AKHDAR PRODUCTS

The ASMED Business and Incubators
Center in Al Jabal Al Akhdar has produced
around 60,000 bottles of fragrances and
essential oils, including white rose water and
frankincense spray, since its inception until
mid-2023.
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Oman aims to eliminate adult illiteracy totally by next year

International Literacy Day on September 8

MUSCAT: The number of teachers working in literacy centres in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman during the academic year (2022-2023) stood at 8,631, whereas 2,623 adults were enrolled in literacy programmes in the same academic year.

This was revealed as the country joins Unesco and world countries to mark the 'International Literacy Day' which is celebrated on September 8 every year.

As a result of the strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education, including special activities to achieve literacy programmes and projects and speed up the eradication of illiteracy, Oman had seen its illiteracy rate dropping to 2.60 among the age group 15 years and above, according to the 2022 data of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

In order to achieve the desired goal of the Arab Decade, which is for the Sultanate of Oman to be free of illiteracy by the end of 2024, the Ministry of Education focused on eradicating the illiteracy of the productive age group (15-44) during this decade period.

The statistics received from the authorities showed the

percentage of illiteracy in the aforementioned age group reached (0.44%) by the end of 2023 as compared to the percentage for the same category in the year 2015, the beginning of the Arab Decade period, this percentage was (2.2%). This is considered a qualitative achievement in eliminating illiteracy in the aforementioned category, and Oman seeks to achieve its commitment by 2024.

As part of the celebrations, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the ministry, will highlight the most significant efforts, projects and programmes it undertakes to eradicate illiteracy.

This year the International Literacy Day will be celebrated under the theme 'Promoting literacy for a world in transition: Building the foundation for sustainable and peaceful societies'.

Since the academic year 1973-1974, the Sultanate of Oman has been working hard to limit and eventually eliminate all forms of illiteracy - reading, writing, cultural and civilisational illiteracy. The country is committed to the principle of 'the right to education for all' without discrimination on the basis of genders or age groups in confirmation that education is a guaranteed right for all.



TOUR OF SALALAH FROM SEPTEMBER 10 TO 13

The third edition of thrilling Tour of Salalah cycling race is all set to enthrall the cycling enthusiasts and public alike through its four competitive stages from September 10 to 13. The UCI-calendar event will begin from Khor Rori in Salalah for a 123.7 km first stage to finish at Ayn Ishat. Nearly 100 cyclists will compete in the Tour of Salalah 2023 with four stages across the picturesque terrain of the land of the frankincense. **DETAILS ON P10**

Intra-GCC exports rose by 13.4%

SALALAH: The intra-GCC exports increased by 13.4 per cent reaching \$83.4 billion in 2021 compared to \$73.5 billion in 2020. This was revealed by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, while delivering a welcoming speech at the ministerial level meeting of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority in Salalah on Wednesday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Al Saqri and attended by Chairmen of the Standing Preparatory Committee at the ministerial level of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority.

Stressing the magnitude of the efforts to develop cooperation, coordination, and integration among member states, Dr Al Saqri said that the review of the development path of the GCC countries in general underpins the importance of the role played by the GCC Economic and Development Authority.

In recent years, the GCC economies have witnessed further improvement and recovery. **SEE ALSO P2**

Newly discovered comet visible this weekend

PARIS: A comet called Nishimura discovered just a month ago could be visible to the naked eye this weekend, offering stargazers a once-in-a-437-year chance to observe the celestial visitor.

The ball of rock and ice, whose exact size remains unknown, is named after the Japanese amateur astronomer Hideo Nishimura who first spotted it on August 11.

It is rare that comets reach their moment of peak visibility so



soon after being discovered, said Nicolas Biver, an astrophysicist at the Paris Observatory.

"Most are discovered months, even years before they pass closest to the Sun," he said.

The comet only swings by the Sun every 437 years, he said, a long orbital period which sees it spend much of its time in the freezing outer Solar System. When comets approach the Sun from the vastness of space, the heat causes its ice core to turn into dust and gas, which form a long tail.

Nishimura, which has the scientific name C/2023 P1, will pass closest to the Sun on September 17. — AFP

200 acres for mango cultivation project in Barka

BARKA: The Mango Production and Marketing project in the Wilayat of Barka is an output of the Food Security Lab and is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. It aims to boost national production of mangoes for the local market.

Nasser bin Hamad al Sabaei, CEO of the project, said that the project has an investment value of RO 1.250 million and it occupies an area of 200 acres. He added that the Mango Production and Marketing Project is an integrated farm for

In the first stage, 5,000 mango saplings were planted and an additional 5,000 saplings will be planted by the end of this year as per the executive plan. Upon completion, the project will have 17,000 mango saplings

mango cultivation and aims to provide a large supply of high-quality mangoes.

The implementation of the project began in accordance with the plan. Besides, a modern irrigation network was installed and electricity was connected to the farm. In the first stage, 5,000 mango saplings were planted and an additional 5,000 saplings will be planted by the end of this year as per the executive plan. Upon completion, the project will have 17,000 mango saplings planted on

an area of 200 acres to produce an estimated 3,600 tonnes of mangoes annually by 2028. The project is expected to provide job opportunities for nationals, he added.

The project applies latest methods and guidelines and internationally recommended agricultural methods in the plantation of mango saplings and other methods like pruning, etc., to provide appropriate environment for large-scale cultivation of mangoes. — ONA





GCC meeting explores opportunities of economic integration

SALALAH: The Standing Preparatory Committee at the ministerial level of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority held the 5th meeting of in Salalah on Wednesday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, and attended by Chairmen of the Standing Preparatory Committee at the ministerial level of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority.

Dr Al Saqri delivered a welcoming speech at the meeting in which he stressed the magnitude of

the efforts to develop cooperation, coordination, and integration among member states.

He pointed out that the review of the development path of the GCC countries in general underpins the importance of the role played by the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority. In recent years, the GCC economies have witnessed further improvement and recovery, and the GCC countries have been able to contain inflationary pressures that have worsened in most countries of the world during 2022 he added.

Al Saqri also also pointed out that intra-GCC exports increased



by 13.4 per cent reaching USD 83.4 billion in 2021 compared to USD 73.5 billion in 2020. The draft agenda of the meeting included a number of important topics, foremost of which are:

the decisions issued by the GCC Supreme Council at its 43rd session held in December 2022, to achieve economic unity. The ministers also reviewed the proposal of the Secretariat General

on the governance of the joint Gulf economic and development action, in addition to the latest updates in the action plan for building the Gulf economic model and its mechanism, along with the proposed timeframe.

In addition, the meeting reviewed the outputs and recommendations of the future integration prospects in the economic and development fields of the GCC countries. The Gulf Statistics Center also presented a detailed performance dashboard for the level of implementation in the common market, and the outputs of the statistical survey to measure the implementation of the decisions of the Gulf joint action.

The Committee's decisions will be submitted to the Supreme Committee for Economic and Development Affairs. — ONA

Dhofar declared 'Agricultural Quarantine Area' in drive against Parthenium weed

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 6

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) has declared Dhofar Governorate an agricultural quarantine area in an effort to combat the Parthenium hysterophorus pest.

Parthenium hysterophorus is a highly invasive species that can cause significant damage to agricultural crops and livestock. It is also a known carcinogen and can cause health problems in humans.

The ministerial decision, which was published in the Official Gazette on July 16, 2023, prohibits the import, sale, cultivation, propagation, and transportation of Parthenium hysterophorus in Dhofar Governorate. It also regulates the production, manufacture, import, and circulation of non-heat-treated organic fertilisers and substances that may inadvertently contain the pest.



Violators of the decision face administrative fines ranging from RO 500 - 1000. They may also face criminal penalties under the Agricultural Quarantine Law.

Speaking to the Observer, Eng Fael al Jahfli of the Ministry said: "We urge the public to cooperate in the fight against Parthenium hysterophorus. They can do this by reporting any sightings of the pest to the ministry or by destroying any plants that they see." He added that the Ministry is committed to protecting agricultural resources and public health. The declaration

of the agricultural quarantine area in Dhofar is a significant step in this effort.

The official also emphasised that cooperation is essential from all parties, especially the Royal Oman Police (ROP), which is the general controller of public transportation in the Sultanate of Oman. He also urged citizens and farm owners to avoid buying untreated fertilisers.

Environmental activist Ali bin Salem Akaak has also appealed to the public to help combat the invasive pest Parthenium hysterophorus. Also known as



"congress grass" or "carrot weed," Parthenium hysterophorus is native to Mexico and Central America, but it has been introduced to many other parts of the world, including Oman.

"This pest is a major threat to our agricultural resources and public health," said Akaak.

"It can spread rapidly and is difficult to control. We need everyone's help to get rid of it." Akaak also said that the ministry is working with other government agencies and stakeholders to combat Parthenium hysterophorus.

CPA warns against price hike

KABEER YOUSUF
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Prices of essentials during the Khareef season are well under control. Dedicated officials are on duty checking on any undue price hike in and around Dhofar Governorate, according to an official from the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).

Speaking to the Observer, the official urged all commercial entities to follow the price range as they used to be pre-Khareef season, and anyone found to be charging additional amounts on any goods or services will be subject to legal procedures.

This comes in the wake of the recent visit of Salim bin Ali al Hakamani, Chairman of the CPA, who visited the Governorate of Dhofar to check on the situation of the markets, to learn about the efforts made by consumer protection in stabilising them, and to witness the progress of work in monitoring and organising them.

"Due to the vast expansion of economic activities in the Dhofar Governorate, the business and economic scenario is thriving, and it pays to have better monitoring of the market to ensure the quality of services provided to the consumer," said Salim bin Ali al Hakamani, Chairman of the CPA.

He further said that any

price hike due to any valid reason should get prior approval from the concerned authorities, failing which will incur remedial measures to be taken against them.

His statement comes in the wake of a slew of complaints where some of the commercial establishments were charging extra for the goods or services delivered in view of the tourist influx during the Khareef season.

During the visit, Salim bin Ali al Hakamani met with Mohammed bin Saif al Busaidy, Wali of Salalah where they reviewed the Authority's efforts in Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef season, and the efforts made to stabilise the markets as a result of intensifying field monitoring and follow-up operations and taking the necessary legal measures against violators.

The Consumer Protection chief was also briefed on the role and efforts made by the concerned department in monitoring and verifying consumer observations, examining complaints and reports and dealing immediately with them, at the level of following up on the markets by intensifying oversight and forming work teams.

The CPA Chief also visited a number of markets, centres and shops in Dhofar Governorate.

Oman to participate in heritage meeting in Riyadh

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will take part in the plenary meeting of the World Heritage Committee's 45th session, due to be held in Riyadh from September 10-25, 2023.

Oman's delegation will be led by Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hamami, Permanent Representative of the

Sultanate of Oman to the Unesco. The delegation also includes experts in tangible cultural heritage, representing the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the Environment Authority and Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

Oman attends the meeting in its capacity as member of the World Heritage Committee since the 44th session, organised from China via videoconferencing in 2021 after the session was adjourned in 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic.

Oman assumed significant roles through its discussion of files

submitted by member states. The international committee accords three segments to its speciality in the global list of sites.

Accordingly, it designates a site as a 'cultural heritage site', 'natural heritage site' or 'mixed site' that combines natural features and aspects of human intervention.

'Step Forward' elevates women's leadership in sports

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

The 'Step Forward' programme, an initiative organised by the Omani Olympic Committee (OOC) in partnership with Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo), continues its mission to empower women's leadership within the sports and administrative realms.

A workshop was convened on Wednesday at the Omani Olympic Academy headquarters to review and assess sports leadership projects participating in the programme. Under the presence of Taha bin Suliman al Kishri, OOC Secretary-General, and an evaluation committee comprising Sanaa bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, Head of the Oman Committee for Women's

Sports and Gender Equality; Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Touqi, OOC board member and Sports Affairs expert, and Khalifa bin Saif al Aissa'i, Consultant for Special Bodies at the Office of the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The Step Forward programme is a pivotal initiative orchestrated by the Women's Sports Committee for the year aiming to foster women's leadership capabilities in sports and administration. It provides participants with opportunities to cultivate their administrative and leadership acumen, bolster teamwork, and encourage personal development.

Moreover, it contributes to enhancing the stature of women in the sports arena, exemplifying a proactive approach to goal-setting and sports project



development to bolster women's sports in Oman. The programme encompasses a series of specialised workshops and practical training sessions that have been conducted since May, featuring hands-on applications and the hosting of inspirational figures and leaders closely associated with the programme.

During the workshop, the three groups presented their proposed projects, emphasising the practical and executive aspects to the evaluation committee for the selection of the winning project. The victorious project will be unveiled at the closing ceremony scheduled for the end of this month.

In line with Oman's urbanisation and residential revitalisation efforts, this project transforms public spaces in residential areas into vibrant sports parks. It features a badminton court, a multipurpose sports field, an open-air mini-theatre, a cafe, and a service building, offering safe and community-focused sports spaces for all age groups and genders. Environmentally conscious with open facilities, it enhances the aesthetics of the proposed location.

This proposal seeks to establish an academy for electronic sports enthusiasts, facilitating skill improvement, professionalism and participation in global electronic sports competitions. The academy will comprise professional players, trainers

and experts in the electronic sports field. It aims to promote technological innovation, digital culture, and economic development while advancing sports tourism in Oman, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

Khalifa al Aissa'i highlighted the evaluation criteria for these projects, including the idea, target audience, and project feasibility.

Sanaa al Busaidi, shared insights into the 'Step Forward' programme, which included five interactive workshops focused on self-development, leadership, management, and collaborative project ideas. The programme also featured interactions with inspirational figures and the evaluation of group projects by a neutral committee to identify the best initiatives.



Leadership workshop focuses on accelerating digital transition

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with global consultancy company Gartner, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology organised on Wednesday a workshop on the role of leadership and motivation on accelerating government digital transition.

The workshop studied measures to empower digital transition and provide incentives that enhance change and innovation. It also explored major global trends in advanced technologies, as well as means of monitoring areas of the techs' application in the government sector.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport,

Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, underscored the ministry's determination to bring about a qualitative shift in government action, establish a flexible administrative apparatus that keeps pace with rapid technological developments, and upgrade the national manpower's capabilities in the government sector.

Al Shidhani added that the workshop was aimed at ways to transfer knowledge, refine skills and promote the standard of digital awareness through participation and interaction with regional and international platform.

— ONA

Over 500,000 kilogrammes of honey produced in Oman in 2022

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

Oman has achieved significant milestones in honey production. In 2022, local honey production exceeded 533,701 kilogrammes, according to statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Notable governorates in terms of honey production include North and South Al Sharqiyah with 147,088 kilogrammes, North and South Al Batinah Governorate with 131,269 kilogrammes, and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with 126,470 kilogrammes. The total number of honey bee hives reached 130,142 by the end of the previous year.

Abdullah al Muqbali, a beekeeper, emphasised the challenges faced by beekeepers, including environmental pressures, climate change, dwindling food resources, diseases, parasites, and the use of harmful pesticides.

These challenges pose a risk to bee populations and have far-reaching ecological consequences. Bees play a crucial role in pollinating flowers, supporting food production, enhancing



plant diversity, and maintaining environmental balance and biodiversity.

Al Muqbali emphasised that one of the primary obstacles hindering the growth of Omani honey production is the import of honey from foreign countries, despite the substantial quantities produced locally.

Oman is recognised as a significant exporter of honey, and Al Muqbali called for action to curtail the importation of honey from abroad. He pointed out that this practice results in significant losses for local beekeepers and business owners and can lead to

consumer deception, as some imported honey products are fraudulently labeled as originating from Oman. He also urged the allocation of honey exhibitions based on demand to prevent financial losses for beekeepers.

Discussing the challenges faced by beekeepers, Al Muqbali highlighted difficulties in delivering honey products to consumers, citing instances where delivery companies fail to meet deadlines.

He also noted the challenges of maintaining beehives during honey seasons, as beekeepers must search for suitable locations

and expend considerable effort and time when relocating hives.

Combatting diseases that affect beehives and providing essential nutrition during the dry season were among the additional challenges highlighted by Al Muqbali.

Regarding consumer awareness, al Muqbali acknowledged that many consumers are unfamiliar with new honey varieties, raising doubts about product quality. He stressed that diligent inspections and certification processes have effectively addressed these concerns.

CDAA raises awareness of risk assessment in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 6

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Dhofar Governorate has raised awareness for risk assessment through a symposium on vital facilities and a three-day seminar on the security of vital installations.

The symposium, held in Salalah, brought together experts and stakeholders from the security and safety sector, along with project managers from the government and private sectors.

Lt-Col Ahmed Kashop, Commander of the CDAA in Dhofar Governorate, said the symposium was timely, given the industrial and technological progress and competition between companies and factories.

"These factors have led to many health and social risks,



such as work injuries, fires, gas leaks, and hazardous materials leaks," said Lt-Col Kashop.

"The CDAA plays a vital role in dealing with these risks. We investigate reports of accidents and work with security and safety teams at facilities to develop emergency plans and risk assessments." Risk assessment is an analytical process that identifies potential risks and evaluates their likelihood

and severity. It helps develop effective mitigation measures to reduce the risk of accidents and incidents.

The symposium allowed participants to learn about the importance of risk assessment and how to implement it in their organisations. It also highlighted the CDAA's role in protecting the public's health and safety.

The seminar featured 17 speakers and attracted 250

participants. The seminar provided a forum for discussing critical security and safety issues, focusing on global perspectives and insights. Participants explored a wide range of topics related to occupational security and safety, including the introduction of cutting-edge technological innovations and novel practices in the field.

The forum also featured several interactive sessions, providing attendees with opportunities to participate, ask questions and exchange experiences actively.

The seminar was a valuable learning experience for all attendees. It helped raise awareness of the importance of prioritising workers' and facilities' safety and security.

The seminar gave participants the knowledge and skills to implement security and safety measures in their organisations.

Over 7 million mobile subscriptions in Oman

MUSCAT: There are seven million mobile subscriptions as of the second quarter of 2023, an increase of 2.61 per cent over the first quarter of the same year, with an average usage of 87.6 minutes per subscription.

The total fixed-line phone subscriptions are more than 560,000, an increase of 0.15 per cent over the first quarter of the same year, with an average usage of 23.5 minutes per subscription.

As for mobile broadband, total subscriptions until the second quarter of 2023 were

about 6 million, an increase of 4.78 per cent over the first quarter of the same year, with an average usage of 9GB per subscription.

The total fixed broadband subscriptions reached more than 540,000, an increase of 0.18 per cent compared to the first quarter of the same year, with an average usage of 531GB per subscription.

The total international minutes issued during the second quarter of 2023 was 188.8 million minutes.

Open House focuses on public speaking, leadership

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Public speaking is a challenge for many. It needs regular practice to build confidence and emerge as a good orator in public.

Toastmasters is one such platform that helps expand knowledge in public speaking, communication and leadership skills.

Toastmasters' first Open House in District 105, initiated by Area 18 Director TM Dr V Champakavalli, was held last week at Hatat House. The Area 18 comes under Division F, District 105 (Oman) Toastmasters International.

The Open House emphasised the benefits of Toastmasters to prospective members interested in expanding their knowledge in

public speaking, communication and leadership skills.

The very purpose of the Open House was to attract a large number of guests and to boost membership. The clubs under Area 18 include Corporate Club (BIG), Mana TKS Toastmasters, Mana Telugu Toastmasters and Muscat Debaters (Arabic speaking).

Speaking to the Observer, TM Dr V Champakavalli said that open houses are held almost every year, and key guests are invited to share their expertise and knowledge with the participants, which help their personality development.

"With the Open Houses, we aim at improving the participants' confidence and shed any stage fear to mould them to be better speakers of tomorrow. We are paying attention to their ability



to address a gathering, help them improve their leadership skills and provide an opportunity to network and interact with the other

participants," Dr Champakavalli added.

People from different parts of the community were invited

as guests, and dignitaries from District 105 (PQD and CGD), including Saiju Victor, Division F Director, shared their experiences.

Guests were encouraged by the presentations by members, and many showed interest in joining the Toastmasters.

"Usually, leadership traits are hidden skills of a person, and unless he or she gets an opportunity to exhibit and hone the skills, they remain tacit and wouldn't even be able to brush the quality."

The Open House was a huge success as a large number of participants made use of the occasion and interacted with each other, gaining new insights into the unspoken areas of leadership qualities, public speaking and fine-tuning their language. Members from all the clubs and District leaders appreciated the efforts of the Area 18 Director to highlight the Toastmasters International community.



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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HIBBA AL KINDI, who went snorkelling, found a Uno card on the sea floor. “It was weird because it was at the bottom, and it was a reverse Uno card,” she said.

Symbolic indeed, as if asking us to reverse our actions.

At some scenic places, one can see the birds, and then, on a closer look, the trash consists of plastic bags, slippers, discarded pampers, etc.

The discarded materials thrown in the sea return to the shore. There have been international stories of microplastics found in water ending up in the human body. Environmental pollution has been a significant concern, and many measures have been taken.

In Oman today, dumping waste in the sea could lead to a fine of thousands and imprisonment.

If anyone dumps waste or any other harmful material in water, the Environment Authority will impose penalties as per law.

Dumping any material in the marine environment, regardless of its type, shape or condition, is an environmental offence.

The penalty can go up to two years imprisonment and a fine of up to RO 50,000.

This fine is because the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law

LITTER NOT

prohibits dumping waste or any other materials of any kind, shape or condition in the marine environment without a permit from the Environment Agency.

It has also specified a penalty for violators on imprisonment, “For no less than a month and not exceeding two years and a fine of no less than RO 5,000 and no more than RO 50,000, or one of these two penalties.” The Environment Authority has worked on an initiative to create the National Waste Register, a digital national programme. The system aims to know the quantities of waste and its sources, whether at the individual level, shops, industrial facilities, government agencies, etc. It also allows the registration of waste collectors and transporters, including recycling factories and final disposal facilities (engineering landfills). This brings in hazardous waste storage and treatment facilities and the last disposal facility.

It facilitates obtaining data and evaluating local conditions, as well as the methods of providing waste management services. According to the Authority, the system also makes it easier for investors to know the sources and quantities of waste. It facilitates evaluation and proposes mechanisms to deal with it.

In addition, the measure works to strengthen monitoring and inspection operations, following up on compliance with environmental requirements, obtaining licenses, and avoiding random disposal of them in undesignated places.



Armenia, US forces to hold joint drills amid Moscow tensions



Armenian soldier looks through binoculars as he stands at fighting positions near divided Taghavard village in Nagorno-Karabakh. — Reuters file photo

YEREVAN: Armenia will host joint drills with US forces next week, officials in Yerevan said on Wednesday, the latest sign of the ex-Soviet republic's drift from its traditional ally Russia.

The announcement came a day after Moscow dismissed criticism from Armenia that Russian peacekeepers were failing to maintain order over the only route linking Armenia to the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

The Armenian defence ministry said the Eagle Partner 2023 drills aim to "increase the level of interoperability" between Armenian and US forces in international peacekeeping missions.

They will be held on September 11-20 in Armenia's Zar training centre.

The Kremlin responded saying the announcement "raises concerns" and vowed to "thoroughly analyse" the exercises.

Russia and Armenia are at odds over a 2,000-strong Russian peacekeeping contingent responsible for the Lachin corridor, which connects Armenia to the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

They have been deployed there since 2020 when Russia brokered a ceasefire to end a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the mountainous territory.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan recently said Moscow was either "unable or unwilling" to control the corridor.

His government says Azerbaijan has closed the road and blockaded Nagorno-Karabakh spurring a humanitarian crisis in Armenian-populated towns.

Marking a major foreign policy shift, Pashinyan also said that Yerevan's longstanding reliance on Russia as its security guarantor was a "strategic mistake."

His wife was on Wednesday in Kyiv to attend a meeting of first ladies and gentlemen and deliver humanitarian aid for the first time since Russia's attack of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia on Tuesday dismissed criticism from Armenia that its peacekeepers were failing to maintain order at the Lachin corridor, the sole road linking Armenia to the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia deployed peacekeepers to patrol the road in 2020 after Yerevan and Baku fought a war over the region, but Armenia has since accused Azerbaijan of blocking the corridor, stopping food from getting to Armenian-populated towns.

Tensions between Baku and Yerevan have escalated sharply in recent months, as both sides accuse the other of cross-border attacks.

The two sides have been unable to reach a lasting peace settlement despite mediation efforts by the European Union, United States and Russia. — AFP

China warns against 'new Cold War' as big powers meet in SE Asia

JAKARTA: China's premier said on Wednesday major powers must keep their differences under control and avoid "a new Cold War", as top Asian and US officials gathered for talks in Indonesia.

Beijing has expressed concern about US-backed blocs forming on its doorstep, while facing disputes with other powers in the region over the South China Sea and other issues.

"Disagreements and disputes may arise between countries due to misperceptions, diverging interests or external interferences," Li Qiang said at the start of an ASEAN-plus-three meeting with Japan and South Korea in Jakarta.

"To keep differences under control, what is essential now is to oppose picking sides, to oppose bloc confrontation and to oppose a new Cold War."

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) is holding separate summits with China, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada on Wednesday, providing an arena for big powers to lobby the bloc and their rivalries to play out.

US Vice President Kamala Harris is attending in place of President Joe Biden, while Li was taking part instead of President Xi Jinping.

The Chinese premier's comments came after Beijing's Defence Minister Li Shangfu in June warned against establishing



China's Premier Li Qiang (2nd L) speaks during the 26th ASEAN-China Summit at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. — AFP

Nato-like alliances in the Asia-Pacific region.

Washington is a member of the AUKUS defence partnership with Australia and Britain, and the Quad, a strategic alliance that includes Australia, India and Japan.

Wednesday's meetings come before an 18-member East Asia Summit on Thursday to be attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the G20 summit in New Delhi at the weekend, where broader geopolitical issues are expected to

top the agenda.

Harris met ASEAN leaders, praising them for their "shared commitment to international rules and norms... and regional issues".

In a sign of Washington's increasing regional engagement, she announced the creation of the first US-ASEAN centre in Washington.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol are attending both days of meetings.

"Japan and China talked about Fukushima, but it wasn't heated," a

Southeast Asian diplomat said.

Chinese state news agency Xinhua said Li outlined Beijing's position on the issue and called on Japan to handle the matter responsibly.

A roundtable involving Lavrov and Harris on Thursday will be the first high-level US-Russia encounter since a foreign ministers meeting in Jakarta in July, where US and European officials rounded on Moscow's top diplomat over the Ukraine conflict.

— AFP

■ MAASAI BLOWS A WELCOMING HORN



A delegate from the indigenous Maasai community blows a horn and wears an ostrich feathers headgear as he arrives for the Africa Climate Summit (ACS) 2023 at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi, Kenya. — Reuters

Scholz calls on Germany to pull together to remove economic 'mildew'

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday called on the ruling coalition, democratic opposition and local authorities to pull together to overcome the "mildew of red tape, risk averseness and despondency" that has spread across Europe's largest economy in recent years.

"The citizens are fed up with this standstill, and I am too," Scholz said in a speech to the Bundestag lower house of parliament during a session on the 2024 budget, sporting a black eye patch following a jogging accident.

The chancellor announced a new "Germany pact" with a bundle of measures aimed at reducing bureaucracy, speeding up approval processes for new construction

and digitising citizens' access to key government services.

The pact sets out a range of goals to be achieved in consultation with powerful regional governments including swifter online consultation processes for wind farms and transport and data networks, a government document showed. "Citizens want orientation, courageous compromises," Scholz said. "That is my demand of us all: the government parties that have argued too loudly in recent months and also the democratic opposition."

This was also key, he said, to fend off "those who want to draw political profit from decline scenarios and panic-mongering" in reference to the far-right party



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speaks during a plenum session of the lower house of parliament, Bundestag, for a general debate on the Federal Government policy in Berlin. — Reuters

Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has surged in polls over the past year to second place, well ahead of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD).

This "so-called alternative" was in reality a "demolition commando" for our country, he said in unusually harsh terms.

The chancellor rejected the idea of fresh stimulus to boost an economy battling high inflation, financing costs and a drop in exports.

"I set no store by a debt-financed flash-in-the-pan so-called stimulus programme that would counteract the European Central Bank's attempts to fight inflation," he said.

The government was already

investing record sums, he said. The 2024 budget foresaw it investing 58 billion euros from its climate fund in hydrogen, the chip industry, climate-friendly mobility, digital infrastructure and building renovation.

It was also investing 54 billion euros from the regular budget in railways, new bridges, faster Internet, charging stations, social housing and a climate neutral economy. Rail operator Deutsche Bahn alone was getting 24 billion euros extra in investment over the coming four years.

Such sums showed Germany was holding its own vis-à-vis the US and the \$430 billion US Inflation Reduction Act, he said.

— Reuters



S Korea’s Yoon says any military ties with North Korea must stop



South Korea’s President Yoon Suk-yeol (L) attends the ASEAN-South Korea Summit as part of the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. – AFP

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Wednesday any attempt to cooperate with North Korea on military affairs in a way that damages international peace must immediately halt.

Yoon made the comment at a summit meeting with Southeast Asia’s ASEAN bloc countries in Jakarta, Indonesia, his office said.

The office did not elaborate but his comment comes amid reports that arms negotiations between North Korea and Russia are actively advancing and that the North’s leader, Kim Jong Un, plans to visit Russia soon to meet President Vladimir Putin.

“Attempt at military cooperation with North Korea that harms international peace

must immediately halt,” Yoon’s office quoted him as saying at a meeting with the leaders of ASEAN countries. North Korea and Russia have denied they were in arms negotiations.

A visit by Kim later this month to Russia’s far-eastern port city of Vladivostok is partly to discuss supplying Moscow with weapons for the war in Ukraine, the *New York Times* reported.

Russia’s Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, said earlier the two countries planned to conduct joint military exercises.

At a later meeting with ASEAN leaders, together with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Yoon said South Korea would

work closely with the two Asian neighbours with the goal of resuming their three-way talks on improving ties.

An annual summit between the three has not taken place since 2019 because of tensions, largely over Japan’s wartime past.

Yoon called for vigilance to help stop illicit North Korean activities that fund its nuclear and missile programmes, including sending workers abroad to earn foreign currency.

Under a UN Security Council resolution adopted in 2017 and backed by China, UN member countries are required to send back all North Korean workers and not take them on again.

North Korea, which maintained

strict border restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been reopening slowly in recent weeks, with increased train crossings, and the resumption of flights, with China.

Some ASEAN member countries expressed concern over North Korea’s launches of ballistic missiles during a summit with China, South Korea and Japan on Wednesday, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said.

Retno also added that Japan and China touched on the issue of wastewater release in Fukushima during the summit.

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006 and had been testing various missiles over recent years. — Reuters

Hundreds flee Khartoum district after shelling kills 19

WAD MADANI: Hundreds of families fled on Wednesday from a Khartoum suburb where Sudanese army shelling killed 19 civilians the previous evening, activists and residents .

The exodus adds to the almost 2.8 million already displaced from the Sudanese capital — whose pre-war population was around five million — since fighting began on April 15 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

“Hundreds of families are fleeing Ombada,” a district of Omdurman, Khartoum’s sister city across the Nile, a resident of the area said. The person asked for anonymity because of security reasons.

Another resident, also declining to be identified, said “combat has intensified since Tuesday” and included air strikes on Wednesday.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) control the skies over Khartoum and have carried out regular air strikes while RSF fighters dominate the city’s streets.

On Tuesday evening, the Ombada resistance committee said the army had “bombarded the paramilitaries with artillery and drones”.

“These rounds missed their targets and 19 civilians were

killed,” the committee added in a statement on Facebook.

Such committees once organised pro-democracy rallies but now provide a range of community assistance and relief during the war.

The RSF has for years had bases in residential areas. But during the war the United States and Saudi Arabia, which earlier mediated unsuccessful ceasefires, accused the paramilitaries of occupying “civilian homes, private businesses, and public buildings”, some of which were looted.

The US-supported Sudan Conflict Observatory has said the SAF “would still be required to ensure that civilian harm is minimised regardless of whether a target has been made a legitimate military target”.

On Wednesday, residents in various districts of the Khartoum area reported fighting between SAF, led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, and the RSF headed by General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

The latest casualties come after 20 civilians died at the weekend in what activists said was an air strike in Khartoum’s south.

The war had already killed around 5,000 people, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). — AFP



Sudanese wait at a Passports and Immigration Services office in Port Sudan. – AFP file photo

Japan PM speaks to China’s Li about radioactive water release

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Wednesday he explained Japan’s stance on the release of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant to Chinese Premier Li Qiang on the sidelines of a regional meeting in Indonesia.

Japan started releasing the water from the wrecked plant into the ocean last month, drawing strong criticism from China. In retaliation, China has imposed a

blanket ban on all aquatic imports from Japan.

A massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 triggered a nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in the world’s worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl 25 years earlier.

Kishida told reporters he spoke briefly with Li ahead of a session at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta.

“During the chat, I explained



Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during the ASEAN-Indo Pacific Forum (AIPF) as part of the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. – AFP

Japan’s position on the treated water to Premier Li,” Kishida said. He refused to say how Li had responded.

Kishida avoided commenting directly on whether he had sought the ban on aquatic imports to be lifted during his talk with Li, repeating that he had explained Japan’s position. He added nothing had been decided on whether he would talk with Li again on the sidelines of the Group of 20 (G20)

summit later this week.

The talk with Li marked the first time the two had met in person, Japan’s foreign ministry said. It was also the first high-level talk between the two countries since the release of the water from the Fukushima plant. A visit to China by the head of Japan’s junior coalition party in late August was postponed amid worsening relations between Tokyo and Beijing following the water release. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

Floods kill seven in Turkiye’s northwest

At least seven people were killed as heavy rains triggered flash floods in northwest Turkiye, agency Anadolu said on Wednesday.

Five people died and one person was missing in Kirklareli province near the border with Bulgaria and Greece, after houses were flooded. Authorities said a further two people were killed and 31 injured in Istanbul’s northern Basaksehir and Kucukcekmece.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said search and rescue operations were continuing and pledged



financial support to families in flood-affected areas.

Around 125 kilogrammes of rain per square metre hit Istanbul in less than six hours, equal to what Turkiye’s largest city would typically expect in September as a whole. — Reuters

BRASILIA

Brazil cyclone death toll rises to 27

The death toll from an extra-tropical cyclone that lashed southern Brazil with torrential rain and winds rose to 27 after six more bodies were found, authorities said on Wednesday, warning it could increase further.

“Thousands of people have been rescued. Unfortunately, 27 deaths have been confirmed so far, and given the situation, the number could rise further,” Rio Grande do Sul state Governor Eduardo Leite told journalists.

“There are still a lot of families



stranded on the roofs of their houses,” he added. “There are thousands of stranded people who still need to be rescued.”

Communications Minister, Paulo Pimenta, said the federal government would request more aircraft to help in the rescue effort.

CONAKRY

4 dead on anniversary of Guinea coup

Four people in Guinea died in clashes between protestors and security forces on the second anniversary of a military coup, an opposition group said on Wednesday.

A collective called Living Forces said four young men aged 15-18 had died.

The deaths brought the tally of fatalities inflicted by the security forces since June 2022 to 30.

The chronically unstable west African state has been ruled by the military since September



5, 2021, when soldiers forced out the elected octogenarian president, Alpha Conde.

In June the following year, the junta hardened its stance as the opposition clamoured on rights and democracy.

— AFP



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In brief

■ SARAJEVO



DODIK VOWS TO BAN ENVOY FROM SERB ZONE

Bosnia's Serb leader Milorad Dodik ratcheted up tensions in his ongoing confrontation with international peace envoy Christian Schmidt on Wednesday, vowing to ban the official from entering the country's Serb entity.

The announcement comes just days after prosecutors charged Dodik for passing laws that would allow Bosnia's Serb entity to bypass or ignore decisions made by the top international envoy to Bosnia and the constitutional court.

"We don't respect Schmidt," Dodik told the press in Banja Luka, the capital of RS.

"Since this morning, we have been drafting a decree on how to send him back, and how to arrest him if he comes here."

■ MYANMAR



COURT JAILS PHOTOJOURNALIST FOR 20 YEARS

A court in military-ruled Myanmar on Wednesday sentenced a photojournalist to 20 years in prison, the longest known to a media professional since the 2021.

Sai Zaw Thaik was arrested in late May in Rakhine state while he was reporting on the Cyclone Mocha's impact.

The specifics of the charges against the photojournalist were not immediately clear, but initially, he faced legal action under four different laws, which included the Natural Disaster Management Law and Section 505A of the Penal Code.

— Reuters

■ OSLO



COURT REJECTS META BID TO DEFER BAN

A Norway court on Wednesday rejected US tech giant Meta's request to defer a ban on behavioural marketing based on users' personal information, which has landed it a heavy fine in the country.

Since August 14, Meta has been incurring a fine of \$97,000 per day of non-compliance under an order issued by the Norwegian data protection agency Datatilsynet.

It says Meta has failed to comply with a July 14 ban on sending Facebook and Instagram users targeted advertisements based on their personal data which the social media platform collects without their explicit consent. — AFP

Deadly market attack in Ukraine overshadows visit by Blinken

KYIV: A Russian attack on a city in eastern Ukraine killed at least 16 people on Wednesday as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Kyiv to offer support for its counteroffensive against Russia's forces.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy condemned the attack, which hit a market, shops and a pharmacy in the city of Kostiantynivka, close to the battlefield. He said a child was among the 16 dead, and officials said at least 34 were wounded.

"This Russian evil must be defeated as soon as possible," Zelenskiy said, describing it as a deliberate attack on a "peaceful city". Aides posted video footage showing an explosion after what sounded like a missile approaching, and people scurrying for cover or falling to the ground.

Russia did not immediately comment on the attack, and has denied deliberately targeting civilians. Blinken was expected to announce a new package of US wartime assistance worth more than \$1 billion during his two-day visit, a senior State Department official said.

The first top US official to visit Kyiv since the counteroffensive



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy shakes hands with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken before a meeting at Bankova in Kyiv. — Reuters

began in early June, Blinken had talks with Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and was later meeting Zelenskiy.

"We want to make sure that Ukraine has what it needs, not only to succeed in the counteroffensive, but has what it needs for the long

term, to make sure that it has a strong deterrent," Blinken said standing alongside Kuleba.

US media reports have cited

unidentified US officials as saying the Ukrainian counteroffensive has been too slow and hindered by poor tactics — criticism that angered Ukrainian officials and prompted Kuleba to tell critics to "shut up".

Ukraine has retaken more than a dozen villages and small settlements in its offensive. But its push into Russian-held territory has been slowed by minefields and trenches.

US officials have not publicly criticised Ukraine's military tactics, and last week said they had seen progress in the southeast.

The State Department official said Washington wanted to discuss how the counteroffensive was going and assess battlefield needs as well as any steps that might be required to shore up Ukraine's energy security before winter.

Asked about Blinken's visit, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow believed Washington planned to continue funding Ukraine's military "to wage this war to the last Ukrainian".

He said US aid to Kyiv would not affect the course of what he called Russia's special military operation. — Reuters

Storms kill 11 in Mediterranean, east Europe

VOLOS: Storms have killed at least 11 people in Greece, Türkiye and Bulgaria, with a Greek region hit by more rain in 24 hours than it normally sees in a year, officials said on Wednesday.

A period of extreme heat has given way to heavy storms, turning streets in northwestern Türkiye into rivers and hitting Greece with unprecedented downpours as it recovers from weeks of wildfires.

"Everything saved from the fire we had in July has been destroyed by this bad weather," said Christos Kleftakis, 49, in Nea Anchialos, near the central Greek city of Volos.

"This is unprecedented — these severe weather events, the strength of the rain, the wind. I've never seen anything like that before," he added.

Combined with other factors such as urbanisation and land-use planning, these more intense rainfall events contribute to flooding.

Greece's central Magnesia region got rainfall of 600-800

millimetres over a 24-hour period including Tuesday, a government meteorologist told reporters in Athens.

Dimitris Ziakopoulos called it an "unprecedented phenomenon" for the country's meteorological data, which dates back to 1955.

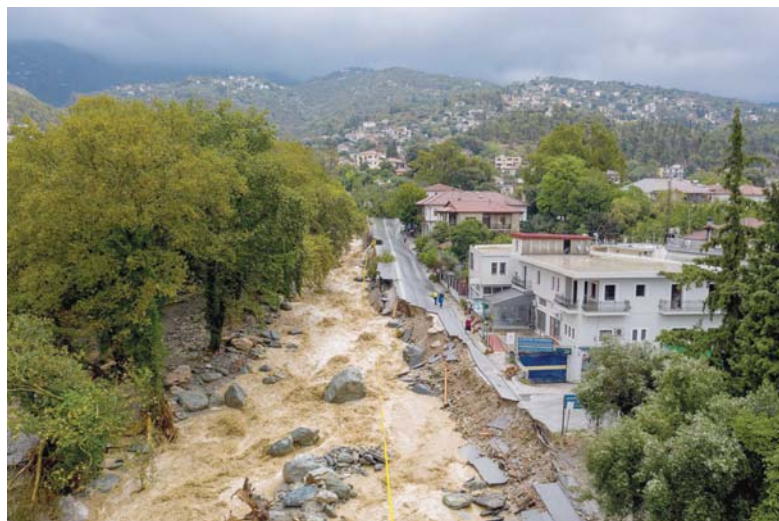
The storm, dubbed "Daniel" by Greek weather experts, has been battering the country since Monday, mainly affecting the Magnesia region and its capital city Volos, 300 kilometres north of Athens.

The torrential rains in Greece follow weeks of devastating wildfires.

"This is an extreme phenomenon," said Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

A massive blaze raging over the last two weeks destroyed swathes of the Dadia national park in the northern Evros region, which officials say is now under control.

In Istanbul, the downpours came after a particularly dry summer that saw the water reservoirs of the city of 16 million people fall to nine-year lows. — AFP



An aerial view shows a partially destroyed road in a flooded area in the city of Volos, Greece. — AFP

Biden administration moving to escalate energy trade dispute with Mexico



Migrants walk to Mexico across the Lerdo-Stanton International Bridge, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. — Reuters file photo

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's administration has asked U.S. energy companies to prepare affidavits documenting how Mexico's protectionist policies disrupted their investments as Washington prepares to escalate a trade dispute with its neighbour, according to people familiar with the discussions.

The request for affidavits from major US oil and renewable energy companies represents the latest and clearest signal that the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) plans to seek an independent dispute settlement panel under the United States Mexico Canada Agreement trade pact, or USMCA.

Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's steps to roll back reforms aimed at opening Mexico's power and oil markets

to foreign competitors ultimately sparked the trade dispute.

U.S. energy and power companies, such as Chevron and Marathon Petroleum, which sought to expand in Mexico, have complained that they have been denied simple permits and applications in decisions that favoured state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) and national power utility Comision Federal de Electricidad (CFE).

The United States is likely to seek a dispute panel before the end of the year if talks on the issue continue to stall, and the affidavits represent evidence that would be included in the panel request, the sources said. If that panel rules against Mexico and it fails to take corrective action, Washington could ultimately impose billions of dollars in retaliatory tariffs on

Mexican goods.

The steps add to a significant worsening of trade relations between Washington and Mexico City, even as their economic integration grows. In August, USTR requested a USMCA dispute settlement panel to intervene in a disagreement over Mexico's curbs on genetically modified corn imports. Mexico now buys about \$5 billion worth of US GM corn annually, mostly for livestock feed.

Like the energy policies, Washington argues that banning GMO corn for human and animal consumption violates Mexico's obligations under the trade pact.

Obrador is seen as a major obstacle to resolving both disputes since he sees energy and corn as important to Mexico's national identity. — Reuters

Africa seeks united front on green growth

KELLY MACNAMARA AND NICK PERRY

A landmark African climate summit was due to wrap up on Wednesday after attracting \$23 billion in funding pledges as leaders sought to forge a united front and highlight the continent’s potential as a green powerhouse.

Africa is acutely vulnerable to the growing impacts of climate change, yet Kenyan President William Ruto has fought for a narrative shift at the Nairobi conference, focusing on accelerating the region’s clean energy transition.

“A new Africa is there and it means business,” Ruto said, adding that the summit had seen funding pledges worth \$23 billion “for green growth, mitigation and adaptation efforts” across the continent.

A final declaration from the Africa Climate Summit is expected to call on the international community to ease the continent’s crushing debt burden and reform the global financial system to unblock investment in clean energy.

Leaders will also demand that rich carbon polluters honour long-standing climate pledges for poorer nations.

Analysts say a united African voice could generate momentum for a series of key gatherings leading to a crunch UN climate summit starting in November, including the G20 meeting in New Delhi this weekend.

But consensus is challenging across the diverse continent of 1.4 billion people, where some governments are championing a renewable-powered future while others defend their reserves of fossil fuels.

Competing visions of the world’s energy future are likely to play out at the COP28 talks in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, where the world will take stock of the as-yet-inadequate efforts to slash planet-heating emissions.

Ruto said the summit had “successfully demonstrated that African solutions are not just appropriate for Africa’s problems, they are necessary for global well-being”.

He said earlier that Africa is well placed to take

AFRICA IS WELL PLACED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NEED TO MOVE AWAY FROM CARBON-SPEWING FOSSIL FUELS

advantage of the need to move away from carbon-spewing fossil fuels, boasting a young population, vast renewable potential and natural resources.

This includes around 40 per cent of global reserves of cobalt, manganese and platinum crucial for batteries and hydrogen fuel cells. Kenya has become a leader on renewables, pledging that they will make up 100 per cent of its electricity mix by 2030.

Efforts at the summit to up investment in renewables were given a boost on Tuesday, with the UAE pledging \$4.5 billion to accelerate Africa’s switch to clean energy. But there are daunting challenges for a continent where hundreds of millions lack access to electricity.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) says Africa hosts 60 per cent of the world’s best solar resources, but only three per cent of energy investments. In a report published on Wednesday, the IEA and the African Development Bank Group urged donors and development finance institutions to scale up concessional funding to encourage private sector investment in Africa’s energy sector.

— AFP

6 billion tonnes of sand extracted from oceans yearly

AGNÈS PEDRERO

Some six billion tonnes of sand and other sediment is extracted from the world’s seas and oceans every year, the UN said, warning of the devastating toll on biodiversity and coastal communities.

Launching the first ever global data platform on sediment extraction in marine environments, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), warned that the scale of dredging was growing, with dire consequences.

“The scale of environmental impacts of shallow sea mining activities and dredging is alarming,” said Pascal Peduzzi, who heads UNEP’s analytics centre GRID-Geneva.

He pointed to the effects on biodiversity, as well as on water turbidity, and noise impacts on marine mammals.

The new data platform, Marine Sand Watch, uses artificial intelligence to track and monitor dredging activities of sand, clay, silt, gravel and rock in the world’s marine environment.

It uses so-called Automatic Identification System (AIS) signals for ships combined with AI to identify the operations of dredging vessels, including in hotspots like the North Sea and the east coast of the United States.

The signals emitted by the vessels allow “access to the movements of every ship on the planet,” Peduzzi said, adding that AI makes it possible to analyse the mountains of data gathered.

That process is still in the early stages, and so far, only around 50 per cent of vessels are being monitored.

But the platform estimates that out of some 50 billion tonnes of sand and gravel used by humanity each year, between four and eight billion tonnes come from the world’s oceans and seas. “This represents six billion tonnes on average every year, or the equivalent of more than one million dump trucks every day,” Peduzzi said.

He pointed out that “our entire society depends on sand as a construction material”, to make everything from schools, hospitals and roads to hydroelectric dams, solar panels and glass.

At the same time, sand plays a vital environmental role, including to protect coastal communities from rising sea levels. The UN is aiming to publish the 2020-23 figures by the end of this year.

But it is already clear that these activities are not slowing down, but rather are “taking on gigantic proportions”, Peduzzi said. He warned that the world is approaching the natural replenishment rate of 10-16 billion tonnes of sediment washed into the world’s oceans each year. — AFP

Human-centric globalisation: Taking G20 to the last mile, leaving none



Narendra Modi

The writer is Prime Minister of India

FOR INDIA, THE G20 PRESIDENCY IS NOT MERELY A HIGH-LEVEL DIPLOMATIC ENDEAVOUR. AS THE MOTHER OF DEMOCRACY AND A MODEL OF DIVERSITY, WE OPENED THE DOORS OF THIS EXPERIENCE TO THE WORLD

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – these two words capture a deep philosophy. It means ‘the world is one family’. This is an all-embracing outlook that encourages us to progress as one universal family, transcending borders, languages, and ideologies.

During India’s G20 Presidency, this has translated into a call for human-centric progress. As One Earth, we are coming together to nurture our planet. As One Family, we support each other in the pursuit of growth. And we move together towards a shared future - One Future - which is an undeniable truth in these interconnected times.

The post-pandemic world order is very different from the world before it. There are three important changes, among others. First, there is a growing realisation that a shift away from a GDP-centric view of the world to a human-centric view is needed. Second, the world is recognising the importance of resilience and reliability in global supply chains.

Third, there is a collective call for boosting multilateralism through the reform of global institutions.

Our G20 Presidency has played the role of a catalyst in these shifts.

In December 2022, when we took over the Presidency from Indonesia, I had written that a mindset shift must be catalysed by the G20. This was especially needed in the context of mainstreaming the marginalised aspirations of developing countries, the Global South and Africa.

The Voice of Global South Summit in January 2023, which witnessed participation from 125 countries, was one of the foremost initiatives under our Presidency. It was an important exercise to gather inputs and ideas from the Global South. Further, our Presidency has not only seen the largest-ever participation from African countries but has also pushed for the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20.

An interconnected world means our challenges across domains are interlinked. This is the midway year of the 2030 Agenda and many are noting with great concern that the progress on SDGs is off-track. The G20 2023 Action Plan on Accelerating Progress on SDGs will spearhead the future direction of the G20

towards implementing SDGs.

In India, living in harmony with nature has been a norm since ancient times and we have been contributing our share towards climate action even in modern times.

Many countries of the Global South are at various stages of development and climate action must be a complementary pursuit. Ambitions for climate action must be matched with actions on climate finance and transfer of technology.

We believe there is a need to move away from a purely restrictive attitude of what should not be done, to a more constructive attitude focusing on what can be done to fight climate change.

The Chennai High-Level Principles for a Sustainable and Resilient Blue Economy focus on keeping our oceans healthy. A global ecosystem for clean and green hydrogen will emerge from our presidency, along with a Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre.

In 2015, we launched the International Solar Alliance. Now, through the Global Biofuels Alliance, we will support the world to enable energy transitions in tune with the benefits of a circular economy.

Democratising climate action is the best way to impart momentum to the movement. Just as individuals make daily decisions based on their long-term health, they can make lifestyle decisions based on the impact on the planet’s long-term health. Just like Yoga became a global mass movement for wellness, we have also nudged the world with Lifestyles for Sustainable Environment (LiFE).

Due to the impact of climate change, ensuring food and nutritional security will be crucial. Millets, or Shree Anna, can help with this while also boosting climate-smart agriculture. In the International Year of Millets, we have taken millets to global palates. The Deccan High Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition is also helpful in this direction.

Technology is transformative but it also needs to be made inclusive. In the past, the benefits of technological advancements have not benefited all sections of society equally. India, over the last few years, has shown how technology can be leveraged to narrow inequalities, rather than widen them.

For instance, the billions across the

world that remain unbanked, or lack digital identities, can be financially included through digital public infrastructure (DPI). The solutions we have built using our DPI have now been recognised globally. Now, through the G20, we will help developing countries adapt, build, and scale DPI to unlock the power of inclusive growth.

That India is the fastest-growing large economy is no accident. Our simple, scalable and sustainable solutions have empowered the vulnerable and the marginalised to lead our development story. From space to sports, economy to entrepreneurship, Indian women have taken the lead in various sectors. They have shifted the narrative from the development of women to women-led development. Our G20 Presidency is working on bridging the gender digital divide, reducing labour force participation gaps and enabling a larger role for women in leadership and decision-making.

For India, the G20 Presidency is not merely a high-level diplomatic endeavour. As the Mother of Democracy and a model of diversity, we opened the doors of this experience to the world.

Today, accomplishing things at scale is a quality that is associated with India. The G20 Presidency is no exception. It has become a people-driven movement. Over 200 meetings will have been organised in 60 Indian cities across the length and breadth of our nation, hosting nearly 100,000 delegates from 125 countries by the end of our term. No Presidency has ever encompassed such a vast and diverse geographical expanse.

It is one thing to hear about India’s democracy, democracy, diversity and development from someone else. It is totally different to experience them first-hand. I am sure our G20 delegates would vouch for this.

Our G20 Presidency strives to bridge divides, dismantle barriers, and sow seeds of collaboration that nourish a world where unity prevails over discord, where shared destiny eclipses isolation. As the G20 President, we had pledged to make the global table larger, ensuring that every voice is heard and every country contributes. I am positive that we have matched our pledge with actions and outcomes.

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Relationship between school and home

As the new academic year has commenced, accusations started to be levelled at schools, teachers and educational directorates. These naturally extend to the Ministry of Education, which is tasked with finding ways to enhance the educational system as a whole and address lack of resources that affect it.

When we get to the matter, these charges won't alter reality, we must, however, be more practical in this regard. Some of them are not accurate or objective in the first place, and some of them reject the responsibilities that must be played under these conditions, in which the world's nations are comparable despite their varied circumstances.

The problem here calls for us, as guardians, to put ourselves in the shoes of our brothers and sisters, the teachers, and to imagine ourselves as the current directorates and schools. It also calls on us to be presented with unbiased, bright facts, like the sun, that tell us that our options are very limited.

In addition to the aforementioned, the demands are there every year, and given the unusual conditions the nation has experienced and is experiencing, the situation will stay steady. What are our options in such a situation? We must address this crucial and practical subject in the context of broad discussions in order to arrive at consensus.

In order to enhance the educational process, we must first collaborate with all parties, including instructors, schools, and the ministry, rather than leveling charges against one another.

According to current statistics, parents have an average of five children of different age groups. On the other hand, there are more than 40 male and female pupils in each class taught by one teacher. The parent should put himself in the position of the instructor and consider if he/she can manage so many students in one place, while each period should not be more than 45 minutes. The guardian



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IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS, WE MUST FIRST COLLABORATE WITH ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING INSTRUCTORS, SCHOOLS AND THE MINISTRY, RATHER THAN LEVELING CHARGES AGAINST ONE ANOTHER

will undoubtedly acknowledge the challenges of the job because, at home, he finds it very challenging to supervise and monitor two to three children, review their schoolwork, and make periodic visits to the school to check on the performance of his children.

If this is the case, then let's take into account the fact that a school has hundreds of children who are all under the supervision of this small number of instructors, despite the fact that there are schools in South Al Sharqiyah that have around 1,500 pupils. However, given these conditions, we as parents just put the whole blame on the school, entirely ignoring other details.

Regarding the ministry, it oversees more than 750,000 students within a constrained financial framework. All of these facts and conditions compel us to work with the instructors and the school, and we must then assume responsibility when our kids' standards slip. Here, our responsibility is to fill in any gaps in the educational process. To do this, we must put ourselves in the position of the teacher, the school and the ministry, and then talk from a position of understanding the challenges they face in carrying out their duties.

All the fundamental elements of education cannot be provided by the government through the Ministry of Education, as this actually cannot be achieved. We as parents need to reevaluate the connection between "my role as a teacher or head of a school and my role as a parent." After that, we must establish duties and responsibilities since it is only from that position that we can stay away from the blame.

We do not, of course, relieve the Ministry of Education, the directorates, or the instructors of their duty to advance and enhance the educational process. However, in these situations, parents have a bigger responsibility to play to prevent future generations from not getting educated properly in this blame game.

A SELFIE WITH MAGPIE



A scrap iron sculpture of a magpie, the national bird of South Korea, is displayed at a park in New Delhi, on Wednesday, ahead of the G20 India summit. – AFP

Big power disputes cast shadow on Southeast Asia summits

MARTIN ABBUGAO AND
DESSY SAGITA

Southeast Asian leaders were holding meetings with top US, Chinese and Japanese officials in Indonesia on Wednesday, where big power rivalries and regional issues from the South China Sea to North Korean missiles were on the table.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asia Nations (Asean) was holding separate summits with China, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada, providing an arena for big powers to lobby the bloc.

US Vice-President Kamala Harris is attending in place of President Joe Biden, while Chinese Premier Li Qiang is taking part instead of President Xi Jinping.

"We seek common ground while setting aside differences. We both have a relentless pursuit of peace," Li said in opening remarks at the Asean-China summit.

"As long as we keep to the right path, no matter what storm may come, China-Asean cooperation will be as firm as ever... against all odds."

Wednesday's meetings will be more regional in scope before an 18-member East Asia Summit on Thursday to be attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, where broader geopolitical issues are expected to top the agenda. The

HOST INDONESIA TOLD THE SUMMIT THAT THE BLOC WOULD NOT BECOME A PROXY FOR BIG POWER COMPETITION

Russian Embassy in Indonesia posted an image of Lavrov arriving in Jakarta on Wednesday.

"At both summits, the vice-president will underscore the United States' enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific generally and to Asean centrality specifically," US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Tuesday, using another term for the Asia-Pacific region.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol were attending both days of meetings. They will meet with Li at an Asean plus three summit where a row between China and Japan over the release of treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant could again come to the fore.

Host Indonesia told an Asean leaders' summit on Tuesday that the bloc would not become a proxy for big power competition as US-China tensions continue to flare, the South China Sea and Russia's war in Ukraine.

The roundtable including Lavrov and Harris would be the first high-level US-Russia encounter since a foreign ministers' meeting in Jakarta in July, where US and European officials rounded on Moscow's

top diplomat over the Ukraine conflict.

A Southeast Asian diplomat present at Wednesday's meetings said they would conclude with joint statements about closer diplomatic, economic and food security collaboration between the powers and Asean.

Li was scheduled to visit a Beijing-funded high-speed rail project between Jakarta and the Javan city of Bandung, Indonesian officials said.

On Thursday, Asean leaders will host summits with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Albanese addressed a regional

forum in Jakarta on Wednesday where he said Canberra sought closer engagement and economic ties with Southeast Asian nations.

Other regional issues such as North Korea's ballistic missile launches are also expected to feature prominently.

South Korea's Yoon, in an interview with Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* on Tuesday, said he would push for Asean to "join forces" with Seoul to counter Pyongyang's nuclear threats.

Myanmar will also be a major issue at the summits with China — a key diplomatic ally of the junta.

On Tuesday, Southeast Asian leaders strongly condemned the violence and attacks on civilians

in Myanmar, directly blaming the junta. China also upset several Asean members last week when it released a new official map claiming sovereignty over the majority of the South China Sea.

It sparked sharp rebukes from across the region, including Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Japan said late on Tuesday it had lodged a "strong protest" against Beijing over the map and called for its retraction, government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told a briefing.

The Southeast Asian diplomat who spoke to AFP said joint statements from the meetings will "contain references to the South China Sea and Myanmar".

In a draft Asean chair statement to be issued this week seen by AFP, leaders were to express concern about "land reclamations, activities, serious incidents" in the waterway.

But to avoid angering Beijing, experts said Asean leaders were unlikely to confront Li.

"I predict... the leaders will avoid discussing confrontational issues such as China's new map," Aleksius Jemadu, a foreign affairs expert at Indonesia's Pelita Harapan University, said. "They won't risk the relationship with big powers." — AFP



US Vice-President Kamala Harris with Indonesia's President Joko Widodo before their bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 43rd Asean Summit in Jakarta on Wednesday. – AFP

sport

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

The third edition of thrilling Tour of Salalah cycling race is all set to enthrall the cycling enthusiasts and public alike through its four competitive stages from September 10 to 13.

The UCI-calendar event will begin from Khor Rori in Salalah for a 123.7 km first stage to finish at Ayn Ishat.

Nearly 100 cyclists will compete in the Tour of Salalah 2023 with four stages across the picturesque terrain of the land of the frankincense.

World Tour ranking top three riders Kenny Nijssen of the Netherlands (UCT) and Euseibo Pascual (Spain) of BCA and Ahmed Naser (Bahrain) lead the impressive field in Salalah.

A total of 522 km will be covered in this edition, which will be keenly contested by 13 teams.

Three top continental teams – Bahrain Cycling Academy (Bahrain), Universe Cycling Team (the Netherlands) and Stork-Metropol Cycling (Spain) – will join the action with national teams of Algeria, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, hosts Oman and Iraq in the event which will conclude on September 13.

Two cycling clubs from Oman – Cycle KOM and Oman Royal Army – will contest with Shabab Al Ahli Dubai Club (UAE) for the club honours.

فرق و المنتخبات المشاركة - طواف ضلالة
Participating Teams - Tour of Salalah

Stork-Metropol Cycling
UCI Continental Team

ALGERIA
National Team

United Arab Emirates
National Team

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
National Team

Universe Cycling Team
UCI Continental Team

OMAN
National Team

THAILAND
National Team

BAHRAIN
Cycling Academy Club

CycleKOM Club

Victorious Club

Shabab Al Ahli Club

Royal Army of
Oman Club

Al Wathba Club

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f/oman.cyclingassociation
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The third edition of the Tour of Salalah is organised in accordance with the regulations of the International Cycling Union (UCI). The Tour is organised by Oman Cycling Association and supported by Dhofar Municipality.

Paul Willcox, captain of Cycle KOM, said it would be a huge task in Salalah, as they will be competing as the champions of the Oman Cycling Association League from last season.

The second stage from Sadah Beach to Hajeeff will cover 148 km, the third stage covers 104

km from Al Haffa Souq to Wadi Darbat and the Tour will conclude with a 147 km race from Ain Razat to Ittin Public Park.

PRIZE MONEY
A total prize money of 6,625 Omani rials would be won during the Tour of Salalah 2023. The Classification of the Stages will present RO 2,540, general individual time classification (RO 1,265), points classification (RO 445), young rider classification (RO 445), most aggressive rider (RO 445) and team classification (RO 422).

CYCLING FEVER TO GRIP SALALAH

TOUR OF SALALAH TO BE STAGED
FROM SEPTEMBER 10 TO 13

STAGE - 1

FROM
KHOR RORI
TO
AYN ISHAT

123 KM

◀ Starting place: Khor Rori
◀ Departure of the convoy: 7:15 am
◀ Signing and Team Presentation: 8:00 to 8:30 am
◀ Neutral Start: 9:00 am
◀ Actual start: After 3 km
◀ Finish line: Ayn Ishat

START

STAGE - 2

FROM
SADAH
TO
HAJEEF

148 KM

◀ Starting place: Sadah
◀ Departure of the convoy: 6:30 am
◀ Signing and Team Presentation: 8:00 to 8:30 am
◀ Neutral Start: 9:00 am
◀ Actual start: After 5 km
◀ Finish line: Hajeeff

START

STAGE - 3

FROM
ALHAFFA
TO
DARBAT

104 KM

◀ Starting place: Al Haffa Souq
◀ Departure of the convoy: 7:00 am
◀ Signing and Team Presentation: 8:00 to 8:30 am
◀ Neutral Start: 9:00 am
◀ Actual start: After 3 km
◀ Finish line: Wadi Darbat

START

STAGE - 4

FROM
AIN RAZAT
TO
ITTIN

147 KM

◀ Starting place: Ain Razat
◀ Departure of the convoy: 7:15 am
◀ Signing and Team Presentation: 8:00 to 8:30 am
◀ Neutral Start: 9:00 am
◀ Actual start: After 5 km
◀ Finish line: Ittin public park

START

SRI LANKA SURVIVE AFGHANISTAN SCARE

LAHORE, Pakistan: Title-holders Sri Lanka outlasted a rampaging Afghanistan by just two runs in a dramatic finish to reach the Asia Cup Super Four stage on Tuesday.

Needing to overhaul a target of 292 in 37.1 overs to oust Sri Lanka on net run-rate, Afghanistan fell agonisingly short as Mujeeb Ur Rahman holed out with three needed from the first ball of the 38th over.

They could still have qualified by reaching 295 within 37.4 overs but appeared to not be aware of that permutation as number 11 Fazalhaq Farooqi blocked out two deliveries before being dismissed while attempting another defensive shot with six needed to go through.

Mohammad Nabi hit a blistering 32-ball 65 while skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi made a 66-ball 59.

Rashid Khan hit three boundaries off Duniwell's 37th over, but off the first ball of the next over Mujeeb was caught on the boundary.

Sri Lanka were earlier guided to 291-8 by Kusal Mendis who scored a brilliant 84-ball 92.

Pakistan and India had already qualified for the Super Four stage from Group A, with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh joining them from Group B.

Pakistan face Bangladesh in Lahore on Wednesday to start the Super Four stage.

Afghanistan were struggling in the 20th over on 129-4 but Nabi started to hit out and the situation changed as they added 96 in the next 10 overs.

Nabi, who put on 80 for the fifth wicket with Shahidi, cracked five sixes and six fours to help Afghanistan get back on track, hitting the fastest ODI half-century for his country off just 24 balls.

Mujeeb had set the previous record against Pakistan in Sri Lanka last month off 26 deliveries.

Nabi holed out off Maheesh Theekshana in the 27th over but Shahidi and Karim Janat (22) kept up the tempo, adding 33 before they both fell in the same over from Wellalage.

Despite the double blow, Afghanistan did not give up as Najibullah Zadran (23) and Rashid (27 not out) kept them in contention.

But in a dramatic finish, the Afghan camp did not realise their hopes were still alive once Mujeeb



Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi plays a shot during the Asia Cup 2023 one-day international (ODI) match between Sri Lanka and Afghanistan at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. — AFP

was dismissed and Sri Lanka progressed.

Sri Lankan skipper Dasun Shanaka admitted Nabi nearly took away the game. "It's a tough one," said Shanaka whose team has now won 12 consecutive ODIs. "The first target was a 37.1-over game and Nabi almost took the game away from us but we got wickets when needed."

Shahidi said: "It's very disappointing to lose. We fought well and gave our best. I am proud of the team, the way they played, and fought till the last ball."

Earlier, the 28-year-old Mendis played an attractive innings that included three sixes and six fours

to anchor the Sri Lankan innings after they won the toss and batted first.

Sri Lanka got off to a solid start of 63 for the first wicket between Pathum Nissanka (41) and Dimuth Karunaratne (32).

Mendis took over and added 102 for the fourth wicket with Charith Asalanka, who made a 43-ball 36. But from 186-3 Sri Lanka had a middle-order stutter that saw them lose four wickets in the space of 41 runs, including that of Mendis who was unluckily run out.

Rashid dropped a drive from Shanaka onto the stumps with Mendis short of his ground at the

non-striker's end. Wellalage, who scored an unbeaten 33, added an invaluable 64 runs for the eighth wicket with Theekshana (28).

Gulbadin Naib dismissed Theekshana off the final delivery to finish with Afghanistan's best figures of the innings with 4-60.

— AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 291-8 in 50 overs (K Mendis 92, P Nissanka 41, C Asalanka 36, D Wellalage 33 not out, D Karunaratne 32; Gulbadin Naib 4-60, Rashid Khan 2-63) Afghanistan 289 in 37.4 overs (Mohammad Nabi 65, Hashmatullah Shahidi 59, Rahmat Shah 45; K Rajitha 4-79, D Wellalage 2-36)

Result: Sri Lanka won by two runs

NZ overcome Bairstow blitz to level T20 series

NOTTINGHAM, United Kingdom: Mitchell Santner starred with the ball before Tim Seifert led the way with the bat as New Zealand beat England by six wickets at Trent Bridge on Tuesday to end a four-match Twenty20 series all square at 2-2.

When Jonny Bairstow was making a quickfire 73, to give the Black Caps a reminder of his stunning Test century against them in Nottingham last year, T20 world champions England were on course for a huge total.

But, with England white-ball captain Jos Buttler officially rested from the game, New Zealand took four wickets for 35 runs — with left-arm spinner Santner returning fine figures of 3-30.

New Zealand controlled their chase, with Seifert making 48 and the in-form Glenn Phillips 42 before Mark Chapman's unbeaten 40 completed a comfortable win with 16 balls left. England will now face New Zealand — the team they beat in the 2019 50-over World Cup final — in a four-match one-day international series starting in Cardiff on Friday as they continue their preparations ahead of a title defence in India starting next month.

The first two matches of the T20 series witnessed two dominant England wins, by seven wickets and 95 runs, before New Zealand hit back with an equally emphatic 74-run success at Edgbaston on Sunday.

AGGRESSIVE OPTIONS

"We were far from our best in the first two games and the last two have been closer to what this side is about," New Zealand captain Tim Southee said at the presentation ceremony.

"They (England) got off to a great start tonight but we knew that if we kept taking wickets it was the best way to slow them down. We were trying to be smart and make them take aggressive options."

Stand-in England captain Moeen Ali said: "They (New Zealand) bowled really well but we just lost some momentum after the powerplay so that was disappointing."

He added: "They had a brilliant start with the bat too and then we couldn't wrestle it back."

England were 105-1 off 11 overs after Moeen won the toss.

But Santner led New Zealand's fightback in the field with a haul that included the prize scalp of Bairstow in an innings where the next highest score was the 26 made by both Dawid Malan and Liam Livingstone.

Bairstow dominated the powerplay with three legside sixes, pacemen Matt Henry and Kyle Jamieson the bowlers to suffer. But his assault ended when he failed to clear long-on after lofting Santner down the ground. Ish Sodhi, another of New Zealand's spinners, induced ring star Harry Brook — left out of England's provisional World Cup squad — to hole out for four before Santner removed both Malan and Moeen in the 16th over.

Bairstow suffered a shoulder injury while batting with the result that regular white-ball keeper Buttler was drafted in as emergency cover behind the stumps. Seifert hammered Brydon Carse and Luke Wood for sixes before leaping teenage leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed had him caught and bowled in a return of 2-27 on his return to the team. But Chapman made sure of Kiwis victory. —AFP



New Zealand's Tim Seifert catches out England's Will Jacks. — Reuters

Toyota Gazoo Racing power to double-podium finish at Rally Finland

JYVASKYLA, Finland: The Toyota Gazoo Racing (TGR) World Rally Team (WRT) recently secured yet another impressive double-podium victory this season with its GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric vehicle in the 2023 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) at Rally Finland.

Elfyn Evans' remarkable driving secured him first place in the No 33 Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric vehicle. His exceptional performance was matched by teammate Takamoto Katsuta, who secured a third-place podium finish in his No 18 Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric vehicle. Following its fifth Rally Finland win since 2017, Toyota has increased its manufacturers' championship lead to 67 points.

Evans dominated in his No 33 GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric

vehicle throughout the event.

Having taken over the lead, Evans continued in fine form to win seven consecutive stages and build an advantage of over 30 seconds ahead of the final day. He went on to win three of the rally's last four stages, sealing his seventh career victory by 39.1s with the fastest time in the rally-ending Power Stage.

Katsuta scored his fourth FIA WRC podium after a strong and confident performance on the roads around Jyväskylä, where he has lived for many years. He and co-driver Aaron Johnston won the first forest stage and were soon fighting for a podium place amidst challenging weather conditions.

An excellent drive on wet roads to win the second day's final stage also allowed him to regain the advantage in his fight for third.

He stretched that advantage with a further fastest time on the rally's last day before setting the fourth-best time in the Power Stage to seal third overall.

Akio Toyoda, TGR-WRT Chairman, commented: "Elfyn, Takamoto, congratulations on achieving another amazing

victory at Rally Finland! Being the alternate Team Principal this time, as the principal Jari-Matti Latvala participated in the No 97 GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric vehicle, I was able to realise that each member of the team is doing a very hard job in each area and that made me appreciate everybody



Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT at Rally Finland.

again. I always told every team member three things: 'one team', 'never give up', and 'we hate to lose'. Elfyn, Scott, thank you for bringing me to the podium, I definitely want to do this amazing job in Japan again. I am grateful for Jari-Matti, who has built and is leading such a great team, and I want to

thank him and the team for this amazing week."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate

entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all

of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars', TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars.

Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

The next leg of the 2023 FIA WRC is the Acropolis Rally in Greece, which will take place from September 7-10. Its legendary reputation for rocky mountain roads and high temperatures combine to create a tough challenge for vehicles, tyres and drivers alike.

Oman come back to defeat Palestine

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

Oman registered a confidence-boosting 2-1 friendly victory over Palestine on Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The visitors took the lead by an early goal through Mahmood Abu Warda in the second minute while Red Warriors goals were netted by Omar al Malki through header in the 20th minute and Mohsin al Ghassani from a penalty in the 36th minute.

The warm-up match against Palestine was part of national team's preparation for the preliminary Joint Qualification for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides the 2024 AFC Asian Cup.

The head coach of Oman senior football team, Branko Ivankovic, relied on a starting list with Fayeze al Rushaidi as the goalkeeper. The four-man defence comprised Jameel al Yahmadi, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi and Ahmed al Kaabi. The midfielders were Abdullah Fawaz, Zaher al Aghbari and Omar al Malki played as an attacking midfielder. The striking



line-up included Issam al Subhi and Mohsin al Ghassani.

Oman team, ranked 73rd in Fifa world ranking as of last July, and the opponent Palestine team, ranked 96th, began the match with more focus to score an opening goal. The visitors managed to break the deadlock with an early goal in the second minute by Mahmood Abu Warda after a perfect ball from Tamer Seyam.

Later, Oman players pressed hard for an equaliser. In the 10th

minute, Zaher al Aghbari created a scoring attempt as he sent a ball to Issam al Subhi who was inside the box but his ball went above the cross bar.

Branko's men were working from different sides to find a goal and Jameel al Yahmadi played active role as he was delivering assists to the penalty box for the strikers.

After series of attempts, Omar al Malki equalised the result as he headed in a cross from Abdullah Fawaz. In the 29th minute,

Oman goal scorer Al Malki was replaced by Abdulrahman al Mushaifri. The goal encouraged the hosts players to double the result.

The Saudi referee Khalid al Turaisi decided a penalty for Oman after Jameel al Yahmadi was brought down in the box by Palestine's Alaa Edin Hasan. The penalty was converted by Mohsin al Ghassani for a second goal in the 36th minute.

Before the end of the first half, Saleh Chihadeh was very close

to equalise for Palestine but his weak shot was saved by Fayeze. The first-half ended with Oman leading 2-1.

In the following half, both coaches including Branko Ivankovic and Makram Dabdoob performed different substitutions as they gave chances for several players.

Seeb player Tamim al Balushi played his first international match as he replaced Al Nahdha's Issam al Subhi. Musab al Maamari was another available

young face in the national team squad during the second half as he delivered a good show. Musab was very close to score third goal for the national team but his shot went wide in the 86th minute.

Substitute goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi saved Oman from a goal in the dying minutes as he thwarted a scoring attempt by Palestine's Saleh Chihadeh. The match continued without any change in the result despite the substitutions from both teams as Oman won the game by 2-1.

AMERICANS FARE BETTER AS GAUFF, SHELTON MAKE SEMIS

GOOD DAY FOR DJOKOVIC



NEW YORK: It was a good day for Novak Djokovic at the US Open on Tuesday, as he claimed his spot in a record 47th Grand Slam semifinal, but an even better one for the United States with Coco Gauff and Ben Shelton getting through to the last four.

The only thing that kept it from being a perfect tennis on Tuesday for home fans was Djokovic beating Taylor Fritz 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 to stay on course for a fourth US Open title that would see him match Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slams.

With the temperature once again nudging towards 100 Fahrenheit (38 Celsius), 19-year-old Gauff warmed up the Arthur Ashe crowd by speeding past Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko 6-0, 6-2 to become the youngest American to reach the US Open women's semifinals since Serena Williams in 2001.

But Fritz could not keep the party going, although the 25-year-old had his opportunities, converting only two of 12 break chances while committing 51 unforced errors, almost double his opponent's 26.

Fritz had lost all seven career meetings with Djokovic and never beaten a top-10 opponent at a Grand Slam but rolled into the quarterfinals in sensational form, the only player to not drop a set and broken only once in 50 service games.

Djokovic wasted no time ending both those runs, breaking the American three times before ending the first set with a booming ace and never took his foot off the gas.

The fickle New York crowd has never really fully embraced Djokovic and the Serb is likely to find himself increasingly unpopular this week.

Not since Andy Roddick in 2003 has an American man won the US Open and Djokovic could single-handedly dash home hopes of ending that drought.

Having eliminated Fritz he now finds 20-year-old Shelton standing between him and a 10th trip to the final.

"It's normal, it's logical to expect that most of the crowd would support the home player,"

said Djokovic. "That's probably going to be the case on Friday, but I'll be ready for it."

"I'm trying to enjoy the moments on the court, but there is so much stress and pressure going on that it's hard to have fun on the court."

"It's really about finding a way to navigate through the match and win a tennis match for me."

CARRY THE FLAG

There are not too many sporting events in New York that create more buzz than an all-American clash under the Arthur Ashe Stadium lights at the business end of the season's final Grand Slam.

The atmosphere during a night session is always electric but it was dialed up a few notches for Tiafoe and Shelton, the contest the first in 15 years two feature two Black American men battling on the world's largest tennis venue.

The match lived up to its blockbuster billing as the big-hitting Shelton hammered his way to 6-2, 3-6, 7-6(7), 6-2, becoming the youngest American to reach the US Open men's last four since Michael Chang in 1992.

If Gauff is to reach her first US Open final she will need to get past tricky Czech Karolina Muchova, who was a 6-0, 6-3 winner over Romanian Sorana Cirstea. The semifinal will be an intriguing match-up between two of tennis's hottest and most creative players.

Since her opening round loss at Wimbledon, Gauff has won 17 of her last 18 matches, including titles in Washington and Cincinnati.

Muchova, the French Open finalist, has also been in superb hardcourt form, getting to the round of 16 at the Canadian Open and falling to Iga Swiatek, before losing in the final of the Cincinnati Open to Gauff.

Gauff may not have to carry the US flag into the last four on her own, with Madison Keys, the losing finalist in 2017, meeting Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova on Wednesday in quarterfinal action. — **Reuters**



USA's Coco Gauff hits a return to Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko during the US Open women's singles quarterfinals match. — **AFP**



USA's Ben Shelton serves to USA's Frances Tiafoe during the US Open tournament men's singles quarterfinals match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — **AFP**

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Forum moots launch of ‘Gulf’ product brand, e-platform for Gulf projects

Streamlining trade: Sultanate of Oman chairs Trade and Industry meetings of GCC states underway in Salalah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 6

Trade and Industry Ministry representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) convened the 57th preparatory meeting of the Trade Cooperation Committee and the 43rd preparatory meeting of the Industrial Cooperation Committee here on Wednesday, September 6. These meetings were chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. The launch also witnessed the presence of Khalid bin Ali al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Development Affairs of the GCC General Secretariat. During the preparatory meeting of the Trade Cooperation Committee, the under-secretaries delved into several vital topics, including the challenges associated with intra-GCC trade and streamlining trade exchanges. Additionally, they reviewed the latest developments in trade laws, notably in competition and e-commerce regulations. The agenda also encompassed the activities of the Small



and Medium Enterprises and Business Entrepreneurship Committee, the Internal Trade Commission, and the Foreign Trade Committee. Furthermore, the meeting involved a review of progress regarding free trade agreements with various countries and international blocs. The session culminated with a comprehensive discussion on the General Secretariat's report on the implementation of decisions made in previous Trade Cooperation Committee meetings and other pertinent matters related to the trade sector in the GCC countries. Simultaneously, officials participating in the Industrial Cooperation Committee meeting discussed efforts to establish a unified definition of the national (Gulf) product and its associated standards. Discussions also revolved

around the executive regulation of the unified industrial organisation law system and strategies to address challenges facing the industrial sector. Additionally, the proposal to create an electronic information platform dedicated to Gulf industrial projects and joint initiatives was examined. This platform aims to serve as a comprehensive database to facilitate access to information for investors interested in the industrial sector. The meeting also provided an opportunity to learn from member countries' experiences in areas such as future factories, combating harmful practices, and safeguarding Gulf industries from unfair competition. To further fortify the Gulf industrial sector, the inaugural Gulf Industrial Exhibition is scheduled to open on

Wednesday, September 13, 2023. This event will feature the participation of numerous Gulf factories and will span two days at the Sultan Qaboos Culture and Entertainment Complex in Salalah. On Thursday, September 14, 2023, the proceedings will continue with ministerial meetings. These include the 65th Trade Cooperation Committee, the 51st Industrial Cooperation Committee, the Fifth Standardisation Affairs meeting, and a consultative session between the ministers of trade and industry and the heads of federations and chambers of the GCC. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will preside over these gatherings.

Speaking at the event, Khalid al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary-General of the GCC States, emphasised the significance of collective efforts in the commercial sector. "With the trade volume between GCC countries surpassing \$100 billion, there's an undeniable urgency for intensified efforts to advance our shared Gulf initiatives. This encompasses the promotion of electronic commerce, harmonisation of legislative and legal frameworks among GCC nations, robust support for small and medium enterprises, alignment of trade strategies on international platforms, addressing challenges obstructing intra-GCC trade as overseen by your esteemed committee, fostering integration to safeguard Gulf consumers, and championing the GCC Integration Initiative in the realm of investment," he said. "Global economic dynamics are marked by remarkable progress in artificial intelligence, the digital revolution, the fifth industrial revolution, a global shift towards a green economy, and ground-breaking innovations in renewable energy, digital currencies, the Internet, and swift geopolitical transformations in international economic relations. Thus, it becomes imperative for us to proactively respond and remain at the forefront of these developments," Al Sunaidi further stated.

Oman crude price soars to \$90.41 per barrel, reaching 11-month high



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

Oman crude oil prices, traded via Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), surged to \$90.41 per barrel on September 6, 2023, marking the highest level in 11 months. The last time prices reached a similar level was on October 7, 2022, when it peaked at \$90.69 per barrel. This recent increase in prices reflects the growing optimism in the global oil market, driven by various factors such as supply concerns and increasing demand. DME — partly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — has played a crucial role in facilitating the trading of Oman crude oil futures contracts. Since its launch, a total of 19,856,259 contracts have been traded, demonstrating the exchange's significance in the energy market. The October 2023 contract for Oman crude oil had an official selling price (OSP) of \$86.57, indicating a premium over the spot price due to market expectations. This higher OSP reflects the positive sentiment surrounding the oil industry and suggests that the market anticipates sustained demand in the coming months. Moreover, the total delivery of Oman crude oil for the current period amounted to 14.616 million barrels, further underlining the strong demand for this particular grade of crude oil. This delivery volume signifies the confidence of market participants in Oman crude oil's quality and its ability to meet global energy requirements. The robust trading activity on the DME is also evident from the total exchange volume of 97,381 contracts. This figure illustrates the substantial interest and participation of market players in the Oman crude oil futures market. The average daily volume (ADV) stands at an impressive 4,234 contracts, reflecting the consistent engagement of traders and investors in the market. Meanwhile, DME said in a statement that Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) recently utilised the DME auctions platform to sell a shipment of 2 million barrels of Oman crude. The November-loading barrel cargo was successfully sold at a premium of \$0.21 per barrel above the November 2023 Official Selling Price (OSP). The DME Auction platform attracted 14 participants, who submitted a total of 16 bids within a 2-minute timeframe. The Oman OSP is determined by calculating the average price of DME Oman Crude Oil (OQD) Marker Prices on a daily basis throughout the month.

OIA invests in US battery tech startup

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced an investment in the US-based company 'Our Next Energy (ONE)', which specialises in innovative battery technology for Electric Vehicles (EVs) and energy storage. This step comes in continuation of OIA's efforts to diversify its international investment portfolio and achieve optimal benefit for Oman in terms of return on investment and sustainable investments that align with Oman's commitment to Net-Zero emissions by 2050. As part of the investment, OIA and ONE signed a Strategic Collaboration Agreement (SCA) to explore potential areas of collaboration in energy storage and battery manufacturing in Oman. ONE was founded in 2020 as a battery company with the aim of accelerating the world's progress towards net-zero emissions by doubling the range of electric



vehicles, using safer, more abundant materials, and establishing a local supply chain. The company is focused on high-density LFP (Lithium Iron Phosphate)-based batteries, which are created from lower-cost, more abundant iron and are known for improving safety by avoiding thermal runaway. ONE's Aries LFP, Aries II, and Gemini batteries all use safe, sustainable LFP

chemistry and offer driving ranges between 500 and 1,000 km. "OIA is proud to be part of this pioneering technology and vision, which aligns with its strategy to focus on sustainable energy and is compatible with national strategies and commitments such as Oman Vision 2040 and the net-zero emissions goal by 2050," said Ibrahim al Eisri, Director of Private

Equity at OIA. "Electric vehicles are the future, and we are making sure to be a player in the transformation to ensure the growth and sustainability of the electric vehicles' market as an environmentally responsible investor." "Having the support from investors like Oman Investment Authority will accelerate ONE's progress towards a sustainable future and allow the organisation to scale its transportation and grid products into global markets," said Mujeeb Ijaz, CEO and Founder of ONE. This investment comes on the heels of other investments made by OIA in the energy transition field. This includes investments in Ascend Elements, which specialises in recycling lithium-ion batteries, and Group 14, which specialises in manufacturing innovative silicon-carbonate battery materials to replace traditional graphite materials used in lithium-ion batteries.

OABC, Al Tamimi & Company host session on Oman’s new labour law

MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Council (OABC), Oman’s largest and most active international business networking group and the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman, in partnership with OABC Corporate Member Al Tamimi & Company, the region’s leading law firm, were delighted to host a successful morning session on the Omani Labour Law.

The event took place on Sept 5 at the Intercontinental Hotel Muscat, and brought together over 200 esteemed legal professionals, executives and business leaders to discuss the significant changes introduced by the new labour law.

The experts provided valuable insights and guidance on the implementation of the newly announced labour law, ensuring that employers and employees left well-informed and equipped to navigate the evolving legal landscape.

Highlights of the event included the dynamic Q&A session that provided participants with the opportunity to seek clarification on specific aspects of the law, and business networking before and after the event, allowing attendees to connect with like-minded business people and expand their professional network.

“OABC gathered over 200 professionals from every business sector in Oman, to receive clear, highly beneficial advice on a very important aspect; the new labour law, which impacts all



businesses in Oman,” says Ali Daud, President and Chairman Emeritus of OABC.

“These sorts of experiences and events set the organisation apart here in Oman, and add incredible value for our members.”

“Reforms such as this new labour law show the government’s support of the country’s workforce and its ongoing drive towards continued development,” says Fouad Eid, Vice President of OABC and VP of Champion X, an American company and global leader in chemistry solutions, artificial lift systems, and highly engineered equipment and technologies.

“At OABC, our membership consists of both local and foreign companies, and individuals from the public and private sector, who eagerly attended this event to better understand the new law’s

implementation.”

Abdelhaleem Mohammed Ahmed, Senior Counsel & Head of Litigation – Oman, Al Tamimi & Company, commented: “The new labour law overhauls the legal framework in respect of the employment relationship in the private sector and introduces significant changes to the old legal framework.

The new law seeks to address changes in the work environment, align Oman labour relations with international best practices, and it is the most significant amendment to the Oman labour legislation since 2003.

The New Law provides employers with additional rights for terminating employment relationships and introduces new and additional obligations on employers and employees alike. Employers should be aware

that they are required to comply with the new law by January 25, 2024.

Our team in Oman possesses a wealth of experience in respect of employment matters and disputes, and has an in-depth understanding of both the old and the new employment legal frameworks.”

“Since the day the labour law was announced, OABC members have been asking for this session to clarify aspects regarding its implementation, and we’re proud to present the topic with our Corporate Member, Al Tamimi & Company,” says Rebecca Olson, Chief Executive Officer at OABC.

“This is part of OABC’s mission, to keep member companies in the know about changes, opportunities, and developments that impact their business in Oman.”

BankDhofar introduces innovative vertical debit card

MUSCAT: BankDhofar recently announced the launch of its new debit card vertical designs.

The new designs are part of its customer centric strategy to enhance the banking experience for the valued customers.

The vertical debit cards reflects the way people use their cards.

The cards are portrait oriented, similar to how customers use their smart phones.

The card front displays only the name of the customer, along with the issuer and BankDhofar’s logos and hides customer details on the back, to improve security and also to be used more intuitively for ‘Tap and Pay’.

A colour scheme was chosen to reflect the specific segment colours along with a wave pattern of silver to reflect the movement and endless possibilities. Some key features of the debit card:

Enhanced security: The card incorporates advanced security features such as EMV chip technology which ensures secure transactions making it convenient for both retail and online purchases.

Contactless payment: With the inclusion of NFC technology, cardholders can simply tap their card on a compatible payment terminal to complete the transaction quickly and securely.

Global acceptance: The vertical debit card is accepted across the world allowing customers to make purchases and withdraw cash from ATM’s across the world.

Instant issuance: The vertical



debit cards are issued instantly at any of the expanding branch networks allowing customers immediate access to their accounts.

“We wanted to create debit cards that our customers would be proud to use,” said Bilal al Raiisi, AGM Cards & Bancassurance at BankDhofar, “The new vertical designs are similar to how people use their smart phones and underscores our commitment to provide convenience, security and modernity.”

BankDhofar continuously strive to anticipate the needs of its customers and deliver financial solutions that cater to their evolving needs.

BankDhofar remains committed to elevating the customer’s banking experience, ensuring it aligns with the modern world while delivering on the promise of security and reliability.

BankDhofar is a leading financial services provider that offers a wide range of products and services, including current accounts, savings accounts, credit cards, loans, and investments.

Bank Nizwa launches minor account digital onboarding



MUSCAT: In a move to simplify securing children’s financial futures, Bank Nizwa, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading Islamic bank, has launched the digital onboarding for Minor Accounts.

With this service, parents can open fully Sharia compliant Minor Accounts for their children anytime, anywhere through the Bank Nizwa mobile application.

Bank Nizwa’s Minor Account is designed with the aim to ensure children enjoy financially stable futures. The Bank offers parents the opportunity to open Sharia aligned accounts for their children, which will in turn instil in them a savings mindset and teach them the importance of making prudent financial decisions. In line with the banking world leaning towards complete digitalisation of services, Bank Nizwa brings banking solutions to customers’ smartphones through its mobile application.

Through the digital onboarding of Minor accounts, the Bank reaffirms its commitment to developing cutting-edge solutions that cater to the ever-changing needs of the customers. This feature will allow parents to easily open a new account for their children,

set up automated deposits and savings targets, and tailor the accounts to their children’s financial goals.

Commenting on the new digital onboarding feature, Sadiq Baqer al Lawati, Head of Digital, eSales & Payment at Bank Nizwa said, “At Bank Nizwa, we believe our customers deserve unparalleled banking solutions that are simplified, accessible and hassle-free. With this in mind, we have launched the digital onboarding service for Minor Accounts. Through this move we have made securing their children’s financial futures possible from the comfort of their homes, offices or on the go.

It is our endeavour to ensure the future generations of Oman are well-informed in the ethical practices of Islamic banking, and empowered with strong money management skills that will last them a lifetime.”

With the digital onboarding feature for the Minor Account, customers no longer need to visit branches to open bank accounts for their children. It can be done from anywhere at any time and in a swift streamlined way that means customers can start saving for their children’s futures instantly.

National Finance, Injaz Oman unveil winners of ‘The Company’ competition



MUSCAT: National Finance, the leading finance company in the country, joined Injaz Oman to unveil the winners of ‘The Company’ competition, at an elaborate ceremony held at OCEC.

An initiative by Injaz, ‘The Company’ programme and competition gave student participants the opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills and honoured the most innovative young entrepreneurs.

This competition not only highlights the talent and potential of the Omani youth, but also underscores National Finance’s commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Under the umbrella of its ‘Imtidad’ social responsibility wing, National Finance partnered with Injaz Oman as the Main Sponsor for the University

Category of the Competition. This partnership exemplifies National Finance’s unwavering dedication to providing the youth with avenues and opportunities to turn business aspirations into well-rounded ventures.

Commenting on the occasion, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Finance, said, “We are extremely proud of the Omani youth who have demonstrated flair, intelligence, business acumen and tenacity during the course of ‘The Company’ programme and competition.

Through this experience, the participants have learned the value of hard work, perseverance, problem-solving and team work.

At National Finance, we believe our youth should be encouraged to act on their entrepreneurial instincts in order for them to build home-grown brands that

will succeed in the market.

To this end, we go above and beyond to establish collaborations and partnerships with organisations like Injaz to empower our youth with the skills, tools and education to bring their dreams for the future to life.”

“The Company’ competition saw the enthusiastic participation from students of different age groups across The Sultanate of Oman.

As part of the competition, they were challenged with ideating, refining, and presenting their own business concepts.

These challenges gave them the opportunity to understand the importance of strategic business planning, market dynamics and inventive thinking in the success of a business. Through the process, participants learned how to generate solutions and to utilise flexible work methodologies in

order to reach their goals.

Social welfare is a central pillar of National Finance’s operations.

As the pioneering finance company in the country, National Finance has supported and initiated several campaigns that positively impact local communities. National Finance prioritises sustainable initiatives that yield a meaningful impact on society and serve to empower and uplift the youth of Oman.

A bright future for the country is the goal, and National Finance has designed its initiatives to instil confidence in young people to pursue their entrepreneurial ideas in a competitive real-world market.

Through its social responsibility efforts, National Finance continues to foster a culture of innovation, invention and sustainable growth in the society.

Student visionaries invited to become future energy leaders



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

The Future Energy Leaders Programme is back for its 2nd edition at Oman's Green Hydrogen Summit 2023. Building and scaling our future industries will require the brightest minds. Those who are prepared to think outside the box and challenge the status quo will drive us towards a more sustainable and equitable future. This programme aims to provide global students with the opportunity to explore the emerging green hydrogen industry and bridge the gap between academia and the green hydrogen industries.

The Green Hydrogen Summit is set to take place from December 12 to 15 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Positioned as the Green Hydrogen hub of the Middle East, Oman takes bold steps towards the forefront of the global energy landscape. With an eye on decarbonisation targets and economic amplification, the Sultanate of Oman is firmly establishing Green Hydrogen as a pivotal energy source of the future.

Dr Sausan al Riyami, OHC Director, GUTech, the programme lead, said, "Student competitions provide a platform for out-of-the-box ideas; thinking differently can transform entire industries by bridging classroom knowledge with real-world challenges, fostering innovation and problem-solving.

These platforms provide hands-on experience, encouraging collaboration and networking among peers and professionals. Through competitions, emerging talents gain insights into diverse energy sectors, from sustainable technologies to policy

frameworks. "The competition eco-system hones skills, cultivates resilience, and nurtures leadership qualities, propelling participants into impactful careers. As these young minds push boundaries, they catalyse advancements, accelerating the global journey towards a sustainable energy future." Students may submit their abstracts on or before October 1, 2023. Finalists will have the opportunity to unveil their research and studies on an international stage, engaging with an audience comprised of industry experts.

University students are encouraged to submit their abstracts through the Green Hydrogen Summit website: <https://greenhydrogensummitoman.com/future-energy-leaders/>

Highlighting the significance of this programme, Dr Intisar al Busaidi, Petroleum Engineer at Sultan Qaboos University, said "Embrace the challenge of today to shape the world of tomorrow.

"As future leaders in the realm of green hydrogen and sustainability, we hold the power to harness innovation, drive positive change, and create a legacy of environmental stewardship that future generations will thank us for.

"The Future Energy Leaders program offers a platform to highlight the student's potential in Oman and around the world to transform their ideas into reality."

This edition of Future Energy leaders is being held within the biggest Hydrogen event in the MENA region 'Green Hydrogen Summit' Oman also known as GHSO. GHSO draws support from leading local and international energy companies, including BP, Vulcan Green Steel, Thyssenkrupp, Bureau Veritas, BMW Group, OPAZ and Engie.

Solar power spurs shift back to daytime consumption in Oman

CRT Impacts: Daytime and night tariffs are presently quite close, giving large consumers the flexibility to switch between peak and non-peak consumption

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

Large industrial and commercial customers of electricity who are subject to subsidy-free Cost Reflective Tariffs (CRT) are gradually shifting their demand back to the afternoon period to take advantage of reduced tariffs in the wake of the launch of the Ibri II Solar Power Project two years ago.

It marks a reversal of the trend first witnessed in 2017 when the introduction of CRT prompted large consumers to shift their demand away from the peak afternoon period to the lower-cost off-peak period at night.

CRT tariffs — representing the actual cost of electricity production, distribution and supply — apply to large government, commercial and industrial consumers with an annual consumption of over 150,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) per year.

But following the operationalisation of the 500 MW solar PV project at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate in 2021,



the Bulk Supply Tariff — the key constituent cost of CRT — was revised for 2022 and 2023.

Afternoon tariffs were reduced because of the availability of renewable power during the day, while night tariffs were increased relative to 2021. Both tariffs are now quite close, giving large customers the flexibility to switch between the peak and non-peak periods.

But come 2025, the shift to afternoon demand will come full circle when the Manah I and Manah II solar PV projects, with a combined capacity of 1000 MW, are due to be brought into operation, according to Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the sole

national buyer of power and water output in the Sultanate of Oman.

"By 2025, the afternoon tariff level is expected to be similar to the current off-peak tariff, while the night-time tariff will increase further.

"PWP expects that many CRT consumers will revert to pre-CRT consumption profiles benefiting from low afternoon tariffs and the initial CRT impact on peak demand may reverse," Nama PWP — a subsidiary of Nama Group — noted in its recent 7-Year Outlook Statement.

Significantly, further changes in the demand profile of large consumers are anticipated as more solar capacity comes online in the

coming years, particularly as Cost Reflective Tariffs are revised.

"The additional solar projects in 2025 and 2027 will further affect the CRT," PWP noted in its outlook statement.

"CRT consumers are expected to begin reacting to changes in CRT by shifting part of their demand back to the afternoon period.

"This will be observed more starting from 2025 once the Manah solar projects begin operation. These shifts towards the peak period may occur gradually in response to the CRT changes but are expected to represent a persistent increase in peak demand for the remainder of the period," it added.

OQGN outlines 5-year plan to grow pipeline network

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 6

State-owned gas transporter OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), which earlier this week announced its intention to list a 49-per cent stake on the Omani bourse, has outlined a comprehensive five-year strategy to grow its pipeline network.

The ambitious plan, which seeks to strengthen OQGN's position in the energy market, also reflects the company's commitment to delivering reliable and sustainable energy solutions.

The company's growth strategy is built around three pillars: first, continued investments in expanding and improving its natural gas transportation network; second, the acquisition of additional gas transportation assets; and third, diversification into the transportation of various energy sources.

Mansoor al Abdali, Managing Director of OQGN, said: "We are actively pursuing



diversification as a key component of our growth strategy. Over the next five years, we plan to expand our network by connecting with new partners and improving existing network segments."

Notably, OQGN seeks to play a critical role in Oman's energy transition by simplifying hydrogen transportation and storage. Furthermore, OQGN distinguishes itself as an innovative institution with a strong

commitment to environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles, aligning its strategic priorities with Oman's sustainability ambitions, including the pursuit of Net Zero emissions targets.

Al Abdali added: "We currently have two major projects underway to optimise the flow towards Salalah and Sur, addressing bottlenecks in these areas. Furthermore, we are collaborating with Integrated Gas Company (IGC) and Public Authority of Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to explore opportunities in Duqm. This represents our organic growth initiatives. Additionally, we have ambitious plans to participate in alternative energy sources, particularly in the field of hydrogen."

This comprehensive strategy demonstrates OQGN's commitment to not just growing its operations, but also to helping Oman achieve a more sustainable and energy-diverse future, officials stressed.

Omani organic fertiliser producer exemplifies waste circularity

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 6

A local Omani company has been winning plaudits from both government officials and private citizenry for embedding sustainability and circularity in its commercial operations.

Al Jabal Fertiliser specialises in harvesting organic waste from livestock farms across Dhofar to produce organic fertiliser that enjoys strong demand across the governorate and beyond.

Established in 2003, the Dhofar based facility collects manure from livestock owners in the governorate and lets it ferment



with water for at least 60 days. It is then covered with plastic to kill seeds, bacteria and weeds, before it is crushed and turned into seed fertiliser.

The fertiliser is then filtered to remove stones and impurities. Finally, it is heat-treated to eliminate weeds, seeds, and other



harmful substances. The fertiliser is then packaged in plastic bags to maintain its quality.

Hamed Ahmed Jaaboub (pictured), General Manager, said: "We are proud to be a leading producer of organic fertiliser in Oman. We are committed to providing our customers with high-quality fertiliser that will help them improve the quality of their soil and produce healthier crops. We are also committed to sustainable development and use environmentally friendly practices."

Al Jabal Fertiliser receives an estimated 6,000 tonnes of cow manure from local farmers

annually, in addition to poultry and fish waste. Its final product is used by farmers in Oman to improve the quality of their soil and to produce healthier crops.

The factory also exports its fertiliser to other countries in the region. Al Jabal Fertiliser Factory uses modern technology and strict quality control measures to ensure that its fertiliser meets the highest standards.

The factory is also committed to sustainable development and uses environmentally friendly practices. A number of local Omanis are employed at the facility as well.

Uptick in Oman's oil exports to Europe



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The Omani government has been working for several years to diversify its sources of national income. At the same time, Oman has been able to increase the volume of its oil production to more than one million barrels per day (bpd), from around 700,000 bpd 10 years ago, while efforts continue to uncover new oil and gas discoveries.

These efforts make Oman one of the leading countries in the region in terms of energy exports to the world.

Recent indicators confirm the presence of large quantities of oil and gas in a number of areas, onshore and offshore, of the Sultanate of Oman.

This was confirmed by some reports issued by oil companies including Occidental Oman, which confirmed in its recent

statement that it had discovered new quantities of oil that would increase the value of Omani exports to countries around the world.

Total national oil reserves amounted to about 4.905 billion barrels in 2022.

Some European countries are on the list that import Omani oil, with inflows reaching the highest level during the past ten years.

The quantity exported during the first seven months of the current year reached about 3 million barrels of oil which enhances trade exchange between Oman and these countries.

This development comes as a result of the cessation of Russian oil exports to those countries due to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

It is usual for Oman to export its oil to Asian countries such as China, Japan, India, South Korea,

OFFICIAL DATA INDICATE AN INCREASE IN NET EXPORT REVENUES FROM CRUDE OIL DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE CURRENT YEAR 2023 TO REACH \$8.4 BILLION, COMPARED TO \$8.2 BILLION DURING THE SAME PERIOD OF LAST YEAR 2022, WHILE OIL PRODUCTION REACHED 1.061 MILLION BARRELS PER DAY, COMPARED TO 1.037 MILLION BARRELS PER DAY DURING THE SAME PERIOD A YEAR EARLIER.

Thailand, Taiwan and others, but some of these quantities have begun to be supplied to European countries due to Russia's current crisis with those countries.

Official data indicate an increase in net export revenues from crude oil during the first half of the current year 2023 to

reach \$8.4 billion, compared to \$8.2 billion during the same period of last year 2022, while oil production reached 1.061 million barrels per day, compared to 1.037 million barrels per day during the same period a year earlier.

This enhances Omani revenues that go towards enhancing development areas and reducing the country's public debt, in addition to enhancing the assets of the country's sovereign funds.

At the same time, the country continues to sign contracts to enhance areas of its energy transition (green hydrogen, in particular) within the framework of the economic diversification policy, in addition to developing non-oil sectors in the fields of manufacturing, fisheries, mining, tourism, and others.

Oman works within the framework of the economic vision (Oman 2040) to enhance

the various aspects that support the local economy and works to increase financial returns from those sectors and provide more job opportunities for citizens, in addition to working on the financial sustainability of the programmes that the government plans to establish and to obtain more oil and gas revenues.

These policies have encouraged more international oil companies to invest in the areas of oil and gas exploration that the Omani government allocated in some concession areas, which will increase the size of macroeconomic, and raise the level of Oman's share in oil production in the coming years.

It will improve also the financial position of the Sultanate of Oman, help reduce public debt, and achieve a surplus in the country's annual financial budgets.

Europe faces dirtier inflation fight than US



FRANCESCO GUERRERA

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Europe might need a miracle to repeat the "immaculate disinflation" currently gracing the United States. Across the Atlantic, price pressures are receding without a recession or massive job losses.

The euro zone's export-led economy is weak, consumers and businesses are borrowing less, and higher borrowing costs mean there's further pain to come.

The contrasting fortunes of Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, and Jerome Powell, chair of the US Federal Reserve, can be summed up in two numbers. The US inflation rate in July was 3.2%, while GDP grew 2.1% year-on-year in the second quarter. The equivalent figures for the euro zone were 5.3% and 0.6%, respectively.

It is a tale of two economies. In the United States, the Fed's steep increase in interest rates appears to have succeeded in guiding inflation towards the central bank's 2% target without causing a recession.

The ECB's similarly aggressive tightening has been less successful in cooling growth in consumer prices, yet risks tipping the bloc into a downturn.

The 20 countries that share the single currency narrowly escaped a recession — usually defined as two consecutive quarters of shrinking GDP — earlier this year.

Though economic output in the euro zone contracted by 0.1% in the final three months of 2022, the bloc recorded zero growth in the first quarter of this year, avoiding the technical definition of a recession by the narrowest of margins.

Yet recessionary risks are still lurking. The euro zone's manufacturing sector, which brings in around a fifth of GDP, is already shrinking. Factory activity in July fell at the fastest pace since the height of the pandemic in May 2020, according to a survey of around 5,000 firms by S&P Global.

It recovered slightly in August but it remains at levels consistent with a recession. Weak demand for exports from China and the end of the post-Covid



A steel worker of Germany's industrial conglomerate ThyssenKrupp AG takes a sample of raw iron from a blast furnace at a steel factory in Duisburg. — Reuters

consumption spurt are forcing Europe's industrial firms to batten down the hatches. Germany's export-led economy, the euro zone's largest, will see GDP fall by 0.3% this year, according to the International Monetary Fund. Activity in services, which make up the lion's share of the bloc's output, is also sinking, touching a 30-month low in August, according to the S&P Global survey.

That's because demand for services like travel and entertainment, which boomed after the pandemic, is waning.

As governments removed fiscal support and higher prices and borrowing costs hit consumers' finances, services firms suffered the worst slump in new orders since May 2013, excluding the pandemic years, in August.

The nine consecutive hikes in the ECB's policy interest rate since last year are also making

credit scarcer and less desirable. The central bank found that companies' demand for loans in the second quarter was the lowest since its records began two decades ago. That's not surprising considering that benchmark interest rates are at their highest level since 2000, while banks are charging companies and households the most for loans since 2008 and 2012, respectively.

These grim economic indicators suggest the bitter medicine dispensed by Lagarde and her colleagues is working. Euro zone inflation has halved from the 10.6% peak it reached in October 2022.

However, prices are still rising at more than twice the ECB's 2% target and the central bank expects them to remain above that level until at least 2025.

Policymakers in Frankfurt have hinted that, even if rates stop rising soon, they will remain

elevated for a while. That will put more downward pressure on the economy. To be sure, neither the ECB nor professional forecasters in the financial services sector expect a recession this year. The central bank has pencilled in GDP growth of 0.9% in 2023 while economists, on average, reckon the bloc's output will expand by 0.5%.

One bright spot is the region's workers. The euro zone's unemployment rate is at an historic low of 6.4%, largely because companies embarked on a hiring spree to meet the spike in demand for goods and services after Covid-19. And they are not done yet.

Around 3% of available jobs in the bloc are currently vacant, close to the 3.2% record reached in the second quarter of 2022. At the current pace, it will take until 2026 for the vacancy rate to return to its pre-Covid level,

reckons Capital Economics. Though a recession would lead to increased layoffs, the resilient job market suggests a short and shallow downturn could avoid mass unemployment.

European labour regulations and strong unions, which make it harder for companies to fire people in a recession, would also limit the damage.

That in turn could allow the ECB to enjoy some version of the "immaculate disinflation" playing out in the United States. The problem for Lagarde, however, is that workers' increased bargaining power is feeding through into higher pay.

Labour costs rose 5.0% in the first quarter of the year compared to the same period in 2022. That's hardly compatible with bringing inflation back down to 2%. Europe faces a longer and dirtier fight to tame rising prices.

— Reuters

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SEPTEMBER 7, 2023 | SAFAR 21, 1445 AH

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Observer Classified Section

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K-POP

K-pop boy group ‘RIIZE’ members (L-R) Seongchan, Seunghan, Sohee, Wonbin, Shotaro, Eunseok and Anton attend at their debut showcase in Seoul. — AFP



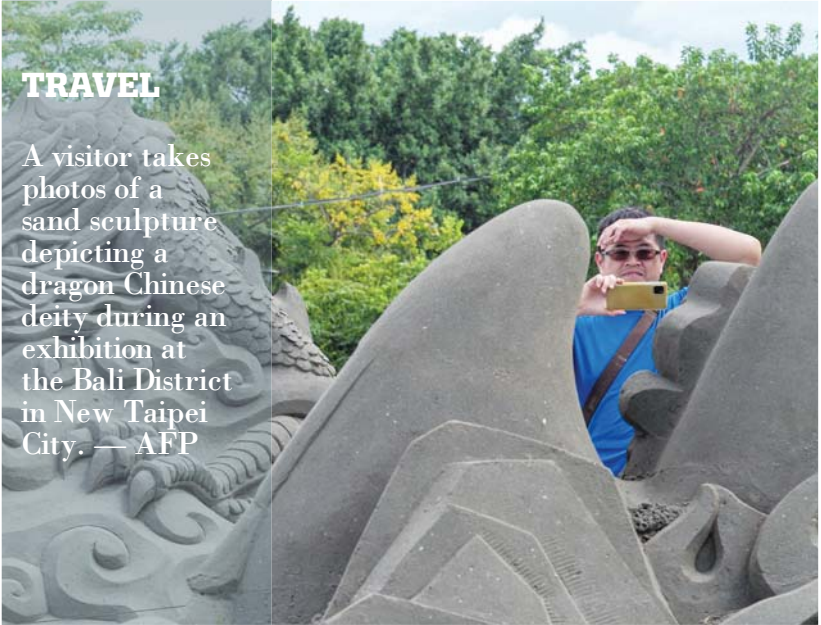
LIFESTYLE

Alexia Delrieu, 50-year-old “bouquiniste” (book seller) opens her stall on the left bank of the Seine River in Paris. — AFP



MUSIC

French singer Alex Montembault poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



TRAVEL

A visitor takes photos of a sand sculpture depicting a dragon Chinese deity during an exhibition at the Bali District in New Taipei City. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Players from the Royal Southern Yacht Club and Cowes Island Sailing Club play the annual cricket match on the Brambles sandbank in the middle of The Solent near Southampton in southern England. — AFP

art & life

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Al Batinah Film Festival will give a boost to short film production



The filmmaking camp accompanying the Second Al Batinah Film Festival commenced its activities on Monday in the picturesque Wilayat of Al Musannah. This initiative is a collaborative effort between the Office of the Governor of South Al Batinah. It receives substantial support from both the Training and Development Committee and the Support and Production Fund of the Omani Film Society.

The primary objective of this filmmaking camp is to nurture and enhance the skills of its 28 enthusiastic participants, all of whom share a passion for short film production. The camp, led by seasoned experts in the field, is designed to unveil the intricacies of filmmaking, equip participants with new talents, and instil the confidence needed to shine in the realm of cinema.

The participants represent a diverse spectrum of interests within the filmmaking domain, including six aspiring directors, eight budding cinematographers, five budding screenwriters, three enthusiastic production managers, and six passionate actors eager to embark on cinematic journeys.

The programme officially commenced on Tuesday with an engaging creative thinking workshop,

jointly presented by Fatima al Hinai, Director of Media and Marketing at Al Batinah Film Festival, and Anwar al Ruzaiqi, Director of the Support and Production Fund at the Omani Cinema Society. The workshop's core objective is to empower participants to engage in effective brainstorming, fostering the creation of innovative and original ideas for their short films.

The camp will continue its journey on Wednesday, spanning two days, with an exclusive screenwriting workshop facilitated by screenwriter Qaisar al Hinai. This workshop aims to equip participants with the skills to transform their creative ideas into compelling short film scripts.

Subsequently, from September 17 to 18, a workshop on the art of photography and cinematography will be presented by Bahraini director Jan al Balushi. Through hands-on sessions and the production of short scenes, participants will acquire comprehensive artistic skills in photography and cinematography.

The camp will further progress with a workshop on film editing using state-of-the-art technologies conducted by Mohammed al Ruqaiishi from September 20 to 21. This workshop focuses on imparting creative and effective video



editing skills using specialised software, enabling participants to achieve stunning visual effects in their productions.

Director Mohammed al Ajmi, the founder and director of the Al Batinah Film Festival, emphasised the pivotal role played by the festival and other initiatives organised by the Omani Cinema Society in enriching the cinematic landscape

of Oman. He stressed that a primary goal of these festivals is to provide a nurturing environment for the discovery and development of diverse cinematic talents across all governorates. Al Ajmi reaffirmed Oman's commitment to empowering these talents, preparing them for careers in the film industry, fostering their participation in local and international festivals, and



spreading cinematic culture.

Al Ajmi stated, "This camp has been established to cover all aspects of filmmaking, from idea generation and brainstorming to scriptwriting, film direction, and the intricacies of cinematography and editing. It aims to guide participants towards achieving the highest standards of cinematic excellence in their work."

Fatima al Hinai, co-presenter of the "Exploding Creativity" workshop, expressed that the "Creative Thinking" workshop is designed to ignite and cultivate creativity within short film production. She highlighted the camp's role in fueling a passion for cinema and inspiring creative expression. Al Hinai

underscored the workshop's significance as a unique opportunity for aspiring filmmakers to explore their ideas and transform them into innovative cinematic masterpieces.

"Together, we will work towards refining writing and directing skills, bringing unique stories to life on the big screen in a captivating and distinctive manner because we firmly believe that every exceptional story deserves to be showcased on the grand cinematic stage," she said.

Notably, films produced during this camp will have the chance to participate in the Al Batinah Film Festival, scheduled to take place from November 12 to November 15.



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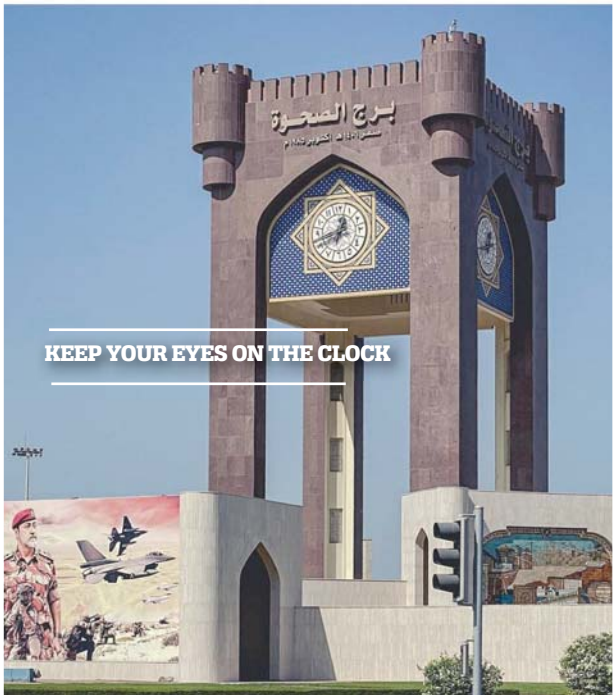
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Thousands of Freddie Mercury's personal items to go on sale

THOUSANDS OF ITEMS belonging to the charismatic Queen frontman Freddie Mercury, from manuscripts of his band's biggest hits to furniture, paintings and knick-knacks are on auction in London from Wednesday.

Among the highlights of the Sotheby's "evening sale", which will be followed by two other live auctions and three online sales, is Mercury's piano.

The Yamaha quarter-tail piano was bought by Mercury in 1975 and was used to create almost all of his greatest songs.

It is expected to sell for £2 million-£3 million (\$2.5 million-\$3.75 million).

Also on sale is the original manuscript for epic hit

"Bohemian Rhapsody", whose 15 pages of pencil and ballpoint pen remarks reveal the different directions Mercury envisaged for the track.

It also reveals that it was originally going to be called "Mongolian Rhapsody".

Paintings by Chagall, Dali and Picasso that adorned Mercury's home, as well as the last painting he bought a month before his death from AIDS in 1991 -- an oil on canvas by James Jacques Joseph Tissot -- will also go under the hammer.

AUCTION FAN

All the items for sale are from Mercury's home, Garden Lodge, in west London. The property's green door, covered in fan graffiti, is one of the lots.

The entire collection is being offered for sale by Mary Austin, a close friend and one-time fiancée of Mercury's.

"Mary Austin has lived with the collection and has cared for the collection for more than three decades," Gabriel Heaton, a books and manuscripts specialist at Sotheby's, said.

Mercury "was not interested in having a museum of his life but he loved auctions", to the point of being a regular at Sotheby's sales, said Heaton.



Austin believes the artist — who was 45 when he died — would have "loved" this sale, he added.

Some 1,469 lots will go under the hammer at the famous London auction house, whose facade has been decorated with a huge moustache for the occasion.

Many reveal another side of Mercury, including his passion for cats and for Japan — as evidenced by his collection of kimonos and prints.

MOUSTACHE COMB

Mercury's most flamboyant stage costumes, Hawaiian shirt and Superman tank top will also find new homes along with his personal polaroids and legendary snapper Mick Rock's shots.

The finest bottles from his cellar, such as Dom Perignon champagne, will be up for grabs alongside more intimate items,

such as a book of personally annotated poetry and a moustache comb.

Among the more playful items are a set of games including travel Scrabble, at which Mercury excelled.

Before the sale, the auction house hosted the collection at a month-long exhibition, open to the public free of charge.

Sotheby's estimated when the auction was announced in April that the lots would fetch at least £6 million.

Part of the proceeds will be donated to the Mercury Phoenix Trust and the Elton John Aids Foundation, two organisations involved in the fight against AIDS.

Sotheby's says it is the largest collection, by volume, of a cultural icon to go to auction since the Elton John sale in 1988, when 2,000 lots sold for a total of £4.8 million

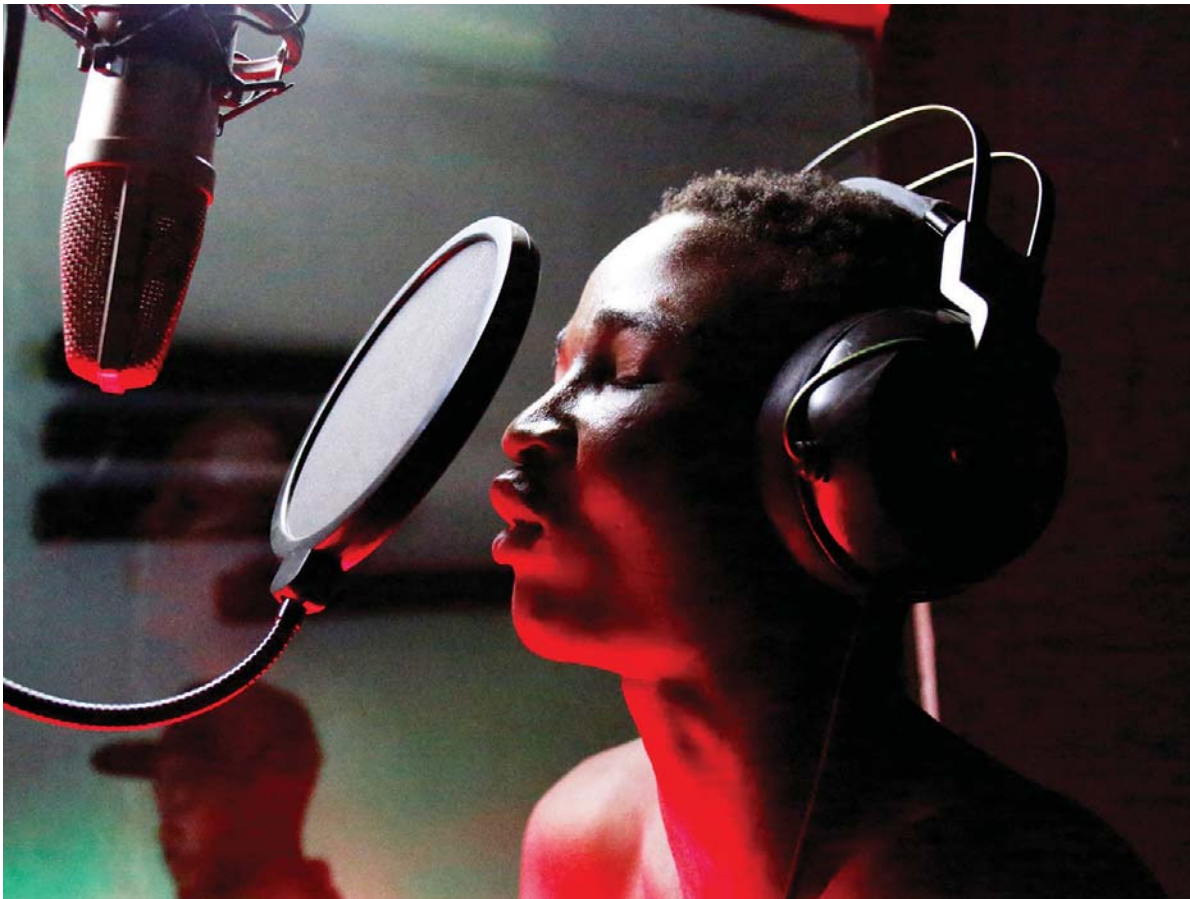
—AFP

MUSIC

Congolese arts refuge helps street children find their voice

A small recording booth on the outskirts of the Congolese capital Kinshasa has become a safe space for homeless teenagers to rap and sing about their life on the streets and dreams of a brighter future.

Lyrics about sexual abuse, theft, and run-ins with the police lay bare the hardships faced by the few dozen children and young people who attend the Mokili Na Poche cultural centre - a day refuge offering a place to wash, eat,



and learn to those in need.

"It really makes me happy when I sing," said 19-year-old Osé Mavakala, who has slept on the streets for years like more than 20,000 other homeless children in Kinshasa, according to UN agency Unicef.

Other teens looked on with pride as Mavakala rapped intently into the microphone at a session in late August.

The chance to record in a studio has inspired Mavakala to dream of bigger goals. "It encourages me and I tell myself - ah, life belongs to the courageous," he said, citing US rapper Lil Wayne and Congolese star Fally Ipupa as influences.

He has been coming to the centre for the past three years, taking part in the music, art, and literacy classes it offers from 8 am to 7 pm local time (0700 GMT-1800 GMT). Founder Cedrick Tshimbalanga hopes these

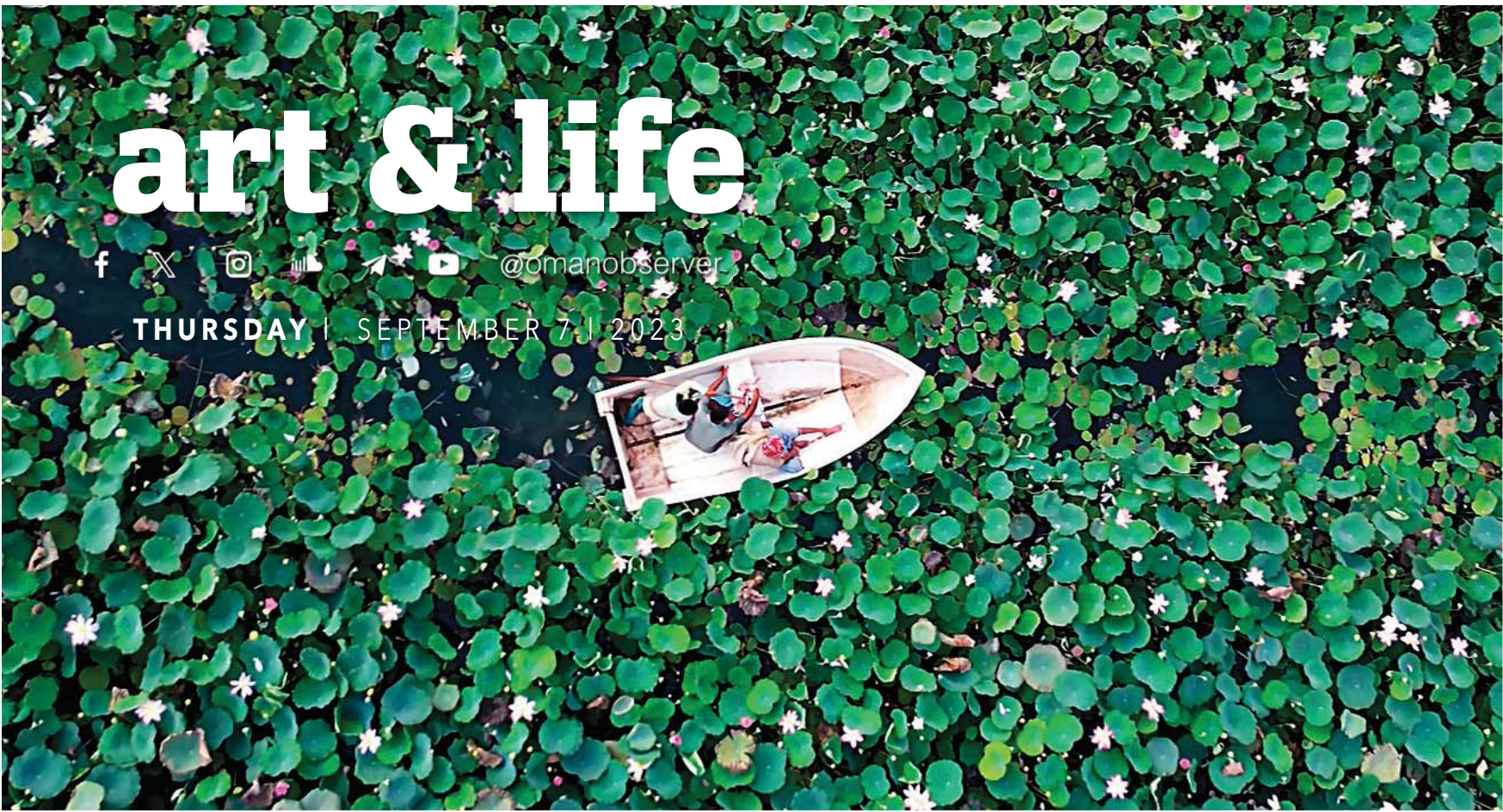
skills and the routine will help the children find their feet and their voices.

"With music first and foremost the young people are able to talk about their daily experience - everything they live through daily: rape, theft, trauma, attacks," said Tshimbalanga, who plans to publish their tracks soon in an album.

The classes are also a chance for the young people to make up for lost opportunities. While Democratic Republic of Congo has made progress in boosting access to education, over 7 million children aged between five and 17 still do not have access to schooling, according to Unicef.

"Break free from the criminal life, my friend, it's time to see what the future holds for you," Mavakala rapped during an emotion-filled impromptu performance at the centre in August

—Reuters



art & life

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TRAVEL

The enchanting lotus garden of Wadi Shab

BY YERU EBUEN
INSTAGRAM:@YRU_HERE

Being one of Oman's most visited wadis and home to a spectacular waterfall hidden inside a cave, travellers speak of Wadi Shab with a sense of awe and reverence, often describing it as "a beautiful paradise" or "a must-visit" when in Oman.

If you've recently visited Wadi Shab, the lotus invasion happening right at the entrance of the wadi will have caught your attention.

The lotus has long been a symbol of purity and rebirth in many cultures, and its power as an attraction has been tested in places like Thailand where the lotus flowers are revered and used in many different ways other than decorations.

Legend has it that the petals of the lotus blossoms are kissed by angels before they open each morning.

While visitors are of the impression that the lotus plants just appeared overnight, locals living in the area said that the plants had been there for quite some time and just gotten social media attention when they started flowering.

A lotus life cycle goes through several stages, starting with seed germination in the muddy depths of freshwater bodies. Initially, lotus seedlings bear floating leaves as they establish themselves. During their juvenile stage, lotus plants extend their stems to reach sunlight, developing the iconic, flat, circular leaves that float gracefully on the water's surface. They flourish in the vegetative growth phase, producing large, water-repellent leaves and anchoring themselves with submerged stems. Maturity heralds the reproductive phase, where lotus plants produce fragrant, eye-catching flowers atop tall stalks. These flowers open early in the day, attracting pollinators, before closing in the afternoon. Following successful pollination, seed pods, or lotus pods, form to house the develop-



ing seeds.

In Southeast Asia, including countries like Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia, lotus flowers often bloom during the wet or monsoon season, which typically falls between June and September. However, specific timing may vary by country and exact location within these countries.

In Oman, locals reported that the flowers bloom usually in the cooler months but are sporadically spread apart in some other months.

Lotus plants, including the sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) and the American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*), have the potential to become invasive in non-native habitats. Their rapid growth and ability to form dense colonies can disrupt local ecosystems by outcompeting native aquatic vegetation. Invasive lotus plants alter water flow, increase sedimentation, and affect



nutrient cycling, negatively impacting water quality and other aquatic organisms.

The invasive potential of lotus plants is especially associated with the American lotus, particularly in regions where it is not native. Once established, these invasive populations can be challenging to man-

age and control due to their robust rhizomatous root systems.

For now, the lotus plants growing in Wadi Shab are celebrated for their beauty. It is becoming an attraction, adding another reason to visit the wadi. Will you make a stop by the lotus garden when you visit Wadi Shab?

THE CHANGING
WORLD OF MEN



Shaddad al Musalmy

'If it means quacking for her, then do it'

PARDON ME, BUT I will be honest here. After four weeks of solitude, I could not keep up at home alone until the woman of my house along with children came back from a one-month holiday.

My masculine solidarity was nothing without her at home. I was so happy to see her back and to this day, she walks with her head held high due to the confidence I instil in her.

Anyways back to reality and she is back home. However, it was imperative for her to go grocery shopping since there was literally nothing at home.

We both like home cooked food not only because she loves being in the kitchen, but also home food makes us check on our calorie intake.

While shopping, she was on one corner of the hypermarket as I was on the other. We separated because we were running out of time. I actually was choosing some nice tomatoes as she came running to me that I thought something wrong had happened.

"I just realised that my handbag is the same colour as my scarf. Did you notice that before?" She asked with all the excitement drawn on her face.

I honestly was astonished to see that she came all the way to come and say this to me. I pretended to draw all my attention but many wires were running through my mind of 'whats' and 'hows'.

"Oh wow, forgot to tell you that your handbag makes a great match for your scarf," these words came out of my mouth just to make her happy. Indeed, for a small white lie, she was happy and we moved on.

Living peacefully is very important for a healthy and steady relationship. After all, it does not cost or harm anything as long as you are making your soulmate happy.

This reminds me of a scholar who said, "If it means quacking for her, then do it. Let

LIVING PEACEFULLY IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR A HEALTHY AND STEADY RELATIONSHIP. AFTER ALL, IT DOES NOT COST OR HARM ANYTHING AS LONG AS YOU ARE MAKING YOUR SOULMATE HAPPY.

other people see the chicken out of you. As long as she is happy, you become happy."

After a great analysis, I come to realise that the reason why some couples fight and others end up in a more serious situation is only because they do not treasure or pick up interest in the smallest details of life.

At many times, it is the smallest thing that makes a huge difference. We should never underestimate the small things that are done by larger hearts out of love. This way we shall all live happily.

Divorce rates are highly increasing in the country. It is within our own power to avoid this because I believe that the moment we all say the "I do's" we mean forever but somewhere somehow the journey stops right in the middle.

Understanding and communicating freely with each other is a great way to spice up relationships. These two go hand in hand.

My neighbour actually had to call it quits with his wife after a great blessing of welcoming their first-born. It was deeply painful to realise later that the reason behind it all was about 'naming' their daughter.

Both husband and wife had different names they had wished for her so the man as the man himself decided the birth certificate to be under the name he wanted. The wife on the other hand always dreamt of a particular name for their daughter.

Later on I asked myself what harm would it do if only he had given her a chance to name her according to what his wife wanted after all she went through thick and thin for nine months. However, an atom sized factor led to their divorce.

Maybe we ought to live with the small things because at the end of the journey it is what we shall remember the most. Everyone can buy flowers and chocolates but the little things you pay attention to on a daily basis are what count. Till then ...

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.

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