

Captives handed over to Red Cross

A third group of captives are handed over to Red Cross staff as part of a four-day ceasefire agreement in the Gaza war, officials on both sides of the conflict said on Sunday. The Israeli army said 14 Israeli citizens and three foreigners were handed over to staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Sunday, the third day of the truce agreement which involves a four-day pause in fighting. **DETAILS ON P6 & 7**



GERMAN PRESIDENT BEGINS VISIT TODAY

VISIT REFLECTS ADVANCED RELATIONS BINDING THE TWO COUNTRIES

MUSCAT: President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany will pay an official visit from Monday to the Sultanate of Oman.

A statement, issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reads as follows: “In reiteration of the Royal keenness attached by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to hold meetings with world leaders to discuss regional situations and finding ways that maintain global peace and harmony, President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany, will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman from Monday till Wednesday. The visit reflects the advanced relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany.

“The visit will explore the joint areas of cooperation that serve the two countries’ interests and aspirations. It



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik



President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier

will also discuss the current regional issues.”
The official visit of Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier comes as a reinforcement of these close and strong bilateral relations represented by the enhancement of cooperation between the two friendly countries based on the good relations and mutual respect between the two countries.
There is no doubt that the political file will be on the agenda during the bilateral meetings between His Majesty the Sultan and Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier in light of the events the region is witnessing, and many issues will be the subject of discussion and consultation between the two leaderships.
Accordingly, Omani-German relations were established on the basis of respect, good faith and mutual trust in dealing with many contemporary international issues. **SEE ALSO P2**

EFFORTS ON TO ENHANCE GROWTH OF NON-OIL SECTOR

MUSCAT: Members of the Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday held a non-public session during which they listened to the Finance Minister’s statement on the State’s draft budget for fiscal year 2024 (in accordance with Article 52 of the Council of Oman’s Law).

The statement of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, covered global economic developments, growth indicators of the Omani economy, expected outcomes of 2023 budget, salient features of the State’s general budget 2024 and related fiscal indicators.

The minister’s statement discussed public revenues, public spending, the current deficit, means of funding, the fiscal position and programmes to modernise public finances.

The discussions focused on



Majlis Ash’shura in session on Sunday.

the contribution of economic diversification drive to the public income and the government’s efforts to enhance the growth of the non-oil sector during 2024. It elaborated on promising development projects that the government intends to implement during 2024, as well as the status of some dormant projects.

The session touched on Oman’s latest credit rating indicators and their impact on investment opportunities

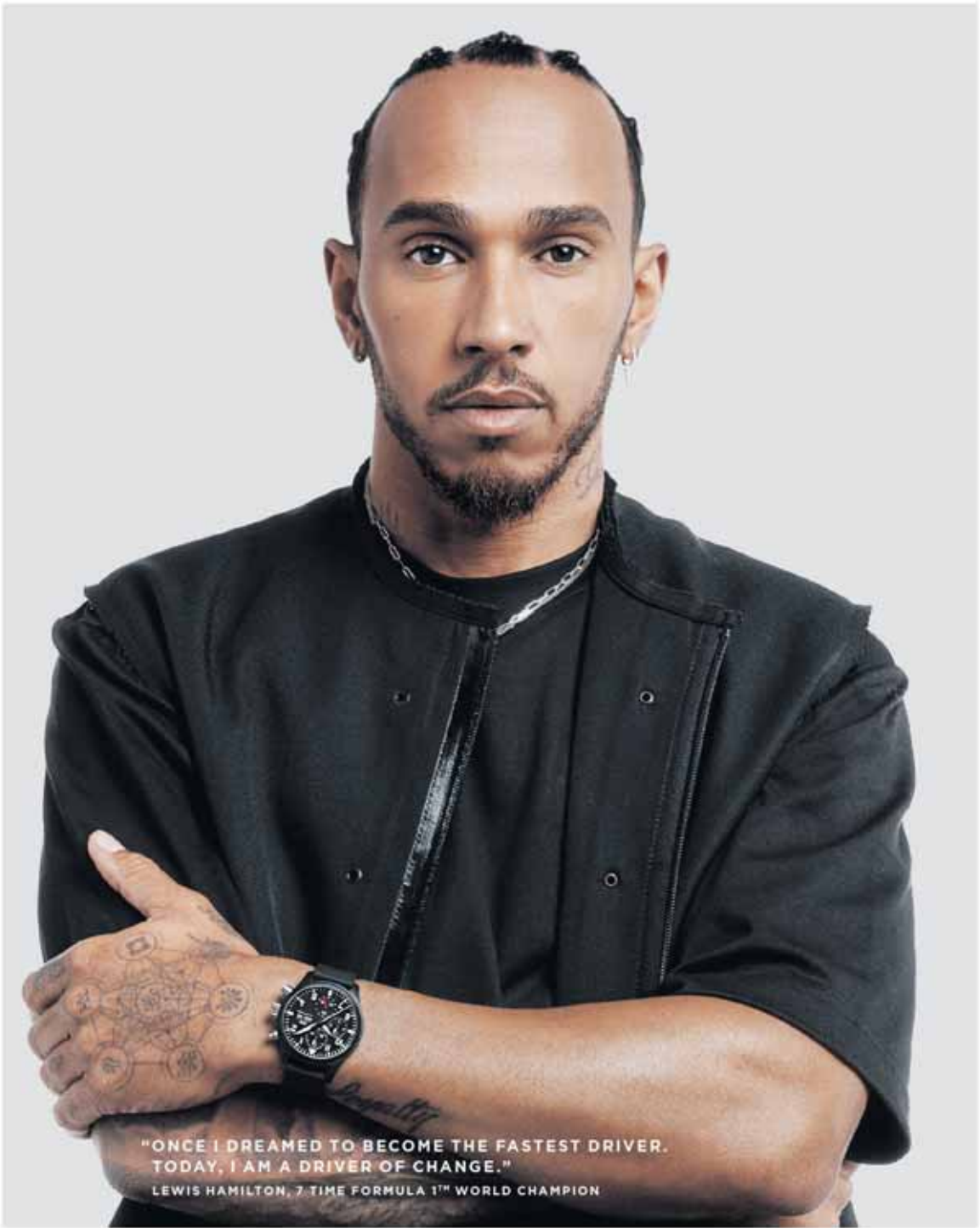
within Oman and abroad, in addition to the ministry’s efforts to cut down the deficit and manage public debt during 2024.

The session laid emphasis on the need to give priority to some economic challenges due to their social consequences. The discussion took place within the context of the Majlis’s second regular session of the first annual convening (2023-2024) of the 10th Term (2023-2027). — ONA



OMANI DOCUMENTARY FILM WINS 1ST PLACE

Omani documentary film ‘You Will Not Dive Alone’ by director Fahd al Maimani, a member of the Omani Film Society, won first place in the International Film Festival of the Sea in the Kingdom of Morocco, whose activities concluded on Sunday. The film reflects a unique artistic journey, and is distinguished by exceptional cinematography and the ability to explore environmental issues in an inspiring way. It talks about the world of the deep seas and oceans in a charming and dazzling way.



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97,000 Germans visited Oman till Sept 2023

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Around 97,000 of the total 2.9 million visitors who came to the Sultanate of Oman at the end of September 2023 were German nationals.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Germans formed the single largest European community to visit the country as tourists.

363,732 of 1,650,210 guests who stayed in the three to five-star hotels were European nationals.

Oman and the European Union (EU) have also finalised steps towards a comprehensive air transport agreement and an MoU between the Civil Aviation Authority and the German air navigation company.

In 2022, Schengen consulates in Oman received a total of 30,885 visa applications. Among these, 23,430 visas were approved.

German-Oman relations have traditionally been robust since the 1960s and several German companies have been involved in various infrastructure projects in the country.

Currently, the national airline, Oman Air, operates direct services to Frankfurt and Munich.

A bilateral investment promotion and protection agreement entered into force on April 4, 2010.



German-Oman relations have traditionally been robust since the 1960s

In 2014, Germany and Oman signed a declaration of intent on cooperation in culture, education, science, and research.

By the end of 2022, 44 German companies were registered in Oman, with a total invested capital exceeding RO16 million in various sectors including construction, mining, quarrying, industry, health, and oil and gas.

Since 2007, there has been a private Omani university, the German University of Technology (GUtech), in Oman whose curriculum follows that of the German partner RWTH Aachen University.

Recently, the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany marked the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations.

A commemorative stamp was revealed during the ceremony to embody the advanced relations between the two countries.

German bakery offers culinary delight

KABEER YOUSUF
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Celebrating 15 years of intertwining the rich flavours of Germany with the culinary landscape of Oman, Shalashil Bakery stands as a testament to the multi-cultural collaborative efforts between Omani and German influences.

For many, the bakery has been a culinary haven for both the local Omani community and the German expatriates residing in the country.

Pioneered by the late Hanz-Uwe Muellers, whose dedication to tantalising Omani taste buds dates back to 1976, Shalashil Bakery has seamlessly transitioned through the years. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the legacy continues under the stewardship of Sarah, the present heir, who effortlessly channels a profound appreciation for both Omani and German gastronomy.

Rahma al Jamali, the current owner and widow of Hanz, expresses gratitude amid the festive atmosphere surrounding the bakery's 15th anniversary.

"We are delighted to celebrate 15 years of sweetly catering to Omanis, Germans, and other residents. Our legacy is not just about running a bakery; it's about introducing the authentic Deutsche tastes to Oman," she shares.

The journey of Shalashil Bakery began when Hanz-Uwe Mueller, a German baker captivated by the warmth and friendliness of Omanis, decided to establish Intercon Bakery in 1976. This venture was followed by the inception of Oman Modern Bakery and subsequent additions such as Al Bustan Bakery in the 80s and Meena Bakery in the mid-90s.

After a sojourn back to Germany, both Hanz and Rahma felt the pull to return to Muscat and pursue their sweet mission in 2008.

Driven by an unwavering passion for pastries, they opened the German bakery named Shalashil in Qurum. Presently, with a presence in three locations across Oman, the bakery caters to the diverse palates of Omanis and Germans, as well as a clientele that spans continents.

Ministers discuss growth, entrepreneurship with students

MUSCAT: A number of ministers met with students of applied science colleges on Sunday and reviewed plans and programmes and closely identified students' aspirations on the backdrop of the economic growth currently witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, brought together Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, stressed the importance of strengthening communication between the ministers and students at the higher education institutions. She appreciated the Royal attention to the vocational training sector that contributed greatly to the development of the vocational training and private training institutions.

The minister pointed to the ministry's efforts in developing vocational colleges including assessing the eight vocational



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colleges, devising plans to develop them in the short, medium, and long terms, raising the efficiency of the existing facilities, and adding new facilities to keep pace with the increasing number of students at vocational colleges in addition to modernising equipment and educational supplies.

Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, reviewed the axes and priorities of Oman Vision 2040, as well as the most important programmes overseen by the Unit pointing to the Vision's interest in youth as the basis for development.

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, explained that the ministry offers work-related training, on-the-job training, and it has recently introduced a training programme for self-employment. He pointed to the ministry's goal of building a true culture and full awareness of the general image of the labour sector. The minister said that the job-seekers are untapped human resource who, if remained unemployed, represents an economic loss to the country in the first place. He referred to the ministry's efforts and initiatives in cooperation and partnership with other sectors, such as the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to develop training standards.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, spoke about the ministry's role in sustaining economic growth and providing job opportunities for job seekers through diversifying the sources of national income and achieving the set goals.

The minister explained the ministry's role in supervising plans for implementing annual projects, following up on the reality of economic policies and programmes, evaluating plans, visions, policies and programmes and monitoring and studying local, regional and international economic variables.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, outlined the most prominent initiatives and sectors overseen by the ministry. He said that the ministry facilitates procedures and partnerships, supports national industries, promotes export and attracts investment. He added that the ministry establishes partnerships with relevant public and private establishments and enables the private sector to implement projects.

The ministry endeavours to create new investment opportunities, improve the trade balance, create a single platform to display investment opportunities, diversify the economy and increase companies' contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP).



Royal Academy of Management conducts leadership programme

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) is conducting the State-Owned Enterprises Chairpersons Programme, which is designed to diversify and strengthen the economy through working with a community of chairpersons of state-owned enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme will host thirty-five participants from the boards of state-owned enterprises. It is conducted in partnership with Oman Investment Authority, Board of Directors Institute (GCC-BDI) and other institutions.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management stated, “The implementation of this programme aligns with His Majesty the Sultan’s vision to govern the state-owned enterprises, aiming to enhance their performance and boost efficiency by equipping leaders with the capabilities to contribute to the economic system and build a sustainable and resilient economy.

The Royal Academy of Management is driven by its vision to be a centre for developing national leaders and fostering creative thinking, administrative development and knowledge foresight.

The programme will build



The programme will build a community of chairpersons from state-owned enterprises by equipping them with the necessary knowledge

a community of chairpersons from state-owned enterprises by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge and will familiarise participants with the best practices in government-operated companies and empower them to contextualise these practices at a local level.

His Excellency added that the programme significantly enhances national capabilities with a new vision that is able to adapt to rapid changes and contribute to the future development map of the

Sultanate of Oman.

John Gollifer, CEO of GCC BDI said, “The strategic partnership between GCC BDI and the Royal Academy of Management Oman exemplifies our unwavering dedication to shaping the future of board development training. Together, we will embark on a transformative journey, equipping leaders with the skills and knowledge to drive innovation and growth in an ever- evolving business landscape.”

He also stressed that this

collaboration embodies the shared vision for a brighter, more empowered future in the world of business leadership.

It will address various topics that are integral to the development of the community of chairpersons of state-owned enterprises in Oman, with the ultimate goal of diversifying the economy. Key focus areas include strategic planning, effective decision-making, future thinking tools, board of directors’ effectiveness, as well as governance and company culture.

No precaution required to travel to China: WHO

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Amid several calls to travel agencies and other genuine sources, even in Oman, about travel to China in the wake of reported respiratory illness among children in the Northern part of the country, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said no precaution is required to travel to China.

This comes in the wake of the WHO monitoring of data from

Chinese surveillance systems that have been showing an increase in respiratory illness in children in the said areas, since mid-October.

“Based on the available information, WHO does not recommend any specific measures for travellers to China.

In general, persons should avoid travel while experiencing symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness, if possible; in case of symptoms during

or after travel, travellers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share travel history with their healthcare provider,” a WHO communique said.

Ever since the report revealed an increasing number of respiratory cases in Northern China came out, people who have regular travel contacts with China began to panic and were full of questions as to the precautions and travel cautions.

Further, WHO advised

against the application of any travel or trade restrictions based on the current information available on this event.

“The WHO doesn’t advise any travel restriction or trade barriers at this point in time but it recommended that people in China follow measures to reduce the risk of respiratory illness, which include recommended vaccines against influenza, Covid-19 and other respiratory pathogens as appropriate.”



NORWEGIAN OFFICIAL VISITS NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE

MUSCAT: Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Kingdom of Norway and his accompanying delegation on Sunday visited the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies in Bait Al Falaj Garrison. Upon his arrival, the guest and his accompanying delegation were greeted by Rear Admiral Ali Abdullah Al Shidi, NDC Commandant. – **ONA**

NCSI BAGS SALEM AL ALI AL SABAH INFORMATICS AWARD

KUWAIT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) won the award of Salem Al Ali al Sabah Informatics Award in its 23rd edition dedicated to Sustainable Development.

The award was won through the 2020 Electronic Census project, covering the enumeration of population, residences and establishments. The project was implemented by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The award shows appreciation for NCSI efforts in the field of digital transition in statistical tasks. Besides digitising data, the project boosts knowledge and supports decision-making in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of the



Dr Khalifa al Barwani, CEO of the NCSI said the award winning is credited to the overall process of digital development in Oman

NCSI said in a statement that the accomplishment was the outcome of efforts made in the field of digital transition and sustainable development. The award winning is credited to the overall process of digital development in the Sultanate of Oman, he affirmed.

— ONA

Oman Across Ages Museum emerges major crowd puller

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The National Day Holidays saw a lot of movement in domestic tourism. One major attraction this holiday season was the Oman Across Ages Museum (OAAM) in Manah.

Set amidst Al Hajar Mountains, the museum is a complete treat for the visitors. The visitors constituted a combination of nationals, residents and tourists.

The OAAM received more than 23,700 visitors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman, including 11,800 visitors on the first day of the holiday. Even on Saturday, the museum received many visitors.

The museum was ready for the holidays with extra staff members, and the visiting hours were extended.

During the holidays, author Abdulaziz al Kharousi launched his book, ‘Oman Banknotes (1970 - 2021) at the museum.

Abdulaziz, the author of three books, is interested in heritage and tourism.

The book was officially launched

by Professor Dr Abdullah bin Saif al Ghafri, Member of the State Council and Professor of the Aflaj Chair at the University of Nizwa.

A numismatist, Abdulaziz is also a member of the Historical Association of Oman. The book is now available at the gift shop.

He said, “By the grace of God, the book of Omani banknotes 1970-2021 was launched at the Knowledge Center of the Oman Across Ages Museum, located in the ancient place - Manah.” This museum is considered a cultural tourist destination for every knowledge seeker, as it was created to show the Omani heritage extending to the roots of history.

“The Oman Across Ages Museum focuses on the unique character of the Sultanate of Oman and introduces one to its features, ancient history and renaissance, which continues to push it forward at the local and international levels under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to contribute toward spreading awareness amongst the young people,” he said.

The choice of this place came after searching for the most

appropriate place for such an event. The Historical Association of Oman took this book from the Oman Across Ages Museum and took it to various parts of the earth.

The currency is a distinct feature of the Oman Across Ages Museum as well. In the Renaissance Gallery, the visitors are introduced to the various developments experienced in the Sultanate of Oman since 1970, such as oil, agriculture, education, road network and infrastructure, media, etc. This is where the currency notes of Oman are displayed digitally on the screen, and the variety of riyals used in Oman brings nostalgic memories.

Saturday was the last day of the national holiday, but that did not stop visitors from pouring into the museum - walking, reading, and sitting down to watch the videos. But the vehicle at the entrance gets immediate attention as people take moments of admiration as they read about the green Land Rover from 2013 - “Cars that witnessed history.” The inscription explained, “On July 2015, the late Qaboos, may he rest in peace, drove the vehicle to the project site.



Oman Across Ages Museum received more than 23,700 visitors including 11,800 visitors on the first day of the holiday



E N J O Y W I N T E R B U T

LITTER NOT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 26

WITH the onset of winter, the mountainous and wilderness areas in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman have been witnessing an increase in visitors during the camping season. Despite the enjoyment of open spaces, some individuals persist in leaving waste in public areas, tarnishing the natural beauty, in defiance of the regulations and laws established by the authorities. Citizens emphasise the importance of educating campers to minimise violations during the camping season, aiming to preserve the environment and wildlife in Oman. Mustafa al Maamari, an environmental affairs enthusiast, highlights the dangers of littering, such as leaving food remnants or paper and plastic waste in natural wilderness areas, especially camping sites.

He said plastic bags, in particular, pose a significant threat as they are harmful to both wildlife and vegetation. Al Maamari added that in addition to emitting unpleasant odours, the waste left behind by some individuals deprives others of enjoying the beautiful outdoors. Furthermore, the waste has detrimental effects on the soil, containing harmful elements that are slow to decompose. This, in turn, leads to the death of animals due to ingestion and attracts foreign animals to the area, disrupting the local natural habitat. Al Maamari suggests increasing awareness campaigns at the beginning of the winter season about the risks of littering in the wilderness, utilising social media platforms for disseminating information. He emphasised that the negative impact of negligent individuals contributes to the worsening of the problem. Turki al Kharousi, a regular camper, noted that the phenomenon of littering has become widespread

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in various wilderness areas over the past decade. “Even during family trips, finding a litter-free spot has become challenging,” he said, adding that this trend has increased, especially during the winter season. And even at the end of winter, litter continues to mar the scenic views of the sand dunes. Due to the nature of wilderness areas being influenced by winds, Al Kharousi explains that litter can be transported to other locations, further defacing the natural landscape. Younis al Rawahi also criticised the littering phenomenon in tourist destinations, considering it a negative behaviour seen in most beautiful tourist spots in the country. He viewed the actions as indicators of indifference from some individuals who seemingly care little about the impact on others and the environment. Al Rawahi called on authorities to intensify awareness efforts for visitors and suggested stricter penalties for those committing such violations.



OMAN REGISTERS IMPRESSIVE GROWTH IN FOOD CONSUMPTION

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There has been a compound annual growth (CAGR) of 4.6 per cent in food consumption in Oman, according to the forthcoming Oman AgroFood Expo and Conference organisers, who cited the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR).

Oman’s agriculture sector, according to sources, has an investment opportunity of RO 320 million amid RO 4.8 billion in food imports, besides ongoing infrastructure development of fisheries and aquaculture at RO 1.3 billion.

This key annual gathering, the 5th Oman AgroFood Exhibition and Conference, to be held under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources from December 4 to 6 at the Oman Convention



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& Exhibition Centre, will bring together government decision-makers, international thought-leaders, regional trail-blazers and innovative technology and solution providers to transform the sector and make the Sultanate of Oman’s ambitious vision a reality.

“The Sultanate of Oman has ambitious plans to expand

production and capabilities in agriculture and fisheries and to build up the sector as a contributor to economic growth,” a spokesperson from the ministry said.

Agricultural modernisation and rural farm development are the key pillars of Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Water Resources’ Sustainable Development 2040 Strategy. The government set up the Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) to develop, invest in, and implement programmes to boost farm production and food processing in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

This includes increasing dates, honey, fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, and red meat exports.

While the OFIC has already spawned four new subsidiaries, two specialising in dairy production in the north and south of the Sultanate of Oman, and the other two focused on poultry and red meat. In this regard, the private sector also plays an essential role in developing the agricultural sector’s potential, including the Oman Flour Mill, which is investing in an egg production facility in collaboration with international investors.

Ministry implements programme on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage



The programme stems from Oman’s efforts to activate UNESCO’s 2003 Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth on Sunday began implementing a capacity-building programme in the field of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

The programme is carried out by experts from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO). More than 30 young men and women interested in this field are taking part in the five-day programme.

The programme stems from the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to activate UNESCO’s 2003 Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage and an Arab Strategy to this effect undertaken by ALECSO. Held at the premises of Scientific

College of Design in Muscat Governorate, the programme seeks to raise awareness about the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage, identifying its role in shaping cultural identity and providing comprehensive knowledge about the elements of cultural heritage and methods of documenting it. This is in addition to developing research skills, collecting information and assessing the cultural value of heritage elements.

The programme also aims to achieve the goals of the cultural strategy espoused by the ministry, notably promoting innovation in cultural development, enhancing knowledge, understanding Omani cultural heritage and encouraging participants to take part in projects to preserve cultural heritage in Omani society.

—ONA

Climate change is an urgent threat to pregnant women, children

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Pregnant women, babies and children face extreme health risks from climate catastrophes that warrant urgent attention, according to a Call for Action released by United Nations (UN) agencies ahead of the global Conference of the Parties (COP28) negotiations on climate change in Dubai.

According to the document – Protecting maternal, newborn and child health from the impacts of climate change – the effects of climate events on maternal and child health have been neglected, underreported and underestimated. It highlights that very few countries’ climate change response plans mention maternal or child health, describing this as “a glaring omission and emblematic of the inadequate attention to the needs of women, newborns, and children in the climate change discourse”.

“Climate change poses an existential threat to all of us, but pregnant women, babies and children face some of the gravest consequences of all,” said Bruce Aylward, Assistant Director General for Universal Health Coverage, Life Course at the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Children’s futures need to

be consciously protected, which means taking climate action now for the sake of their health and survival, while ensuring their unique needs are recognised in the climate response.” The year 2023 has been marked by a series of devastating climate disasters. Wildfires, floods, heatwaves and droughts are displacing people, killing crops and livestock, and worsening air pollution. An overheating world is increasing the spread of deadly diseases like cholera, malaria and dengue, with dire consequences for pregnant women and children for whom these infections can be especially severe.

Research shows that harm can begin even in the womb, leading to pregnancy-related complications, preterm birth, low birthweight and stillbirth. For children, consequences can last a lifetime, affecting the development of their bodies and brains as they grow.

“Action on climate change often ignores that children’s bodies and minds are uniquely vulnerable to pollution, deadly diseases and extreme weather,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, Omar Abdi. “We do this at our peril. The climate crisis is jeopardising every child’s fundamental right to health and well-being. It is our collective responsibility to listen and put children at the centre of



Children’s futures need to be consciously protected, which means taking climate action now for the sake of their health and survival.

urgent climate action, beginning at COP28. This is the moment to finally put children on the climate change agenda.” The Call to Action highlights seven urgent actions to address these mounting risks. These include sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and action on climate finance, alongside the specific inclusion of the needs of pregnant women, babies and children

within climate and disaster-related policies. The agencies also call for more research to better understand the impacts of climate change on maternal and child health.

“To find climate solutions that acknowledge the distinct health needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls we must start by asking the right questions,” said Diene Keita, the Deputy Executive

Director for Programmes at UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. “Global climate solutions must support - not sacrifice - gender equality.” The Call to Action was released by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA at an online launch event, alongside an advocacy brief by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH). The PMNCH

advocacy brief reinforces the Call to Action by outlining specific recommendations for different stakeholders – including governments, global financing mechanisms, donors and foundations, private sector and civil society - for ensuring that the health needs of women, children and adolescents are better addressed in climate policies, financing, and programmes.

Oman Investment Authority makes headways in exit plan

MUSCAT: The exit plan of espoused by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) continued to achieve good results that are consistent with the strategic vision set by the OIA as part of its efforts to empower the private sector and attract foreign investments.

The plan, which motives corporate growth, goes in line with Oman Vision 2040 and it establishes an environment that supports economic diversification and enhances cooperation with international companies.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, OIA Chairman, said that, during 2023, the Authority completed many tasks that augmented the volume and development of investments, brought about profits, reduced the



debt of companies and raised the credit rating of some of them.

The OIA completed six national projects and announced “Oman Future Fund”, which will begin extending its services to beneficiary groups in the

near future, he added.

For his part, Talal bin Hamed al Aufi, OQ Group CEO, said that the initial public offerings (IPOs) in the companies of “Abraaj Energy Services” and “OQ Gas Networks” contributed (in 2023) to effectively utilising individuals’ savings in investment that benefited them and enriched Muscat Stock Exchange with large percentage in the energy sector, which he observed, would boost community partnership.

Al Aufi pointed out that OQ Group will utilise the proceeds of the IPOs to expand the scope of its operations to produce a long-term impact by strategically repurposing the additional capital, enhancing growth and accelerating the repayment of existing

investment loans.

Al Aufi explained that the group established a specialised unit tasked with running IPOs, conducting detailed studies of all OQ-affiliated companies and assessing the feasibility of their offerings to public subscription.

Decisions on any new public offerings will be made in coordination with the OIA and OQ Board of Directors, he added.

He affirmed that the value of OQ Group’s assets exceeded \$31 billion by the end of 2022, noting that this underscores the annual profits achieved by the group, the efficiency of the group’s debt management, its financial stability and its constant commitment to generate sustainable value. — ONA



The Supreme Judicial Council
Seeb Court of Appeal
Court Secretariat

Judicial Notice

The Court Secretariat declares that the appellant, **MOHAMED DARWISH SHINOON AL AJMI**, filed civil appeal No. 2023/7105/177 AD before it against the appellee, **Yash Kobi Christopher Wagbom**, and requested the following:

First: accepting the appeal in form.

Second: in substance: cancelling the appealed judgment in its decision refusing to obligate the appellee to pay the electricity and maintenance bills, and deciding again to obligate the appellee to pay the electricity and maintenance bills for the leased premises.

Third: upholding the appealed judgment otherwise. It was not possible to notify the appellee by normal means, and this publication is considered a notice to him of the date for hearing the appeal on Sunday, 31/12/2023 AD, at 09:00 am at the court’s seat located in Al Seeb Al Khoudh, next to Oman Oil Station, in - accordance with Article (11) of the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law issued by Royal Decree No. 29/2002 AD.

Court Secretariat



Tens of thousands join pro-Palestinian march in central London



Protesters hold a banner in as they take part in a 'National March For Palestine' in central London. – AFP

LONDON: Tens of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters marched through central London to call for a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the latest in a series of weekend demonstrations in the capital since the seven-week war began.

The rally, which involved 45,000 campaigners according to police estimates, took place during a four-day truce between Israel and the Palestinian groups, the first break in the fighting, but protesters said that was not enough.

“We need full support for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza,” protester Kate Hudson, 64, said at the rally as demonstrators carrying signs such as “Ceasefire Now!” and “Stop the War on Gaza” walked along the march route that finished outside the Houses of Parliament.

“It’s very welcome that there is a pause ... But this problem needs to be resolved and resolved so that the Palestinians finally have the political settlement that countless UN resolutions have enshrined,” said Hudson, an anti-war activist.

Police, who were handing out leaflets to warn demonstrators against breaking the law, said they had made 18 arrests as of 1900 GMT, including a man who was spotted carrying a placard with swastikas on and six people who refused to disperse after the march.

“I would like to acknowledge the overwhelming majority who came into London today and exercised their right to protest lawfully,” Ade Adekan, the Metropolitan Police’s deputy assistant commissioner said.

“Regrettably, there was still a small minority who believed the law did not apply to them,” he added in a statement providing an update on the number of arrests made.

More than 120 protesters were arrested during a march earlier this month, when skirmishes broke out between police and far-right groups who had gathered to protest against the pro-Palestinian demonstration.

Former interior minister Suella Braverman was fired by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak after an unauthorised article in which she had accused police of “double standards” at protests showing support for Israel and pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

— Reuters

More captive freed in fragile

GAZA: It was set to release a third group of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian captives on Sunday as a delicate truce held in the two sides’ seven-week war.

Fourteen Israeli hostages and three foreign nationals were handed over to the Red Cross in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, the Israeli army said.

“Based on information that was received from the Red Cross, 14 Israeli hostages and three foreign hostages have been transferred to the Red Cross,” it said in a statement on the third day of an agreed pause in the fighting in Gaza, that is to also see Palestinian prisoners freed in Israel.

Hamas said it had released a Russian hostage without saying who exactly was freed.

“In response to the efforts of Russian President Vladimir Putin and in appreciation of the Russian position in support of the Palestinian cause, the Resistance Movement Hamas released one of the detainees of the Russian citizenship,” it said in a statement.

With a four-day truce deal holding since Friday, there was relief for some families after the second groups of hostages and prisoners walked free despite last-minute disagreements that underlined the fragile nature of the process.

The latest hostage handover was delayed on Saturday when Israel was interfering in the selection of prisoners for release and not allowing aid into northern Gaza.

Later it was relented when Egyptian and Qatari mediators relayed a promise by Israel to uphold the accord.

13 Israelis and four Thai hostages were released at night, officials said.

Israel said it in turn freed 39 Palestinian prisoners.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it had received a further list of hostages due to be released by on Sunday. Hamas has released 26 Israeli hostages in exchange for 78 Palestinian prisoners in the two releases already completed. They have also freed a total of 14 Thais and one Filipino.

It is expected to release a total of 50 hostages during the truce in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners.

Egypt has said that it received positive feedback from both sides about the idea of extending the truce for a day or two and releasing more hostages and prisoners.

US President Joe Biden told reporters that “the chances are real” for extending the truce.

Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called for “a permanent ceasefire and a complete end to this aggression”.

But Israeli armed forces chief Herzi Halevi said that “immediately at the end of the ceasefire” the war would continue to return as many hostages as possible.

The pause in fighting has allowed more aid to reach Palestinians struggling to survive with shortages of water and other essentials. — AFP



We should send 200 lorries a day continuously for at least two months to meet the needs

ADNAN ABU HASNA

UNRWA spokesman



Palestinians cheer among supporters after being released from Israeli jails, in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.



Residential buildings, destroyed in Israeli strikes, lie in ruin, in southern Gaza City. – Reuters

Reported killing in refugee camp

GAZA: A Palestinian farmer was killed and another injured on Sunday after they were targeted by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip’s Maghazi refugee camp, the Palestinian Red Crescent said, underlining the fragility of the truce.

There was no comment from Israel on the report but there were fears it could jeopardise the third phase of plans to swap 50 hostages held by the Palestinian groups for 150 prisoners in Israeli jails over a four-day period.

A senior Palestinian source said on Sunday’s phase looked “complicated”.

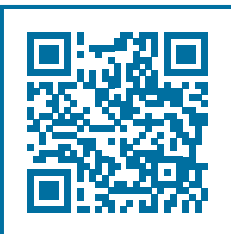
Asked if the farmer’s killing could delay a third batch of releases, the source replied: “I don’t know”.

Israel has vowed to destroy the Palestinian groups, bombarding the enclave and mounting a ground offensive in the north. Some 15,000 people, roughly 40 per cent of them children, have been killed, Palestinian health authorities said on Saturday.

Qatar, Egypt and the United States are pressing for the truce to be extended beyond Monday but it is not clear whether that will happen.

A senior Palestinian source said on Sunday’s phase looked “complicated”. Asked if the farmer’s killing could delay a third batch of releases, the source replied: “I don’t know”

Israel had said the ceasefire could be extended if Palestinians continued to release at least 10



s have been e Gaza truce



West Bank. — AFP



People walk amid the debris of damaged buildings following an overnight Israeli incursion. — AFP

An International Red Cross vehicle reportedly carrying hostages released drives towards the Rafah border point with Egypt ahead of their transfer to Israel. — AFP



o casts shadow on third day of truce

hostages a day. A Palestinian source had said up to 100 hostages could go free.

Television images showed freed hostages on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing after leaving Gaza as Hamas handed the captives to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Six of the 13 Israelis released were women and seven were teenagers or children.

“The released hostages are on their way to hospitals in Israel, where they will re-unite with their families,” the

Israeli military said in a statement.

Israel released 39 Palestinians — six women and 33 teenagers — from two prisons, the Palestinian news agency WAFA said.

Some of the Palestinians arrived at Al-Bireh Municipality Square in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where thousands of citizens awaited them.

Saturday’s swap follows the previous day’s initial release of 13 Israeli hostages, including children and the elderly, in return for the release of 39

Palestinian women and teenagers from Israeli prisons.

The deal risked being derailed when Hamas’ armed wing said on Saturday it was delaying releases until Israel met all truce conditions, including committing to let aid trucks into northern Gaza.

Palestinian groups spokesperson Osama Hamdan said only 65 of 340 aid trucks that had entered Gaza since Friday had reached northern Gaza, or “less than half of what Israel agreed on.” — Reuters

PRESSURE MOUNTS ON ISRAEL FOR LONGER WAR PAUSE

TEL AVIV: Israel faces mounting pressure to extend a four-day pause in its war against Gaza, but military officials fear that a longer truce risks blunting its efforts.

After hours of delay and acrimony that underscored the fragility of the truce, a second tranche of 13 Israeli hostages was freed on Saturday in exchange for 39 Palestinian prisoners — the same number as the previous day.



Relatives take part in a protest asking for the release of Israeli hostages in Tel Aviv. — AFP

A total of 15 foreigners have also been released during the ceasefire — mediated for weeks by Qatar, the United States and Egypt — that marks the first breakthrough after seven weeks of relentless war. Under the deal, 50 of the roughly 240 hostages held in Gaza will be freed over four days in exchange for 150 Palestinian captives, with a built-in extension mechanism to prolong the process as long as at least 10 Israelis are released each day.

It increases diplomatic pressure on Israel from the international community, which will become steadily less willing to countenance a return to the pounding of Gaza and the resulting humanitarian crisis.

“Time works against Israel as always and against the IDF,” said Andreas Krieg, of King’s College London, referring to the Israeli military. “On one hand you want all the hostages out knowing that you can’t get them out militarily and on the other you don’t want to lose completely the momentum of this war,” he said.

And the longer a truce lasted, he said, the more the international community would lose patience with a continuation of the war, he added.

Visiting Israeli troops in the war-battered Gaza Strip on Saturday, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant insisted the timeline for the truce was “short”.

“It won’t take weeks, it will take days, more or less,” he said, flanked by heavily armed soldiers. “Any further negotiations will take place under fire.”

Israel has defied international criticism of its Gaza offensive, which has killed more than 15,000 people, mostly civilians, and left an unprecedented trail of destruction in the Palestinian territory. — AFP

LEBANESE RETURN TO FIND BOMBED-OUT HOUSES



Lebanese farmer and minibus driver Abdallah Abdallah (L) inspects his damaged home in Aitaroun, southern Lebanon near the Israeli border. — AFP

AITARUN: Lebanese farmers went back to their village near the Israeli border to find that weeks of bombing had badly damaged houses and destroyed vehicles.

“What can I say? Israel has always been criminal, it has always targeted our houses,” said Abdallah, a Lebanese farmer, his face weary as he pointed to gaping holes in the walls of his two-storey home in Aitaroun, just across from an Israeli military position.

Since Gaza war began on October 7, the frontier between Lebanon and Israel has seen intensifying exchanges of fire, but also Palestinian groups, raising fears of a broader conflagration.

Abdallah fled after the cross-border skirmishes began, and like others, timidly returned to inspect his home, under the incessant buzz of Israeli surveillance drones.

Few frontier residents said that they intended to stay, fearing renewed violence after the end of the four-day truce that began on Friday.

“My tractor was destroyed and also the van I used to take the children in the area to school,” said Abdallah, a father of six.

The ground around his house was strewn with shrapnel, and burnt fruit trees stood in the

garden.

Across south Lebanon, houses with smashed walls, shattered windows or doors ripped off their hinges bear witness to the violence of recent weeks.

The cross-border exchanges have killed 109 people in Lebanon, at least 77 of them fighters and 14 civilians.

The International Organization for Migration says more than 55,000 people have fled their homes, mainly in south Lebanon, since the hostilities began.

Fatima Taha, 55, breathed a sigh of relief when she discovered her house in the village of Mais al-Jabal was mostly intact, with just a few broken windows.

“We came back when they announced the truce but everyone is afraid,” she said, picking lemons from a tree in her garden.

On Saturday, Israeli soldiers fired into the air to “frighten farmers” who were working on their land, according to Lebanon’s official National News Agency.

Authorities have also warned farmers against harvesting their olives near the border, fearing the harmful effects of what Lebanon says is the Israeli use of the incendiary substance white phosphorus. — AFP

All hands are blessed and cherished

The nation-building responsibility is a common obligation; it is not merely assigned or limited to those employed and young ones. In fact, it is the responsibility of all Omanis as many jobless people are also contributing in building their community and nation in one way or the other. Everybody is accountable for giving back to this blessed land and building a better future for the coming generations.

This communal commitment was agreed upon since the onset of the Blessed Omani Renaissance in 1970. Upon ascending the throne and starting the march of building new Oman, late Sultan Qaboos called upon all Omanis to contribute in this noble mission. He addressed, “We promise you that we shall do our duty towards the people of our dear country. We also hope that every one of you will do his duty in helping us to build the thriving and happy future that we seek for this country, because, as you know, unless there is cooperation between the government and the people, we will not be able to build our country with the speed required to free her from the backwardness she has endured for so long.”

Regardless of their gender and age, the late Sultan addressed all individuals to join forces with the government to take part in the nation-building march, led by the visionary leader and architect of the modern Oman. He believed in his people as a key factor of the overall national development and trusted them as a reliable resource to start the new era from the early days of his ascension to the throne.

In view of this, all are obliged to shoulder this responsibilities and play a role whenever they are and whatever they do. All should leave no stone unturned in serving the nation and its people. Regardless of what they do as a profession, it should not be undervalued no matter how small or big it is as long as it gives back to the nation. Great achievements always start with small deeds.



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UTMOST PRIORITY OF THE NATION-BUILDING MISSION GOES TO SUSTAINING NATION’S COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT

An utmost priority of the nation-building mission goes to sustaining nation’s comprehensive development covering all spheres of life and empowering its people as its backbone. Every country carries out this mission in a different way as focus differs based on governments’ priorities and interests. That is why the speed of development scale undoubtedly varies from one nation to another.

Though, when shedding light on the Sultanate of Oman’s experience in this regard, the case is completely different and unique. Oman’s nation-building has been focused on building people as the most precious national resource. Since the Renaissance kicked off, great significance in this mission has been dedicated to the development of Omanis first.

Likewise, directing the same importance to Omanis continues with the new reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Reflecting on His Majesty’s belief in youth, they have always been empowered to be capable of pushing the wheels of national development ahead.

Calling upon all Omani youth to contribute in developing the future vision of Oman, His Majesty stated, “I salute every young man and woman with ideas and who would like to be heard, and I invite them to put those ideas forward because when the future vision is discussed, it is the future of their children. We don’t differentiate between our youth at home and abroad”.

In his second speech to fellow citizens, His Majesty stated, “Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource and the arms that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them, and sense their needs, interests and aspirations which will definitely be accorded the attention that they deserve”.

Heroes do not hike tall buildings or stop bullets with an outstretched hand; they bleed and sacrifice their life, time and efforts to serve the nation and its subjects. So did Omanis; they brought their best to serve the nation over the past centuries.

A HALO IN THE SKY!



A halo appears around the moon and the planet Jupiter, above the sky of Redbourn, Britain, on Saturday. – Reuters

The technologies African farmers need

Ethiopia has long suffered from recurrent large-scale famines, most notably in the early 1980s, when at least one million people died, and millions more were displaced. This year, however, Ethiopia has become a net exporter of wheat for the first time, an extraordinary feat given its vulnerability to climate change and food-security crises.

While many factors contributed to this accomplishment, it mainly reflects the central role that new technologies have played in transforming Ethiopia’s agricultural sector. By boosting crop yields and building resilience to extreme weather, these innovations have proven particularly helpful in regions facing worsening droughts and other climate risks.

The Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) programme, established by the International Fertilizer Development Center, has been instrumental in deploying proven and high-performance agricultural technologies at scale, with the aim of helping farmers increase the production of millet, maize, rice, wheat, and other staples. As a result of the yield-increasing performance of these technologies, the area allocated to heat-tolerant wheat varieties in Ethiopia has grown from 5,000 hectares in 2018 to more than 2.2 million hectares in 2023, putting the country on the path to food self-sufficiency.

The “polycrisis” world of increasingly volatile global supply



Hippolyte Fofack

a former chief economist and director of research at the African Export-Import Bank, is a former World Bank economist, and a research associate at the Harvard University Centre for African Studies

AFTER SUFFERING FROM RECURRENT LARGE-SCALE FAMINES, ETHIOPIA HAS BECOME A NET EXPORTER OF WHEAT FOR THE FIRST TIME, OWING LARGELY TO THE DEPLOYMENT OF TECHNOLOGY

chains has accelerated the drive towards greater self-reliance. The war in Ukraine triggered a surge in food prices in Africa, with the wheat sub-index, for example, reaching a multiyear high in May 2022. Ethiopia was hit particularly hard, because it had been importing almost half of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine. Now the continent is reeling from the export ban that India, the world’s largest rice exporter, recently imposed on several varieties.

Amid this challenging environment, the Ethiopian government’s remarkable ability to use technology to boost domestic production and to reduce the risks associated with over-reliance on food imports may well represent a breakthrough. Such progress, especially in a country that was an agricultural basket case for several humiliating decades, offers hope for Africa, which has been on the frontline of the climate crisis, with food insecurity often fuelling political unrest.

Consider, for example, that cereal yields in Africa have stagnated to 1,589 kilogrammes per hectare, far below the global average of 4,153 kilogrammes. There are many reasons for this, but chief among them is the chronic technological deficit. The lack of agro-processing and high value-added industries is another long-standing hurdle to

increasing agricultural output and productivity growth on the continent, and has also exacerbated post-harvest losses estimated at about 30-50 per cent of total food production in Africa.

Compounding the problem is the limited use of fertiliser on the continent and excessive dependence on rainfed agriculture. At around 7.6 million metric tons in 2021, fertiliser use is far lower than in East Asia (61.9 million metric tonnes) and South Asia (38.7 million metric tonnes), while the dearth of irrigation systems and other water-management tools is especially worrisome in light of the accelerating pace of global warming. These shortcomings



The war in Ukraine triggered a surge in food prices in Africa.

have precipitated a rise in extreme hunger, with many communities on the continent facing the worst food crisis in 40 years.

But the consequences of geopolitical upheaval and intensifying climate risks extend beyond food security to create a vicious cycle of droughts, floods, macroeconomic instability, and balance-of-payments crises across the continent. Around 85 per cent of the food in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is imported, largely owing to the region’s weather-sensitive agriculture. The continent now spends around \$75 billion annually on cereal imports, depleting foreign-exchange reserves and increasing exchange-rate pressures. (Most African

currencies depreciated sharply in 2022, with the Ethiopian birr growing especially weak.) This import dependence negatively affects the balance of payments, with increasingly frequent global supply shocks exacerbating the region’s vulnerability.

Africa’s food-import bill is set to rise dramatically in the coming years, partly because of geopolitically induced shocks and projected population growth. But global warming will also fuel this surge. According to the Global Climate Risk Index, five of the ten countries most affected by climate change in 2019 were in SSA, where one-third of the world’s droughts occur but less than 1 per cent of arable land is equipped with irrigation. The World Bank estimates that, if global temperatures rise to 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2050, crop production in SSA will decrease by 10 per cent.

Such a gloomy prediction may well come true. This year is on track to be the hottest on record, around 1.4°C above pre-industrial average temperatures. Moreover, if greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise at current rates, climate models predict an additional 4°C of warming during this century. The need for greater investment in climate mitigation and adaptation has never been clearer.

sport



Ibri team left the cup

Ibri paddlers hog limelight

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Ibri paddlers reigned supreme in all the domestic TT events as they ended the 2023 season by clinching the National Senior Team's Table Tennis title on Saturday beside their previous triumphs in U-11 and U15 TT championships.

Al Dhahirah Governorate based team senior players took the top honours in the national senior team's category championship after defeating Seeb 3-2 in a tight clash on Saturday. The tournament was organized by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Seeb's professional Jordanian player Zaid Yousef led his team in the first game as he beat Ahmed al Riyami 3-0. Then, Ibri's professional player from Egypt Omar Badier could manage to register the equaliser after registering a 3-0 win in the following match. In the third game, Muhanad al Balushi took Seeb again to the lead as he stun Ibri's Nasser al Balushi 3-2. Later, Omar Badier returned Ibri to the origin point again after he defeated Zaid Yousef 3-0. In the deciding game, Ahmed al Riyami surprised Oman's former senior TT champions Asad al Raisi as he beat him 3-0 to deliver the title for Ibri team.

As many as 15 teams including Al Seeb, Qurayat, Ahli Sidab, Nakhal, Al Rustaq, Al Suwaiq, Saham, Ibri, Yanqul, Al Nahda, Al Ittifaq, Salalah, Dhofar, Mirbat and Masirah took part in the three days event. All the participated teams distributed into three groups as the first group comprised from Saham, Ahli Sidab, Salalah, Al Nahda and

Nakhal. The second group featured from Al Seeb, Ibri, Al Rustaq, Al Ittifaq and Al Suwaiq. Masirah accompanied Qurayat, Dhofar, Yanqul and Mirbat teams in the third group.

Ibri crowned as the champions after they positioned as runners up in the group stage behind the toppers Al Seeb. Ibri won all the group matches against Al Rustaq, Al Ittifaq and Al Suwaiq except they suffered to a defeat against Al Seeb. In the quarterfinals, Ibri secured slot after beating Masirah 3-1. Then, the champions progressed to the finals as they overcome Salalah 3-2 and then winning Al Seeb 3-2 in the concluding game. Ibri (A) team had lifted the U-11 championship while Ibri (B) positioned in the second place and Saham (B) team placed in third position.

Saham (A) team had crowned as champions of U-13 championship while Irbi (A) and Ibri (B) teams were placed in the second and third place respectively. Ibri (A) team had lifted the U-15 championship after topping the group with 14 points while Yanqul team positioned as runners up with 13 points and Saham in third place with 12 points.

After completion of the final team's senior match, Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, the Under-Secretary of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth delivered the medals and trophies for the top winners in all the local championships. During the podium ceremony, OTTA feted Oman's international blue badge umpies namely Mohammed al Alawi and Aisha al Saidi for obtaining this umpiring degree after series of written exams and interviews beside some assessment in different regional and international events.

Dhofar triumph over Al Rustaq, Al Nasr dominate Sur

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 26

In a thrilling match held on Saturday at the Saada Sports Complex, Dhofar showcased their prowess by defeating Al Rustaq with a commanding 4-1 scoreline, as part of the tenth round of the Oman Football League.

The home team, Dhofar, commenced the game with a dynamic offensive strategy, asserting control over the proceedings. while the opposing team, Al

Rustaq, relied on quick offensive transitions. Dhofar seized an early lead, with the first goal materialising in the 5th minute through a rapid attack initiated by Naif Faraj. The ball skillfully manoeuvred through Al Rustaq's defenders and found its mark as Abdullah al Musharafi slotted it into the net.

After the goal, Al Rustaq tried to press for an equaliser and had several dangerous opportunities,



but Dhofar's goalkeeper and defenders thwarted their attempts. Dhofar then took advantage of the open spaces in Al Rustaq's defence to score the second goal in the 20th minute, courtesy of player Hussein al Shuari.

The game continued as a riveting exchange between the teams. Al Rustaq managed to secure a free-kick in the 31st

minute, expertly delivered by Abdullah al Habshi. Abdulazim al Ajmi rose to the ball, scoring a goal that narrowed the gap. However, despite Al Rustaq's dominance, they were unable to capitalise on subsequent opportunities. The first half concluded with Dhofar maintaining a 2-1 lead.

The second half saw both teams maintaining their initial



momentum. Al Rustaq, despite dominating possession, struggled to convert opportunities into goals. Dhofar, relying on effective counter-attacks, secured a third goal in the 88th minute through Mohamed Al-Siyam. As the match drew to a close, Qasim Saeed scored Dhofar's fourth goal in the 90+3rd minute, cementing their victory at 4-1.

With this result, Dhofar

temporarily clinched the sixth position in the league standings, boasting 13 points. Conversely, Al Rustaq faced their fourth loss, retaining the tenth position with 8 points.

AL NASR'S DOMINANT SUR

In another match on Saturday, Al Nasr secured a decisive 3-0 victory against Sur, elevating their points to 15 and maintaining

the fifth position in the Omani Football League. Walid al Musalmi showcased his prowess by scoring all three goals for Al Nasr.

Despite enjoying home advantage and audience support, Sur failed to capitalise on their opportunities, freezing their points at 10 and dropping to the eighth position. Simultaneously, their direct competitor in the standings Dhofar, surged ahead with a victory over Al Rustaq.

Bahla and Al Shabab Share Points in Tenth-Round

In a separate match on Saturday, Bahla and Al Shabab played to a goalless draw in the tenth round of the Omani Football League at the Nizwa Sports Complex.

With this result, Bahla failed to secure their second victory in the competition, remaining at the bottom of the table with 5 points. On the other hand, Al Shabab raised their points to 10, maintaining the ninth position.

MARTIN KEEPS CHAMPIONSHIP HOPES ALIVE WITH VALENCIA SPRINT WIN



Jorge Martin celebrates on the podium after winning the sprint race of the MotoGP Valencia Grand Prix. – AFP

VALENCIA: Pramac Racing’s Jorge Martin won the sprint at the season-ending Valencia Grand Prix on Saturday to cut Francesco Bagnaia’s world championship lead to 14 points and set up an epic showdown in Sunday’s finale.

Martin, who started sixth on the grid, put in a battling display for his ninth sprint win of the season as Ducati’s Bagnaia crossed the line in fifth place at the Circuit Ricardo Tormo.

Like he has done on several occasions this season, Martin shot off the line and moved up from sixth to third in the matter of seconds, before riding on the coattails of Brad Binder to surge past Bagnaia towards the end of the first lap.

“I took a big gamble to race with the medium and the soft rear tyre, I think we were a bit on the limit,” Martin said.

“At some point I saw Binder was pulling away. I did my 100%, it was win or crash and it went well. Hopefully tomorrow, with good tyres, I can win again.”

Martin made his play for the win in

the eighth lap, picking off pole-sitter Maverick Vinales with a burst of speed on the straight and then taking advantage of a mistake from Binder as he squeezed into the lead when the South African ran wide.

“I had a really good race today. On the first lap I tried to be aggressive and got through on a few guys early on,” said KTM’s Binder, who finished second.

“I saw Maverick had a gap on us, so I put my head down and managed to get him.

“I lost a bit of time trying to get past him. I had a lot of moments out there but I didn’t have enough to battle Martin today but it’s I’m super happy to be back on the podium.”

Binder finished ahead of Honda’s six-times MotoGP champion Marc Marquez, while Aprilia’s Vinales was fourth. This is Marquez’s final weekend racing for Honda, before he moves to Gresini Racing for the 2024 season.

“My last race in this long period with the Repsol Honda team, I tried to give everything,” Marquez said. — **Reuters**

Martin made his play for the win in the eighth lap, picking off pole-sitter Maverick Vinales with a burst of speed on the straight and then taking advantage of a mistake from Binder

Team Tour De Cop arrives in UAE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Team Tour De Cop, a journey of cyclists supporting UN’s sustainable developments goals for a brighter future which began in Muscat, arrived in Al Ain with enthusiasm to a warm welcome and are proceeding to Abu Dhabi and then to Dubai before the COP 28 begins.

The team, comprising cyclists from various backgrounds including students, professionals, and environmental enthusiasts,

took off from Muscat. It includes notable figures such as renowned long distance cyclist Ambassador Mohammed Elewa, German cycling pioneer Wolfgang Hohmann alias Wolfi, and visually impaired Egyptian triathlete Ibrahim Hafez, exemplifying the spirit of inclusivity and determination that drives the Tour De Cop.

Endorsed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and supported by the German Embassy in Oman, the Tour De Cop began its

long journey starting from the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) in Muscat and marks a milestone in promoting sustainable practices and environmental consciousness.

Speaking to the Observer on the way to Abu Dhabi, Yousef Ahmed, a German-Egyptian businessman and environmental advocate who initiated the journey and the contact point enroute, said the journey has so far been a testament to human endurance and a commitment to a more

sustainable future.

“Each pedal stroke represents a call to action, resonating with the message of this year’s Tour De Cop, ‘Every drop counts,’ focusing on the critical issue of global water scarcity, well known to the GCC,” Ahmed said adding, “This milestone not only symbolises the unity and commitment of the team towards environmental advocacy but also marks the halfway point of their journey, underscoring their dedication to promoting sustainability and awareness on a global stage.”

Lakers edge Cavs on road, 76ers hold off Thunder

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles big man Anthony Davis scored 23 of his season-high 32 points in the second half on Saturday as the Lakers earned a third straight NBA road win with a hard-fought 121-115 victory over the Cavaliers in Cleveland.

Davis added 13 rebounds and three blocked shots, helping the Lakers overcome a slow shooting night from superstar LeBron James against his former club, which honoured the league’s all-time leading scorer with a video tribute in the first quarter.

James connected on just eight of 23 shots — one of nine from three-point range — on the way to 22 points in a nip-and-tuck game that featured 16 lead changes and never saw either team push its lead to double digits.The Cavs’ 40-point first quarter saw them up by just five, and they led 71-70 at half-time.

Davis’s layup — after he rebounded a James miss, put the Lakers up 111-103 with 3:48 to play.

The Cavaliers cut the deficit to one with less than two minutes remaining, but James drove for a layup, came up with a steal and threw down a dunk and the Lakers held on.

“We just had to impose our will in the



Anthony Davis (3) shoots over the defence Jarrett Allen (31) at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse. – USA TODAY Sports

defensive end,” Davis said, acknowledging the Lakers benefited from the second-half absence of Cleveland’s Darius Garland, who departed early with a neck injury.But he hailed a “total team win” after seven of the eight Lakers players who took the court scored in double figures.

Donovan Mitchell, back

after missing four games with a hamstring injury, finished with 22 points and Jarrett Allen added 21 points and 14 rebounds for the Cavs.In Oklahoma City, Philadelphia’s NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid scored 35 points and drained six free throws in the final 9.8 seconds to help the 76ers hold off the

Thunder 127-123.

Embiid came up just shy of his first triple-double of the season, adding 11 rebounds and nine assists to go with four blocked shots and a steal to help the Sixers end the Thunder’s six-game winning streak.

Up by nine with 49 seconds remaining, the Sixers saw their lead cut to 121-118 on rookie centre Chet Holmgren’s dunk with 11.1 seconds to go.

Embiid made two free throws, and he responded again at the line after Holmgren twice cut the deficit to two points.

“Obviously he put the game away,” Sixers coach Nick Nurse said of Embiid, but he added that in a league where late charges have become the norm, the Sixers have to finish better.

“Great performance, a lot of good stuff, et cetera,” he said. “But as everybody’s seeing around the league, there’s a lot of wild finishes in the games. We’ve got to make sure we stay locked in.”

Tyrese Maxey scored 28 points and eight rebounds, and Tobias Harris added 16 points for Philadelphia.

Holmgren delivered another impressive performance, leading the Thunder with 33 points to go with six rebounds and three blocked shots. — **AFP**

Jaiswal, Kishan help India thrash Australia to go 2-0 up



Rituraj Gaikwad (58) Yeshswi Jaiswal (53) were the top scorers.

THIRUVANA-NTHAPURAM: Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and Ishan Kishan led India’s batting charge to set up a convincing 44-run win over Australia in the second Twenty20 international on Sunday.

Jaiswal smashed a 25-ball 53 and fellow left-hander Kishan hit 52 off 32 deliveries to help India to 235-4 after being invited to bat first in Thiruvananthapuram.

Spinner Ravi Bishnoi and fast bowler Prasidh Krishna took three wickets each as the hosts kept Australia down to 191-9 and extend their lead to 2-0 in the five-match series.

Batsmen ruled as Jaiswal lay the foundations for India’s mammoth total with key

contributions from fellow opener Rituraj Gaikwad, who made 58, and Rinku Singh’s unbeaten nine-ball 31.

Jaiswal, who smashed nine fours and two sixes, raced to his fifty in 24 balls but soon fell to fast bowler Nathan Ellis, who got three wickets.

Kishan, a wicketkeeper-batsman, raised his fifty with a six off leg-spinner Tanveer Sangha before he got out to Marcus Stoinis.

But the left-handed Rinku finished off the innings with a flurry of boundaries and sixes.In reply, Australia fell to 58-4 including Steve Smith (19), previous-match centurion Josh Inglis (two) and Glenn Maxwell (12) back in the dug-out.

Tim David, who smashed 37, and Stoinis, who hit 45 off 25 balls, attempted to hit back in their partnership of 81 as the two hit six fours and six sixes between them.

Bishnoi broke the stand with his leg-spin to dismiss David who mistimed a hit to long-on. Stoinis was the next to go as the wheels came off the chase and Krishna got two more to nearly end the batting team’s hopes.

Skipper Matthew Wade struck an unbeaten 42 off 23 balls to reduce the margin of loss for Australia, who last week lost the opener four days after being crowned champions of the ODI World Cup. The third T20 is on Tuesday in Guwahati.

— **AFP**

Hernandez penalty gives Milan win over Fiorentina, Camarda makes history

MILAN: French defender Theo Hernandez's first-half penalty gave AC Milan a 1-0 win at home over Fiorentina on Saturday, their first victory in five Serie A matches.

Hernandez broke the deadlock from the penalty spot in first-half stoppage time after a late challenge from Fabiano Parisi.

Milan's Francesco Camarda made history when he came on as a substitute for Luka Jovic in the final minutes, becoming, at 15 years, eight months and 16 days old, the youngest debutant in a Serie A match.

"Francesco is a good lad; he is working well and we also need his freshness. He is very young but also very mature. We were all very happy for him. I could be his grandfather," Milan's 58-year-old manager Stefano Pioli told Sky Sports Italia.

Milan are third in the table with 26 points, five behind leaders Inter Milan. Fiorentina are sixth with 20 points.

Pioli said his side had made progress after their lacklustre run of matches.

"We had a good first half, then mentally it couldn't be our best performance and yet we made progress there by suffering, holding out and bringing home the points," he said.

"I am sure that when we get results a bit more consistently, we can then get back to playing our beautiful style of football. There are moments where you have to do things this way."

Christian Pulisic had an opportunity for Milan with a strike from the edge of the area that forced Fiorentina keeper Pietro Terracciano to make a flying save.

Tommaso Pobega had come close to putting Milan ahead late in the first half with a header towards the near post but Terracciano managed to get a hand to it.

Fiorentina nearly equalised around the hour mark when Nico Gonzalez's cross deflected off a Milan defender and clipped the far post.

Jovic tried to double Milan's lead but his attempt to beat Terracciano ended with the shot hitting the outstretched boot of the Fiorentina keeper.

Deep into stoppage time Milan keeper Mike Maignan saved a close-range shot from Rolando Mandragora with his face.

Milan's next match is the UEFA Champions League fixture at home against Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday, followed by hosting Frosinone in Serie A next Saturday. — **Reuters**

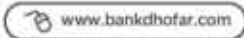


Francesco Camarda comes on as a substitute to become the youngest player to ever make their debut in Serie A. — **Reuters**





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Oman-Australia copper miner targets first output by year-end



Section of Al Hadeetha Resources' project facilities at the Al Wash-hi-Majaza copper mine

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Just over five years after it became the first foreign investor to receive a mining license under Oman's modernised mining law, the Omani-Australian joint venture Al Hadeetha Resources LLC has announced that it is gearing up to begin production of copper concentrate from its landmark project in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

Muscat-based Al Hadeetha Resources LLC is 51 per cent owned by Alara Resources, an Australian-based mining exploration company, which in 2018 received a first-ever license by an international mining firm to exploit copper and associated gold resources at the Al Wash-hi Majaza site in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah North

According to a key official of Al Hadeetha, a 1 million tonnes-per annum capacity copper

Muscat-based Al Hadeetha Resources LLC is 51 per cent owned by Alara Resources, an Australian-based mining exploration company, which in 2018 received a first-ever license by an international mining firm to exploit copper and associated gold resources at the Al Wash-hi Majaza site in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi

concentrator plant has been readied at site and is currently under early commissioning ahead of the start of operations before the year-end.

The site is now fully geared for operations, said Avigyan Bera, CEO — Al Hadeetha Resources, in a recent media interview. First metal is anticipated before the end of the year, paving the way for the start of revenue inflows from the project, he noted. Ahead of the hot and cold commissioning of the concentrator, the company has already commenced the mining of copper ore from the site, having earlier excavated massive amounts of overburden to gain access to the underlying ore. By year's end, an estimated 300,000

tonnes of copper ore is expected to be stockpiled for processing into copper concentrate.

JV partner Alara Resources' Managing Director Atmavireshwar Sthapak said the project will benefit from an anticipated uptick in global copper prices.

"Alara's future is one of great opportunity. Although the short-term copper price is off the historic highs of recent years, forecasts are for new records to be set from 2025 as the transition to a renewable energy future gains more momentum. Alara is well positioned to benefit from copper price upside, with the sale of all production from the project for the first 8 years locked in, at a price based on market at the

time of delivery," Sthapak stated in the company's Annual Report for the year ended June 30, 2023. Global commodities heavyweight Trafigura has signed a long-term agreement to offtake copper concentrate from the project.

Significantly, the imminent launch of the project — Alara's flagship among a portfolio of five mining ventures in the Sultanate of Oman — will pave the way for its other investments to be progressed as well, he said.

"Once Al Wash-hi — Majaza Mine copper production is "bedded down", the company will renew its focus on growing and developing its mineral properties portfolio. Opportunities to be considered may include acquiring advanced-stage exploration assets. Cash flow from copper sales will enable Alara to ramp up the search for our next potential mine, as we move to implement our mission of becoming a mid-tier base metals production company in the Middle East," Sthapak added.

Credit Oman posts 8 per cent growth in insured Omani exports

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 26



Shaikh Khalil bin Ahmed al Harthy, CEO

of the current year, with a total value of RO 119.865 million. It was followed by the petrochemical and plastic sector, which witnessed a remarkable growth of 281 per cent, reaching a total value of RO 25.629 million. The mining sector recorded a growth of 136 per cent with a total value of RO 3.242 million compared to the same period last year. However, the clothing sector experienced a decline of 34 per cent with a total value of RO 1.333 million. The packaging sector's domestic sales and exports amounted to approximately RO 852,967, registering a decrease of 9 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Al Harthy reaffirmed Credit Oman's commitment to continue supporting the Omani export system, as well as standing by local manufacturers and sellers through innovative insurance services and solutions. These efforts are aimed at boosting sales volume and enhancing confidence in Omani companies to sell their products both domestically and internationally, he added.

Credit Oman, the leading export credit agency in Oman, announced an overall growth of 8 per cent in the total value of insured Omani exports and domestic sales during the third quarter of the current year, amounting to a total value of RO 259,092 million. This growth reflects the continuous improvement in Oman's economic and trade performance, driven by government initiatives and measures to enhance financial and economic indicators, it said in a statement.

Shaikh Khalil bin Ahmed al Harthy, CEO, emphasised the ongoing efforts to strengthen the Omani export system and support local manufacturers and sellers through innovative insurance services and solutions provided by Credit Oman.

These initiatives aim to increase sales volume and enhance trust in Omani companies to sell their products both domestically and globally. The Omani product is renowned for its high quality and enjoys a good reputation in various countries around the world, he stated.

According to Al Harthy, the insured sectors covered by Credit Oman encompass a wide range of diverse industries. The food and consumer goods sector led the insured domestic sales and exports in the third quarter

Investments in Oman's oil & gas sector total \$5.84 bn in H1

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 26

Investments in oil and gas exploration, development and production during the first half of 2023 amounted to \$5.84 billion, according to a senior official of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals

Dr Saleh bin Ali al Anbouri, Director General of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production, said 62 per cent of this amount went towards capital expenditures, such

as geological surveys, drilling operations, and construction of facilities, while the remaining 38 per cent was earmarked towards operating expenses.

"During the current year, oil companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman drilled many exploratory wells in various oil and gas concession areas targeting different reservoirs and at varying depths," said Dr Al Anbouri. "There are indications of "promising" results from some wells, although this has to be confirmed through



Dr Saleh bin Ali al Anbouri, Director General of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production

long-term testing extending over several months or more. Other wells need further study and



The Oil & Gas industry continues to be a pivotal source of revenue for the Omani economy

testing. The objective is to maintain stable levels of production and reserves."

According to the official, a number of concessions are available for investment, with the Ministry open for negotiation with any developer interested in this acreage. At the same time, the Ministry continues to promote available blocks through its bidding rounds. The latest bid round, launched at the start of this year, has three blocks — 15, 54 and

NBO RELOCATES BRANCH TO CENTRAL LOCATION IN IBRA

MUSCAT: Committed to creating a seamless banking experience for its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has recently celebrated the official opening of its new branch in the centre of Ibra. The reimagined branch marks a significant step in NBO's journey and endeavour to elevate its banking services. With its focus on customer-centricity and digital transformation, NBO is committed to unlock opportunities for its customers, empowering individuals, and businesses to achieve their financial aspirations.

Tariq Atiq, General Manager and Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at National Bank of Oman, said "As a customer-centric organisation, the starting point for the design of our branches has always been the customer journey. We continuously aim to make banking more accessible to people across all different demographics in Oman and meet their ever-changing needs. Our centrally located and redesigned branch in Ibra will provide our customer base in that area with a valuable banking experience, integrating physical with digital services."



NBO Ibra branch opening.

The branch's spacious and inviting layout fosters a welcoming atmosphere, while its digital corner empower customers to take control of their financial transactions seamlessly. Operating 24/7, this digital corner includes a range of services such as ATMs, Cash Deposit Machines (CDMs), and Multipurpose Kiosk catering to both NBO and non-

NBO customers. The branch also features a dedicated Sadara Centre, an exclusive service tailored for NBO's Priority Banking customers. This specialised area will offer personalised assistance and a host of premium banking services, ensuring an unparalleled banking experience.

As a digital pioneer, NBO has various innovative services and

smart solutions that are designed to efficiently support its customers in planning and managing their financial lives.

More details about NBO's branches and range of products and services are available at www.nbo.om, by contacting the Call Centre on 24770000 or by visiting any of NBO branches located across Oman.

Investments in Oman's oil & gas sector total \$5.84 bn in H1

FROM PAGE 13

36 — up for bids. Interest in these concessions has been significant from both local and international companies, he said, adding that the ministry is currently evaluating the offers and expects to award the blocks soon.

Referring to recent exploration activity reported by Occidental Oman in its Block 65 licence, Dr Al Anbouri said it pertains to previously discovered oilfields. Initial production has so far reached around 6,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boed).

"This daily output is high relative to other wells drilled in the area, but production is expected



The Oil & Gas industry continues to be a pivotal source of revenue for the Omani economy.

to decrease naturally, while the operator is currently working on a waterflood project to maintain production levels in the same field," he stated.

Dr Al Anbouri confirmed that Oman remains committed to its agreement with the "Opec Plus" alliance to reduce its crude oil production. A voluntary reduction of 40,000 bpd came into effect in May 2023 which, per the latest Opec-Plus pact, will continue till the end of December 2024.

Meanwhile, oil and gas companies continue to drill new exploratory wells in their respective concessions in close coordination with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, he added.

Bank Muscat offers daily cashback rewards for Visa Credit cardholders

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to extend rewards to customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched an exciting offer for Visa Credit Cardholders on

Get a chance to win OMR 53 when you spend OMR 53 using your Bank Muscat Visa Credit Cards



the occasion of Oman's Glorious 53rd National Day. Customers will get the chance to enter a draw to win RO 53 cashback when spending RO 53 using their Bank Muscat Visa Credit Cards during the promotion period when shopping locally or internationally through point-of-sale machines (POS) or online. The offer is valid until November 30, 2023.

During the offer period, there will be 53 winners every day, leading to a combined total of 848 winners during the campaign period. Customers will get 1 chance to enter the draw for any local spend of minimum RO 53 and 2 chances to enter the draw for any international spend of minimum RO 53. The winners will be announced at the end of the campaign period. The draw is applicable to all Bank Muscat Visa Credit Cards including: Asalah Visa Signature Credit Card, Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Card, Bank Muscat Visa Gold Credit Card, Bank Muscat Oman Air Visa Platinum Credit Card, Bank Muscat Visa Classic Credit Card, Bank Muscat Private Banking Visa Infinite Credit Card and Bank Muscat Visa Infinite Credit Card. To learn more about the offer, visit: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/National-Day-Offers.aspx>

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager for Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to launch this new offer on the occasion of Oman's Glorious 53 National Day to offer our valued customers exciting benefits on their Visa Credit Cards. The bank remains committed to its responsibility in the continuation of progress and development by focusing on creativity and innovation to achieve more success. We thank all our customers for their strong trust in the bank's products and services. I would like to take this opportunity to invite our customers to benefit from this offer and enjoy the various benefits Bank Muscat's cards offer."

Bank Muscat's contactless Visa Credit cards are a popular option for customers for both online and point-of-sale machines transactions. The bank caters to the largest family of customers in the Sultanate of Oman and offers a wide range of Visa Credit cards with benefits that are closely attuned and personalised as per the needs of different customer segments. To check out the exclusive world of Bank Muscat Visa cards and the various privileges they offer, please go to: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/bm-cards/Pages/cards.aspx>. To apply for a credit card, log in to Internet Banking (<https://www.bankmuscatonline.com/English/>) or mBanking App and have the card delivered to your doorstep.

National Finance offers 0% finance for Danube products

MUSCAT: National Finance, the leading non-banking financial company in the Sultanate of Oman, has established a strategic partnership with renowned furniture and home décor retailer Danube Home to introduce an enticing promotion that is poised to redefine the shopping experience. Combining convenience and ensuring affordability, prospective customers looking to purchase their favourite furniture and home goods from Danube Home can now avail National Finance's 0% Interest Financing up to six months from the date of purchase.

Currently under way at select Danube Home stores, this hassle-free proposition, launched with the signing of an agreement between National Finance and the décor retailer, aims to empower patrons to redecorate their homes with

stylish and high-quality homeware, unburdened by budgetary constraints. This promotion, under National Finance's Consumer Durables Financing arm, aligns seamlessly with the company's commitment to delivering an array of innovative finance solutions to cater to diverse customer segments.

Reflecting on the company's newest promotion, Rakesh Makkar, Chief Business Transformation Officer, National Finance, said, "We recognise that diversifying our Consumer Durables Financing offerings to cater to prospective customers is a great way to extend the reach of our services to support the aspirations of a wider demographic. We are thrilled to tie-up with Danube Home to offer a financing solution that equips its customers with the purchasing power to obtain the furnishings



that best suit their style. As the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, we are committed to providing the most effective and flexible financial solutions, making them easily accessible. This is to ensure that we can meet the needs of our clients quickly and efficiently."

"At Danube Home, we are resolute in our aim to offer our customers with the best in home furnishing solutions," said Sayed Habib, Director, Danube Home. "Hence, we are delighted to collaborate with National Finance as our customer-centric approaches align. Through this partnership, our customers can benefit from the convenience and swiftness of National Finance's 0% Interest financing solutions and the supreme quality of Danube Home's wide range of home décor."



Oman Data Park launches on-the-job training course



MUSCAT: On November 26th in Muscat, Oman Data Park launched the “Sahab” programme for on-the-job training in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, represented by the Employment and Training Support Center. The initiative aims to enhance and refine the skills of graduate applicants for various positions. The launch event took place at the company’s headquarters in the Knowledge Oasis under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, the Minister of Labour.

Oman Data Park designed the Sahab programme as part of its commitment to corporate social responsibility by contributing to the professional development of national talent. The initial phase

of the programme will focus on training for 15 out of 25 available positions.

Sayyid Salim bin Musallam bin Ali al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, highlighted that the “Sahab” programme is a qualitative initiative to employ 25 Omanis in highly specialised areas related to cloud computing and artificial intelligence initiatives. He emphasised that the programme aims to create Omani competencies across various fields.

Abdulrahman Bin Mohammed al Alawi, the Acting Director of the Employment and Training Support Center at the Ministry of Labour, noted that the programme aims to

enhance the professional growth of new graduates through training and development, refining their professional and technical skills. The programme focuses on quality, innovation, and contributing to bridging the gap between academic education and the requirements of the job market, ensuring the qualification of new graduates with the skills demanded by the market.

Makbul Bin Salem al Wahaibi, the CEO of Oman Data Park, stated that the Sahab programme represents a qualitative addition to the recruitment process for graduates. It facilitates the rapid integration of beginners into professional and early work life, with a mechanism that ensures its effectiveness in achieving

the set goals. The programme’s selection process involves a careful evaluation of applicants meeting the minimum requirements for each job opportunity. Those selected undergo an assessment to identify suitable candidates for the presented positions. Successful candidates are then included in the initial shortlist of qualified candidates.

Oman Data Park is the first provider of managed cloud computing and cybersecurity services in the Sultanate of Oman, playing a fundamental role in supporting the digital transformation of the country through comprehensive solutions for computing, cloud services, data storage, and network enhancement.

Omani drone startup participates in Dubai Airshow

MUSCAT: Omani drone traffic management startup, Serb, participated in the Dubai Airshow 2023 last week, which took place from 13 to 17 November at the Dubai World Central Airshow Site.

Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of SERB, Anwaar al Hinai, shared the following, “Being a part of the Dubai Airshow gives us a unique opportunity to interact with industry stalwarts, discuss collaborative projects, and shape the future of drone regulations. Our focus is on fostering seamless integration of drones into the airspace, ensuring safety and efficiency.”

A spokesperson for the



company shared that the Dubai Airshow, which drew over 1400 global exhibitors and showcased more than 180 advanced aircraft, provided multiple networking opportunities for the upcoming startup.

The company, formerly known as AirGo, is working on an integrated air traffic management system in collaboration with the Omani Civil Aviation Authority.

The system will offer services to three types of users: recreational, commercial, and enterprise.

Earlier this year, the company raised \$2.7 million in seed funding from the Saudi venture capitalist firm Forming Future.

Producer prices decline in Q3

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman witnessed a significant record decline of 13 per cent in producer prices during the third quarter of 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022, as reported by the National Center for Statistics and Information.

The prices of oil and gas products experienced a notable decrease of 13.7 per cent, while non-oil products also saw a decline of 8.2 per cent.

The drop in oil and gas prices is primarily attributed to a 16 per cent decrease in the prices of crude oil and natural gas. In contrast, prices of refined oil products increased by 2.3 per cent.

The decline in prices for non-oil products is associated with a 10.2 per cent decrease in the manufacturing industries, with various subgroups witnessing declines. Metal products and machinery prices, for instance, decreased by 11 per cent, while prices of other transportable goods dropped by 10.9 per cent, and prices of food, beverages, and textiles went down by 7.9 per cent.

Within the food, beverages, and textiles category, prices of fish, fruits, vegetables, and oils decreased by 18.5 per cent, and dairy products saw an 8.5 per cent decline. On the other hand, prices of woven fabrics increased by 7 per cent, shoes by 0.7 per cent, and clothing and suits by 0.2 per cent. Prices for beverages, bakery products, and other food items remained stable.

In the group of other transportable goods, prices decreased for chemicals by 20.9 per cent, paper products by 7 per cent, rubber and plastic products by 4.8 per cent, and furniture and other goods by 1.4 per cent. Meanwhile, prices of recycled iron waste increased by 1.1 per cent, pigments and pharmaceutical products by 1.8 per cent, and glass, cement, and marble products by 0.4 per cent. Wooden products experienced a modest increase of 0.2 per cent.

Regarding metal, machinery, and equipment products, prices of iron, steel, and aluminium ores and products decreased by 15.9 per cent, power transformers and electrical distribution devices by 9.6 per cent, and products made of iron, steel, or aluminium by 7.2 per cent. Prices of compressed empty cylinders decreased by 4.4 per cent, and prices of air conditioners and car oil filters by 0.1 per cent, while prices of water heaters increased by 1.7 per cent.

In the mining, electricity, and water group, prices decreased by 0.4 per cent due to a 4.5 per cent decline in the prices of stones and sands. However, metal ores saw an increase of 0.9 per cent, and prices of electricity and water remained stable.

— ONA



Salalah Free Zone ideal for local and foreign investment

SALALAH: The Salalah Free Zone showcased an impressive economic performance, boasting a cumulative investment of nearly RO 4.5 billion. This underscores its appeal to both domestic and foreign investors.

The leased land in the area spans approximately 5.8 million square meters, accounting for 48 per cent of the total leasable land, indicating a robust utilisation of available spaces.

During the first half of 2023, the Salalah Free Zone launched several investment projects, significantly enhancing industrial activities. These projects include the “Exahertz” data processing and mining facility, the Gulf’s inaugural specialised trading factory for pastry production, and a company specialising in integrated food production, offering a diverse range of food products.

Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabuk, the CEO of the Salalah Free Zone,



emphasised the region’s status as a major hub for import and export, serving as a leading centre for high-quality industrial and logistical activities. He highlighted the substantial prosperity witnessed in 2022, with a noteworthy increase in trade and economic activities in Oman. Import volumes surged from 12 million tons in 2021 to over 42 million tons, while exports and re-exports reached about 41 million tons, compared to 3 million tons in 2021. The free zone has evolved into a pivotal hub for international trade, with the total



volume of goods passing through the region reaching approximately 101 million tons.

Dr Tabuk pointed out that the Salalah Free Zone hosts a diverse array of sectors and factories that contribute significantly to the national economy. The pharmaceutical industry is exemplified by Felix Pharmaceuticals, a company

investing around 58 million Omani Rials to manufacture high-quality pharmaceutical products, ensuring the availability of top-tier medicines for patients and medical facilities in Oman and beyond.

The petrochemical sector, represented by Octal for Methanol production and OKIYO for Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), plays a pivotal role in propelling

the national economy forward. Octal produces methanol and ammonia, contributing to various chemical and petrochemical product manufacturing. OKIYO, operational since January 2022, significantly contributes to the production and distribution of LPG as a crucial fuel source, with a daily production capacity of around 837 tons.

In the logistics sector, SAGA develops and manages warehouses for storing and redistributing garments, textiles, and accessories, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the supply chain.

Dr Tabuk highlighted Octal’s significant role in supporting the environmentally friendly plastic sector in the national economy. Octal produces PET sheets, resins, and high-quality packaging, shipping to more than 75 countries worldwide in 14-18 days. This meets the raw material needs of global and local industries that

rely on these materials for various plastic products.

The food industries sector is one of the fastest-growing in the Salalah Free Zone, with around 25 projects. Notable companies include Oman Dairy Products Company, specialising in high-quality milk and dairy products, and Joud, the world’s third-largest producer of tahini. Additionally, there is a project for processing, freezing, and packaging fish for export, such as the Ocean Experts Fish Company.

Dr Tabuk concluded by emphasising that the Salalah Free Zone offers advanced facilities and incentives for investors, including tax exemptions and full foreign ownership rights for investment projects. Its strategic location near the Salalah port, overlooking major global shipping routes, positions it among the world’s top commercial ports with robust infrastructure and facilities. — ONA

Investment firms have opportunity for acquisitions

The M&A (mergers and acquisitions) activity is on the up after a somewhat lean period. The current market environment is “as good a time as any” for investment firms to make acquisitions says Martin Gilbert, a fund management veteran.

“If you can find acquisition, it’s a great time to do them,” said Gilbert. “Valuations are down and the usual headwinds are there: public to private, active to passive, fee compression, ESG. Now there is a big move out of equities into bonds.” The former chief executive of Standard Life Aberdeen and current chairman of AssetCo and Revolut has struck more than 40 deals during his ‘City’ (financial district of London) career.

Since taking the helm of AssetCo, he has turned it



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

from a cash shell into an acquisitive fund management company. The firm announced in March it would acquire Ocean Dial Asset Management from Avendus Capital Asset management for £4.1 million. It will merge the business with investment firm River & Mercantile, which it bought in 2022.

AssetCo’s other recent deals have included the acquisition last year of Edinburgh-based SVM Asset Management and its purchase of Saracen Fund Managers in 2021 for £2.75 million. Gilbert also helped orchestrate the sale of Rize ETF (Exchange Traded Fund) to Cathie Wood’s ARK Invest — a move that allowed the US-based firm to break into the European market.

“It is as good a time as any (to deal). But there are more buyers

than sellers at the moment,” Gilbert said. “The key is the integration. It’s easy to buy and it’s very hard to integrate.”

Other asset managers have spotted an opportunity to make acquisitions. Amundi chief executive Valerie Baudson recently said that the current market turmoil presents a “potential opportunity” for takeovers. She said that was particularly the case as the firm looks to grow its technology expertise.

“We only look at things that accelerate our organic growth. It could also be increasing our capacity in technology and services in future, now that is an important strategic move for us. As long as it answers to the strategy, we will look at it,” Baudson added: “The ETF business is still only an institutional business in Europe,

which means there is huge growth ahead of us.”

The asset manager has grown through a series of acquisitions over the past decade. These have included its 2016 purchase of Pioneer Investments from UniCredit and its acquisition of Lyxor two years ago. Meanwhile, BlackRock’s chief executive Larry Fink told analysts last month that the firm was looking for more “transformational” M&A deals. He added that BlackRock is engaged in more discussions than it has been for “many, many years.”

Fink said BlackRock, which is the world’s biggest asset manager, had spent “about \$4 billion on M&A” over the past five years. These have included deals such as the 2019 acquisition of software provider eFront and the purchase of custom indexing specialist Aperio in 2020. Several notable

deals have been struck this year across the asset management sector.

Franklin Templeton has made a string of acquisitions recently. It bought alternative credit manager Alcentra from BNY Mellon last year and financial services firm Legg Mason in 2020. The US-based asset manager also announced in May that it would buy rival Putnam Investments for around \$925 million. The deal was part of Franklin’s ambition to grow insurance client assets.

Meanwhile, UK-based have also been looking for acquisitions this year. Lansdowne Partners announced that it would buy Crux Asset Management. Man Group also revealed it would take a controlling stake in Varagon Capital Partners as part of a push into private credit. (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Hard truths about green industrial policy

Industrial policies aimed at accelerating the energy transition are proliferating globally, from the European Union’s Green Deal Industrial Plan and the United States’ Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to Japan’s Green Growth Strategy and the Korean New Deal. Wealthy, technologically advanced economies are engaged in a race for electric vehicles (EVs), transition minerals, and clean energy. Even developing economies are deploying state-led projects for green industrialisation.

For instance, several African countries, including South Africa, Kenya, Mauritania, Egypt, Djibouti, Tunisia, Morocco, and Namibia, have initiated state-led efforts to support green hydrogen development. Additionally, countries like Indonesia, Bolivia, and Chile are implementing strategies to stimulate industrialisation based on the extraction and processing of nickel, cobalt, copper, lithium, and other transition minerals and metals.

These policies utilise a variety of instruments, including subsidies, regulations, incentives, and diverse state-business arrangements. Despite differences in public and private resources, they all aim to address three interconnected crises: economic stagnation, polarised and precarious employment, and intensifying climate change.

The revival of industrial policy is grounded in the belief that addressing all three crises simultaneously will create a virtuous cycle: targeted investment in green manufacturing and energy will boost economic activity, create well-paying jobs, and usher in a low-carbon economy. The Biden administration’s “modern American industrial strategy” exemplifies this approach, incorporating the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the IRA. Termed the “Biden three-fer,” it seeks to enhance US competitiveness, provide better economic opportunities for workers, and accelerate decarbonisation.

However, the win-win narrative underlying these strategies may



ILIAS ALAMI



JACK COPLEY



ALEXIS MORAITIS

THE GROWTH OF GREEN INDUSTRIES CAN ALSO RESULT IN ENVIRONMENTAL HARM. DESPITE INTENDING TO GENERATE EMPLOYMENT AND VALUE THROUGH THE PRODUCTION OF TRANSITION MINERALS, THE INDUSTRIALISATION STRATEGIES OF SEVERAL GLOBAL SOUTH COUNTRIES TEND TO ENTRENCH EXTRACTIVE PRACTICES



mask the risk that solving one problem may exacerbate another. For example, the shift to manufacturing EVs, which require fewer parts, could lead to job losses in the US automotive sector, as both car companies and the United Auto Workers union have warned. While some jobs may be redirected to battery production, China’s dominance over the global battery supply chain raises concerns for American and European workers.

The growth of green industries can also result in environmental harm. Despite intending to generate employment and value through the production of transition minerals, the industrialisation strategies of several Global South countries tend to entrench extractive practices. In South America’s

“lithium triangle” (Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile), efforts to capture various stages of the lithium supply chain threaten to deplete water supplies, degrade soil, and disrupt habitats, often impacting indigenous Andean peoples. Similarly, semiconductor production, crucial for clean tech, is energy-, water-, and land-intensive, releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Economic stagnation can lead to destabilising domestic politics, pushing governments to prioritise higher growth rates regardless of environmental costs. For instance, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s U-turns on net-zero pledges may seem politically attractive for immediate growth, but longer-term growth depends on competitiveness in green industries.

Industrial policy is not a silver bullet for the intersecting crises of our times. The policy objectives of environmental sustainability, industrial dynamism, and full employment require hard political choices about resource allocation, strategic priorities, and the distribution of economic and social costs. Trade-offs will grow more complex as global warming worsens and growth falters. The “wicked trinity” of contemporary governance — climate catastrophe, economic stagnation, and surplus humanity — will continue shaping public policymaking.

Policymakers should not abandon ambitious strategies but must acknowledge and deliberate the tensions and trade-offs in green industrial policies. This is essential for securing broad

support and building transparent governance structures rooted in democratic deliberation, public oversight, and control. Many industrial strategies are currently products of top-down, technocratic policymaking, despite rhetoric about a “just green transition.”

Subjecting the economy to democratic decision-making challenges the current system but is necessary to secure and maintain popular legitimacy for green industrial policies, facilitate efficient decision-making, and minimise mismanagement. Without embracing these challenges, there’s a risk of a public backlash that impedes the collective action needed to safeguard our future on this planet.

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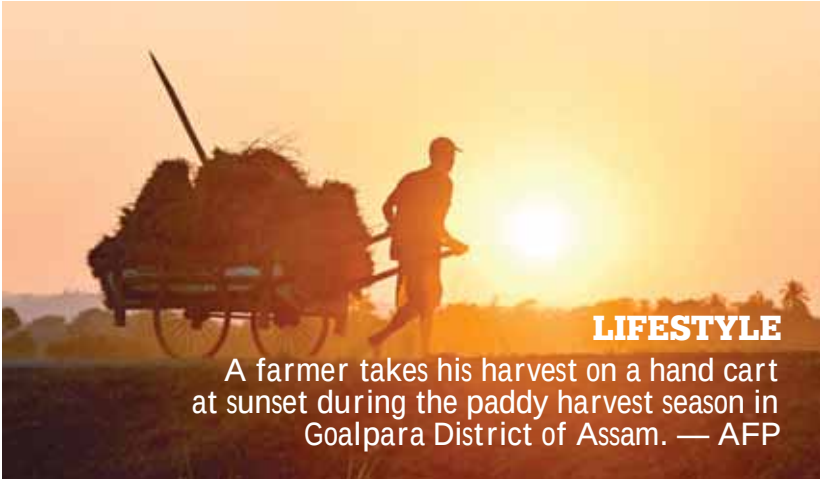
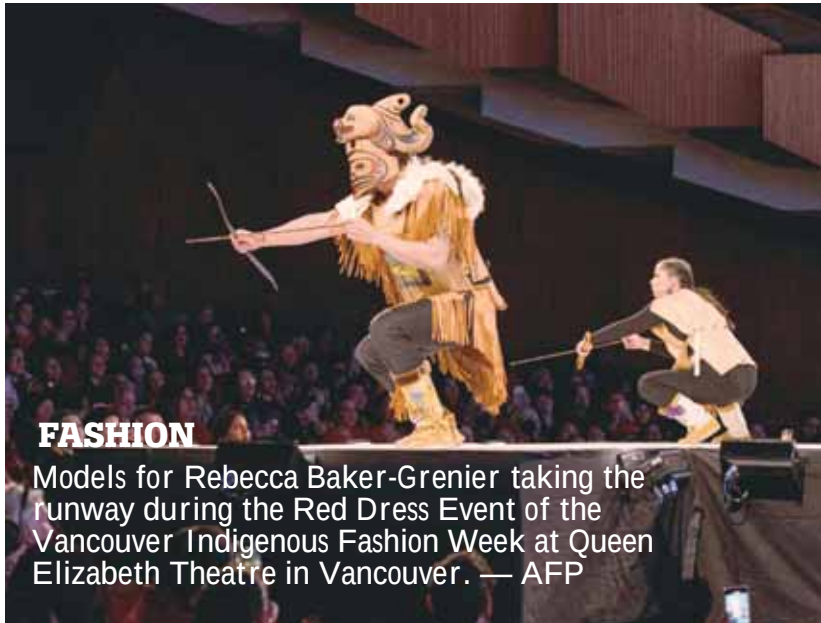
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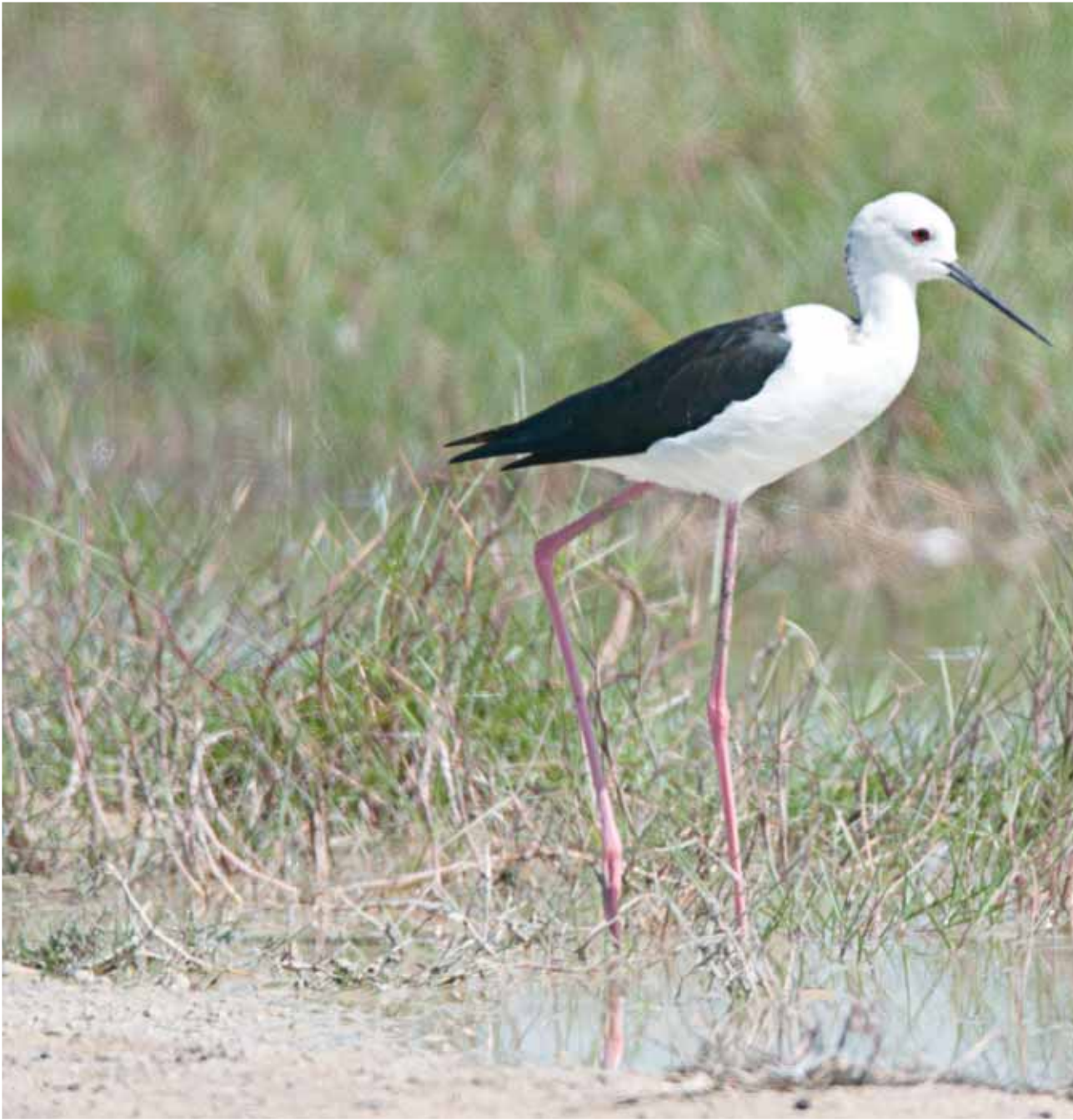
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Black-winged Stilt are photographers' delight

Known locally as 'Al Karsooe,' the Black-winged Stilt can be spotted in coastal areas spanning from Musandam (North) to Dhofar (South), particularly near water ponds or in the shallow waters of wetlands (Al Akhwar)... P20

How do my calorie needs change as I age?

Q: I'M IN MY 50S, AND I'VE HEARD THAT IT'S NORMAL TO BURN FEWER CALORIES AS I GET OLDER. IS THIS TRUE?

A: YOU CAN THINK OF BURNING CALORIES AS "STEP 1 OF BEING ALIVE," SAID HERMAN PONTZER, A PROFESSOR OF EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY AT DUKE UNIVERSITY. FOOD GIVES YOUR BODY THE FUEL IT NEEDS TO STAY HEALTHY, HE SAID.

Your age — among several other factors — can have a big effect on how many calories you need to maintain your body's weight and basic functions, Pontzer and other experts said.

Here's what to know.

HOW YOUR AGE AFFECTS THE CALORIES YOU BURN.

The size of your body is the most important factor that affects your calorie requirements, Pontzer said. "The bigger you are, the more calories you need."

But your life stage is also crucial, he added.

Babies and children, for example, require fewer calories than adults simply because they are smaller. But when you calculate how many calories they use relative to their body size, it's actually more than what adults use because they are growing and developing, Pontzer said.

Being more physically active also increases the number of calories you burn, said Anna Maria Siega-Riz, a nutrition professor and dean of the School of Public Health and Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She was the lead author of a 2023 report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine that estimated the calorie needs of people in the United States and Canada.

According to that report, an inactive, 200-pound, 40-year-old man would need about 2,700 calories per day to maintain his weight and basic bodily functions. But if he were an athlete training for a couple of hours each day, he would need about 3,500 calories per day.



The same report estimated that starting around age 19, calorie requirements "drift down" a bit each year — to the tune of about 11 calories annually for men and seven for women, said Susan Roberts, a senior associate dean of foundational research at the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine.

A 170-pound woman who walks for 60 to 80 minutes each day, for example, would need 2,450 calories per day at age 20 — at age 60, however, that would drop to 2,150, and at 80 it would be 2,000.

This age-related drop in calorie burn is usually most noticeable in your 60s and beyond, Roberts said, possibly manifesting in weight gain or a less robust appetite. As you age, you tend to lose muscle and gain fat, which burns fewer calories, she said. And your brain — the body's most metabolically active tissue — naturally shrinks in size and requires less energy, she added.

It's also common for people to become less physically active as they age, further reducing the number of calories they burn each day, Siega-Riz said.

You can estimate your own calorie requirements using an online calculator. Keep in mind that such calculators can provide only a general picture of what you should consume. Your actual needs will vary according to your daily activities, genetics and other factors, Siega-Riz said.

If you're wondering whether you're consuming the right amount, the best way to check is to weigh yourself every so often, Siega-Riz said. If your weight is relatively stable, then you're eating an appropriate number of calories.

But for some people, a hyper-focus on the scale can create or worsen anxieties about food and weight, Siega-Riz said, so weigh yourself only as often as you're comfortable.

What burning fewer calories means for your eating habits.

The good news is that you prob-

ably won't need to do much calorie counting as you age, because your appetite should naturally ebb to match your needs, Pontzer said.

But as you get older, it's important to make sure you're getting the right balance of nutrients, Roberts said.

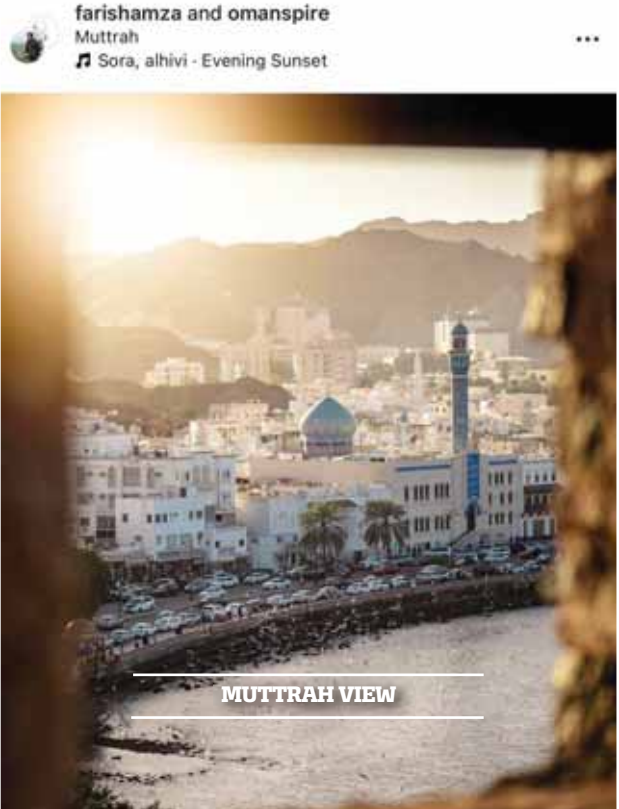
For instance, research suggests that beginning in your 50s, your body needs more of certain nutrients such as calcium, vitamin B6, vitamin D and protein, even though you're likely eating fewer daily calories overall.

Because of that, Siega-Riz said, you'll need to dedicate more of your daily calorie budget to foods that give you a bigger bang for your buck nutrient-wise — fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean sources of protein.

Roberts agreed. When you're in your 20s and 30s, she said, "you can still have calories left over for chocolate or beer or a piece of cake." But if you're in your 80s and consuming only about 1,500 calories per day, there's less room for treats, she said.

Roberts thinks it's wise for older adults to take a multivitamin supplement to help fill in any nutritional gaps. But even then, a good diet is still necessary to ensure you're getting other important nutrients including protein, fiber and healthful plant-based compounds, she said. — NYT

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



AROUND THE WORLD



FOR THE PAST 12 WEEKS, you've been logging long runs, paying attention to your nutrition, your sleep, your strength training and more — all to cross the marathon finish line. The work isn't quite done, however; it's time to finish off strong and then taper off.

During the final weeks the end is in sight, and the reward for all this effort is just around the corner. Here's how to wrap up with confidence for a solid marathon day.

YOUR WORKOUT PLAN

Most marathon runners ease off for the last three weeks of training. So the final block starts with one last big week of training and a final 20-miler before you begin your taper. Use this last hard week to test all your race day logistics.

"Wear the same shoes and clothes you plan to use for your marathon," said Kathy Butler, a running coach in Boulder, Colorado. "Practice how far in advance you'll be getting up before the race, run at the same time as the race and use all the same foods and drinks, too."

Expect to feel tired on the final 20-miler, and don't beat yourself up if you don't run well. "You're not rested yet, and you're probably going to think there's no way you can run 26 miles, but you can," Butler said.

Many athletes dread tapering for fear of losing fitness. Instead, embrace it. "You've put in all that training, and now it's time to recover so you can race well," she said.

In the first week following your final long run, cut back each run by a mile or two, and make your next long run around 14 or 15 miles. The next week, take off a few more miles from each run, even removing one of your weekday runs if your legs feel tired. For your last long run — a week out from race day — aim for around 9 to 10 miles.

While you're cutting back on your mileage, you should continue doing goal pace or interval running to stay sharp. Try 2- or 3-mile segments at marathon pace, with



a couple of minutes rest in between, for example.

For your final week of the taper, "just make yourself feel good," Butler said. Consider a massage a week out, concentrate on sleeping and eating well, and add in one more rest day. The day before your race, run an easy 2 miles with a couple of strides to finish.

YOUR NUTRITION AND HEALTH

As you enter the taper period, keep your calories coming in, said Nancy Clark, a sports dietitian and author in Newton Heights, Massachusetts. "The biggest mistake people make during the taper is underfuelling because they're running less," she said. "You need to keep eating to recover from the training and store up nutrients for race day."

With that in mind, Clark suggests eating like you did throughout training, focusing on quality carbohydrates and protein. A salad with cottage cheese and hard-boiled eggs or snacks like crackers and hummus are good choices.

But skip the overflowing plate of pasta the night before the race. "You don't need to stuff yourself, just make sure you are adequately fuelled," Clark said. That could look like a big, healthy lunch the day before, followed by a normal to lighter dinner, with a few snacks in between. On race day, stick with your tried-and-true breakfast and



running fuel.

The night before your race, nerves might wreck your sleep, and that's OK. "If you're well rested at that point, a bad night's sleep won't hurt you," Butler said.

YOUR MIND

Once you begin tapering, you may start to feel anxious about race day and struggle with confidence. Now is when to trust the process, said Deena Kastor, an Olympic bronze medalist in the marathon, based in Mammoth Lakes, California. "It may feel hard to believe that the body is capable of the distance right now, but the training will pay off."

There's a saying about marathons: The race begins at mile 20. In other words, this is when the going often gets toughest. "The marathon can be an emotional event," Kastor said.

If you reach a moment of doubt — and you will — remind yourself, "This is exactly what the marathon has to give," Kastor said. "Your character matters here, and when things get tough, be prepared to not give in."

SKILL TO LEARN: VISUALISING RACE DAY

Take the time to look at your racecourse map so you understand its intricacies, and imagine yourself on it. From start to finish, picture yourself climbing the biggest hills, taking in food and hydration and then ultimately heading towards that finish line. Also imagine "disaster" scenarios, when everything seems to go wrong in your race, and have a plan for how you'll manage it. With enough practice, the real thing will feel (almost) like just another run. — **NYT**

DRAMA



For 'The Encounter,' fasten your headphones before immersion

TURN OFF YOUR CELLPHONES. Unwrap your candy. And put on those headsets.

An immersive stage show that makes heavy use of binaural technology (3-D audio) for drama is coming to Broadway this fall after a sold-out run in London and arts festival appearances throughout Europe.

"The Encounter," inspired by Petru Popescu's novel "Amazon Beaming," is loosely about a National Geographic photographer's experience with a mystical tribe in Brazil in 1969. But, as directed and performed by British director Simon McBurney, it is also an exploration of the nature of reality, and the meaning of storytelling.

"I became fascinated with the whole process of memory — what the relationship is between the actual way memory works in the brain, and the effect of that



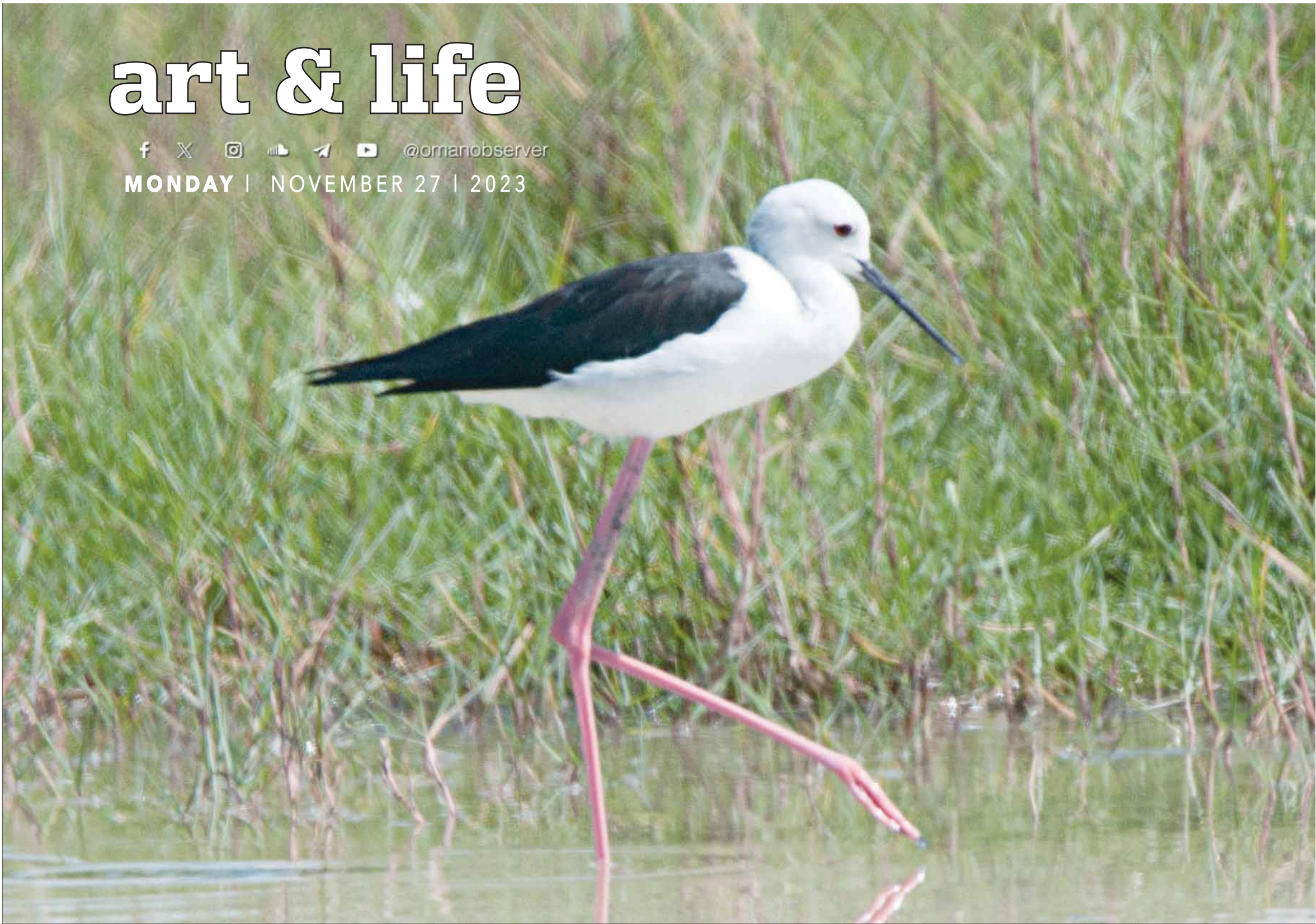
in our lives," McBurney said in a telephone interview. "I had this story, and my own personal obsession, and they started to wind around each other like a double helix, and gradually I began to find a form which seemed to me to be deeply dramatic and theatrical — compelling as a story, but also as a set of things that provoke and question the imagination of the audience."

McBurney, who created the show for Complicite, a company he co-founded, said "The Encounter" is partly about solitude. "It is very intimate, because of the technology, and I want people to go on that journey," he said.

The show began its life last summer at the Edinburgh International Festival, and then was staged at the Barbican Theater in London early this year; it has also been performed at festivals in Britain, Greece, Switzerland, Austria, France and the Netherlands. In a review of the London production in *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley wrote that "The Encounter" is "one of the most fully immersive theater pieces ever created" and described it as "a journey to the centre of your mind that begins in your auditory nerves and keeps burrowing deeper."

The Broadway production will begin previews on September 20 and open on September 29 at the John Golden Theater; it is scheduled to run through January 8. McBurney said he hoped to do most of the performances, but another actor, Richard Katz, will step in as needed. ("Eight shows a week is steep with this show," McBurney said. "It's difficult to explain, but it's very tough.")

McBurney has worked on Broadway twice before, as the director of a 1998 revival of "The Chairs," by Eugene Ionesco, and a 2008 revival of Arthur Miller's "All My Sons." — **NYT**



Distinctive black-winged Stilt photographers' delight

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA ALSALMANI

This is the time to witness and capture the elegance of the black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) along the coasts of Musandam, Muscat, Al Batinah, Al Sharqiya, Al Wusta, and Dhofar.

These birds are known for their distinctive flight style, with legs extended backwards and their resonant calls during flight.

According to studies, adult Black-winged Stilts are between 33-36 cm long. They boast long pink legs and an elongated, slender black beak. The upper part of their bodies is black, contrasting with a white underside, and they often have a white head and neck. Male individuals exhibit an ivory colour with a greenish sheen, while females showcase black to brown hues. Weighing approximately 0.16 kilogrammes, these birds possess a striking red iris, and their feet cover about 60 per cent of their total length.

Feeding primarily on aquatic insects, the Black-winged Stilt may also consume molluscs and crustaceans. Unlike some waterfowl, they do not swim or dive for their food. Instead, they wade in shallow waters, mud, and sand, utilising their long legs and beaks to search for prey on or near the water's surface. Occasionally, they immerse their heads in the water to capture underwater prey, classifying them as carnivorous birds.

In addition to their presence in Oman and the Arab Gulf states, these birds are found in various locations worldwide, including Australia, Central and South America, Africa, southern Asia, Southeast Asia, and parts of North America. Sociable in nature, they thrive in small groups and prefer habitats like freshwater swamps, saltwater areas, mudflats, and shallow edges near lakes and



rivers.

The Black-winged Stilt crafts bowl or cone-shaped nests using grass and fine branches, usually positioning them around or in water. Females lay up to four eggs within 24 hours, with both parents



taking turns in incubation, lasting 22-26 days. Flight feathers begin to develop after 28-32 days, and independence is achieved by the young within two to four weeks. In the wild, these birds can live up to 12 years on average. Known locally as 'Al Karsooe,' the

Black-winged Stilt can be spotted in coastal areas spanning from Musandam (North) to Dhofar (South), particularly near water ponds or in the shallow waters of wetlands (Al Akhwar). Thriving in the moderate temperatures of the Sultanate of Oman, these birds spend most of their time foraging in shallow waters. Their prolonged presence offers a golden opportunity for birdwatchers to observe their behaviour and photograph their activities.