

P12

ALCARAZ, MEDVEDEV ADVANCE; JABEUR WINS US OPEN THRILLER



P15

OMANI RE VETERAN NAMED CEO OF NEW WADI NOOR SOLAR POWER



P18

I DON'T KNOW DRAWING... EVERYONE CAN DRAW



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT ELECT OF SINGAPORE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Tharman Shanmugaratnam on the occasion of him being elected as new President of the Republic of Singapore. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of success to President Tharman to lead the friendly people of Singapore towards further progress and welfare, wishing the friendship relations between the two countries further development and growth.

BEIRUT

SYRIA SCRAPS MILITARY COURTS

Syrian President Bashar al Assad announced on Sunday the scrapping of military field courts where thousands are thought to have been sentenced to death. Assad issued a legislative decree "ending the work" of the original 1968 proclamation that created the courts, the presidency said in a statement. "All cases referred to the military field courts are to be referred... to the military judiciary," said the statement posted on the Telegram messaging app, adding that the move went into effect immediately. Syrian lawyer Ghazwan Kronfol said the courts' jurisdiction was expanded to civilians in response to unrest in the 1980s. — AFP



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BEAUTIFYING THE BEACH



The Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Housing and Urban Planning, has launched a competition for building cottages and beach canopies. The competition targets Omani youth specialising in engineering design and civil and architectural engineering. — ONA

HOCKEY55 WORLD CUP

Omani men pitted against Malaysia, US and Fiji

ANUROOP

ATHIPARAMBATH

MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The draw for the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup to be hosted by Oman from January 24 to 31, 2024 was unveiled at a grand ceremony in Salalah on Sunday.

The official launch of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 was attended by International Hockey Federation (FIH) President Tayyab Ikram, chief guest HH Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said and Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth. **TURN TO P5**

11,900 living with dementia in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF

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An estimated 11,900 people are living with dementia in the Sultanate of Oman, according to the last statistics released in 2019. It is projected to reach 124,800 by 2025. The syndrome, however, can be delayed or avoided in as many as 5,000 people, according to the Oman Alzheimer's Society. Oman Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) warn that despite advances in drug development, risk reduction remains the only proven prevention tool. The governments should urgently fund more research on risk reduction and introduce strategies, education, and



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Around 55 million people were living with dementia all over the world by 2020, and that the number is projected to reach 153 million by 2050

DR HAMED SINAWI

Chairman, OAS

support services to delay or prevent up to 55 million of the global projected 139 million cases of dementia by 2050, equalling nearly 5,000 cases in Oman.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the press meet held at the Haffa House Hotel to announce Oman's participation in organising a national Alzheimer's

symposium at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on September 13, Dr Hamed Sinawi, Chairman, Oman Alzheimer's Society (OAS), said around 55 million people were living with dementia all over the world by 2020, and that the number is projected to reach 153 million by 2050. The case rate in Oman, too, is on the rise. The symposium will showcase recent advances in the diagnosis of dementia, including the launch of a smartphone application for dementia caregivers. "Dementia risk reduction can prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and adopting a healthy lifestyle can prevent the onset of dementia. Up to 40 per cent of

projected dementia cases could be delayed or avoided by addressing just 12 risk factors. Remember, it's never too early or too late to reduce your risk of developing dementia," said Dr Hamed.

RISK FACTORS

There are many proven risk factors for dementia, many of which individuals have a degree of personal control over. These include smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, infrequent social contact, head injuries, and conditions including diabetes, hearing loss, depression, obesity, and hypertension. Other risk factors include air pollution and restricted access to early education,... **TURN TO P5**

EXPERTS STUDY LOGGERHEAD TURTLE NESTS

MASIRAH: For the second year in a row, specialists from the Environment Authority have been joining hands with experts from the NOAA (the US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and an Omani team in implementing a project to study the success rate of loggerhead turtle nests in the Wilayat of Masirah, Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South. The project aims to determine the number of young loggerhead turtles and the extent to which their nests provide a suitable habitat, identify the difficulties that the turtles face and forge practical solutions for the challenges.

ECOSYSTEM The project also includes ways of enhancing the capabilities of ecosystem supervisors in Masirah Island, Al Halaniyat Islands, Daymaniyyat Islands and the Ras Al Hadd reserve. The project, a five-year a wildlife



conservation venture started in 2022, is the outcome of a memorandum of understanding signed by the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the United States. As part of the project,

field surveys are conducted annually between the months of May and October, the period during which the turtle nests are enumerated, the eggs are examined and safety measures are cross-checked. — ONA

Drive to combat human trafficking

MAI AL ABRI

MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) on Sunday launched the second edition of the national awareness campaign titled 'Insan' (Human) to outline the concept of human trafficking and its related international agreements, besides highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's efforts in tackling the phenomenon. The campaign targets audiences from all segments of the society. It publishes

public awareness messages in Arabic, English, Urdu, Bengali and Filipino, among other languages. **CAMPAIGN** These messages will be disseminated through various channels such as billboards, digital screens at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport, websites, and social media platforms. Additionally, the campaign will be presented through events, activities, lectures, workshops, articles, news releases, and interviews on television and radio.

Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs and Chairman of the NCCHT, said: "The Sultanate of Oman accords great attention to combating human trafficking and all its practices, which contravene lofty human principles and values, impede human rights and insult human dignity." Al Harthy added that, given the importance of society's role in addressing this crime, Oman focused on community awareness about the crime. **TURN TO P3**



Musandam to have bus service from UAE



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The Ras al Khaimah Transport Authority (RAKTA) in the UAE has signed an agreement for direct international bus service between the RAK emirate and the Musandam Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman.

Nasser al Hosani, Director

General of Musandam Governorate Municipality signed the cooperation agreement with Eng Esmael Hasan al Blooshi, Director General of Ras Al Khaimah Transport Authority.

Al Blooshi emphasised that the signing of this agreement marks the starting point for future collaboration between the two parties and the implementation of joint projects in the fields of public

and tourist transportation that serve the citizens, residents, and tourists in both countries.

Under the agreement, RAKTA operates its buses starting from the main bus station located in the Al Dhait South area, with the bus route concluding in the Wilayat of Khasab, in the Governorate of Musandam.

It's worth mentioning that the bus route includes several stops within the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah (Rams area, Sha'am area) and (Harf area, Qada area, Wilayat of Bukha, and Tibaat area) within the Governorate of Musandam.

Al Hosani, the Director General of the Municipality of Musandam Governorate, said that the agreement aims to provide a passenger transportation service between the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah and the Governorate of Musandam for the benefit of the public.

Additionally, he mentioned that the service will be evaluated in the future through continuous coordination between the two sides to enhance and develop the service provided to citizens and tourists.



KHUR AL MILH A PALETTE OF SALT

An aerial shot of Khur Al Milh in the Wilayat of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate, is well known for the production of natural salt using conventional methods. The salt production process begins when mercury soars in May and continues until November. – ONA

MoL launches capacity-building conference

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) inaugurated a two-day conference on Capacity Building and Talent Management under the auspices of Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy and in the presence of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. The event is organised in collaboration with Al Assayel for Conferences.

Bringing together a distinguished panel of experts and decision-makers from human resources, higher education, and youth development. The conference aims to explore the economic and societal impacts of enhancing employee skills and competencies.

In his keynote address, Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, underlined Oman's storied history of nurturing talents across diverse fields. He remarked, "Investing in talent is not merely a choice but a



necessity for a nation aspiring to global leadership."

This conference assumes paramount significance at a juncture where the value of human capital has never been more apparent. According to Al Busaidy, the returns on such an investment far surpass the initial costs and substantially contribute to national and global progress.

The National Capacity-Building and Talent Management System is key to Oman Vision

2040. That seeks to centralise talent development efforts across the public and private sectors.

Al Busaidy said, "A comprehensive electronic platform that brings together service recipients and providers in one place. Talented people find in the platform what they are looking for in terms of tests to discover the type of talent and programmes to develop it.

While the employees find workshops, courses, and training programmes they need to build

their capabilities and hone their skills." The conference will place a special focus on distilling global and regional best practices in talent development and capacity building these insights to the unique needs of Oman. Al Busaidy commended the meticulous planning and expressed confidence that the conference will mark a pivotal step towards enhancing national capabilities, aligning educational outcomes with labour market requirements, and fortifying

Oman's human capital.

Dr Zamzam bint Saif al Lamkiyah, Director of the National Capacity-Building and Talent Management System, shed light on the fragmentation currently characterising capacity-building and talent development initiatives. Despite their positive impact, these programmes often operate in silos, potentially jeopardising their long-term sustainability.

Under Oman Vision 2040, this initiative seeks to rectify the situation by consolidating various development endeavours. Objectives include establishing a unified national system for skill development, bridging the gap between education and the labour market, bolstering human capital, and preparing for future industrial revolutions. The programme aims to align Oman's human resource initiatives with global standards, thereby elevating the nation's competitive edge.

Dr Al Lamkiyah emphasised the pivotal nature of capacity-

building as a national investment, asserting that well-executed training programmes enhance work quality and elevate satisfaction levels among both citizens and residents. These initiatives equip individuals with specialised skills, qualifying them for senior positions and significantly contributing to Oman's global competitiveness index.

Discussing the intricacies of talent management, Dr Al Lamkiyah pointed out that it encompasses talent identification, diagnosis, categorisation, and their development from early education to advanced levels, ultimately integrating them into the workforce. This approach aims to create a reservoir of highly skilled talents capable of driving innovation and scientific research across diverse fields.

Touching upon contemporary challenges, she observed that effective talent management is indispensable in today's rapidly evolving and fiercely competitive business landscape.

Winter charter flights planned for Salalah

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is working on a joint promotion to operate charter planes to the Dhofar Governorate from Europe and also from other countries for the first time.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, made the announcement in response to the recent figures that showed a large number of foreign and domestic tourists visited the Dhofar Governorate for Khareef this year. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of Khareef visitors between June 21 to August 15 stood at 739,884, an increase of 16.3 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022.

The number of visitors who



came to the governorate in August itself saw an increase of 46 per cent from the previous year. Of these, 158,161 visitors (around 29 per cent) came by flight compared to 571,723 visitors who travelled by road.

With national airlines making efforts to augment the seating capacity, the number of air travellers increased from around 16 per cent last month.

Between June 1 and June 30, the Dhofar Governorate

received 20,746 Khareef visitors (18,511 in 2022), 375,362 visitors (332,687 in 2022 between July 1-31, and 343,776 (285,021 in 2022) between August 1-31.

The number of Omani visitors to Khareef Dhofar during this period was 516,276, while 125,889 visitors from other GCC states showed up at Khareef Dhofar season this year, compared to 107,604 in 2022.

The number of tourists of other nationalities increased to 97,716 in 2023 from 83,382 in 2022. It may be noted that passenger movement at Salalah had increased by 32 per cent to 183,167 in July 2023 compared to 137,741 in June 22.

The aircraft movement increased by 26 per cent to 1,612 in July 2023 from 1,282 during the same period a year ago, according to the latest figures released by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

EA workshops focus on carbon neutrality

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority has launched workshops on sectoral plans for carbon neutrality.

Organised by the National Net-Zero Programme in Muscat, the workshops seek to follow up and implement the national strategy for an orderly transition to carbon neutrality. They constitute an effort to reach a unified implementation plan, while at the same time adding a number of projects to achieve the interim goals based on the motives.

During the first week, the workshops discuss the electricity sector's targets to reach zero carbon emissions, the initiatives and projects implemented in the sector, major challenges and the

capabilities required to address them. Then, the programme will proceed to other sectors, including the sectors of cities and buildings, transport, industry, oil and gas sector and other possible sectors.

Representatives of government and private sector establishments taking part in the programme include Oman Investment Authority, Nama Power and Water Procurement, Nama Electricity Distribution, the Authority for Public Services Regulation, Nama Dhofar Services, OQ, and Hydrom. Oman was among the earliest countries that announced a strategic approach to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050.

– ONA



Workers safety gets priority in Labour Law

VINOD NAIR
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The Labour Law issued by the Royal Decree No 53/2023 prioritises ensuring the safety of all stakeholders at the workplace or worksites by listing in detail the obligations.

Article 103 states that an Occupational Safety and Health Committee shall be established in the Ministry, the formation of which and the definition of its powers and work system shall be determined by a decision of the Minister of Labour. Article 104 states that the employer or his representative is obligated to inform the worker before employing him of the dangers of his profession and the means of prevention that he must take the necessary precautions to protect workers during work from health damage and the dangers of work and machinery, by providing the

necessary occupational safety and health conditions in the workplace so that workers can carry out their duties, by ensuring that workplaces are always clean and meet occupational safety and health conditions, by making sure that the machines, parts and tools are installed and maintained in the best safety conditions and by providing the necessary training to familiarise workers with the risks associated with their professions and how to prevent them.

The employer may not charge the worker or deduct any amount from his wages in exchange for providing this protection.

Article 105 states that the worker is obligated to refrain from any action intended to prevent the implementation of instructions or misuse or cause damage to the means established to protect the safety and health of workers in the facility.



The workers must use means of prevention and exercise the necessary care to preserve the equipment and means of work in their possession and implement the established instructions to maintain safety and health.

Article 106 states that the occupational safety and health regulations shall be issued by decision of the minister after coordination with the

three production parties (the government, employers and workers), and the concerned authorities, provided that they include general measures for occupational safety and health that must be applied in all workplaces — those related to lighting, ventilation, air renewal, potable water, bathrooms, dust and smoke removal, workers' sleeping places, and precautions

taken against fire.

It will also include penalties prescribed in the event of violating the provisions of these regulations.

Article 107 states that in the event of a violation of the provisions of occupational safety and health, the competent authority may send a written notice to the employer to take corrective measures to stop the violation within the period specified in the notice.

In the event of an imminent danger threatening the safety and health of workers, the ministry must take the necessary measures to close the workplace, either completely or partially, or stop using the equipment until the causes leading to this danger disappear.

Assistance may be requested from the Royal Oman Police, if necessary, to implement these measures.

Stoppage of licenses to new training institutions reduced



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, issued a decision to amend some provisions of Ministerial Resolution 39/2023.

The temporary decision to stop receiving applications for licensing to establish private training institutions has been reduced to nine months from three years.

The Ministerial Decision 39/2023 stopped processing licensing applications for the establishment of private training institutions for a period of three years.

Oman participates in embassy festival in The Hague



THE HAGUE: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by its Embassy in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, participated in the Embassy Festival, held annually in The Hague.

At the Omani embassy's pavilion, Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, received the Mayor of The Hague, ambassadors of participating countries, the Chairman of the Netherlands Business Council for the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) region, and senior visitors who expressed their admiration for Oman's notable presence.

The visitors learned about Oman's key tourism and heritage attractions, as well the country's unique historic accomplishments.

The pavilion was established by the Tourism Office of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and representatives of the Omani Village in the city of Nijmegen.

Oman is keen to participate in the annual Embassy Festival, the largest forum in Europe. — ONA

DRIVE TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

FROM PAGE1

As a first step, Oman established the NCCHT website, which provides a comprehensive account of laws and measures on identifying trafficking victims, the method of reporting cases of human trafficking to the authorities and ways to seek assistance through 14 international languages, he said, noting that the two-month campaign began on Sunday and lasts till October 30.

He emphasised that the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking is committed to diligently working in alignment with international and regional treaties and agreements to address human trafficking. This collaborative effort involves working closely with national and international partners to prevent and combat human trafficking, uphold the rule of law, and preserve human values.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS
Recognising the crucial role of community awareness in tackling this issue, Oman has taken steps to enhance awareness about human trafficking within the community. These steps include creating a dedicated website for the committee that provides comprehensive information on legislation, tools for identifying victims, and guidelines for reporting trafficking cases in approximately 14 international



languages.

Moreover, the committee will continue its efforts through the 'Insan' campaign for the current year. The campaign aims to shed light on Oman's efforts to provide care and assistance to victims, increase awareness about reporting human trafficking practices within the community, and educate people about the risks and legal consequences of this crime.

It is important to emphasise that combating human trafficking is a shared responsibility at both national and international levels, requiring collaboration among all global community members in cooperation with relevant authorities. The committee plays a leading role in reducing this issue and offering protection and assistance to victims.

"Recognising the severity and far-reaching impact of this crime

on individuals and society, there is a need for concerted efforts, relying on community awareness and the cooperation of labour source countries to achieve the desired goals. The committee appreciates the collective efforts of relevant authorities in serving and safeguarding the people of Oman and realising their aspirations," Al Harthy added.

The second edition of the national awareness campaign, 'Insan,' will enhance community awareness regarding the identification and reporting mechanisms for these practices. It will achieve this by highlighting their indicators, negative consequences, and legal ramifications while encouraging the active participation of all community members in combating these cases.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that in 2017,

the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking initiated a national awareness campaign called 'Ihsan,' followed by another awareness campaign in 2019 titled 'Insan.' They also introduced a new bilingual website (Arabic and English) to facilitate communication and assistance for victims in 14 languages.

The committee continues its efforts to enhance public awareness about human trafficking issues. Their National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking for 2021-2023 encompasses various key areas and principles, focusing on training for frontline workers and raising community awareness. In this context, there is a unified effort among all relevant authorities to disseminate necessary awareness through targeted campaigns aimed at those most vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking.

GCC higher education ministers discuss projects, plans

MUSCAT: The GCC under-secretaries of higher education and research held their preparatory meeting in Muscat on Sunday for the 23rd meeting of the committee of GCC ministers of higher education and research. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr Bakhait bin Ahmed bin Suhail al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education.

The under-secretaries discussed implementation of decisions made at the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council pertaining to the general framework of studies and joint research of priority to sustainable development in the GCC states.

During the meeting, the under-secretaries reviewed the projects of the Committee of GCC Ministers of Higher Education and Research in relation to strengthening joint Gulf action and following up the implementation of the committee's strategic plan (2022-2026) and the most prominent initiatives. They also touched on several common topics that serve joint research cooperation among GCC states.

GCC EDUCATION UNDER-SECRETARIES REVIEW SUPREME COUNCIL DIRECTIVES

Meanwhile, GCC Under-secretaries of Education held in Muscat on Sunday their preparatory meeting for the 7th meeting of the Committee of GCC



Ministers of Education.

The meeting was held under chairmanship of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education. The under-secretaries discussed the

directives of the GCC Supreme Council and the Ministerial Council, such as digital transformation, rejecting terrorism and extremism, promoting international cooperation, status of all GCC institutions, organisations,

and offices under the umbrella of the Secretariat, in addition to protecting moral, religious, and family values in the Gulf societies.

The under-secretaries also reviewed the action plan of the Committee of Ministers of Education for the years (2021-2026), and cooperation in achieving the fourth goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (quality education). They also discussed a proposal of the Sultanate of Oman, and the Secretariat's General proposal for on-the-job training. The meeting was concluded with a discussion focusing on the effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on education.

The meeting came out with

a set of recommendations that include assigning a technical work team from the ministries of education in the GCC countries to find a unified vision about the areas of international cooperation and mechanisms in the field of education, holding periodic workshops in the member states for specialists in all sectors concerned with continuing learning during crises, and benefiting from evidence and training portfolios previously completed by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) on education highlighting Islamic values and citizenship (intellectual fortification, community participation, family education, and media culture). — ONA



MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT



1 Employers are strictly prohibited from subjecting workers to any form of forced labour, as stated in Article (5). Violation of this provision can result in penalties, including imprisonment for up to one month and fines of up to two thousand Omani riyals.

The recently announced labour law, detailed in Royal Decree No (2023/53), establishes a thorough framework of rules designed to protect workers' rights and prevent them from becoming victims of human trafficking.

Employees should familiarise themselves with their rights and responsibilities to avoid falling prey to human trafficking.



2 The retention of a worker's passport and personal documents without their written consent, as per Article (6), is strictly forbidden.

NEW LABOUR LAW IS A

GUARD AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING



7 Workers are exempt from paying judicial fees for all lawsuits arising from disputes related to this law, as long as they are filed by workers or their beneficiaries, in accordance with Article (13).



3 Workers cannot be assigned tasks that deviate from their agreed-upon contract terms, except in specific cases and on a temporary basis, in accordance with the provisions of Article (53).



8 Employers are not allowed to permit non-Omani workers who have been granted work licenses to work for other employers without prior electronic authorisation from the Ministry, as per Article (29).



4 The law empowers workers to terminate their contracts while ensuring all their rights and compensation if they experience fraud during their employment, non-payment of wages for more than two consecutive months, or any form of assault. This is covered under Articles (11, 12).



9 Workers may not be subjected to more than eight actual working hours per day, in accordance with Article (70).



5 Advertising and promotion of employment opportunities are prohibited from being classified based on religion, race, or cost, and must not demean human dignity, as articulated in Article (32).



6 Charging workers any fees for their employment, as outlined in Article (31), is strictly forbidden. Violators may face penalties of up to one month in prison and a fine of one thousand Omani riyals.



10 Employers must transfer workers' wages to their accounts in a local bank or financial institution licensed by the Central Bank of Oman, as outlined in Article (87) before they can be discharged from their wage obligations.

FOLLOWING
ARE SELECTED
EXCERPTS FROM
THE NEW OMANI
LABOUR LAW



Move to ramp up frankincense cultivation and value addition

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 3

Dhofar University hosted the second international frankincense forum on Sunday. The two-day forum brought together scientists and researchers from more than 13 countries to discuss the latest advancements in frankincense and other plants.

The forum was inaugurated by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. He emphasised the ministry's commitment to collaborate with various partners, including governmental and academic institutions. The recently signed memorandum of understanding with Dhofar University strengthens the partnership between the university and the ministry, particularly in the realms of frankincense and related industries. This collaboration extends to aromatic plants, whether utilised for health-related purposes or other industrial applications.

Dr Al Habsi explained that this cooperation programme with Dhofar University will involve joint efforts among the ministry, the university, and the private sector. This collaborative initiative will persist across various facets of the agricultural and livestock sectors.

He underscored the forum's



Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, at the forum in Salalah on Sunday.

significance, highlighting the substantial participation of specialised researchers in the field of frankincense, both domestically and internationally. Their presence contributes to advancing research in the realm of frankincense and disseminating knowledge about frankincense products. Dr Al Habsi also noted a growing interest among researchers and students, especially regarding the manufacturing aspect, with numerous companies operating in this domain. The ministry is actively promoting expansion and has designated specific lands for investment solely for the purpose of increasing frankincense cultivation, in addition to existing reserves. This expansion aims

to yield positive outcomes for preserving the frankincense tree in the Sultanate of Oman.

In his opening remarks, Amer al Rawas, the university president, said, "Frankincense has a long history in Oman, dating back to the BC era. It is a valuable commodity that has been used for its therapeutic, religious, and medical properties. The frankincense tree is a symbol of life in Dhofar, and the land of Al Baleed in Salalah has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its importance to the frankincense trade."

Al Rawas also mentioned that Dhofar University is committed to scientific research and innovation. The university has established a

specialised research centre with a focus on biodiversity, notably in frankincense and plant research. The centre has collaborated with experts from Germany, France, Italy, China, Morocco, and the Sultanate of Oman.

The frankincense forum featured presentations of 45 scientific research papers, as well as lectures and studies on frankincense and local plants. The event was attended by delegations from universities and scientific institutes in Germany, France, Switzerland, Australia, India, China, and the United States. Representatives from Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Morocco also attended.

OVER 15,000 TOURISTS VISIT AL BATINAH SOUTH FORTS



AL RUSTAQ: The forts and castles of Al Batinah South Governorate drew 15,935 tourists in the first half of this year.

Dr Al Mutasim bin Nasser al Hilali, Director, Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Al Batinah South Governorate, explained that the governorate boasts 11 castles and 46 forts, adding that the restoration of Nakhl Forts was completed while the restoration work at Rustaq Fort is under way.

Al Hilali added that during the previous period, the restoration and renovation of Al Hazm Fort was completed and is awaiting private investment, the restoration of Barka Fort and Al Mansour Fort was completed as the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism endeavours to develop and rehabilitate historical monuments across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is striving to restore the historical monuments which will be managed and operated by small and medium enterprises and companies specialised in managing castles and forts. This, he said, will contribute to generating job opportunities for nationals, the official concluded. — **ONA**

11,900 living with dementia in Oman

FROM PAGE 1

which governments are responsible for addressing.

Furthermore, governments are responsible for providing other services that can help improve the lives of those with dementia, such as affordable access to health and long-term care and mental health services.

The Oman Alzheimer's Society (OAS) says tackling dementia risk factors in individuals, both before and after a diagnosis, could reduce or slow down the oncoming 124,800 projected dementia cases by 2050 in a way that is accessible and affordable for people across the globe.

Moreover, many governments have already agreed to prioritise dementia risk reduction and support for those living with dementia and their carers through their commitment to the WHO's Global Action Plan on the public health response to dementia. Yet, evidence suggests that many have forgotten or ignored this commitment.

SUPPORT SERVICES

"We are calling on governments worldwide to invest in both research and support services, to reduce dementia risk, and to invest in risk reduction

awareness campaigns; clear, persuasive campaigns that cut through the noise and confusion of much of the healthcare messaging", says Barbarino, CEO of Alzheimer's Disease International.

"Without treatment or a cure, this is a critical step to prevent as many cases as possible. We must ensure populations are aware of dementia risk-reduction strategies, at all ages, and have access to necessary information, advice, and support services."

Worldwide, September is commemorated as World Alzheimer's Month, an international campaign to raise dementia awareness and challenge stigma. Each year, Alzheimer's and dementia associations, alongside everyone involved in the treatment, care, and support of people with dementia from around the world, unite to organise advocacy and information provision events. September 21 is World Alzheimer's Day.

Only 40 governments worldwide have developed national dementia plans, with even fewer of these including risk reduction strategies. As a result, governments still need a vital tool to delay or prevent future cases.



Oman pitted against Malaysia, US and Fiji in Hockey5s

FROM P1

Sixteen teams will compete in both men's and women's tournaments at the newly-built stadium in Al Amerat to become the first ever hockey5s world champions.

On this occasion, the pools of the tournament were revealed.

In the men's competition, the Netherlands were drawn with Pakistan, Poland and Nigeria in Pool A. India, Egypt, Switzerland and Jamaica will compete in Pool B. Australia, New Zealand, Trinidad & Tobago and Kenya are placed in Pool C, while hosts Oman will face Malaysia, United States and Fiji in Pool D.

In the women's competition, hosts Oman were drawn in Pool A along with Malaysia, Fiji and Netherlands. Australia, South Africa, Ukraine and Zambia are placed in Pool B. India, United States, Poland and Namibia are in Pool C, while New Zealand, Uruguay, Thailand and Paraguay



complete Pool D.

FIH President Tayyab Ikram, in his message congratulated all the 32 teams that qualified for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup and said: "I

would like to congratulate all the 16 men's and women's teams that will be a part of the record books as the first teams to compete in an FIH Hockey5s World Cup!

You represent the very best of Hockey5s; and you will be the trailblazers and the role models for all future players who take up this new and exciting format of



our beloved sport."

Speaking about the new era that the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 ushers, he added: "The draw ceremony today not only sets up the path to the gold medal for our teams, but also heralds the dawn of a new era in hockey! Hockey5s is not just a very exciting format, but it is also a highly accessible version of hockey that I am sure

will inspire even more youngsters to pick up the stick and the ball and start playing our beautiful sport."

The FIH chief was confident that the OHA, which successfully organised the Men's and Women's Hockey5s Asia Cup recently, "will put together a fantastic show for the inaugural Hockey5s World Cup."



Erdogan’s Russia visit vital for grain deal, Turkish chief aide says



The cargo ship Mehmet Bey waits to pass through the Bosphorus Strait off the shores of Yenikapi in Istanbul, Türkiye. – Reuters file photo

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will focus on the Black Sea grain deal during their meeting on Monday as Türkiye seeks to bring Moscow back to the deal, Erdogan’s chief foreign policy advisor said.

“We play a leading role here. We see strong support from all around the world for the realisation of the grain corridor,” Erdogan’s chief foreign policy and security advisor Akif Cagatay Kilic told an interview on A Haber television channel.

“The current status of the grain deal will be discussed at the summit on Monday. We are cautious, but we hope to achieve success because this is a situation

that affects the entire world,” Kilic said.

Ankara acknowledged the technical complexities surrounding the agreement, particularly concerning Russian grain and payment mechanisms, Kilic said. The issue also involves international payment systems such as SWIFT, posing a multifaceted challenge, Kilic added.

“Here, the decision of Russian leader is important. I believe that the bilateral meeting between President Erdogan and Putin will play the most important role in this issue.”

Russia quit the deal in July - a year after it was brokered by the United Nations and Türkiye-

complaining that its own food and fertiliser exports faced obstacles and that not enough Ukrainian grain was going to countries in need.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Erdogan would hold talks with the Kremlin chief in Sochi on Monday but gave no further details.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in Moscow to discuss grain ahead of the Erdogan meeting.

Shoigu said it was not Russia’s fault that the grain deal had failed and repeated the Russian position that Moscow would return to it if all the promises made to Russia were fulfilled.

“It turned out that it is more difficult to do this than to build new corridors, new ground routes,” said Shoigu, who attended the signing ceremony for the Black Sea deal in Istanbul in 2022.

The Black Sea grain deal was intended to combat a global food crisis that the United Nations said had been worsened by Russia’s full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022, which Russia calls a “special military operation”.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that he had sent Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov “a set of concrete proposals” aimed at reviving a deal that allowed the safe export of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea.

— Reuters

Air strike in Khartoum kills 20 civilians: activists

WAD MADANI: Residents of Khartoum awoke on Sunday to artillery and rocket fire, hours after an air strike in the city’s south killed at least 20 civilians including two children.

“The death toll from the aerial bombardment” in southern Khartoum “has risen to 20 civilian fatalities,” according to a statement by the neighbourhood’s resistance committee. They are among many volunteer groups that used to organise pro-democracy demonstrations and now provide assistance to families caught in the crossfire between the army and paramilitary fighters.

In an earlier statement, they said the victims included two children, and warned that more fatalities went unrecorded, as “their bodies could not be moved to the hospital because they were severely burned or torn to pieces in the bombing”.

Since war began between the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on April 15, around 5,000 people have been killed, according to estimates from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project.

The Sudanese Armed Forces control the skies and have carried out regular air strikes while RSF fighters dominate the streets of the capital.

Western countries have accused the paramilitaries and allied groups of killings based on ethnicity in the western Darfur region, and the International Criminal Court has opened a new probe into alleged war crimes.

More than half of Sudan’s 48 million people now require humanitarian aid and protection, and six million are “one step away from famine”, according to the United Nations.

Despite insecurity, looting and bureaucratic obstacles, the world body says it has been able to get aid to millions of those in need.

The war has internally displaced around 3.8 million people while another million have crossed borders into neighbouring countries.

Among the displaced are nearly 2.8 million from Khartoum, according to the International Organization for Migration. That is more than half the capital’s pre-war population of around five million. — AFP



Sudanese queue outside a passport office in Gedaref, following an announcement by the authorities of the resumption of issuing passports in war-torn Sudan. – AFP

North Korea stages tactical nuclear attack drill

SEOUL: North Korea conducted a simulated tactical nuclear attack drill that included two long-range cruise missiles in an exercise to “warn enemies” the country would be prepared in case of nuclear war, the KCNA state news agency said on Sunday.

KCNA said the drill was successfully carried out and two cruise missiles carrying mock nuclear warheads were fired towards the West Sea of the Korean peninsula and flew 1,500 km at a preset altitude of 150 meters.

Pyongyang also said it would bolster its military deterrence

against the United States and South Korea.

South Korea’s military said the claim of success could be an exaggeration as “not all of them succeeded,” Seoul’s Yonhap News reported, citing a senior official at the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

KCNA also reportd that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited Pukjung Machine Complex, which produces marine engines, and a munitions factory to stress the importance of strengthening Pyongyang’s naval forces.

“He affirmed that a future plenary meeting of the Central



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects the Pukjung Machine Complex and a major munitions factory in an undisclosed location in North Korea. – Reuters

Committee of the WPK (Worker’s Party of Korea) would set forth an important modernisation of the complex and the development direction of the shipbuilding industry,” a KCNA statement said.

The latest missile test came just after the joint annual exercises between South Korea and the United States, known as Ulchi Freedom Shield, came to a close on Thursday. It featured air drills with B-1B bombers. In a separate report, KCNA said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had inspected “a major munitions factory”, the latest in a string of visits to weapons

plants in recent weeks.

Kim “expressed satisfaction” and stressed the importance of the factory “in bolstering up the armed forces of the DPRK”, KCNA reported, using the acronym for North Korea’s official name.

North Korea has conducted a record number of weapons tests this year, and last month failed in its second attempt to put a spy satellite into orbit.

Seoul and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in response, staging joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and US strategic assets. — Agencies

TAITUNG

Typhoon Haikui makes landfall in Taiwan

Typhoon Haikui made landfall in eastern Taiwan on Sunday, unleashing torrential downpours, whipping up winds and plunging thousands of households into darkness as the first major storm to hit the island directly in four years. Nearly 4,000 people were evacuated from high-risk areas, hundreds of flights cancelled and businesses closed in preparation for the storm.

Taiwan’s Central Weather Bureau said in a news conference the typhoon was “at our doorstep”



and by 3:40 pm confirming it had made landfall in coastal Taitung.

Residents hunkered down indoors in the dark, staying away from windows as strong gusts of wind sent fallen trees and dislodged water tanks flying in the air. — AFP

JERUSALEM

Israel considers deporting 1,000 Eritreans

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Israel was considering deporting 1,000 Eritreans who took part in “riots” in Tel Aviv over the weekend that injured dozens.

Clashes erupted when a demonstration against an Eritrean government event turned violent, injuring nearly 140 people.

Netanyahu said the clashes between Eritrean government supporters and opponents had crossed a “red line”.



“At the special ministerial committee I established today, we asked for a few swift measures, including expelling a thousand regime supporters who took part in these riots,” he said in a statement.

— AFP

SULAIMANIYA

Iraqi security forces deploy in Kirkuk

Iraqi security forces deployed in the northern Iraqi oil city of Kirkuk on Sunday to prevent further violence as the death toll in clashes between groups the previous day rose to four, police and security sources said.

Four protesters were shot dead on Saturday in clashes between groups in Kirkuk that broke out after days of tensions.

Amir Shwani, a spokesman for Kirkuk police, said in a statement to reporters a curfew had been lifted and vehicles were moving



normally in the city. on Sunday.

But security forces had deployed additional troops on the streets to “prevent violence and protect civilians”, he said.

The dispute centres on a building in Kirkuk.

— Reuters



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MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 4 | 2023

7

In brief

■ SYDNEY



AUSTRALIA BOOSTS SECURITY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

Australia said on Sunday it will help boost security in neighbouring Solomon Islands by sending additional personnel to cover both the Pacific Games in November and next year's general elections.

"At the request of the Solomon Islands Government, Australia has extended its contribution to the Solomons International Assistance Force (SIAF) until June 2024 to assist with security for the national general elections," a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade spokesperson said in a statement. "Australia is proud to be Solomon Islands' primary security partner, and will also deploy additional security personnel to support the Pacific Games in Honiara." — **AFP**

■ HANOI



US EXPECTS TO UPGRADE VIETNAM TIES

The United States expects to elevate its diplomatic relations with former foe Vietnam to the top level as President Joe Biden travels to Hanoi in a week.

Vietnam had initially expressed caution about the upgrade. That led the Biden administration to multiply efforts to persuade the southeast Asian nation, including through multiple visits of high-ranking members of the US government in recent months.

The unprecedented push has led Washington to expect to be elevated to the top tier of Vietnam's diplomatic ranking.

Biden said it publicly in July and officials in both countries have since informally expressed optimism about the two-step upgrade. — **Reuters**

■ WASHINGTON



POLICE INVESTIGATE DEATH AT BURNING MAN FESTIVAL

Police in the US state of Nevada were investigating a death at the Burning Man festival, where thousands of people were ordered to shelter in place after heavy rains turned the desert site into a mud pit and forced organisers to close the gates.

Pershing County Sheriff's Office in northern Nevada said it was investigating "a death which occurred during this rain event," according to a statement cited by US media.

The heavy rainfall forced the Bureau of Land Management and the Pershing County Sheriff's Office to close the entrance to Burning Man for the remainder of the event. — **AFP**

Russia hits Ukraine's Danube port in attack condemned by Romania

KYIV: Russian drones targeted Ukraine's southern Odesa region in the early hours of Sunday, with Moscow hitting a Danube port on the border with Nato member Romania in an attack condemned by Bucharest.

Moscow has hit Ukrainian port infrastructure on the Black Sea and on the Danube for weeks, since exiting a key deal that allowed the safe passage of ships carrying grain.

The Odesa region attacks came as Kyiv has claimed some successes in its counter-offensive on the southern front this week.

Kyiv said that some of the drones hit the Danube area, saying that at least two people were wounded in attacks on "civilian industrial" infrastructure.

The Russian army said it had targeted "fuel storage" facilities in the Ukrainian port of Reni, which lies on the Danube river that separates Ukraine from Romania.

Moscow has targeted the Danube ports of Reni and Ismail — both near Romania and across the war-torn country from fighting hotspots — several times over the last few weeks.

Reni — which also lies close to Moldova — is a sea and river port and important transport hub.

Bucharest's defence ministry said the attacks were "unjustified and in deep contradiction with the rules of international humanitarian law".

It also stressed that the Moscow

drone attacks did not "generate any direct military threat to the national territory or territorial waters of Romania." Neighbouring Moldova called the attack "brutal."

"Russia must be held accountable for every piece of infrastructure destroyed," Chisinau's pro-EU President Maia Sandu said on social media.

The Odesa region attacks came as Kyiv this week reported some successes on the southern front of its counteroffensive.

Kyiv said it had recaptured the village of Robotyne, calling it a strategic victory that would pave the way for its forces to push deeper into Russian positions towards Moscow-annexed Crimea.

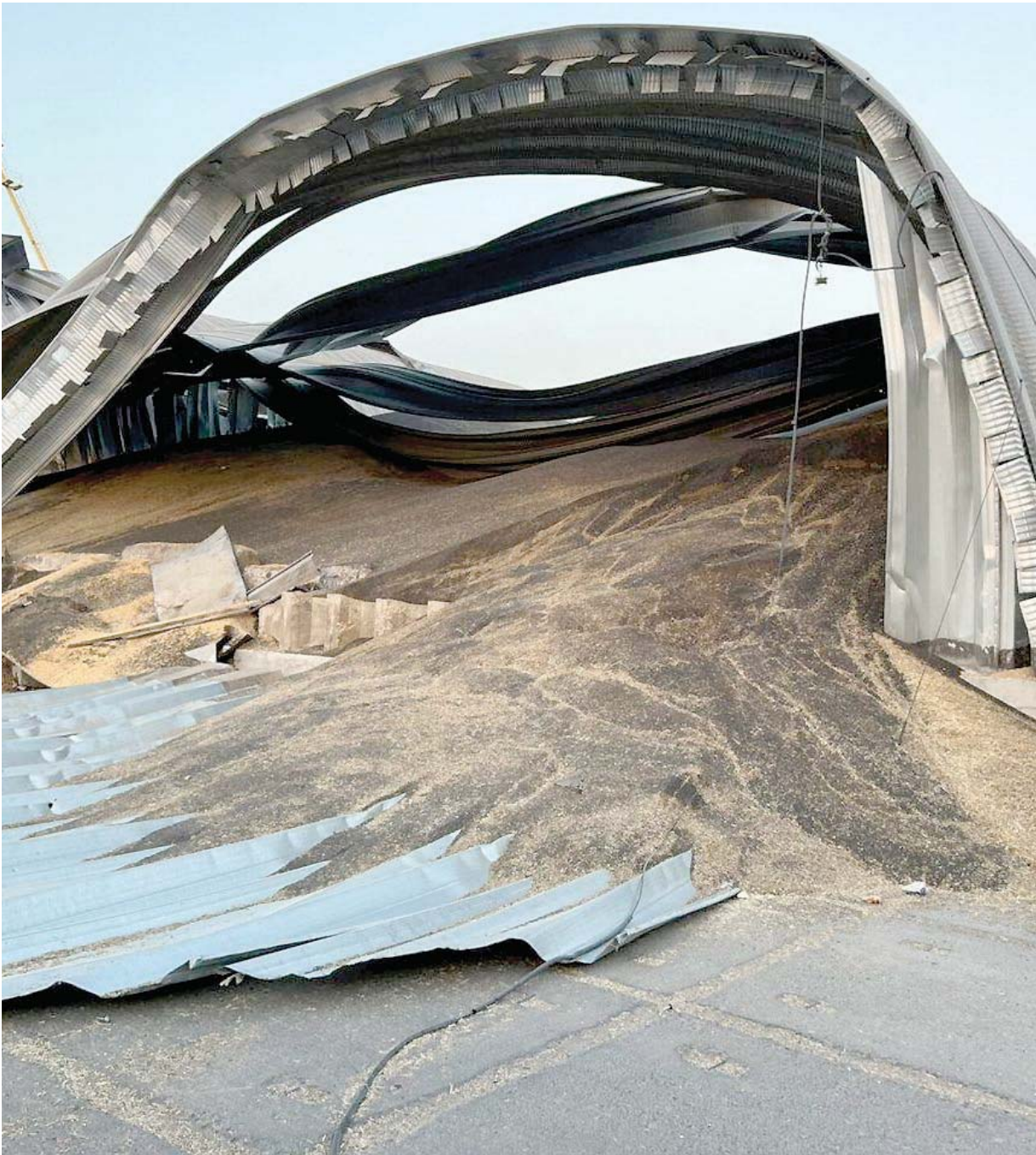
General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, leading the southern counteroffensive, told *The Guardian* newspaper this weekend that Kyiv's army has made an important breakthrough by breaching Russian lines near Zaporizhzhia.

"We are now between the first and second defensive lines," Tarnavskiy — who led Ukrainian troops to liberate the southern city of Kherson — told the UK paper.

Heavily mined territory had slowed Ukrainian troops, saying that sappers had cleaned a route by foot and at night.

The paper quoted him as saying that Kyiv's forces are now back on vehicles and that Russia has redeployed troops to the area.

— **AFP**



A grain warehouse heavily damaged by a Russian drone attack is seen at a compound of a port on the Danube, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa region, Ukraine. — **Reuters file photo**

Armenian PM says depending on Russia was 'strategic mistake'

LONDON: Armenia's prime minister has said his country's policy of solely relying on Russia to guarantee its security was a strategic mistake because Moscow has been unable to deliver and is in the process of winding down its role in the wider region.

In an interview with Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* published on Sunday, Nikol Pashinyan accused Russia of failing to ensure Armenia's security in the face of what he said was aggression from neighbouring Azerbaijan over the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Pashinyan suggested that Moscow, which has a defence pact with Armenia and a military base there, did not regard his country as sufficiently pro-Russian and said he believed Russia was in the process of leaving the wider South Caucasus region.

Yerevan was therefore trying to diversify its security arrangements, he said, an apparent reference to its ties with the European Union and the United States and its attempts to forge closer ties with other countries in the region.

"Armenia's security architecture was 99.999 per cent linked to Russia, including when it came to the procurement of arms and ammunition," Pashinyan told *La Repubblica*.

"But today we see that Russia itself is in need of weapons, arms

and ammunition for the war in Ukraine and in this situation it's understandable that even if it wishes so, the Russian Federation cannot meet Armenia's security needs.

"This example should demonstrate to us that dependence on just one partner in security matters is a strategic mistake."

His words underscore resentment inside Armenia about what many there see as a failure by Russia to defend their interests.

There was no immediate response to Pashinyan's interview from Moscow, which has chaired talks between Yerevan and Baku in what it says is the complex search for a peace deal.

Moscow has in the past bridled at such criticism, defended its actions, and rejected the idea that it has downgraded its foreign policy priorities because of Ukraine.

Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but its 120,000 inhabitants are predominantly ethnic Armenians. It broke away from Baku's control in a war in the early 1990s. Heavy fighting took place again in 2020 until Russia brokered ceasefire.

Pashinyan accused Russian peacekeepers deployed to uphold the ceasefire deal of failing to do their job.

— **Reuters**



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attends a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Moscow, Russia May 25. — **Reuters file photo**

Pope Francis and Mongolia's Catholics under one roof at papal Mass

ULAANBAATAR: In an unprecedented event, Pope Francis and just about the entire Catholic population of a country were in the same room when he presided at a Mass in Mongolia's capital on Sunday.

The Mass in Ulaanbaatar's Steppe Arena was the religious highlight of the pope's trip to visit the Catholic community of just 1,450.

Most of Mongolia's nine parishes are in the capital, but one in a remote area has only about 30 members and Church officials said they expected everyone who could make it to attend.

Many Mongolians still live a nomadic tradition to graze their animals and in his homily, the pope used the image to make his point.

"All of us are God's nomads, pilgrims in search of happiness, wayfarers thirsting for love," he said, adding that the Christian faith quenched that thirst.

Several Buddhist monks in their saffron robes attended the Mass, which was conducted in Mongolian, English and Italian.

Francis, who leaves for Rome on Monday after inaugurating a Church charity and health centre, began his day at an inter-religious service where he called himself one of the "humble heirs" of ancient schools of wisdom and



People wave Chinese and Hong Kong flags, as Pope Francis arrives to attend the Holy Mass at the Steppe Arena, during his Apostolic Journey in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. — **Reuters**

quoted the Buddha.

There, sharing a theatre stage with a dozen other religious representatives, he urged all religions to live in harmony and shun ideological fundamentalism that foments violence.

Since he started the trip, Francis has praised religious freedom in Mongolia. The landlocked country borders China, which human rights groups say represses religious freedom.

In unscripted comments at the end of the Mass, the pope sent greetings to China, making another overture to the communist country to ease restrictions on religion.

The inter-religious meeting was attended by leaders representing

Mongolian Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, evangelical and Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Hindus, Shintos, Bahais and shamans.

"Brothers and sisters, today we are meeting together as the humble heirs of ancient schools of wisdom. In our encounter with one another, we want to share the great treasure we have received, for the sake of enriching a humanity so often led astray on its journey by the myopic pursuit of profit and material comfort," he said.

Francis, 86, quoted from a writings of the Buddha that says "the wise man rejoices in giving", noting it was similar to Jesus' saying "It is more blessed to give than to receive". — **Reuters**

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

Customer satisfaction not a service

Do you know the importance of providing a good service to customers? In the corporate world, we, generally, see a dedicated department for customer service in many services providing organisations. Is it really an efficiently active unit or just established for the sake of showing off and deceiving visitors and customers? It might not be adequately serving the target audience for one reason or the other! Thus, there is no point of having it if it adds no value to the business.

Serving customers is unfortunately not accorded high importance in some organisations. This could be obvious to some of you; perhaps to those who have experienced unpleasant service or treatment. I just wonder how some organisations dare to carelessly provide improper bad services or deals to their customers.

Believe it or not, people are desperately treated and served, although they pay or have already paid for the service or product, which they are supposed to get. What is actually frustrating is that you might be treated inappropriately in a commercial and customer-oriented organisation where employees are assigned to serve their customers. Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, said: “Get closer than ever to your customer; so close, in fact that you tell them what they need well before they realise it themselves”.

Just imagine that one day you are about to buy a product, but due to bad customer service or offensive attitude of the promoter or salesperson, you change your mind. Possibly, you might even hate that particular shop or brand for the unacceptable experience you had. Such incidents happen every so often when the sales executive or service provider doesn't really care whether he/she gets a customer on that day or not.

It is true what has been said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it”. Therefore, if employees think about that, they will definitely do things differently.



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

SERVING CUSTOMERS IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT ACCORDED HIGH IMPORTANCE IN SOME ORGANISATIONS

In fact, they are not fully aware of the significance behind well and satisfying customer experience and its impact on people and their impressions. Sometimes, It is because of employers are not highly concerned about loyally serving their customers or clients so do their employees.

Mahatma Gandhi was absolutely right when he said, “The customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption of our work, but he is the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to do so”.

In point of fact, we all have different stories about when we were treated exceptionally well or extremely poorly. Usually, we likely tend to share these extraordinary stories and abnormal experiences with colleagues, friends or family. For that reason, we all recognise the influence of the word of mouth marketing as it can be the absolute best advantage or the worst downside for a company.

If truth to be told, what organisations are not aware of is a proper customer experience so they get their customers pleased. Getting customer's satisfaction is what matters more than just providing him a service or a product. Thus, organisations need to be more focused on satisfying their customers by exceeding their expectations and giving them a first-class service. As Bill Gates advised, “Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning”.

Organisations shall have customer satisfaction department instead of customer service. Customers need to be satisfied not just served, so you have them on your side to promote your brand, product or service. Dear customer service executives or agents, just remember that only the good experience that makes the difference. Loyal customers don't just come back and simply recommend you, instead they insist that their friends do business with you.

PAINTING THE ROCKET!



An artist paints a wall mural surrounding ahead of the G20 India summit in New Delhi on Sunday. – AFP

This Cold War is different

US President Joe Biden recently brought the leaders of allies Japan and South Korea to Camp David to discuss how to contain China and counter Russia's influence, for example in Africa's Sahel region, which has recently experienced a string of coups d'état. Meanwhile, leaders from the BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – gathered in Johannesburg to criticise the West's dominance over the international institutions established after World War II. It was enough to give Cold War historians déjà vu.

The West's main adversary today is China, not the Soviet Union, and the BRICS is no Warsaw Pact. But with the world entering a period of uncertainty following the demise of the post-Cold War order, the parallels are sufficient to convince many to turn to pre-1989 conceptual models to gain insight into what might come next. This includes the US and China, though each is betting on a different model.

Between the end of WWII and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the two main forces defining the international order were ideological conflict, which split the world into two camps, and the quest for independence, which led to the proliferation of states, from 50 in 1945 to over 150 in 1989-1991. While the two forces interacted, ideological conflict was dominant: struggles for independence often morphed into proxy wars, and countries were



Mark Leonard

The writer is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict

CONTRARY TO HOW IT MAY APPEAR TO MANY, NOT LEAST IN THE US, THE NEW COLD WAR SEEMS TO BE BASED NOT ON THE OLD LOGIC OF POLARISATION, BUT ON A NEW LOGIC OF FRAGMENTATION

forced either to join a bloc or define themselves by their “non-alignment.”

The US seems to think a similar dynamic will dominate this time around. Faced with its first peer competitor since the fall of the Soviet Union, the US has sought to rally its allies behind a strategy of “decoupling” and “de-risking” – essentially an economic version of the Cold War policy of containment.

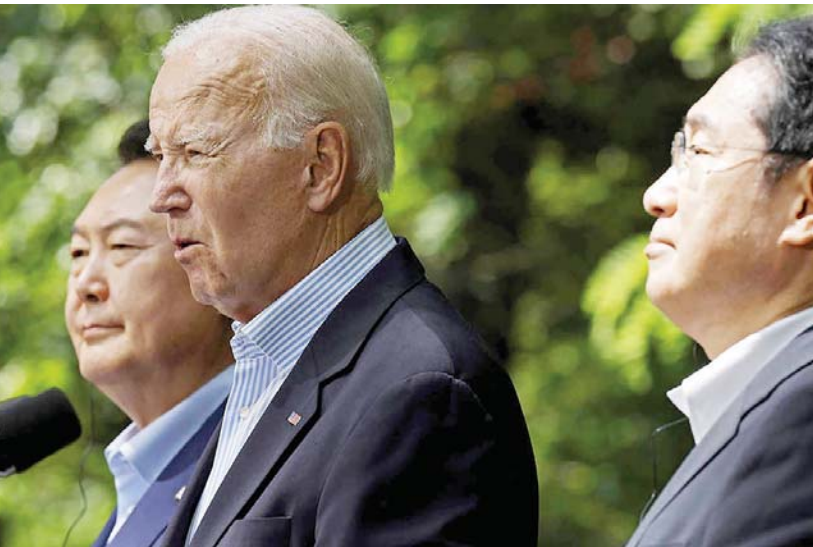
Whereas the US may be expecting Cold War II, shaped primarily by ideological polarisation, China seems to be betting on global fragmentation. Yes, it has tried to offer non-Western countries an alternative to Western-dominated institutions such as the G7 or the International Monetary Fund. But, in China's view, the quest for sovereignty and independence is fundamentally incompatible with the formation of Cold War-style blocs.

Instead, China expects a multipolar world. While China cannot win a battle against a US-led bloc, President Xi Jinping seems convinced that it can take its place as a great power in a fragmented global order.

Even America's closest allies are not immune from the trend toward fragmentation, despite US leaders' best efforts. Consider the recent Camp David summit.

Though some media were quick to herald a “new cold war,” the participants' interests diverged in several ways.

South Korea's main focus remains North Korea, and the intelligence-sharing agreements and nuclear consultations announced after the summit were as much about signaling their resolve to push back against North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's regime as they were about countering China. Japan, for its part, is eager to avoid strategic escalation over Taiwan – a development that would threaten its economic model, which depends significantly on trade with China (including in semiconductor-related technology). And both South



The US seems to think a similar dynamic will dominate this time around.

Korea and Japan are unhappy with the zeal with which America is pursuing its de-risking strategy.

As for the situation in the Sahel, it has all the features of a classic Cold War proxy standoff. Since Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali succumbed to military coups, the US and France have come to rely on Niger's government as the last bastion of Western support in the region. Under the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Russian mercenary army Wagner Group gained substantial influence over Mali's governance and practically ran the Central African Republic. The last thing the US and France want is for Wagner to gain another foothold in the region.

But now that Niger's

government, too, has been ousted by the military, American and French responses have diverged sharply, allowing the country's new rulers to have their cake and eat it. The military junta has requested Wagner's assistance to stave off the threat of intervention, but appears willing, at least for now, to allow the US to continue operating drone bases in the country.

Perhaps the biggest surprise last week was the BRICS' announcement that six countries – Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – would become full-fledged members by the beginning of next year. Pre-summit editorialising notwithstanding, China is under no illusion that countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE will join it in a bona fide anti-Western bloc; China's goals are more subtle.

Joining the BRICS increases countries' freedom of action – for example, by increasing access to alternative sources of financing or, eventually, providing a genuine alternative to the US dollar for trade, investment, and reserves. A world in which countries are not dependent on the West, but free to explore other options, serves China's interests far better than a narrower, more loyal pro-China alliance ever could.

Sport

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Brighton win with Ferguson hat-trick

ANDY JALIL
BRIGHTON, SEPT 3.

Newcastle continue to struggle after finishing in the top four last season and qualifying for the Champions league. They have lost three Premier League matches in four after losing five in the entire previous season.

They went down 3-1 in defeat to Brighton with teenager Evan Ferguson grabbing his first treble at senior level. His manager, Roberto De Zerbi, said in praise: “His qualities are enough to become a great player. One day he can be one of the best scorers in Europe. He is 18. I don’t know many young players like him.”

Zerbi added: “I’m really pleased with his performance, especially in the first half. His improvement is important for him, for us, for his career. He is working to complete his qualities not only scoring.”

Newcastle were unimpressive from the start. Their third defeat came within three weeks of the start of the season whereas last season they hadn’t lost three matches until as late as March. It should be said though that their two losses were against Manchester City and Liverpool and now against a highly improved Brighton. However, their slow, listless effort cannot be excused.

Brighton’s fine form has seen them rise into the top four this season. They were slow at the start but the tempo picked up as the first half progressed and they took the lead in the 27th minute after an error by the goalkeeper Nick Pope whose poor clearance saw Kaoru Mitoma take a shot which Pope saved. The follow-

up shot by Billy Gilmour went into Pope’s midriff and bounced out to Ferguson to hammer in.

Just before the hour, not happy with what he had been seeing of his team, Newcastle manager made three substitutions. But less than halfway into the second half, Brighton went two up after poor defending by the visitors. An excellent pass from Gilmour was picked up by an unmarked Ferguson who had enough room as he ran on to curl a shot into the bottom corner.

The young Brighton striker was full of energy and looked unstoppable as only five minutes later he completed his fine hat-trick. It came just after Newcastle’s Anthony Gordon had missed a good chance with a shot that went wide of the far post.

There was an element of luck with the third goal as Ferguson’s shot took a slight deflection from defender Fabian Schar’s leg. Had that not happened it seemed Pope would have had the shot covered.

Brighton may have had four in the end had not a tackle from Kieran Trippier stopped Mitoma from scoring. Newcastle got a consolation goal in added-on time from Callum Wilson. But the day belonged to young Ferguson.

Newcastle manager, Eddie Howe said: “Of course there are concerns when you are not winning, I’m not naive. But I have to look at the fixture list, which has been tough for us. I need to be calm, analyse where we can get better, then go to work and try to do it. It’s important I don’t overreact.”



Red Warriors boost training ahead of Palestine friendly

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The national senior football team players will undergo their fourth training session on Monday as part of the underway domestic training camp in Muscat.

Red Warriors are in very intensive training schedule including daily fitness and physical training during morning session at the fitness hall in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex while reporting to the technical and tactical training in the evening sessions at the greenfield of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Oman team players, coached by Croatian Branko Ivankovic, will test their initial readiness ahead of travelling to USA camp with a friendly match against Palestine scheduled on Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.



Three players joined the training camp recently namely: Fayez al Rushaidi, Harib al Saadi and Ahmed al Khamisi to complete the full squad while Motaz Saleh trained individually whereas Salah al Yahyaiei is awaiting for the final medical team confirmation on his recent injury.

High profile camp in USA

The ongoing internal warm-up gathering will be followed by a high profile abroad camp in USA as the national team delegation will travel to USA on Friday. The external camp in USA will feature a tight friendly match against the USA team, ranked 11th in the world, on September 12 in Minnesota, USA.

Both camps will play vital role

for the team’s preparation for the preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar assignment.

The head coach of Oman team affirmed last week securing direct slot to the 2026 Fifa World Cup is the dream of the team. Red

Warriors’ campaign in the joint qualifiers will begin in November. Oman, ranked 72nd in the world, will face Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Chinese Taipei/Timor Leste in Group D of the joint qualifiers. The Red Warriors will launch their challenge at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals in January 2024 at Group F which

comprised Asian favourites Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan.

After completion of September camps, the preparation of the national team will resume in November as October month will be dedicated for the domestic competitions and the players will be busy with their respective clubs. This was confirmed by coach Branko in the last press meet.

OMAN PROBABLES: Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushaidi, Mahmood al Mushaifri, Ahmed al Kaabi, Motaz Saleh, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Khamisi, Ahmed al Matroushi, Fahmi Said, Juma al Habsi, Musab al Maamari, Tamim al Balushi, Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyaiei, Zaher al Aghbari, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri, Ali al Hinai, Abdullah Fawaz, Jameel al Yahmadi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Ahmed al Adawi, Omar al Malki and Isam al Subhi.

ROGLIC POWERS TO BRILLIANT WIN, KUSS TAKES OVERALL VUELTA LEAD

ESPANA: Slovenian Primoz Roglic powered past reigning champion Remco Evenepoel to win the eighth stage of the Vuelta a Espana after a tough fight on the climb to Xorret del Cati on Saturday.

Roglic's Jumbo Visma team-mate Sepp Kuss took the overall leader's red jersey after Lenny Martinez of Groupama-FDJ cracked near the finish of the 165km stage from Denia.

Kuss is the first American to lead a Grand Tour since Chris Horner at LA Vuelta in 2013.

"It's nice and we'll see how it is over the next few days," Kuss said. "Once you get the jersey you have to be a bit more in front and pay more attention to everything that's going on, rather than being able to relax in the peloton."

The peloton reeled in four breakaway riders at the start of the brutal final climb which pitched up to slopes of 20%.

Battle then commenced amongst the general classification contenders with Jumbo Visma's yellow-clad brigade again setting a fierce tempo along with the UAE Team Emirates trio of Juan Ayuso, Joao Almeida and Marc Soler and Belgium's defending champion Remco Evenepoel (Soudal Quick Step).

It proved too much for Martinez who fell away and Kuss was the first to attack before Evenepoel took it on over the summit on the downhill race to the finish line.

Evenepoel was unable to hold off three-time Vuelta winner Roglic in the final sprint to the line but looked strong as he came home in second place



with Spain's Juan Ayuso third.

"I was on Roglic's wheel, I felt easy, I was following him but I didn't know where the line was," Evenepoel said.

"I ended up losing some time to Primoz, which is a shame, and I feel a bit stupid actually."

Danish co-favourite Jonas Vingegaard, also of Jumbo Visma, was fifth with Kuss seventh.

KUSS LEADS

With Frenchman Martinez more than a minute behind at the finish, Kuss now leads the standings by 43 seconds from Spain's Marc Soler (UAE Team Emirates) and one minute from Martinez.

Evenepoel, Roglic and Vingegaard are well-placed in sixth, seventh and eighth places respectively, around two and a half minutes behind Kuss but with two weeks of racing still to go.

Anyone assuming Kuss will just revert to his role of supporting more illustrious team mates may have to reconsider as the American again showed great legs.

"You always hope for the best. The guys did a really amazing job, controlling the really strong breakaway. Then we had no option in the end," Giro d'Italia winner Roglic said.

"In the sprint it's always a bit of a gamble but I had the legs and I could do it. At least three (Jumbo-Visma leaders) now, no? But maybe there's still someone coming!"

More mountains are in store on Sunday with a 184-km route starting in Cartagena.

— Reuters

Espargaro wins Catalunya GP, Bagnaia crashes out



Aprilia Spanish rider Aleix Espargaro (L), Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia (C) and Aprilia Spanish rider Maverick Vinales compete during the MotoGP race. — AFP

BARCELONA: Aleix Espargaro claimed victory ahead of Aprilia team-mate Maverick Vinales at the Catalunya Grand Prix on Sunday, as championship leader Francesco Bagnaia was taken to hospital after crashing on the opening lap.

Sprint-winner Espargaro was

second for much of the race, but the Spaniard took advantage of Vinales' worn front tyre to surge into the lead with four laps left and seal the win at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya - located seven kilometres from his home town of Granollers.

Espargaro dedicated his victory

to world champion Bagnaia, whose leg was run over by KTM's Brad Binder straight after the crash. Bagnaia was conscious and taken to hospital for treatment.

"First thing I want to say is they told me what happened to Pecco (Bagnaia) is nothing serious, that's lucky. This win is for him,"

Espargaro said.

The win erased the memories of Espargaro's premature celebration at last year's Catalunya GP, when he was one lap away from sealing second position but thought the race was over and began waving to his fans.

"I made a mistake when I was trying to overtake Maverick and I lost a lot of ground. I thought for a moment 'you will not catch him, he's very fast'. But I went to the limit for 25 minutes and I made it happen," Espargaro said.

Aprilia had looked on course for a clean sweep, but Pramac Racing riders Jorge Martin and Johann Zarco leapfrogged Miguel Oliveira (RNF Aprilia) to finish third and fourth.

After a chaotic start, the race was restarted for 23 laps and Martin rocketed off the line to take the lead heading into turn one, but he was quickly overtaken by Vinales and Espargaro - who recorded Aprilia's first-ever one-two in the competition.

"First and second for Aprilia, that's a historic result and were so happy," Vinales said.

Martin will be happy to have held off Oliveira to finish on the podium as he cut Bagnaia's lead atop the championship standings from 66 to 50 points.

"I started well, I tried to be calm in the first few laps even though Oliveira was pushing a lot," Martin said.

Martin also widened the gap to third-placed Marco Bezzecchi (VR46 Ducati), who is 21 points behind the Spaniard after finishing 12th.

Earlier on Sunday, the race was red-flagged after Enea Bastianini slipped on turn one and took out Bezzecchi, Johann Zarco, Fabio Di Giannantonio and Alex Marquez, before Bagnaia was launched into the air by a highside on the next turn.

Both Bagnaia and Bastianini were unable to return for the restart, leaving Ducati without a rider in the race.

— Reuters



Zimbabwe cricket great Heath Streak dies aged 49

JOHANNESBURG: Heath Streak, one of Zimbabwe's greatest cricketers, died on Sunday aged 49, his wife said in a social media post. He had been battling colon and liver cancer.

"In the early hours of this morning, Sunday, September 3, the greatest love of my life and the father of my beautiful children, was carried to be with the angels from his home where he wished to spend his last days surrounded by his family and closest loved ones," Nadine Streak wrote.

A family member told AFP Streak died on his cattle farm 55 kilometres (34 miles) north east of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second most populous city.

"Heath had travelled to South Africa several times each month for treatment. At home, he spent much of his time fishing and farming," said the member, who requested anonymity.

Streak was an outstanding fast bowler and capable batsman. He was a key member of Zimbabwe teams that were competitive against cricket's bigger nations in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

His cricket career ended in ignominy, however, when he was banned for eight years for breaching the International Cricket Council (ICC) anti-corruption code.

It was announced in May this year that Streak was seriously ill -- and it was reported in August that he had died, following a message on social media from former team-mate Henry Olonga.

Streak himself was quick to

assert that he was still alive, but not before numerous tributes by former team-mates and opponents.

In a tribute on Sunday, Olonga wrote on Facebook: "RIP Streaky. You were a titan."

Zimbabwe Cricket chairman Tavengwa Mukuhlanji hailed Streak as a "true legend" in a statement.

"He played with passion, spirit and was nothing less than an inspirational figure who raised our flag high and touched lives within the sport and beyond."

On X (formerly Twitter), several former India batting stars also paid tribute to Streak.

"He was a fierce competitor and led Zimbabwe admirably. May God give strength to the bereaved family," wrote VVS Laxman.

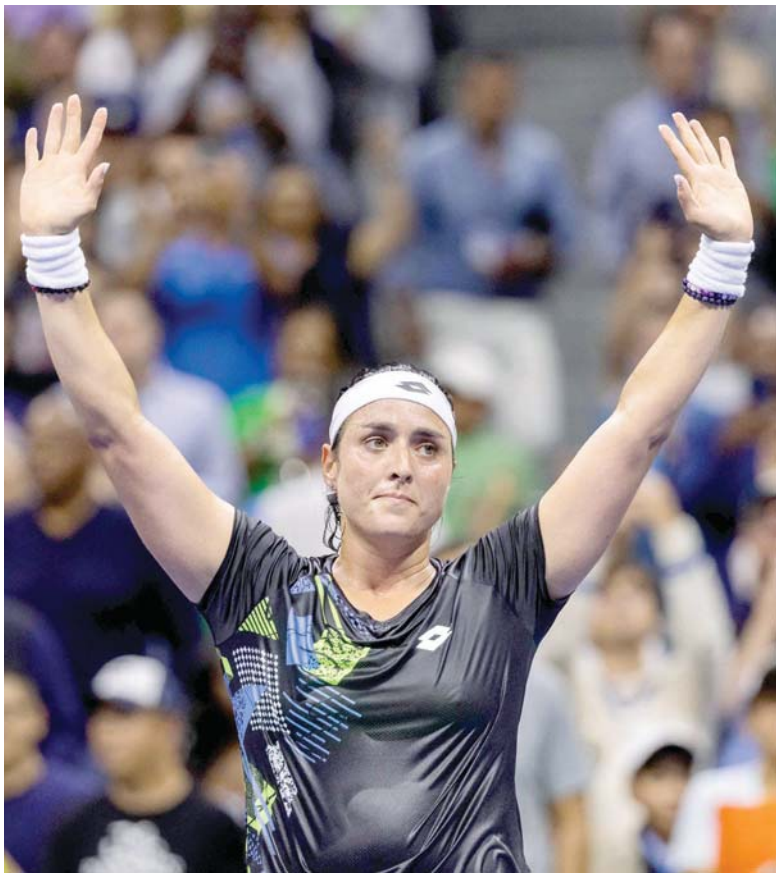
Virender Sehwag called Streak "very competitive."

A strongly-built fast bowler, able to extract movement from unhelpful pitches, Streak took 236 wickets at an average of 28.14 in 65 Test matches.

- Battled almost alone - No other Zimbabwean has taken more than 80 Test wickets.

He made 1,990 runs at 22.35 in Tests to stand seventh on the country's all-time list. His highest score and only century was 127 not out against the West Indies in Harare in 2003.

Streak took 237 wickets -- 104 more than his nearest rival - and scored 2,901 runs in 187 one-day internationals — AFP



ALCARAZ, MEDVEDEV ADVANCE; JABEUR WINS US OPEN THRILLER

NEW YORK: World number one Carlos Alcaraz surged into the last 16 of the US Open on Saturday as Tunisia's Ons Jabeur kept her dream of a first Grand Slam title alive with victory in a three-set thriller.

Alcaraz, looking to become the first man to successfully defend the title since Roger Federer in 2008, produced a flurry of magical shots en route to dispatching British 26th seed Dan Evans 6-2, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

It was another stylish victory for the 20-year-old Spaniard, who will face Italy's Matteo Arnaldi in the fourth round on Monday.

The Spaniard kept Evans on the back foot with his booming forehand while delighting the Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd with several of his signature forehand drop shots.

Alcaraz also conjured one of the shots of the tournament to clinch a decisive break in the fourth set, curling a logic-defying forehand up the line past Evans for a 4-2 lead.

Alcaraz, who will surrender his world number one ranking to Novak Djokovic at the end of this tournament, admitted he was motivated by matching Federer in defending his crown.

"Obviously defending the title is a goal for me," he said. "I'm looking for that. Nobody's done it here since Roger so I'd love to be part

of tournament history with him."

Alcaraz's win keeps him on track for a repeat quarter-final against Italy's Jannik Sinner, a year after the two men duelled in an epic five-hour five-setter that finished at 2.50am, the latest finish in US Open history.

Sixth seed Sinner did his part to keep the rematch on course on Saturday with a stylish 6-3, 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 win over Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka.

Alcaraz's last-16 opponent Arnaldi, meanwhile, advanced after upsetting 16th-seeded Briton Cameron Norrie, winning 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 in just under two hours.

Arnaldi, 22, had never played in the main draw of a Grand Slam before this season, with a brief run to the second round at Roland Garros his best performance in a major championship.

There was better luck for another member of Britain's US Open contingent elsewhere though, with Jack Draper reaching the last 16 of a Grand Slam for the first time with a 6-4, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 victory over American world No.89 Michael Mmoh. Draper will face eighth-seeded Russian Andrey Rublev on Monday for a place in the quarter-finals.

Rublev, a quarter-finalist at last year's tournament, defeated France's Arthur Rinderknech 3-6, 6-3, 6-1, 7-5 to advance.

Meanwhile Russia's 2021 US Open

THIS IS A
TOUGH SPORT.
YOU ALWAYS
DON'T WANT
TO GIVE UP.

champion and third seed Daniil Medvedev made it safely into the last 16 in a late-night 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Argentina's Sebastian Baez.

JABEUR DIGS DEEP

Arguably the game of day six, came in the women's draw, where popular Tunisian fifth seed Jabeur overcame a courageous display by injured opponent Marie Bouzkova to advance.

Czech No.31 seed Bouzkova started strongly to win the opening set against Jabeur, who has been laid low by flu since the start of the championships.

But the game changed midway through the second set when Bouzkova suffered what appeared to be a thigh injury, severely hampering her mobility thereafter.

Despite grimacing and wincing in pain, she somehow managed to keep on playing as Jabeur dug deep to complete a 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 in 2hr 56min on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

"This is a tough sport. You always don't want to give up. I really respect her for that," Jabeur said.

Jabeur, who faces China's Zheng Qinwen in the last 16 on Monday, is chasing a first Grand Slam title after suffering agonising defeats in three major championship finals

in the past two seasons.

Elsewhere on Saturday, Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka maintained her dominant start to the tournament with a 60-minute demolition of France's Clara Burel, winning 6-1, 6-1.

The Belarusian right-hander will play Russia's 13th seed Daria Kasatkina on Monday in the last 16. Kasatkina booked her place in the fourth round with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Belgium's Greet Minnen.

Meanwhile 17th seed Madison Keys became the second American woman into the last 16 after Coco Gauff with a 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 win over Russian 14th seed Liudmila Samsonova.

Keys will play compatriot and third seed Jessica Pegula in the last 16. Pegula outfought Ukraine's 26th-ranked Elina Svitolina 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 to reach the fourth round.

Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova wasted no time in sweeping into the last 16, taking just 56 minutes to dismantle Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-1. Vondrousova plays US youngster Peyton Stearns in the next round.

China's Zheng meanwhile matched her best result at a Grand Slam -- a fourth round appearance at last year's French Open -- by rallying to beat Italy's Lucia Bronzetti 6-3, 4-6, 6-4. — AFP



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GCC Customs Union advances towards unified system

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

In a major stride towards achieving a unified customs system, the 5th meeting of the Board of Directors (BoD) of the Customs Union Authority of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was recently convened in Salalah on Thursday.

The meeting primarily focused on advancing the establishment of a unified customs union and included key discussions and decisions aimed at streamlining operations and addressing existing obstacles.

One of the noteworthy outcomes of the meeting was the approval of a comprehensive and updated timetable for completing arrivals. This milestone decision represents a significant step towards harmonising customs procedures across member countries of the GCC.

By adhering to the approved timetable, businesses operating



within the region can expect standardised and efficient customs processes, resulting in reduced clearance times, improved predictability, and enhanced trade competitiveness.

Recognising the importance

of aligning the Customs Union's structure with its responsibilities, the Board engaged in a detailed examination of the final status of the Customs Union in light of the outcomes of a study on the development of customs ports.

This comprehensive study provided valuable insights into the current state of customs ports within the GCC and identified areas for development and improvement.

In response to the study's

findings, the Board adopted an executive plan proposing solutions to address existing obstacles.

By addressing these challenges with targeted strategies, the Customs Union aims to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency. The proposed solutions encompass measures to streamline administrative processes, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and create a more conducive environment for trade.

During the meeting, the Board also deliberated on the decisions made during the Customs Union's founding phase.

To ensure the effective exercise of its duties in accordance with the bylaws and the powers granted by the Supreme Council's decision – 42/2021, the Board recommended transferring the tasks and jurisdiction of the Customs Union Administration and the Customs Information Centre from the General-Secretariat to the Council of the Customs Union Authority.

This transfer of responsibilities signifies a pivotal shift in the governance structure of the Customs Union.

By empowering the Council with enhanced authority, the Union aims to optimise its decision-making processes, strengthen coordination among member countries, and effectively implement policies and initiatives that promote trade facilitation and economic integration.

The establishment of a unified customs union within the GCC holds immense promise for regional economic growth and cooperation. By creating a seamless and standardised customs framework, the Customs Union aims to eliminate trade barriers, enhance cross-border business transactions, and attract foreign investment.

A unified customs system will not only promote intra-regional trade but will also strengthen the GCC's position as a global trade hub.

CMA launches new tool to fight money laundering

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the launch of the Strix System, which supports a risk-based approach to identify Money Laundering – Terror Financing (ML/FT) risks for companies licensed by the CMA.

Strix allows positioning each company in the risk measurement indicator in accordance with internationally recognised standards and legislative requirements related to combating such practices in Oman.

This enhances the regulatory efforts of the CMA and its ability to determine risks encountering licensed institutions to take the necessary action to deal with such risks.

This move translates the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and achieves one of the three sectoral objectives that the CMA's Strategic Plan (2021-2025) is based on, enhancing the CMA's performance through speeding up the digital transformation process and to carry on the CMA's approach in digitalising and providing its services to the public in a timely manner.

In addition, this project aims at automating the process of collecting data related to licensed companies in the capital market



and insurance sectors to be reviewed by CMA employees using this software then analysing and classifying this data according to risks related to each company individually. Finally, a risk-based regulatory plan is developed.

Notably, the launch of Strix is part of the preparation framework for the mutual evaluation for Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism in Oman by the FATF during the upcoming phase and the CMA endeavours to accomplish best results for the Sultanate of Oman.

It also represents the importance of ML/FT risk-assessment to measure the risk levels of sectors regulated by the CMA and focusing on aspects requiring enhancement and development particularly those related to licensed companies' compliance with Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism requirements and procedures.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 3

The 2nd Engineering Forum on Arab Architecture opened here yesterday, September 3, affording a pivotal platform in advancing the role of architecture in sustainable development.

The two-day forum is being co-hosted by the Omani Society of Engineers and Dhofar Municipality, and it brought together engineers, architects, planners, students, and members of the public from all over the Arab region to discuss the latest trends in Arab architecture and share their insights on how to create more sustainable, resilient, and culturally-appropriate buildings.

The opening was chaired by Eng Fouad bin Abdullah al Kindi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Society of Engineers. In his opening remarks, Al Kindi emphasised the importance of Arab architecture as a vital component of the region's cultural heritage.

He also stressed the need for Arab architects to embrace modern technology and innovation in order to create sustainable and resilient buildings that are responsive to the needs of the 21st century.

The forum featured 16 papers and four discussion sessions.

The papers covered a wide range of topics, including the



GOVERNMENTS AND PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATIONS ARE URGED TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS FIELD, WHICH HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE JOBS, IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE, AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT.

use of traditional materials in modern architecture, the role of architecture in sustainable development, and the challenges of climate change.

The discussion sessions focused on the practical application of these topics, and they generated a lively debate among the participants.

The forum concluded with a call for more research and investment in Arab architecture.

The participants urged governments and private sector

organisations to support the development of this field, which has the potential to create jobs, improve the quality of life, and protect the environment.

The following are some specific examples of how Arab architecture has addressed social and environmental challenges:

- Traditional Arab homes are often designed to be cool and comfortable in hot climates, with features such as wind towers and courtyards that help to circulate air.
- Arab architects are increasingly using modern technology to address environmental challenges, such as using solar power and rainwater harvesting to reduce energy consumption and water usage.
- The Bait Al Zubair Museum in Muscat is a traditional Omani

house that has been restored and converted into a museum. The museum showcases Omani culture and history, and it is also a sustainable building that uses passive solar design to reduce energy consumption.

- The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat is a stunning example of modern Islamic architecture. The mosque is decorated with intricate geometric patterns and calligraphy, and it is made from materials such as marble, granite, and wood.
- The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat is a sustainable building that uses solar power and rainwater harvesting. The centre also features a number of interactive exhibits that showcase Omani culture and history.

NWS supports trends for youth development

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services is considered to be one of the prominent companies that work on besides other institutions to develop and enhance the potential of Omani Youth including the graduates and students — who are still in school — and job seekers as well.

The aim of this effort is to provide the target students with training opportunities according to the strategies and plans

developed to refine these youth with knowledge and skills that are expected to support them in their future careers.

Taqi bin Mohammed al Lawati (pictured), Chief Executive of the Human Resources and Culture Unit commented on this initiative: “Nama Water Services is committed to supporting the national trends for the youth development. We are proud of training young people and making



use of the theoretical knowledge that they acquired during their academic careers. We provide them with the opportunity to engage in an innovative and

stimulating work environment that encourages them to Intellectual creativity. In addition, it will assist them in mastering the required skills through practical application that can gain from the expertise and competencies who work in this company.”

During the first half of this year, more than 350 trainees benefited from the training opportunities provided by the company. Regarding this raise in the number

of trainees Al Lawati stated that this is a result of the established training plan that aims to give young people the opportunities they need for practical training.

In addition, it's the continuous follow-up that takes place to ensure that the trainee receives the required doses of practical training, and the prepared programme is considered good nutrition for the students, as the training takes place under

continuous guidance from the company's highly qualified expertise.

The trainee participates in practical and field projects and works alongside with various departments that he learns from them during this professional coaching, latest technologies, and methods used in the business execution. Some of the trainees also get opportunities to attend seminars and workshops.

Huawei launches Seeds for the Future programme

MUSCAT: Huawei announced the launch of this year's prestigious Seeds for the Future programme for university students across the Middle East and Central Asia.

Huawei kicked off the first phase of the 2023 Seeds for the Future programme at an official opening ceremony at the Qatar National Convention Centre, Doha, Qatar, on September 3, 2023.

Bringing together 175 students from the Middle East and Central Asia (ME & CA) for the first time ever in Qatar, the regional event aims to develop local talent, share knowledge, increase ICT sector awareness, and foster a digital community for young ICT talents.

The 2023 edition of the competition will witness the participation of students from elite universities representing 15 countries in the region, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Oman, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan. 10 students from Oman are set to participate in this year's edition of Seeds for the Future.

The participating students hail from Oman College of Management and Technology, Majan College, University of Technology and Applied Sciences

(UTAS) Sohar, Sohar University, University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) Muscat, National University for Science and Technology, and Global College of Engineering and Technology.

Shunli Wang, Vice President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia, said: “Huawei is committed to nurturing an open, shared ICT talent ecosystem across the Middle East and Central Asia, including Oman.

The Seeds for the Future programme is our flagship global CSR programme that aims to inspire talent to shape the future of their respective countries.

We are honoured for the unwavering support and endorsement the programme continues to receive in its sixth year now. We extend our best wishes to the 2023 regional participants and look forward to an exciting edition.”

Jawad Abbassi, Head of GSMA, MENA, commented: “Advanced technologies like AI, 5G, and cloud are revolutionising how we live, learn, and work. Digital transformation across the MENA is accelerating at an unparalleled pace, and it's crucial that we narrow the ICT talent gap and arm students with 21st-century skills. Enabling students to upskill their tech knowledge while gaining crucial soft skills is of paramount importance.”

Bank Nizwa opens Saham branch

MUSCAT: In a remarkable display of its commitment to expanding its presence in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic Bank in Oman, proudly announces the opening of its 21th branch in Saham.

The branch was opened in a official ceremony by Dr Shaikh Sultan bin Abdullah bin Saleh al Battashi, Wali of Wilayat of Saham alongside Shaikh Majid bin Ali al Maamari, Hussain al Shalwani, board members of Bank Nizwa, Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa and Executive management members.

With this strategic move, Bank Nizwa reaffirms its dedication to cultivating an extensive network of branches and delivering exceptional Sharia-compliant products and services to its valued clients in Saham and its neighbouring wilayats in Al Batinah.

Illuminating the substantial role this branch plays in Bank Nizwa's overall expansions effort, Khalid al Kayed, the CEO of Bank Nizwa, stated, “The opening of our new branch in Saham signifies a momentous milestone for Bank Nizwa. Within Saham lies a strategically vital market that opens doors to abundant growth prospects.

This expansion aligns perfectly with our continuous commitment to extending our presence and offering exemplary Islamic banking solutions that are innovative and cater to the needs



of our valued customers across the Sultanate of Oman.”

Bank Nizwa leads the way in Islamic finance, setting itself apart with an unwavering commitment to delivering groundbreaking Sharia-compliant solutions tailored to the local market's distinctive needs.

In step with the evolving preferences of its customers, the branch will offer an extensive array of banking solutions, encompassing in-branch, online, and digital services.

Clients will gain access to a diverse portfolio of products and services thoughtfully tailored to cater to the specific requirements of individuals and businesses, incorporating specialised options for wealth management.

As Bank Nizwa extends its reach across the Sultanate of Oman, its unwavering dedication to its most prized asset — its people — remains steadfast. The new Saham branch proudly houses a team of exceptional Omani employees, boasting

remarkable qualifications, extensive training, and invaluable experience. With indispensable skills, knowledge, and an innate understanding of the local dynamics, these individuals stand poised to meet the diverse needs of the Saham community.

Embracing the forefront of technology, the branch seamlessly integrates digitalisation and innovation into its operations, guaranteeing optimal efficiency and convenience for its esteemed customers.

As the pioneer and leading full-fledged Islamic Bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa further solidifies its position in the Sultanate of Oman with the establishment of the Saham branch, fortifying its expansive network across the country.

Acknowledging the strategic significance of Al Batinah Governorate due to its coastal location on the Gulf of Oman and its substantial population, the bank has already set up branches in Sohar, Rustaq, and Barka.

OAB appoints new acting head of retail banking



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced that Khalid al Amri (pictured) has been appointed as Acting Head of Retail Banking. Al Amri was previously Head of Branch Banking with OAB, a position he had held since 2021.

As a seasoned professional, Al Amri's new role will see his responsibilities include overseeing the bank's retail banking strategy and ensuring the continued delivery of top-tier financial solutions and exceptional customer service, building on his years of experience leading OAB's branch network, retail SME, direct sales and branch support.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank said: “OAB continues its successful track record in appointing Omani talent in top leadership positions within the organisation.

As Khalid assumes his new position, I am confident that he will contribute to our ongoing achievements and strengthen our commitment to delivering innovative products and exceptional services to customers.

Enjoy distinctive luxury with the Lexus RX

MUSCAT: The Lexus RX stands out in its class with its attractive design, inspiring technology and fuel-efficient performance. The, fifth-generation RX has been completely reimagined to deliver greater style, comfort and performance with a choice of three powertrains, two of which are electrified.

The RX sports an attractive design with triple LED headlights which are sleeker, sharper and more horizontal and the body and spindle grilles merge at their boundaries to create a seamless expression symbolised by the sense of a solid mass, striving towards a new identity and originality.

Complementing the RX's distinctive design is a thrilling drive personality imbued by three powertrain options. A newly developed inline 4-cylinder, 2.4-litre turbocharged engine that produces 275 hp and 430 nm of torque is paired to a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

Meanwhile, the new hybrid-



electric system combines a 2.5-litre petrol engine and electric motor to produce a total of 247 hp, which is paired to an electronically-controlled continuously variable transmission (E-CVT) to provide a fuel consumption value of 20.7 km/L. A hybrid-electric system pairing a 2.4-litre turbocharged engine with an electric motor is also available, which provides a combined power of 366 hp mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

The interior of the RX offers

ample luggage space and five newly designed luxury seats with excellent legroom, including an 8-way adjustable powered driver seat. Drivers can also create an oasis with nature-inspired Thematic Ambient Illumination, an optional feature that bathes the RX interior in a choice of 14 themes.

Additional features include SmartAccess with a push-button start, a 21-speaker Mark Levinson Clari-Fi 2.0 sound system, and a panoramic roof with movable

outer sliding glass for the front section. The vehicle's inviting interior provides drivers and passengers with a host of advanced features for a refined cabin experience. These include a new 14-inch touchscreen multimedia system with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, a 7-inch colour multi-information display (MID), a colour head-up display (HUD), a wireless charging system for smartphones, six USB chargers, and one 12 Volt charger.

In addition, the 2023 RX offers

the Lexus Climate Concierge system with Triple Zone Independent Temperature Controls. In the Lexus RX, safety is a top priority for the all-new RX. Drivers can enjoy complete peace of mind, thanks to the Lexus Safety System+, an advanced safety and driver assistance system that includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS) together with new features such as Emergency Steering Assist, Acceleration Suppression at Low Speed and Intersection Collision Avoidance Assistance.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom.

There is no doubt that his leadership experience underscores his readiness to take on new responsibilities.”

Throughout his years of dedicated service, Al Amri has consistently demonstrated a deep understanding of the financial landscape and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

With 30 years of experience, in the fields of accounting and finance, investment, retail and wholesale/corporate banking businesses, he will add value to the bank's retail segment and contribute to the overall growth of the bank.

OAB's retail banking operations have been recognised with numerous awards and accolades, including winning Domestic Retail Bank of the Year — Oman at the prestigious Asian Banking & Finance (ABF) Retail Banking Awards 2023, where the bank also emerged victorious in the SME Payment Solutions of the Year — Oman category.



Omani RE veteran named CEO of new Wadi Noor Solar Power

Renewable power: JV set to commence construction of 500 MW Manah I Solar IPP

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

Newly launched Wadi Noor Solar Power Company (WNSPC), the joint venture undertaking the implementation of a new 500 MW solar PV based Independent Power Project (IPP) at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has named Eng Yahya al Rawahi (pictured) as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Also known as 'Manah I Solar IPP', the project is in the early stages of construction in the Wilayat of Manah – one of two identical solar PV schemes that will be built side by side to create Oman's biggest grid-connected renewable energy project with a combined capacity of 1,000 MW.

Prior to joining Manah-I, Eng Al Rawahi, a veteran of Oman's nascent renewable energy industry, had helmed a number of pioneering solar PV projects in the Sultanate of Oman, including the 100 MW Amin Renewable Energy project of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and more recently the 500 MW grid-connected solar project of Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company SAOC (SAGC) in Ibri.

"We're thrilled to share some fantastic news with all of you.



Today, we welcome Eng Yahya Al Rawahi as the new Chief Executive Officer at Wadi Noor Solar Power Company," said the JV in a post over the weekend. "Eng Yahya brings a wealth of experience and leadership to our organisation, with a proven track record in the solar industry. His arrival marks the beginning of

an exciting new chapter for our company," added.

In May this year, Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP), the national buyer of electricity and water output, signed agreements with Wadi Noor Solar for the development of Manah I Solar IPP with an investment of around \$460 million.

The partnership comprises EDF Renewables Middle East, the regional arm of leading international energy giant EDF Renewables, and Korea Western Power Co Ltd, a key player in South Korea's power sector.

Construction work on the

massive facility is expected to begin in earnest from December 1, 2023. When fully operational by March 2025, it will generate enough renewable electricity to power an estimated 75,000 homes, while also offsetting over 1,100,000 metric tonnes of CO2 per year.

A similar construction timeframe is also envisaged for Manah II Solar IPP, the identical twin of Manah I Solar IPP coming up alongside. The latter project is being developed by a consortium of Singapore's Sembcorp Industries Ltd and China-headquartered Jinko Power Technology Co Ltd.



OSW 2024 to spotlight future mobility in Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 3

The outlook for 'Future Mobility' in the Sultanate of Oman will be among a number of sustainability themes that will be showcased at the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW 2024), set to take place at Oman Convention & Exhibition Center from April 29 to May 1, 2024.

Organised by Connect with the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) as well as Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the 'Future Mobility' expo will focus on the theme, 'Sustainable Living in a Circular Society'.

"OSW Future Mobility is the newest event to be held as part of Oman Sustainability Week that aims to become Oman's most comprehensive future mobility platform, showcasing the latest concepts, solutions, technologies, and innovations in future clean mobility," said the organisers.

"From the rise of ride-sharing services to the development of autonomous vehicles, the way we get from point A to point B is evolving rapidly.

Technologies such as blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), 5G, and artificial intelligence (AI) are also playing a major role in the changing landscape of mobility," they further noted.

The event will build on a series of landmark initiatives announced by the Omani government in support of its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

MoTCIT has rolled out a programme of incentives and measures to help reduce carbon emissions in the transportation, communications, and information technology sectors, which together account for nearly 20 per cent of Oman's overall carbon emissions.

The ministry's phased strategy for achieving zero carbon neutrality is as follows: First stage — reducing emissions by three per cent by 2030; Second — reducing emissions by 34 per cent by 2040; and Third — reducing emissions by 100 percent by 2050.

Also as part of the first stage targets, at least 35% of all new light vehicles in Oman will be electric, rising to 65 per cent by 2040 and 100 per cent by 2050.

Canada's economy unexpectedly shrinks

OTTAWA: Canada's economy unexpectedly contracted in the second quarter at an annualised rate of 0.2% and growth was most likely flat in July, data showed on Friday, a result that will probably allow the central bank to hold rates amid a possible recession.

The second-quarter reading was far lower than the Bank of Canada's (BoC's) forecast for a 1.5% annualised GDP growth as well as the 1.2% gain expected by analysts. June gross domestic product declined 0.2% from May, in line with forecasts.

"The Canadian economy may already have fallen into a modest recession," said Stephen Brown, deputy chief North American economist for Capital Economics. The figures "leave little doubt that the Bank of Canada will keep interest rates unchanged next week," he said.

The quarterly slowdown was largely due to declines in housing investment and smaller



A man works at an auto shop in Ottawa. — Reuters

inventory accumulation as well as slower international exports and household spending, Statistics Canada said.

In June, Canadian wildfires adversely impacted multiple industries, including mining and quarrying and rail transportation. Friday's GDP report is the last major piece of domestic data before the BoC makes its next policy decision on Wednesday.

Thirty-one of 34 economists polled by Reuters between Aug. 24-30 expect no change to the central bank's overnight rate at the meeting. — Reuters

Meeting held to attract investment in transportation and logistics sectors

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Civil Aviation Authority, in cooperation with the National Programmer Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher) and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, organised yesterday in Muscat an introductory meeting for a number of companies and individuals working in the transport and logistics sectors, as a preparatory step for workshops and clinics to attract investment in transport and logistics, scheduled to be held next October.

Engineer Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, reviewed at the beginning of the meeting the



challenges facing the transport and logistics sectors, the proposed solutions for them, and new investment opportunities.

The meeting included a visual presentation on the current situation of the sector.

Logistics in the Sultanate of

Oman and investment projects in this sector, in addition to presenting indicators of the logistics sector to improve the position of the Sultanate of Oman, and investment opportunities in the ports and maritime affairs sector, the land transport sector,

logistics services, the air transport sector and the most important challenges facing these sectors.

It is noteworthy that the workshops and clinics to attract investment in transport and logistics seek to increase the proportion of investments in these two sectors, improve the attractiveness of the two sectors for Omani cadres, and improve the Sultanate of Oman's classification in the Logistics Performance Index.

During the investment attraction workshops, a number of government and private institutions will discuss the challenges of ongoing projects and frame new investment opportunities in cooperation with the Nazdaher team, in addition to working on the possibilities that achieve the desired goals of this meeting. — ONA

Shell to sell home energy business in UK, Germany to Octopus Energy

LONDON: Shell said it would sell its home energy business in the UK and Germany to British energy supplier Octopus Energy Group as part of a deal in which the two companies explore a partnership on EV charging.

Returns in the British energy retail sector have been under pressure over the past few years as companies have struggled with soaring wholesale costs and a cap on

prices they can charge customers imposed by regulator Ofgem.

"This agreement follows the announcement during our Capital Markets Day to divest our home energy retail business in Europe," said Shell Executive Vice-President Steve Hill. He said the company was focusing on projects and countries where it believed it could deliver the most value.



Octopus last year acquired rival Bulb, which was one of the largest energy suppliers to collapse in 2021 due to soaring wholesale gas and electricity prices.

"Shell Energy Retail customers should sit tight for now – the deal is expected to complete in the fourth quarter of 2023 following regulatory approval, and they will be contacted at that time," Octopus said in a statement.

Financial details of the deal were not immediately disclosed but sources have previously estimated the value of the deal at \$50-100 million. Shell and Octopus have also signed a memorandum of understanding to explore a potential international partnership over electric vehicles (EV) charging, including for Shell Recharge subscribers, Shell said.

— Reuters

Omani Insurance Industry: Opportunities and challenges (Part III)

Any construction company or contractor or small, medium enterprises (SMEs) requires surety bonds when a contractor bids or as a condition of contract awarded.

Most government clients or others have a similar requirement. Many private owners and entrepreneurs in our country approach banks only because banks are authorised to sell 'Performance Bonds'. On the other hand, surety bond products can be offered by both banks and insurance companies in most countries of the world.

A surety bond is a promise to be liable for the debt, default, or



MURTADHA M J IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

The writer is a successful entrepreneur & insurance expert

3) Payment Bond
4) Warranty Bond (also called a Maintenance Bond)

During my chairmanship of the Finance & Insurance Committee at OCCI during 2018-2022, we requested Capital Market Authority and Central Bank of Oman to consider authorising the Insurance industry to transact activities of selling surety bonds.

The market has yet to receive this permission.

NATURAL PERILS & COMMON PROTECTION

The nature of the topography and landscape of our country, with a lengthy seafront that is exposed to extreme weather events, contributes to an unbalance insurance portfolio that does

not easily appeal to international reinsurance players.

Consequently, the centralisation of reinsurance locally becomes key support to the local direct insurance companies.

Furthermore, with the government playing the role of both producer and consumer — across multiple sectors, notably Oil & Gas, Mining, Agriculture & Fisheries Wealth, Health, Tourism, Aviation & Maritime Transport, Logistics, Housing & Infrastructure, and so — its large portfolio of high-value assets and infrastructure must be suitably safeguarded against disasters.

A centralised reinsurance entity can play a part in mitigating the cost burden on the government

if these assets are damaged in any calamity. In the event, the proposed centralised reinsurance entity becomes the captive reinsurer for the nation — one buyer for reinsurance protection or retrocession protection, a feasibility study report shall be prepared accordingly.

Notable is a recommendation for the creation of a National Central Reinsurance Company (NCRC) as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative to support, among other objectives, premium retention, cash flow management and foreign currency inflows into the country.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Separately, the Health Committee at Oman Chamber

of Commerce & Industry has discussed in the First Committee Meeting the introduction of a classification system covering all private hospitals in Oman — a scheme that would allow for healthcare tariffs and prices to be structured based on their grades.

When it eventually comes into force, licensed insurers are required to run their healthcare insurance business professionally independent of their other insurance activities — a move that recognises healthcare insurance as the new dominant stream of the insurance industry.

The measure will also help attracting new players into the Insurance and healthcare sectors in Oman.

Opportunity Oman: Leather industry

Oman, a land known for its history and culture, has quietly transformed into a thriving economic hub on the Arabian Peninsula. Among its many promising sectors, the leather industry shines as a beacon of potential.

According to projections from Straits Research, the leather goods market is on track to reach an impressive \$720.8 billion by 2030, boasting a robust Compound Annual Growth Rate of 6.2%. Oman's rich heritage in leather craftsmanship positions it as a potential global leader in the leather industry.



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED AL BALUSHI

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leather products is increasing, with a growing preference for sustainable and ethically sourced materials. Oman's leather industry has the potential to tap into this trend by producing high-quality and eco-friendly leather products.

Investing in Oman's leather industry requires careful planning and research. However, with the country's abundance of raw materials, supportive government policies, skilled workforce, access to global markets, and growing demand for leather products, it presents a promising opportunity for investors looking to enter the industry. The leather industry has great potential in Oman due to its abundant availability of raw materials and a strategic location for export markets. To anchor the leather industry in Oman, here are some key initiatives that can be taken:

- Infrastructure development:** The government can invest in building infrastructure such as industrial parks, specialised tanneries, and processing facilities. This will provide a platform for the leather industry to thrive.
- Skill development:** The government can provide training programmes for local artisans and entrepreneurs to develop their skills in leather production. This will create more employment opportunities and foster entrepreneurship in the sector.
- Research and development:** The government can collaborate with research institutions to develop innovative technologies and techniques for leather production. This will improve the quality of leather and enhance the competitiveness of Oman's leather industry in the global market.

- Marketing and promotion:** The government can develop a marketing strategy to promote Oman's leather products to international markets. This can include participation in trade fairs and exhibitions, as well as online marketing campaigns.
- Quality assurance and certification:** The government can establish a certification system to ensure the quality and safety of Oman's leather products. This will increase consumer confidence in Oman's leather products and improve the reputation of the industry.
- Environmental sustainability:** The government can encourage sustainable practices in leather production, such as using eco-friendly tanning methods and minimising waste. This will improve the environmental impact of the industry and enhance Oman's reputation as a sustainable destination for leather production.
- Overall, these initiatives can help anchor Oman's leather industry by improving the quality of products, promoting them in international markets, and fostering a skilled workforce and sustainable practices.
- Al Bashayer Meat Co. SAOC can play a crucial role in anchoring the leather industry in Oman by engaging in the following activities:
- Supplying high-quality raw materials:** As a meat company,

- Al Bashayer Meat Co. SAOC can provide high-quality animal hides and skins as raw materials to the leather industry. By ensuring that the raw materials meet international standards, the company can help to improve the quality of leather products produced in Oman.
- Supporting research and development:** Al Bashayer Meat Co. SAOC can collaborate with research institutions and industry players to develop new and innovative technologies that can enhance the production processes and the quality of leather products.
- This could include researching and implementing new tanning methods, developing new leather finishing techniques, or finding ways to reduce the environmental impact of the industry.
- Investing in infrastructure:** The company can also invest in infrastructure that supports the leather industry, such as modern abattoirs and meat processing facilities that are equipped with state-of-the-art technology to reduce waste and improve the quality of hides and skins. This would help to ensure a steady supply of high-quality raw materials for the leather industry.
- Collaborating with local businesses:** Al Bashayer Meat Co. SAOC can collaborate with local leather manufacturers and other stakeholders in the industry to support the growth and development of the sector.

- This could include providing training and education programmes to help local businesses improve their processes and access new markets. By taking these steps, Al Bashayer Meat Co. SAOC can help to anchor the leather industry in Oman and contribute to the country's economic growth and development.
- The leather industry in Oman can anchor several downstream industries that can add value to the leather products and create more job opportunities.
- Here are some of the potential downstream industries that could be developed in Oman:
- Footwear Manufacturing:** Oman can establish a footwear manufacturing industry that utilises the leather produced in the country. This industry can produce a wide range of footwear, including shoes, boots, and sandals, for both domestic and export markets.
- Leather Goods Manufacturing:** Oman can establish a leather goods manufacturing industry that produces a wide range of leather products, including bags, belts, wallets, and other leather accessories.
- Garment Manufacturing:** Oman can establish a garment manufacturing industry that produces leather jackets, vests, pants, and other leather clothing items for the local and export markets.
- Automotive Industry:** Oman

- can develop an automotive industry that produces leather upholstery and trim for car interiors. This can include the production of leather seats, dashboard covers, and door panelling.
- Furniture Manufacturing:** Oman can establish a furniture manufacturing industry that produces leather sofas, chairs, and other furniture items for both domestic and export markets.
- Leather Chemicals Industry:** Oman can establish a leather chemicals industry that produces chemicals used in the tanning process. This industry can supply the local leather industry and also export its products to other countries.
- Leather Machinery Industry:** Oman can establish a leather machinery industry that produces machinery used in the leather production process.
- This industry can supply the local leather industry and also export its products to other countries.
- In conclusion, investing in Oman's leather industry is not just an opportunity; it's a visionary investment that aligns with global trends towards sustainability and quality.
- As Oman takes strides towards becoming a leather industry powerhouse, the time is ripe for investors and businesses to join this remarkable journey. It's not merely an investment; it's a legacy in the making.

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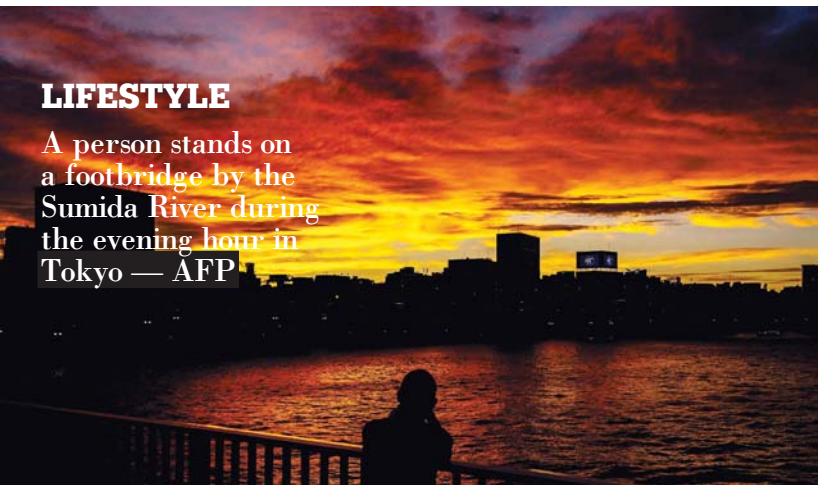
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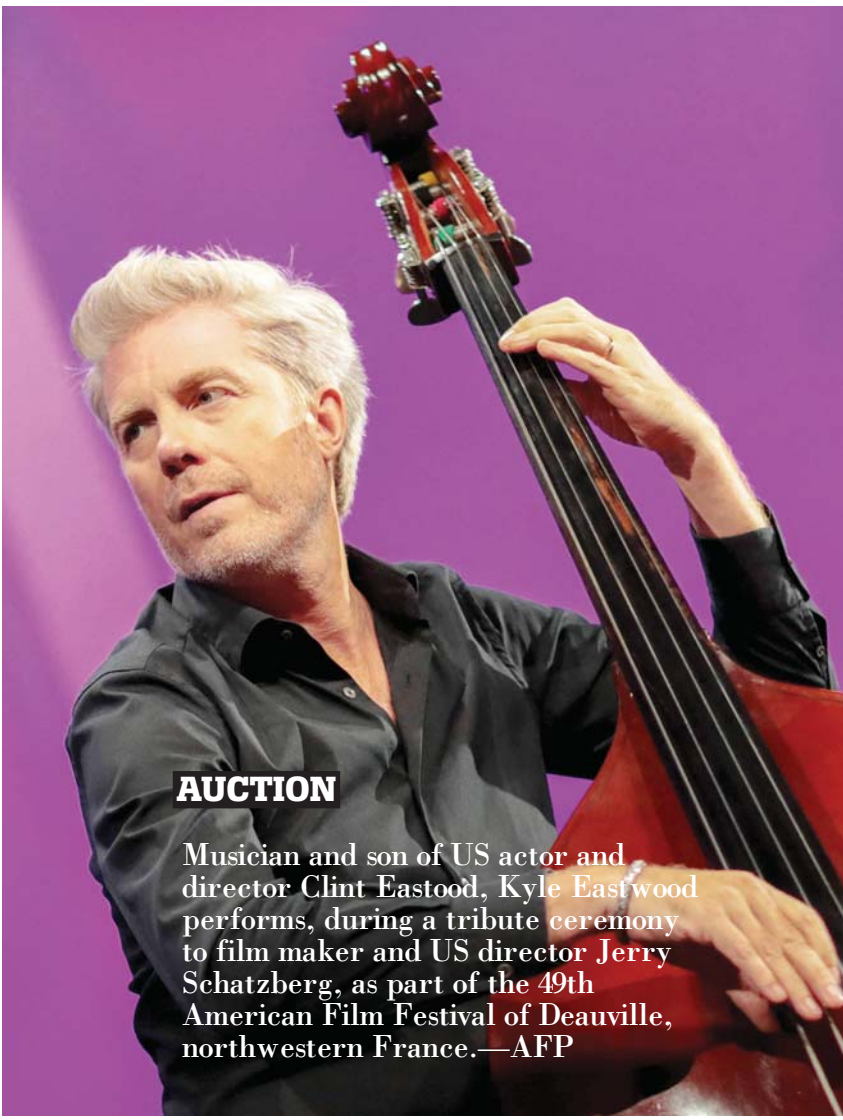
LIFESTYLE

A person stands on a footbridge by the Sumida River during the evening hour in Tokyo — AFP



FASHION

German actor Jan Bülou poses during the red carpet of the movie “Die Theorie Von Allem (The Theory Of Everything)” presented in competition at the 80th Venice Film Festival—AFP



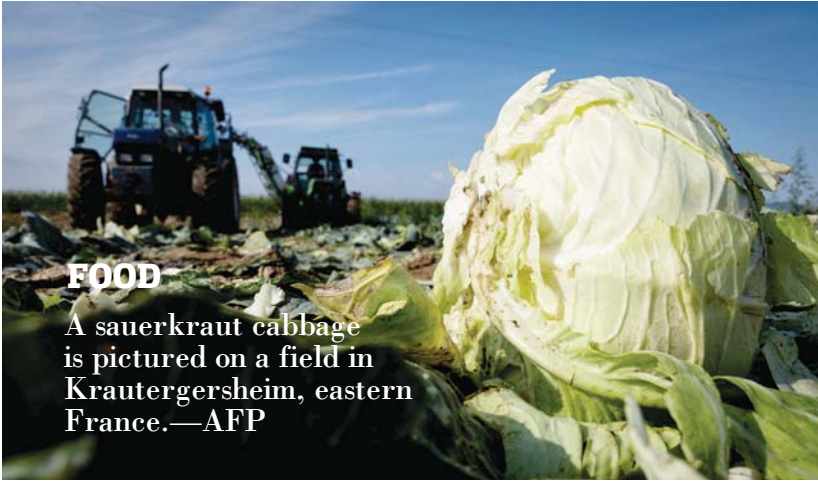
AUCTION

Musician and son of US actor and director Clint Eastwood, Kyle Eastwood performs, during a tribute ceremony to film maker and US director Jerry Schatzberg, as part of the 49th American Film Festival of Deauville, northwestern France.—AFP



CULTURE

Women wearing Dacian-era inspired outfits train archery at the “Romula Fest”, a historic reenactment festival in Resca village, Romania. —AFP



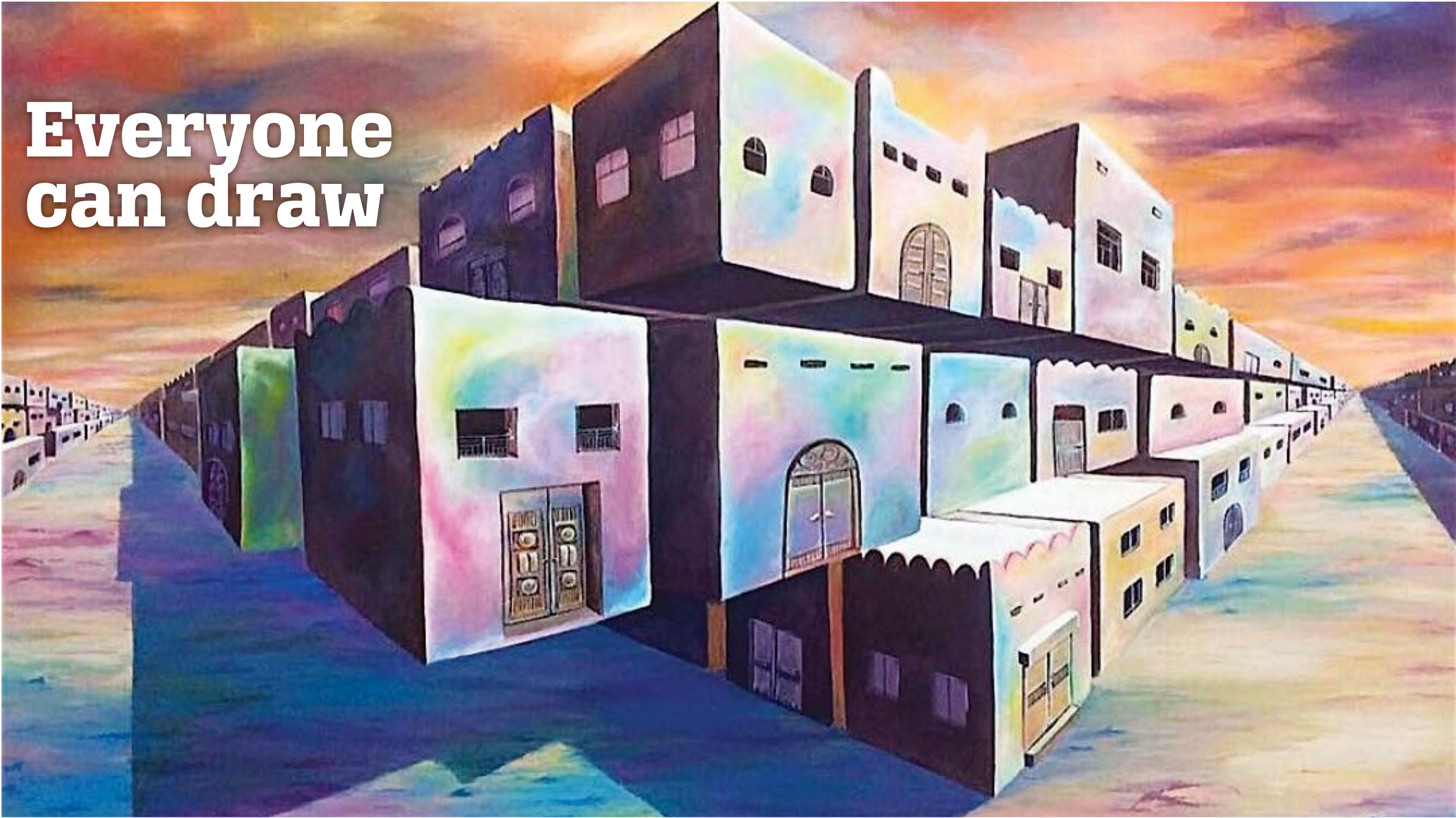
FOOD

A sauerkraut cabbage is pictured on a field in Krautergersheim, eastern France.—AFP

art & life

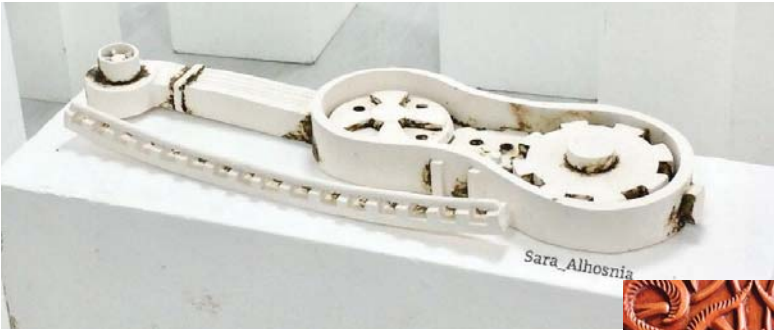
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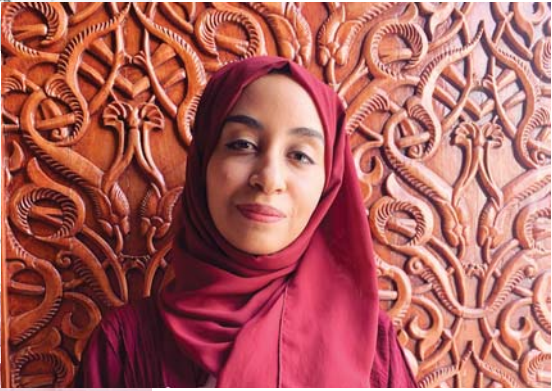
Lakshmi Kothaneth

As society is at its best when it appreciates art. It is ideal if the art students can start at a young age. As the new academic year begins in Oman, teachers have been preparing to plan the lessons for the students. Sara al Hosni, an art teacher, is all set to handle a confession that tends to come from students, “I am not good at drawing.” “For grade five, I always introduce them with the most common saying like “I don’t know how to draw” or “My drawing is not beautiful.” And change that point of view to a positive one, ‘seeing’ is what they need,” said Sara. “I see the talent that they carry from fourth grade and even earlier. And begin from where they have stopped, step by step, to reach a good level. Sara believes everyone can draw. “Yes, absolutely! I had tested



this before when I was in university. Everyone can draw. Each person can try their best to do something. It just depends on what level they are at,” she noted.

As a teacher, she is used to



facing children with mental blocks toward art, especially when they reach 5th grade. “They often tell me they cannot even draw a straight line. I tell them to draw; if you get it wrong, erase it and draw again. You can do that over and over again. Trying from

time to time brings in experience, and this helps. But stopping it where they left it is not going to develop anything or for that matter any skill further.

SO, IS IT FEAR?

“I always tell them not to start with negativity. That always stops a person’s path to reach a higher level. For example, if you are going to say, ‘no way I can do it,’ you don’t realise you can do it by practising,” she said. She describes her journey to discovering art as a beautiful career. “At age five, my family encouraged me to try pencils, paint and even sculpture. Teachers and even friends can encourage us. This encouragement helped me so much when I was younger. I chose it to be my career as an art teacher,” she explained. She quickly points out the benefits of making art part of your life. “I feel that it helps you move on to another feeling. If

stressed, confused or lost in deep thoughts, it could help you find a relief or a solution for that person who is looking forward to a better change,” Sarah suggested. The art teachers take the young ones to museums and art galleries to see the works of professional artists. “This is important because the ideas are not limited to Calais rooms alone. They can see what the future could be like, including modern art, so they can dream to reach a higher level in art. The art form she likes the most is realistic. “I always like to depict the sea, the clouds, etc., that captures the view. I love that very much. That is my favourite troupe of art form,” she reflected. She looks forward to a future where she can have her exhibition. “Surely it would have to feature the sea and nature,” she said while looking ahead to a bright for her and her students.

Instagram Top Picks



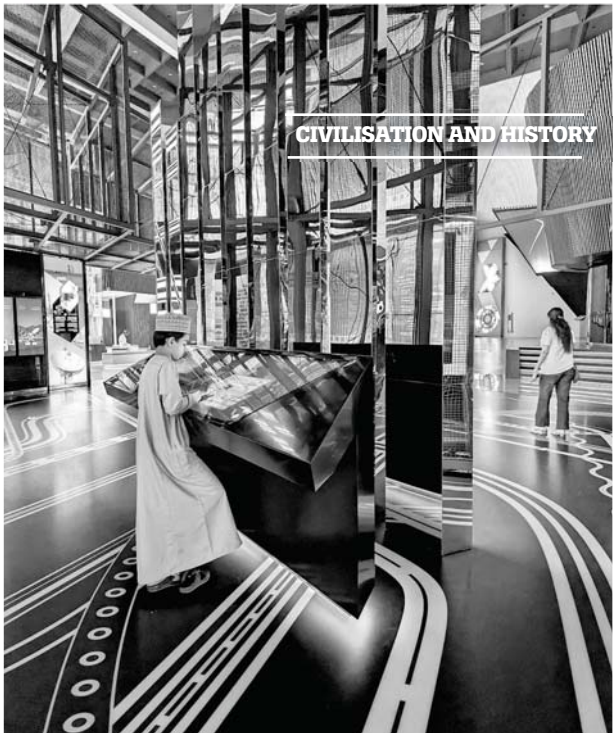
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Armani stages star-studded fashion spectacle in Venice





ITALIAN FASHION DESIGNER Giorgio Armani brought sparkle and stars to the canal city on Saturday with a "One Night Only" fashion show coinciding with the 80th Venice Film Festival. The 89-year-old designer put on a playful, cinema-inspired show for his celebrity guests. His Armani Prive collection was built around harlequin-patterned couture creations, often paired with ruffled collars. Dresses, tops, trousers and headpieces shimmered with sequins. Splashes of bright blues, greens and pinks were added to the largely black ensembles, with silhouettes skin-tight or floaty. The Venice Film Festival has lacked its usual star power this year with many Hollywood A-listers forced to shun the event because of the actors' strike. However, Armani, one of Italy's greatest postwar designers, had no problem filling the city's old armoury with glitz and glamour. Actors Jessica Chastain, Sophia Loren, Sydney Sweeney and Regé-Jean Page and filmmakers Ang Lee and Ava DuVernay were among the famous faces in the front row. Armani's "One Night Only" fashion spectacles have previously been held in cities including Tokyo, New York, London and Dubai" — **Reuters**





Make-up artist explains thinking behind Bradley Cooper nose

THE MAKE-UP ARTIST for Bradley Cooper's Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro" apologised on Saturday for offending people by giving the lead character a prosthetic nose, but said he only wanted authenticity. Bernstein, the son of Jewish immigrants to the United States, was a celebrated US conductor and composer, who wrote classical musical and hit musicals like "West Side Story". Cooper directed, produced co-wrote and stars in "Maestro", which received its premiere in Venice on Saturday. When the first trailer of the film surfaced last month, some critics complained that the nose pandered to Jewish stereotypes. Bernstein died in 1990 but his adult children have defended the make-up in the film, saying their father had had a "nice, big nose". Cooper is not in Venice to present his Netflix production because of a Hollywood actors' strike that prevents promotional work. But his make-up designer Kazu Hiro met the press and said he was surprised by the nose criticism. "I feel sorry that I hurt some people's feelings. My goal was, Bradley's goal was to portray Lenny as authentically as possible, and Lenny had an iconic look that everyone knows. There are so many pictures out there," he said. "We wanted to respect and love that look," he said. Hiro said it took two hours to fix the nose onto Cooper when he was portraying the younger Bernstein, but up to five hours as the character reached old age. Bernstein's daughter, Jamie, said that Cooper had involved the family closely in the development of the film, which focuses on the composer's relationship with his wife, played by British actor Carey Mulligan, and his bisexuality. "He chose to tell this very intimate story about our parents and to really include my brother, sister and me in his process. And really, we didn't expect that," Jamie Bernstein said. "We never dreamed that he would go to the lengths that he did to include us in his process and to go to these incredible lengths to maintain authenticity," she added. "Maestro" will play on Netflix from December 20. It is one of 23 movies competing for the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival, which runs until September 9. —**Reuters**

From art squat to Berlin gentrification lightning rod

BERLIN'S TACHELES ART squat, a symbol of the anything-goes vibe of the city after the fall of the Wall, is completing a disputed transformation into offices, shops and luxury flats. An outlet of the Fotografiska museum chain is set to open inside the hulking, battle-scarred edifice on September 14 and the first residents of newly built homes will move in this autumn. When it is completed, planned for the end of 2024, the complex will boast 265 apartments sized from 25 to 360 square metres (269 to 3,875 square feet) as well as new digs in the German capital for the likes of Netflix and Pfizer. Of the 176 apartments available for purchase — with prices per square metre ranging from 9,500 to 30,000 euros (\$10,300 to \$32,600) — around 45 are still for

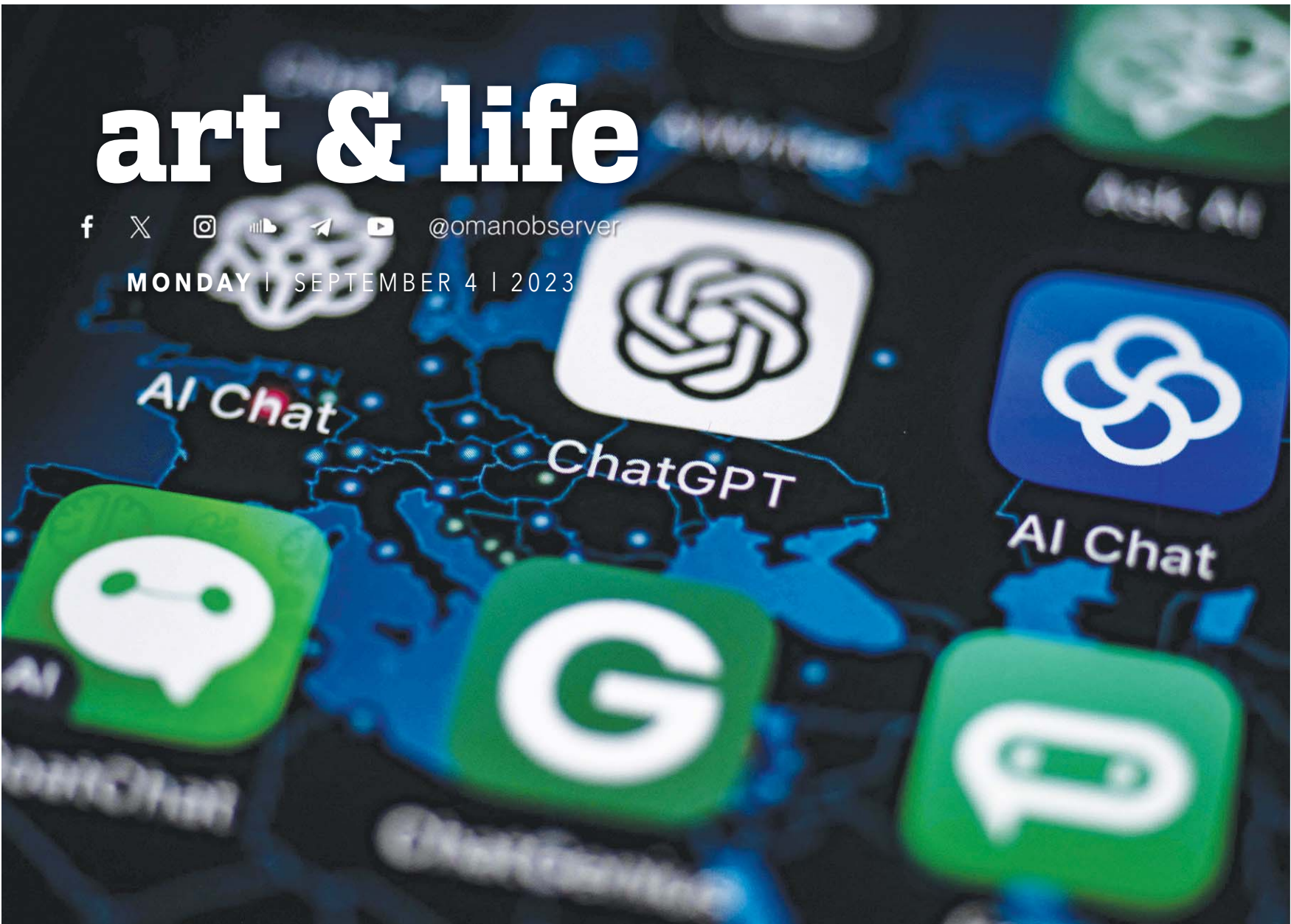


sale, according to developer PWR. The remaining 89 apartments are reserved for rental. Investment fund Perella Weinberg Real Estate bought the property encompassing 25,300 square metres in 2014 for 150 million euros — a steal in the current market. In addition to the historic build-

ing that will house Fotografiska Berlin, the site will include an ultra-modern open-air shopping plaza and glass-and-steel office compounds. Tacheles, which means "straight talk" in Yiddish, was a popular department store in the early part of the 20th century but suffered damage during World War II and was partially demolished by the East German communists. Young artists flocked to east Berlin after the fall of the Wall in 1989, drawn by the low cost of living, and squatted disused buildings including the dilapidated five-storey complex on Oranienburger Street. At its peak as a subculture mecca, the graffiti-covered Tacheles housed a cinema, restaurant and bar as well as art studios and galleries, drawing about 400,000 visitors a year. However in 2012, bailiffs and police evicted the artists to make way for construction work, signalling the end of an era. "Between 2010 and 2012, we were threatened, offered money to leave and had our electricity cut off," Bruno di Martino, a 56-year-old Frenchman who had his studio at the Tacheles since 2006, told AFP.

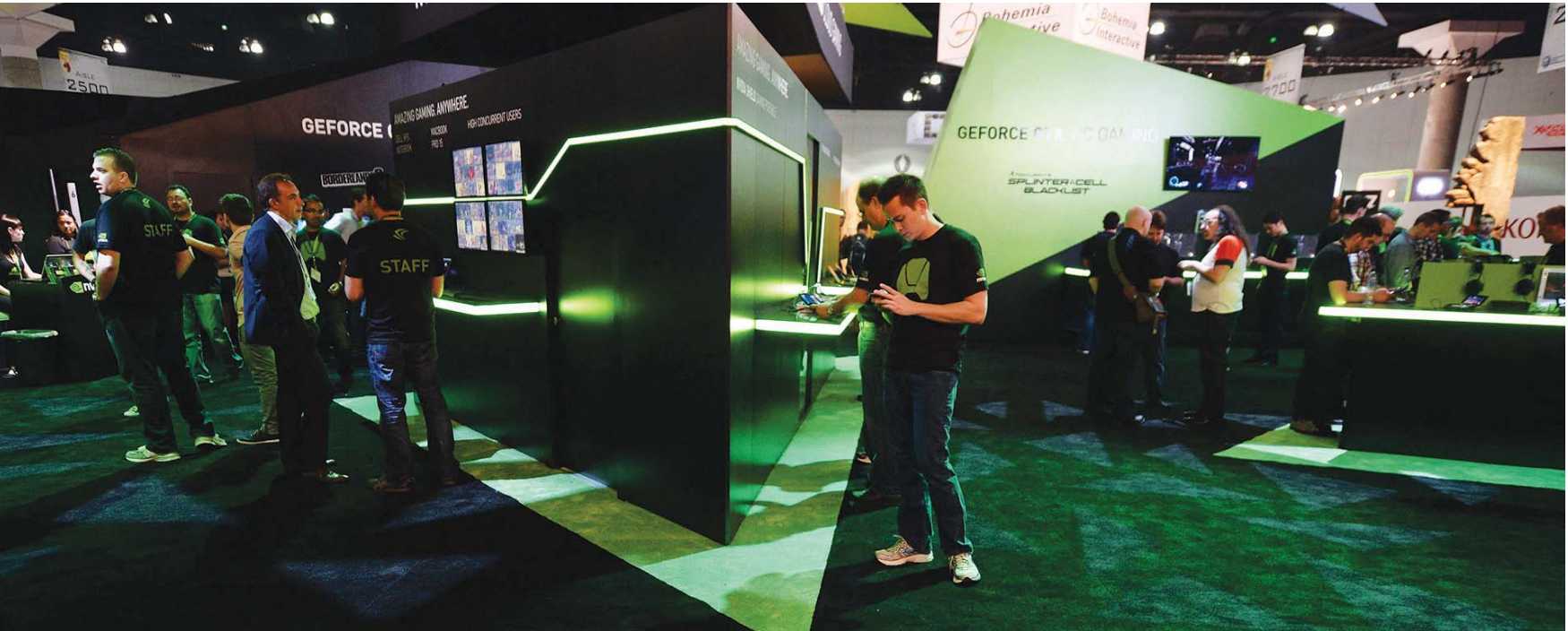
WAVES OF DISPLACEMENT "After the downfall of the communist regime in the former GDR in 1990, it was no longer clear who owned the buildings," said Hanno Hochmuth, historian at the Leibniz research centre in Potsdam. The chaotic conditions allowed for creative ferment, making the "new" Berlin a unique attraction with countless blank slates for development. "In East Berlin, many properties were returned to their former owners or their descendants, and this almost always resulted in resale to real estate speculators," Matthias Berni, an urban planner at the Leibniz centre, told AFP. Property prices soared, touching off waves of displacement from the heart of the city that have gathered pace in recent years. **'PLAYGROUND'** Bruno di Martino was among those impacted. When forced to leave Tacheles, he set up his studio in the Friedrichshain district on another disused site, RAW, previously owned by the German railways. For him, the new Tacheles complex is "a pure profit project aimed at the privileged few".

"Berlin used to attract tourists for its artists, its underground, its alternative side, but all that is in danger of disappearing," he said. There is a certain irony that the Fotografiska photography museum is moving into the building where art was once made. A top-to-bottom renovation has nevertheless retained some of their graffiti and artwork. "We think it's important to continue the spirit of the building," Fotografiska executive chairman Yoram Roth told AFP. "It was a creative hub. It inspired creativity." Born in West Berlin and a descendant of Holocaust survivors, Roth rejects criticism of the city's rampant real estate development. "There is this romantic view of what happened here after the Wall fell," he said. "People want to keep certain things for ever in a certain way. But I think it's also important to remember that whatever happened there was born out of serious tragedy," including two world wars and the Cold War. Roth said Berlin was calling time on the city as a "playground" of vacant lots and squatted property. "It's normal to expect this space to fill back in with something," —**AFP**



TECHNOLOGY

Tech's carbon footprint: can AI revolutionise responsibly?



ACROSS THE GLOBE, data servers are humming, consuming both megawatts and precious natural resources to bring life to our digital world. The planet's 8,000 or so data centres are the foundation of our online existence, and will grow ever further with the advent of artificial intelligence – so much so that research estimates that by 2025, the IT industry could use 20 per cent of all electricity produced, and emit up to 5.5 per cent of the world's carbon emissions. This poses a real – and to some, increasingly urgent – question about the industry's carbon footprint as startups and companies fall behind Silicon Valley's latest forward march. "Pandora's box is open," said Arun Iyengar, CEO of Untether AI, a highly specialised chip-making company that strives to make AI more energy efficient. "We can utilise AI in ways that enhance the climate requirements or we can ignore the climate requirements and find ourselves facing the consequences in a decade or so in terms of the impact." The transformation of the world's data servers to AI readiness is already well underway, in what one Google executive called a "once-in-a-generation inflection point in computing." But the scope of the mission is huge. The creation of generative AI tools such as GPT-4, which powers ChatGPT,

or Google's Palm2, behind the bot Bard, can be broken into two key stages, the actual "training" and then the execution (or "inference"). In 2019, University of Massachusetts Amherst researchers trained several large language models, and found that training a single AI model can emit the CO2 emission equivalent of five cars over their lifetimes. A more recent study by Google and the University of California, Berkeley, reported that training GPT-3 resulted in 552 metric tons of carbon emissions, equivalent to driving a passenger vehicle 1.24 million miles (2 million kilometers). OpenAI's latest generation model, GPT-4, is trained on around 570 times more parameters – or inputs – than GPT-3, and the scale of these systems will only grow as AI becomes more powerful and ubiquitous. Nvidia, AI's chip giant, provides the processors that are indispensable for training, known as GPUs. And while they are more energy efficient than typical chips, they remain formidable consumers of power. **THE CHATGPT 'PROBLEM'** The other side of generative AI is deployment, or inference: when the trained model is applied to identify objects, respond to text prompts or whatever the use case may be. Deployment doesn't necessarily need the computing heft of a Nvidia chip, but taken cumulatively, the end-

less interactions in the real world far outweigh training in terms of workload. "Inference is going to be even more of a problem now with ChatGPT, which can be used by anyone and integrated into daily life through apps and web searches," said Lynn Kaack, assistant professor of computer science at the Hertie School in Berlin. The biggest cloud companies insist that they are committed to being as energy efficient as possible. Amazon Web Services pledges to be carbon-neutral by 2040 while Microsoft has pledged to be carbon-negative by 2030. The latest evidence that the companies are serious about energy efficiency is reassuring. Between 2010 and 2018, global data centre energy use rose by only 6 per cent, despite a 550 per cent increase in workloads and computing instances, according to the International Energy Agency. **BACKWARDS' THINKING** Silicon Valley's AI tycoons believe discussions of AI's current carbon footprint are beside the point, and underplay its revolutionary potential. The naysayers have it "backwards," Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang told reporters on a recent visit to his company's headquarters in California. The mass deployment of AI and faster computing will in the end diminish the need to go to the world's data

clouds, he argued. AI's superpowers will turn your laptop, car or the device in your pocket into an energy-efficient supercomputer without the need to "retrieve" data from the cloud. "In the future, there'll be a little tiny model that sits on your phone and 90 per cent of the pixels will be generated, 10 per cent will be retrieved, instead of 100 per cent retrieved – and so you're going to save (energy)," he said. OpenAI's Sam Altman meanwhile believes that AI will soon enough be able to build humanity a completely new future. "I think once we have a really powerful super intelligence, addressing climate change will not be particularly difficult," Altman said recently. "This illustrates how big we should dream... Think about a system where you can say, 'Tell me how to make a lot of clean energy cheaply, tell me how to efficiently capture carbon, and tell me how to build a factory to do this at planetary scale.'" But some experts worry that the mad dash for AI has elbowed out fears about the planet, at least for now. "Large corporations are spending a lot of money right now deploying AI. I don't think they are thinking about the environmental impact yet," said Untether AI's Iyengar. But, he added: "I think that is coming." —AFP

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



Dr Zainab Al Ajmi

New academic year: A road map for a successful year

The start of a new academic year is a time for a fresh start and focus on the future. It is a chance to set new goals and learn new things. For students, they have the opportunity to begin anew, acquire knowledge, and form new relationships. Similarly, teachers can encounter new students share their insights, and impart their expertise. Adams & Haute (2016), state that "teachers should be proficient in three characteristics; namely, have positive expectations for student success; be extremely good classroom managers; and know how to design lessons for student mastery. What is done (or not done) in the first few days of school will have a major impact on how effective a teacher is during the entire school year. Planning for a successful beginning to the school year should begin days—even weeks—prior to the first day of school". As a student, Ahuja (HomeGuruWorld.com, 2022) picked a handful of tips to follow: "1. Figure out your learning style: If you are a learner who enjoys watching television shows and series, you might adapt to online classes quickly, whereas, if you are an avid reader, you might adapt to reading and clearing your concepts. Once you have analysed which method of study you follow, you have a starting point. 2. How do I spot my habits? Carefully examine your daily routine and identify the habits that are helping you and the habits that are holding you back. Make changes to the bad habits and track your progress over time. 3. Create realistic study plans: Make a solid schedule to follow and decide what your favourite school subjects are. Which is the strongest subject, and which one is the weakest? Make sure to also focus on non-academic subjects and learn to balance out the day. Apart from that, it's not enough to just study your favourite subject. You need to acquire a comprehensive knowledge base and cover the entire syllabus by giving enough attention and time to each subject. 4. Make it a habit to study the topic right after it's taught in school: There might be a time in your day when you feel utterly exhausted. Take a break from studying your current subject and come back to it later. In the meantime, you can study a different subject or take a break, eat, or do something else. 5. Updated timetable: Just like a planned itinerary for a tour, plan your day, and divide it in such a manner that you will have ample time to study and do other activities. 6. Set self-improvement rules: Wake up on time, have a balanced diet, maintain hygiene, and exercise your body. 7. Students work hard but often fail to execute their plans. There are several distractions: TV sets, mobiles, tablets, video games, and much more. Use devices wisely and remember that overuse of any gadget might be a waste of time and energy". In sum, regardless of the role of each party in the educational process, the new academic year is a time of new challenges and opportunities. It is a chance to make a difference in the lives of others and help them reach their full potential. All the perseverance will pay off when teachers view their outcomes and feel satisfaction with their work. Likewise, students who make the most of their academic journey emerge from the year feeling accomplished and grown as individuals.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

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