

AIRPORT TAXI FARES SLASHED BY 45%

Muscat - The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has announced a 45% reduction in airport taxi fares when booked through its licensed apps - Otaxi or Oman Taxi.

Previously, the base fare was RO3 with an additional 400bz charged for every kilometre. The new base fare for airport taxis is RO1.5 with an additional 250bz/km.

MTCIT has approved licences for two companies to oversee taxi services at Oman's airports, effective from October 1.

03



RO30mn Nizwa Hospital expansion opens

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Shakespeare in Malayalam at Qurum Natural Park on Oct 27

GCC prioritises unified tourist visa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The seventh meeting of the undersecretaries of the ministries of tourism in GCC states began at Oman Across Ages Museum in Dakhliyah on Wednesday.

Topping the agenda were discussions on the Gulf Tourism Strategy, the prospect of a unified Gulf tourist visa and development of a Gulf tourism platform.

Dr Ali Foulad, advisor to Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority, said, "A unified Gulf tourist visa will enhance tourism cohesion among Gulf Council countries, drawing tourists from across the globe."

In his address, H E Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidi, Oman's Undersecretary for Tourism, emphasised the meeting's importance in harnessing the opportunities in the GCC countries. He recapped the outcomes of the sixth meeting in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia in 2022. "Gulf co-operation showcases the natural and cultural abundance of our tourist destinations," he noted, urging joint programmes and events to elevate the region's tourism sector.

H E Busaidi stressed the need for actionable plans to realise the shared vision of the Arabian Gulf as a globally competitive tourist destination. He pointed to the sector's potential in offering vast employment opportunities and boosting economic growth. "Tourist establishments, and cultural, natural and heritage sites should be en-



Actionable plans are needed to realise the shared vision of the Arabian Gulf as a globally competitive tourist destination

H E AZZAN AL BUSAIDI

hanced to offer promising tourism experiences."

He also shared Oman's hope for the wilayat of Sur to be nominated Capital of Arab Tourism for 2024. Known for its rich history and diverse tourist attractions, Sur holds significance in the broader Gulf Tourism Strategy.

Khalid bin Ali al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Development Affairs in the GCC Secretariat General, informed about a notable growth in the travel and tourism sector - a 57.5% in-

crease in its contribution to the GCC's GDP in 2022 compared to 2021.

Based on various performance metrics in tourism, GCC countries stand at the pinnacle, outpacing 117 nations globally, he added.

Sunaidi referenced the Gulf Tourism Strategy (2023-2030) approved in the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council, showcasing the region's ambitious goals.

The Tourism Statistics Platform recorded 224 tourism events and identified over 837 tourist sites across GCC countries this year, Sunaidi informed.

Oman among best performing tourist destinations globally

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman was among the top 20 best performing destinations in the world for tourist arrivals between January and July 2023, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

The sultanate ranked 18th in the world (% change vs 2019) for the first seven months of 2023. Oman's percentage

jump was 14% for this period.

Qatar (+95%) was the best-performing destination globally in UNWTO's World Tourism Barometer, which tracked the sector's post-pandemic recovery over the course of 2023 up to the end of July.

"According to data from UNWTO, Oman is among the best performing countries in terms of the number of tourists during the first half of this year. Existing and upcoming promotion plans promise record results," H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, tweeted.

'International tourism has continued to recover from the worst crisis in its history as arrival numbers reached 84% of

pre-pandemic levels between January and July 2023,' UNWTO stated. The Middle East, Europe and Africa lead the sector's rebound globally.

All world regions enjoyed strong tourism recovery in the first seven months of 2023, driven by demand for international travel from several large source markets.

The Middle East reported the best results in the January-July 2023 period, with arrivals 20% above pre-pandemic levels. 'The region continues to be the only to exceed 2019 levels so far.'

Tourist arrivals in Oman surpassed the pre-COVID-19 pandemic level of 2.5mn in 2019 to 2.9mn in 2022.

A report issued by international firm BMI, a Fitch Solutions Company, has indicated that from January to May 2023, Oman reported 1,548,630 visitors, a surge of 95.1% compared to the same period last year.



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35km submarine cable to connect Masirah to main network: OETC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) is preparing to connect the wilayat of Masirah to the company's main interconnected system (MIS) with a 132kV voltage line through a 35km submarine cable and 60km of overhead power transmission lines.

The connection will extend from the Mahout substation to Masirah substation. The consultancy contract for this project was awarded to an experienced firm in December 2022.

The route of the transmission line and submarine cable path have been approved by all concerned parties, and a tender to



(Supplied photo)

implement the project has been awarded to start work in 2024.

Hisham bin Abdullah al Riyami, Director General of Department of Planning and Design at OETC, emphasised the strategic significance of the project and its potential to enhance power supply on Masirah Island.

He informed that it will improve various services on the island. "OETC strives to meet the

growing energy demand across different sectors and locations in Oman. We are committed to contributing to the development and progress in various fields in the country. This project will support all local activities and services on Masirah Island, improve the electricity infrastructure and provide sustainable solutions to meet sectoral needs."

The project aims to reduce reliance on diesel-based power generation, curb carbon emissions and meet the energy demands of Masirah Island while also facilitating the integration of renewable energy sources.

"The company is keen to play its role in accelerating development in various fields in the sultanate," Riyami added.

Phase 1 of Al Naseem in Barka complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has announced completion of the first phase of the Al Naseem project in Barka, part of the Sorouh initiative in South Batinah.

Spread over 350,000sqm, the Al Naseem project is poised to be a notable addition to the region.

Wissama Nasser al Harbi, Director of Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods Department - Sorouh - at MHUP, informed that 10% of Al Naseem's first phase has been sold out and title deeds of ten properties transferred to owners. "With 220 housing units in this phase, Al Naseem is a cornerstone of the Sorouh initiative and will eventually offer over 1,000 units across its five phases."

Earlier in the year, MHUP announced two ambitious Sorouh projects in Muscat and South Batinah costing more than RO160mn.

The first, a comprehensive neighbourhood in Amerat covering 445,823sqm with 1,050 housing units with an investment of RO60mn to be developed in seven years in three stages.

The second, located in Halban in South Batinah, spread over 637,044sqm having 1,350 housing units with an investment of RO100mn scheduled for completion in four stages over eight years.

Both projects will showcase a blend of housing styles, including villas and apartments, and feature mosques, commercial spaces, lush green areas, essential infrastructure and amenities.

Forum recommends adopting national ICV strategy

Muscat - The Oman In-Country Value Forum was held in Muscat on Wednesday under the slogan 'Productivity and Mechanisms of Achieving Balance'.

The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The forum explored ways of establishing new foundations for in-country value (ICV) programmes and specifying determinants in an effort to achieve maximum benefit in various development fields.

The forum, organised by Al Roya newspaper, highlighted the experiences of various enterprises and companies with ICV.



(Supplied photo)

The National Platform for Business Accelerators 2023 was launched at forum. The platform will facilitate partnerships between large enterprises, with promising investments in the ICV sector, and small and medium enterprises for provision of services.

At the end of the deliberations, the forum recommended adopting a national strategy for ICV and establishment of a national authority that regulates and activates ICV programmes, as well as takes necessary steps to support competitiveness.

Additionally, the forum suggested private and public companies set up ICV departments which should shoulder the responsibility of implementing plans and programmes to boost the contribution of ICV to company results.

Forum kicks off in Dhofar to support disabled people

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Special Olympics Oman in Dhofar Governorate opened a two-day forum dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities on Wednesday.

The event is taking place at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

Aisha Omar, Chair of the forum's Organising Committee, emphasised that Oman deeply values and supports people with disabilities, ensuring they receive adequate care, support and rehabilitation.

"The sultanate has established numerous specialised centres and associations for their education and rehabilitation. Moreover, it has framed laws, signed agreements and initiated programmes with the objective of integrating them into the wider community."

She further highlighted the Ministry of Social Development's commitment by offering various care programmes and services. The Vocational Evaluation and Rehabilitation Centre is one such initiative that empowers individuals with disabilities to lead their lives independently.

By the end of 2019, the centre had 79 individuals enrolled. Similarly, the Aman Rehabilitation



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AISHA OMAR

Centre provides an array of services from health and rehabilitation to psychological support, she added. As of 2019, 523 children up to 15 years old, both boys and girls, were enrolled in this centre.

The inaugural day of the forum

featured a dialogue session, two fine and vocational arts workshops led by experts, a visual presentation on mental disability, and an exhibition featuring artworks created by people with disabilities.

Recall

Recall Date: 5.10.2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
BMW G70	2022-2023	56

Recall consequence

The wiper system may fail. In the event of precipitation, it is then no longer possible to continue driving.

Recall Action

Verify the windscreen wiper system console and replace it if necessary.

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Omani citizens safe in Bangkok: Embassy

Muscat - The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Bangkok has confirmed the safety of all Omani citizens after a shooting incident that took place in a commercial centre on Tuesday.

"The embassy followed up on the shooting incident that occurred in a commercial centre in Bangkok on Tuesday evening. The shooting resulted in the death of two victims and injury to others before the perpetrator was arrested. The embassy would like to confirm the safety of Omani citizens after communicating with the competent authorities," a statement said.

Authorities in Thailand charged a 14-year-old boy with premeditated murder and illegal possession of a firearm after the shooting spree. The suspect had suffered a psychological breakdown in the run-up to the shooting, police said. A court turned down a police request to detain him at a mental health facility and ordered him into juvenile detention instead.

RO30mn Nizwa Hospital expansion boosts healthcare in Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Nizwa

The Ministry of Health unveiled the Nizwa Hospital expansion on Wednesday. The RO30mn investment significantly enhances healthcare services in Dakhliyah governorate.

The expansion, spread across eight buildings and spanning 45,135sqm, bolsters the hospital's bed count by 245, raising the total to 555.

Overseen by Royal Court Affairs, the expansion is in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and is a testament to the government's commitment to decentralise healthcare and ensure citizens across governorates receive the necessary services. It will meet demand for specialised healthcare in Dakhliyah and its neighbouring regions.

H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, inaugurated the enhanced facilities in a ceremony that was attended by H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and several high-ranking officials.

Dr Ali Zayid al Busaidi, Director of Nizwa Hospital, highlighted the state-of-the-art additions, including cardiac catheterisation, cardiac care, neonatal intensive care, adult ICU, endoscopy, a day care unit, an expanded Emergency Department and several outpatient clinics.

A notable highlight is the upgradation of the radiology department with an MRI unit, bone-density testing and emergency CT scans. Additionally, the hospital now has a comprehensive centre for training and research.

According to Dr Busaidi, the tangible benefits of this expansion are already evident, considering waiting time for outpatient clinics and surgeries has reduced.

"This expanded capacity will benefit not just Dakhliyah but



The tangible benefits of this expansion are already evident, considering waiting time for outpatient clinics and surgeries has reduced

DR ALI ZAYID AL BUSAIDI

also neighbouring areas like Al Wusta, North Sharqiyah and Dhahirah."

Details of the expansion were presented during a tour of the new facilities by Yousif Yaqoob Ambo Ali from Royal Court Affairs, including additional beds in various wards, such as internal medicine, maternity, male surgery, cardiac intensive care and neonatal ICU. Further, 67

more beds have been allocated to specialised units such as the Emergency Department, delivery room and outpatient clinics.

A subsequent phase of expansion promises further enhancements such as more beds for the Emergency Department, pediatric emergency facilities and expansion of the laboratory, sterilisation unit and blood bank.

Major projects slated for N Sharqiyah in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

North Sharqiyah governorate has announced a slew of development projects set to commence in 2024 in an effort to invigorate the economy and offer enhanced recreational facilities.

According to an official, the governorate will float tenders for numerous projects, including Sharqiyah Park, Arbaa Market renovation, Bidiyah Entertainment Centre, Al Khaldiya Park in Wadi Bani Khalid and Al Ghubrah Park in Dima Wa al Taien. Additionally, several walkways are in the pipeline.

These projects align with the Governorate Development Programme, which has got the attention and support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The official informed that a delegation from the Ministry of Economy recently visited the governorate. Headed by Dr Nasser Rashid al Ma'awali, Undersecretary, the delegation re-



viewed various projects in the governorate, including a sports stadium in Ibra and lake project in Wadi Bani Khalid.

Ma'awali informed that 606 projects have been undertaken in Governorate Development Programme to date. Projects across all governorates saw full completion in 2021, while those slated for 2022/2023 are 70% complete.

He indicated plans for more projects in 2024, including the Al

Maward Market in Sinaw and a new building for the College of Engineering and Technology at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibra.

In a significant boost to development efforts, His Majesty the Sultan has doubled the funds allocated to the Governorate Development Programme, raising the sum from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate in the ongoing Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

New EA initiative to plant 12,000 wild trees in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Environment Authority (EA) has unveiled a new campaign to meet its ambitious goal of planting 10mn indigenous trees across Oman in a ten-year period that started in 2020.

This October, 12,000 wild trees will be planted in Dhofar at locations identified in Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat and Rakhyut.

Called 'We Plant it to Grow with You', the campaign furthers the nation's environmental efforts.

Elaborating on the campaign, an EA official said, "In collaboration with Al Irfan Centre for Community Services, we'll plant saplings as part of our pledge towards the broader national objective of planting 10mn wild trees across diverse Omani terrains."

He emphasised the campaign's significance and said it is rooted in the successes of prior tree-planting endeavours. "It not



only consolidates partnership between the authority and other national sectors but also underscores their shared commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable growth."

Highlighting the environmental impact of tree plantation, the official stated that an acre of forest, roughly the equivalent of a football field, curtails carbon dioxide emissions by 2.5 tonnes annually.

Hajj registration dates announced

Muscat - The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) has announced that those wishing to perform hajj in the 1445 AH season can register, starting from October 23 to November 5, through the electronic platform for pilgrims.

MERA informed that registration can be done through www.hajj.om directly during the specified period.

This year, 14,000 had registered for the pilgrimage, of which 99.7% or 13,956 individuals performed the hajj rites. Forty-four people could not perform hajj due to various reasons.

A survey on the quality of hajj services offered by Omani companies found that 93% of respondents rated the Mina camp services favourably. Scores were similarly high for accommodation (94%), food (97%) and hygiene and cleanliness (94%).

The survey results also revealed areas needing improvement, including the number and cleanliness of toilet facilities in the Mina and Arafat camps.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Announcement of public Auction No. (31 /2023)

Muscat Municipality, represented by the auction the establishment of a public auction for the sale A variety of different vehicles (Light& Heavy vehicles - motorcycles) according to the following details:

Interested individuals for this Auction must comply with the conditions set out here under:

- Those wishing to enter the auction must pay a fee and its amount (=4 OMR) (four Omani rials) which are not refundable, as A temporary deposit (refundable) is required to pay an amount of (500 OMR) (five hundred Omani rials) as fees to participate in the auction , as it required to pay it electronically to the collector of the committee in the directors the general directorate of public affairs administration & financial affairs at municipal presidency building darsait.
- The person who wins the action obligated to pay the full price of the **vehicles** if they were awarded to him plus 5% value added tax, and the action fees by (=3%OMR) of the total of **vehicles** through electronic payment.
- vehicles** are sold in their current condition , and the Muscat municipality is not responsible for the loss or damage of part of it once its value is paid its value does not bear any obligation with respect to **vehicles** in the event that the description of any displayed commodity does not match. It also does not guarantee the validity of the **vehicles** offered for sale or the safety of their technical condition those wishing to participate in the bidding will inspect the **vehicles** on the specified days therefore .
- the **vehicles** sold are not returned or reduced in value , and any petition submitted in this regard will not be accepted.
- the buyer is obligated to transfer , and load the **vehicles** that have been awarded to him after paying their full value within a period not exceeding one week from the date of purchase , and he bears full responsibility for the movables that were not transported within the specified period , and in the event that they are not transferred within the specified period , the municipality may resell the sale at its own expenses .

The date and location set for inspecting the movables and awarding the bid are specified as follows:

Location	Al-wadi Al-Kabir Department of transportation in the wilayat Muttrah
the Date/ Time of the inspection	From 08/10/2023 to 09/10/2023 From 08: 00 AM to 12:00- 00PM
The date for the submitting the participation	From 08/10/2023 to 09/10/2023
A site for submission participation fees	Head office in darsite at the committee loader at the general directorate of public affairs Administrative & financial
Auction date	12/10/2023 at seven o'clock in the morning (meet the day to extend)
For inquires and coordination	Please contact the specialist of the committee member at (98070900)
Other terms	- The VAT specified in the law will be applied to successful bidder. - It is not allowed to enter the auction arena until after showing the receipt of the subscription fee and amount of insurance. - Muscat Municipality may cancel or defer the sale without providing any justification. - The security deposit will not be refunded in cases;- 1. If he does not pay the value of the movables. 2. If he does not transfer the movables from the site within the specified period.



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*Rates as on October 04

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UK invests \$4bn in submarine project

Britain has signed contracts worth 4bn pounds (\$4.8bn) to finance a new phase of the SSN-AUKUS next-generation attack submarine project, according to government officials.

The deals, which involve British companies BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce and Babcock, are part of the AUKUS military alliance between the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom to counter China in the Asia-Pacific region.

AUKUS leaders unveiled the joint submarine project last March in a deal that will see Australia replace its diesel-powered submarines with nuclear-powered ones that have far greater stealth and range. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak praised it as "the most important multilateral defence agreement for generations".

Oman's condensate production rises 7.4% as oil output declines

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As Oman continues to adhere to its OPEC+ commitments on oil production, the sultanate has increased its condensate output in 2023. Condensate production is exempt from the obligations of the OPEC+ agreement.

Total condensate production during the January-August period of 2023 rose by 7.4% to 56.3mn barrels compared to 52.4mn barrels recorded in the same period in 2022, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Condensate is a mixture of light liquid hydrocarbons typically separated from a natural gas stream at the point of production. An OPEC+ agreement allowed non-OPEC oil producers to exclude condensate output from their production quotas, enabling countries like Oman to increase their condensate production.

S&P Global Ratings, which upgraded Oman's sovereign credit rating to 'BB+' on Friday, expects that OPEC+ related oil production cuts will slow Oman's economic growth to approximately 1% in 2023.

'Oman is a voluntary adherent

to the OPEC+ agreement. We expect hydrocarbon sector output to remain relatively stable, with the decline in oil production mitigated by an increase in condensate and gas production. We forecast the non-hydrocarbon economy to grow by about 2%. A likely increase in hydrocarbon

Crude oil production decreased by 2.5% to 199.5mn barrels in first eight months of 2023 compared to 204.6mn barrels in same period last year

production should spur growth in 2024 and 2025,' S&P said.

Oman's crude oil production decreased by 2.5% to 199.5mn barrels in the first eight months of 2023 compared to 204.6mn barrels in the same period last year, as indicated by NCSI data.

The sultanate's daily average oil production (crude oil and condensates combined) decreased by 0.5% to 1.052mn barrels per day (bpd) in the January-August period of this year, down from 1.058mn bpd in the first eight months of 2022.

Daily average oil output in August reached 1.041mn bpd, com-



pared to 1.038mn bpd recorded in July.

Oil exports drop
Oman's oil exports saw a 5%

year-on-year decline in the first eight months of 2023, primarily due to a significant drop in shipments to India.

The sultanate exported a total

of 205mn barrels of oil in the first eight months of 2023, compared to 215.7mn barrels in the corresponding period last year, according to NCSI data.

Oman's crude exports to India plummeted by more than 90% to just 2.7mn barrels in the first eight months of this year, down from 29.9mn barrels in the corresponding period of 2022.

India's crude oil imports from traditional Middle Eastern suppliers significantly declined this year, largely due to increased imports of Russian oil.

However, the sultanate's exports to China, the largest buyer of Oman crude, increased by 11.8% to 186.2mn barrels in the first eight months of 2023, up from 166.5mn in the same period last year. As the single largest buyer of Oman's crude, China accounted for more than 90% of total oil shipments from January to August 2023.

Shipments to South Korea and Japan witnessed sharp declines of 78% and 12.2% this year, respectively.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first eight months of 2023 was 16.3% lower at \$79.8 per barrel compared with \$95.3 per barrel in the same period of 2022.

On Wednesday, the Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange decreased by 0.3% to \$90.68 per barrel (for December delivery).

Bank Muscat hosts media for inside look at contact centre

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Targeting more than two million customers, Bank Muscat's contact centre continues to achieve success in providing a full range of banking services and facilities as an essential communication channel with its customers.

Based on its customer-centric strategy, Bank Muscat's contact centre has become one of the largest and most important centres in Oman's banking sector, overseen by a specialised and highly efficient Omani team. It operates seven days a week, year-round.

In celebration of Global Customer Experience Day, Bank Muscat organised a media visit on Wednesday for media representatives to visit the bank's contact centre located in Ruwi, Muscat.

Attendees had the opportunity to explore the centre's various sections and operations, learning about the services offered by the bank to its customers. The visit included a presentation showcasing the



quality of banking services, facilities available to all customers, and the most significant achievements of the contact centre in recent years.

During the visit, journalists engaged with the centre's staff and held discussions about the centre's operational processes.

The Bank Muscat contact centre employs 160 staff members and offers an automated answering service through its dynamic and intelligent IVR systems. It manages approximately 8.24mn calls, alerts, and mentions annually in Arabic, English, and Hindi languages. Additionally, the centre's team manages 12 social media accounts affiliated with the bank on various so-

cial networking sites, aiming to familiarise customers with Bank Muscat's services and products.

On this occasion, Talal Abdul Hameed al Zadjali, deputy general manager-operations at Bank Muscat, said, "The contact centre serves as a vital link between the bank and its valued customers, accessible 24/7. With minimal waiting times, Bank Muscat's contact centre is one of the most crucial contact centres in Oman's banking sector. We take pride in its achievements in providing top-notch services and facilities. The bank will continue to enhance the contact centre's role by attracting talent and equipping it with state-of-the-art technologies."

The contact centre's services are of utmost importance due to the frequent frauds occurring worldwide in various and evolving forms, aiming to exploit individuals for financial gains. The fraud control team at the contact centre remains vigilant for suspicious operations, equipped to detect fraudulent transactions. It closely monitors and safeguards transactions involving individuals and merchants at points of sale.

The centre also handles reports of lost cards and other urgent matters, especially during holidays and vacations, allowing cards to be blocked in case of loss or theft. This service can be accessed through the centre and Bank Muscat's digital channels.

OPEC chief says global energy demand to rise 25% by 2045

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Global demand for all forms of energy is forecast to rise by 25% through 2045, according to Haitham al Ghaiss, Secretary-General of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

"By 2045, the world's energy demand is expected to increase by 25% from current levels, as the global population is projected to grow by approximately 1.6bn people. This indicates that the world will need more energy in the future," Ghaiss told the Emirates News Agency (WAM) on the sidelines of the ADIPEC 2023 conference in Abu Dhabi.

Ghaiss added, "No single energy source can meet the world's growing needs as the economy expands and the population increases. That's why OPEC supports investment in both oil and renewable energy."

"OPEC will have a dedicated pavilion at the upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), for the first time, to showcase its work, plans, and support for the transition to a clean energy system and reducing carbon emissions."



Haitham al Ghaiss

"Despite some setbacks, global growth continues, and we're optimistic about future oil demand. The global economy is going through different stages, and OPEC will release updated demand forecasts next week," he continued.

"OPEC is committed to both providing the world with energy and investing in both oil and renewable energy."

Ghaiss emphasised that several leading countries, notably the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and several African nations, have successfully used technology in the oil industry.

"These countries have invested in carbon capture technologies, green hydrogen, and

circular economies, and are efficiently working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," he added.

Ghaiss underscored the need for the oil industry to continue contributing solutions to climate change challenges, noting that the UAE is a leading country in reducing carbon emissions and investing in renewable energy.

Ghaiss stated that UAE's ADNOC has made significant achievements in reducing carbon emissions, and Masdar has pioneering environmental projects, which are "clear indicators of oil-producing nations' ability to contribute to environmental preservation and emissions reduction."

Regarding OPEC's vision to expand its membership base, Ghaiss mentioned that he has visited several countries recently, including Azerbaijan, Mexico, Malaysia, and Brunei, and there is also a plan to visit Russia and Brazil.

"These countries possess significant global oil production and capabilities, and OPEC believes in a policy of dialogue and consultation."

WAM

European Union starts probe into 'illegal' Chinese electric car subsidies

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union said Wednesday that it had "sufficient evidence" of illegal Chinese electric car subsidies as it officially launched an inquiry that has enraged Beijing.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen raised hackles in China when she announced last month that Brussels would start an anti-subsidy investigation.

Some fear the European Union's action could lead to a trade war after Beijing warned the probe would harm trade re-

lations between the two sides.

"The Commission is in possession of sufficient evidence tending to show the existence of subsidisation, threat of injury and causal link required for the initiation of an anti-subsidy investigation," the notice of initiation published in the EU's official journal said Wednesday.

The notice included details about how the commission found evidence of loans at favourable rates, tax exemptions and components bought very cheaply.

The clock formally starts tick-



ing now and the probe must be completed within 13 months - though the EU can impose provisional anti-subsidy duties nine months from Wednesday.

If the EU concludes there are

Commission is in possession of sufficient evidence tending to show the existence of subsidisation, threat of injury and causal link required for the initiation of an anti-subsidy investigation

unfair practices, it could impose tariffs on Chinese car manufacturers above the standard 10 percent EU rate.

But Brussels could also decide to do nothing.

interest," the notice read.

Von der Leyen vowed Wednesday that the probe would be "fair".

"Wherever we find evidence that their (EU car manufacturers') efforts are being impeded by market distortions and unfair competition, we will act decisively," she said in a statement.

"We will do this in full respect of our EU and international obligations -- because Europe plays by the rules, within its borders and globally."

The automotive sector is the jewel in Europe's industrial

crown, providing direct and indirect jobs to around 14 million Europeans, or 6.1 percent of all EU employment.

When she announced the probe on September 13, von der Leyen said the cost of Chinese electric cars were "kept artificially low by huge state subsidies".

The notice also said the commission decided to open the investigation "without having received a written complaint by or on behalf of the Union industry".

AFP

OPEC+ maintains output cuts to boost oil prices

Vienna, Austria – An OPEC+ panel recommended Wednesday that the oil cartel keep its current output reduction strategy unchanged after heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Russia vowed to maintain their cuts to prop up prices.

Oil prices recovered in recent months and approached \$100 per barrel last week as top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia have taken millions of barrels off the market.

Crude prices have eased in more recent days, however, as markets worry over a slowing economy and interest rates remaining high for longer in the United States and Europe.

Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee of OPEC+ reaffirmed the commitment of its member countries to maintain its production reduction strategy valid until the end of 2024

In a statement following a virtual meeting, OPEC+ said its Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) "reaffirmed the commitment of its member countries" to maintain its production reduction strategy valid until the end of 2024.

The panel added that it stands "ready to take additional measures at any time" depending on market conditions.

The JMMC also praised the "efforts... of Saudi Arabia" to voluntarily reduce its production by one million barrels per day (bpd) since July.

The Saudi Ministry of Energy confirmed that the voluntary cut would continue until the end of 2023.

It added that the kingdom's



Oil prices decline over interest rate concerns

Muscat – Oil prices edged lower on Wednesday as the robust increase in US job vacancies indicated the Fed may keep raising interest rates, overshadowing supply fears triggered by the OPEC meeting later on Wednesday.

International benchmark crude Brent traded at \$90.30 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.68% loss from the closing price of \$90.92 a barrel in the previous trading session on Tuesday.

The US benchmark West

Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at \$88.55 per barrel, down 0.76% from Tuesday's close of \$89.23 per barrel.

Concerns that the Fed may continue to raise interest rates for a longer period than expected following Tuesday's data flow from the US boosted oil prices.

According to Labor Department figures released Tuesday, US job openings increased more than expected to 9.61mn in August, relative

to the forecast of 8.8mn.

Limiting further price declines, the American Petroleum Institute (API) late Tuesday announced an estimated decrease of 4.2mn barrels in US crude oil inventories, against the market expectation of a draw of 92,000 barrels.

The findings show that the country's crude oil demand recovery from pandemic-era lows is taking longer than expected, pushing prices lower.

Agencies

production would amount to about nine million bpd in November and December.

Russia will maintain its export cuts of about 300,000 bpd until December, Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak said in the government's Telegram channel.

Both Riyadh and Moscow stressed that they would review their cuts next month to decide whether to deepen them or increase production.

The next JMMC meeting is set for November 26 ahead of the ministerial meeting, according to a statement from the

group.

The JMMC has no decision-making power but discusses market conditions and makes recommendations, which are then formally discussed and decided at the organisation's ministerial meetings.

AFP

UK axes key northern leg of costly high-speed railway

Manchester, US – British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday axed a key section of England's new high-speed railway, diverting billions of pounds instead into improving existing transport routes in the north.

Addressing his Conservative party's annual conference in Manchester, Sunak said HS2 would no longer run on high speed rails to the city in north-west England, with the government spending the £36bn (\$44bn) saved on improving current train and road networks.

HS2, Britain's second high-speed train line, has suffered massive delays and ballooning costs but will still run between London and the nation's second biggest city, Birmingham, from around the end of the decade.

"I am ending this long-running saga," Sunak said Wednesday.

"I am cancelling the rest of the HS2 project and in its place, we will reinvest every single penny, £36bn, in hundreds of new transport projects in the North and the Midlands, across the country."

The project's costs had almost trebled to more than an es-



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaks at annual Conservative Party Conference in Manchester on Wednesday (AFP)

timated £100bn from £37.5bn in 2013, even before taking into account the recent surge in inflation, making it one of the world's most expensive lines.

Faced with mounting costs, a big chunk of the project had been derailed already before Wednesday's announcement.

The government in 2021 pulled the plug on the route linking Birmingham to the city of Leeds in northern England.

HS2, aimed at faster journey times and taking capacity off existing busy routes, was at the forefront of the government's grand scheme to "level up" the economy by providing better infrastructure to the north.

London and southeast England have long been seen as benefiting from major transport projects, while the north has lost out.

AFP

UN downplays China economy risks

Geneva, Switzerland – Concerns about China's economic troubles are being exaggerated and Beijing still has plenty of fiscal headroom, the United Nations' trade and development chief said Wednesday.

China's ballooning property-sector crisis has seen several high-profile firms engulfed in debt, fuelling fears about the country's wider economy and a possible spillover globally.

"We don't share the very pessimistic projections about China," said Rebeca Grynspan, head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD lowered its 2024 China growth estimates from five per cent to 4.8%, citing weak

domestic demand.

"It's a slowdown but it's not something like the very pessimistic reviews that we have seen in some of the publications," Grynspan told a press conference presenting UNCTAD's flagship annual economic forecasts.

"We think that there is a slowdown of growth in China, but not a dramatic crisis."

The former vice president of Costa Rica added that China "has a lot of fiscal space, unlike other countries", so Beijing still has the means in hand "to be able to rebound and to support the economy".

China's property sector has long been a pillar of growth –

along with construction it accounts for about a quarter of GDP – and it experienced a dazzling boom in recent decades.

But the massive debt accrued by its biggest players has been seen by Beijing as an unacceptable risk for China's financial system and overall economic health.

Authorities have gradually tightened developers' access to credit since 2020, and a wave of defaults has followed -- notably that of property giant Evergrande.

Richard Kozul-Wright, the director of UNCTAD's Globalisation and Development Strategies division, was even more critical of the prevailing pessimism than Grynspan.

AFP

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tender:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	72/2022 (Refloat)	Supply of Spare Parts for Switchgear & Transformers at OETC Dhofar Grid Stations.	12/10/2023	24/10/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer) , SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat- Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 91777378
Email	tenders@omangrid.com
Website:	www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

إعلان طرح مناقصة

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصة التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لمن الوثيقة تشمل ضريبة القيمة المضافة (أرغ)
1	٢٠٢٢/٧٢ (إعادة طرح)	توريد قطع غيار للقواطع الغازية والمحولات الكهربائية لمحطات النقل بمحافظة ظفار.	٢٠٢٣/١٠/١٢	٢٠٢٣/١٠/٢٤	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول	٢٧٢٥٠

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - المدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي) . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق . أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على الظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد لمدة (٢١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنوناً باسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن يتنظر فيه . - الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقبلة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٠ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش. م. ع. م.
ص. ب : ١٣٨٩, الخوض الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢ . سلطنة عمان
الهاتف : ٩١٨٤٢٣٨٠٠٠ / الفاكس : ٩١٨٢٢٣٠٠٤٦
الموقع الإلكتروني : **www.omangrid.com**



Exclusive offers on Mercedes AMG GLE Coupe, S-Class models

Elevating the luxury driving experience, Mercedes-Benz Oman unveils an exclusive, limited-time service package, available with the purchase of a Mercedes-AMG GLE Coupé or the S-Class luxury sedan.

The five-year/105,000km service package, valid from October 1 to December 31, offers many benefits to enhance vehicle safety, efficiency and value retention, a press release said.

The service package covers all scheduled maintenance procedures carried out by skilled Mercedes-Benz technicians. The technicians use quality tested Mercedes-Benz Genuine Parts – made to the highest standards to ensure an uncompromising vehicle performance, reliability, and safety.

Shaun Michael, CEO, Mercedes-Benz Oman, said, "Our exclusive service package completes the effortless ownership of a new Mercedes-Benz vehicle. Regular servicing not only guarantees safety but also preserves the long-term value and enhances fuel efficiency. Our team of diagnostic technicians applies their specialised and up-to-date skills and know-how to our services to ensure Mercedes-Benz vehicles continue to perform at their best and offer a driving experience like no other."



The Mercedes-AMG GLE 53 4MATIC+ Coupé boasts a turbocharged 3ltr six-cylinder inline engine. It combines dynamic power with elegant sportiness and make a clear performance statement, ensuring even better acceleration and outstanding driving stability. The vehicle is manufactured according to the 'one man, one engine' principle and receives additional power

from the 48-volt electrical system for an even livelier driving experience.

Meanwhile, the Mercedes-Benz S-Class sits at the pinnacle of timeless and modern vehicle luxury. The line of S-Class models forms the heritage of the future in motion and epitomises the promise of luxury, excellence, and effortless and reliable performance.

Bank Muscat offers discount on GIG Insurance

Bank Muscat has announced a new offer on Home Insurance plan from GIG. The discount will be available to customers on home contents and personal belongings insurance cover during a special promotional period, which ends on 30 November 2023, a press release said.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, general manager - Products at Bank Muscat, said, "We are proud to once again enhance our partnership with GIG Gulf, to provide this exciting offer for our customers. This came in response to the great demand witnessed on insurance plans due to the various benefits offered. The bank is always keen to listen to customers' feedback to provide the best and most up-to-date services to enhance their banking experience. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to our customers for their continuous trust in the services and products offered by the bank."

Mehdi Salim al Harthy, general manager and head of Partnership – Oman, GIG Gulf, said, "We are delighted to see the positive feedback the Home Insurance plan re-



Abdullah Tamman Al Maashani

ceives from customers as it is an ideal solution for protection against unexpected events. The plan offers various benefits including a comprehensive protection, cover for alternative accommodation in the event of any covered damage to the home, slab-based premiums among others. I would like to invite customers to benefit from the new offer to keep their home safe and protected."

GIG's Home Insurance plan offers exceptional value to both homeowners and tenants. It protects contents against fire, explosion, lightning, earthquakes, accidental damage, fixture breakage, and the like.

Fly twice weekly between Muscat and Zurich

From September 30, the flight Airbus A340-300 of Swiss Edelweiss Airline started flying on the direct route between Muscat International Airport and Zurich International Airport with one weekly flight.

Edelweiss is Switzerland's leading leisure travel airline and flies to the most beautiful destinations in the world. The airline reliably ensures a pleasant and carefree travel time to the holiday destination and looks after the safety and well-being of its guests with commitment and cordiality. Edelweiss is a sister company of Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS) and a member of the Lufthansa Group, a press release said.

As part of Edelweiss' initiatives to promote the economy and tourism between Zurich and



Oman, the chosen destinations are among the most popular holiday destinations, especially in the winter months, hence in great demand right now.

With A340-300 Airbus being operated on the route, Swiss Edelweiss offers 27 business

class, 76 Economy+ and 211 Economy Class seats for the passengers travelling between Muscat-Zurich with its signature Swiss hospitality, making sure the trip begins smoothly, no matter the reason for travelling and travelers can sit back and relax.

Ooredoo backs Oman Cancer Association for 'Pink Month'

October is known around the world as the 'Pink Month' because of a global effort to raise awareness of breast cancer and how to navigate prevention and early detection.

This year, in partnership with the Oman Cancer Association (OCA) and Muscat Grand Mall, Ooredoo is supporting Breast Cancer Awareness Month with a campaign allowing women in Oman over the age of 40 to be screened free of charge. Through this campaign, Ooredoo aims to underline the importance of regular check-ups and that early detection matters, a press release said.

Ooredoo is committed to being a company with a purpose beyond profit. They are advocates of women's empowerment and stress the importance of not putting off regular health screenings because of cost, fear, or just because they are too busy being their family's caretakers. Breast cancer prevention and early detection, which includes self-exams, regular clinical exams and mammograms are impor-



tant and can save lives. Indeed, experts have confirmed that early detection when something is still tiny gives the very best chance of successful treatment.

The free screening took place in a Mobile Mammography Unit at Muscat Grand Mall, with the first day being for Ooredoo staff and the second day for members

of the public. Mammogram tests take just 20 minutes and Ooredoo is now encouraging women countrywide over the age of 40 to get tested regularly.

Sports training concludes



The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Training and Rehabilitation, in cooperation with the Omani School Sports Association, has concluded its training programme - 'Sports Events and Tournament Management'.

The training programme was launched earlier this week with the participation of 26 teachers and supervisors in the field of physical education and management of sports activities from various educational directorates in the governorates of the Sul-

tanate of Oman, a press release said.

The closing ceremony and the distribution of participants' certificates was held under the patronage of Suleiman bin Hamoud al Harrasi, advisor to the Minister of Education for Studies and Research, and in the presence of Fahd bin Khalfan al Mashaikhi, Secretary-General of the Omani School Sports Association.

The programme covered many topics and theoretical aspects, including comprehensive planning for tournaments, for-

mation of work teams, mechanisms for financially managing matters related to tournaments, as well as sources of income available for sports tournaments, in addition to developing programmes accompanying tournaments and exploring their added value. It also addressed the legal aspects related to sports tournaments, focusing on sports marketing strategies, means of reaching target groups, attracting sports sponsors, and evaluation strategies for tournaments and sporting events.

ALARGAN Towell invites tenders for Al Nakheel ITC

ALARGAN Towell's Al Nakheel has issued an invitation for tenders related to the infrastructure package for the forthcoming Al Nakheel Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) along the Rumais beach in the Wilayat of Barka. The Al Nakheel ITC project aligns with Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's strategy to develop ITC projects in partnership with the private sector.

The progress is already underway at the Al Nakheel ITC, as the initial construction phase gains momentum. Currently, the focus lies on the intricate earthwork required for the develop-

ment of roadways and meticulous land leveling, ensuring that the foundation for this ambitious project is laid with precision.

According to the tender document, prospective contractors, whether operating independently or as part of a joint venture or consortium, must prove they have the required resources and know-how to fulfill the project's specifications. Relevant experience in managing projects of comparable size or scope is essential. Additionally, bidders are expected to have a track record of punctual completion, high-quality work, and expertise in design and build projects.

Mohammed al Abri, CEO of Al Nakheel, commented, "We are monitoring our progress with optimism and are preparing for the upcoming tender phase. This project signifies a major milestone in our journey to enhance Oman's tourism industry, introduce pioneering concepts, and create substantial employment opportunities."

Maher Joujou, the Acting CEO of ALARGAN Towell, the developer of this project, stated, "Our commitment to the Al Nakheel project is centered on creating sustainable, innovative communities that align with Oman Vision 2040 and setting

new standards for urban development." The initiation of the 'Infrastructure Package Tender' marks a significant step forward in bringing this vision to life.

Jumanah Habib, Country Manager of Ibrahim Jaidah Architects and Engineers (IJAIE), the consultants for Al Nakheel project is truly exceptional, and we are committed to ensuring that every detail is meticulously planned and executed. This project exemplifies a harmonious blend of innovation, sustainability, and community development, making it a landmark undertaking for Oman."

Trio win chemistry Nobel for ‘quantum dots’

A rare leak led to winners’ names being mistakenly sent to media outlets before announcement

Stockholm, Sweden - A trio of US-based researchers on Wednesday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for developing tiny ‘quantum dots’ used to illuminate TVs and lamps, hours after a prematurely sent statement revealed their names.

French-born Mounqi Bawendi, Louis Brus of the United States and Russian-born Alexei Ekimov brought advances on tiny particles that ‘now spread their light from televisions and LED lamps, and can also guide surgeons when they remove tumour tissue’, the jury said.

But a rare leak led to the winners’ names being mistakenly sent to media outlets hours before they were officially announced, prompting an apology from the awards’ overseers.

Hans Ellegren, Secretary General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, said a press release went out for ‘still unknown reasons’. “We deeply regret that this happened. The important thing is that it did not affect the awarding of the prize recipients in any way,” Ellegren



A screen shows this year’s laureates US Chemist Mounqi Bawendi, US Chemist Louis Brus and Russian physicist Alexei Ekimov during the announcement of the winners of the 2023 Nobel Prize in chemistry at Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm on Wednesday (AFP)

said during a press conference.

‘Sound asleep’

However, Bawendi told reporters he had not heard the news before receiving the call from the Nobel Committee. “I didn’t know, I was awakened by the Swedish Academy. I was sound asleep,” he said via telephone during a press conference, noting it he had not expected the call.

Bawendi listed his feelings as ‘very surprised. Sleepy, shocked. Unexpected and very honoured.’

Nobel leaks are rare, with the various prize-awarding academies going to great lengths to keep the winners’ names under wraps until the announcements.

Bawendi, 62, born in Paris to French and Tunisian parents, is a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in

the United States. Brus, 80, is a professor at Columbia in New York, and Russian-born Alexei Ekimov, 78, was formerly the chief scientist at the US-based Nanocrystals Technology.

According to the jury, physicists had ‘long known’ about the quantum effects that could arise in nanoparticles, but previously it was ‘impossible to sculpt in nanodimensions.’ In the early 1980s, Ekimov ‘succeeded in creating size-dependent quantum effects in coloured glass’, and a few years later, Brus was the first ‘to prove size-dependent quantum effects in particles floating freely in a fluid’.

“In 1993, Mounqi Bawendi revolutionised the chemical production of quantum dots, resulting in almost perfect particles. This high quality was necessary for them to be utilised in applications,” the jury explained. In addition to their current use, they are believed to be able to contribute to flexible electronics, tiny sensors, thinner solar cells and encrypted communication in the future, with the Academy noting that ‘we have just started exploring the potential of these tiny particles’.

The trio will share the award of 11mn Swedish kronor (around US\$1mn) and will receive the prize from King Carl XVI Gustaf at a ceremony in Stockholm on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of scientist Alfred Nobel who created the prizes in his last will and testament.

AFP

Yemen faces extinction of sea turtles

Al Ghaydah, Yemen - On a Yemeni beach, a sea turtle clambers ashore to lay eggs, which will likely be born female due to rising temperatures, creating a gender imbalance that brings the threat of local extinction.

With sands made hotter by climate change, eggs are rarely yielding male turtles, which require cooler temperatures during the incubation period.

Studies in several coastal regions of southern Yemen ‘have shown that there are 90 per cent more female sea turtles than males’, said Jamal Baouzir, director of the biodiversity department at the University of Aden.

The severe gender imbalance will continue until it brings about the complete extinction of sea turtles in Yemen ‘in the years to come’, Baouzir said.

Environmental activist Hafiz Kelshat said the proportion of males had ‘decreased considerably’ in recent years.

“Most baby turtles are female due to the change in tempera-



A turtle arrives to nest on a beach in Yemen’s Mahra province, near the border with Oman on June 10 (AFP)

With sands on beaches made hotter by climate change, eggs are rarely yielding male turtles, which require cooler temperatures during the incubation period

ture,” he told AFP on a nesting beach in Mahra province, near the border with Oman.

This is especially the case in summer, when temperatures often top 31 degrees Celsius (88 degrees Fahrenheit) - the point at which sea turtle eggs begin yielding females. The gender imbalance is getting worse each year

as longer periods of extreme heat hit the Arabian Peninsula, one of the world’s hottest regions.

The problem is not unique to Yemen, wracked for nearly a decade by a devastating civil war which has created one of the world’s worst humanitarian tragedies.

From the US state of Florida to Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, male sea turtle numbers are dwindling due to climate change.

In 2018, US researchers found that rising temperatures meant most of the 200,000 green turtles in the northern Great Barrier Reef are female, compounding the threat of extinction.

Yemen, wedged between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, boasts a rich variety of natural habitats and species, many of them found nowhere else in the world. But its genetic diversity, and the potential for future tourism development it represents, are increasingly threatened by global warming.

Yemen ranks as one of the region’s most climate-vulnerable countries, according to the Global Adaptation Initiative of the University of Notre Dame in the US state of Indiana.

Extreme heat and increasing rainfall variability leading to both drought and flash floods are among the challenges forecast for the Arabian Peninsula’s poorest country.

Baouzir said that to tackle the deepening gender imbalance, authorities should create ‘a specialised technical team to monitor the turtles in their nesting places and place the eggs in appropriate incubators’ to produce male offspring.

The provision of sun shields on beaches could also help reduce sand temperatures and boost the number of male hatchlings. But environmental conservation has inevitably taken a back seat to the grinding civil war, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and left the country’s infrastructure in tatters.

AFP



Fishing boats are moored at Tunggang fishing harbour ahead of the arrival of Typhoon Koinu in Pingtung county on Wednesday (AFP)

Taiwan cancels flights ahead of Typhoon Koinu

Taitung, Taiwan - Taiwan cancelled flights and closed schools in parts of its southern region on Wednesday ahead of Typhoon Koinu’s expected landfall, the second major storm to make a direct hit on the island in a month.

Taiwan experiences frequent tropical storms from May to November but last month’s Typhoon Haikui was the first to slam into it in four years - unleashing torrential rains, high winds and forcing nearly 8,000 people to evacuate from their homes.

Experts say climate change has made the paths of tropical storms harder to forecast while increasing their intensity, which leads to more rains and flash floods.

Ahead of Thursday’s expected typhoon, more than 100 international and domestic flights have been cancelled, while ferry services to Taiwan’s outlying islands have also been halted.

More than 200 people were evacuated for fear of landslides in the south of the island, and waves lashing the coast could reach up to seven metres (22 feet) high, authorities said.

Fishing boats were crammed into a fishing harbour in Pingtung county on Wednesday to shelter ahead of the typhoon, while primary schools in the agricultural region of Taitung allowed children to go home early.

“It’s barely a month, and we have another typhoon,” 65-year-old Yang Pi-cheng lamented to AFP, as she waited to pick up her grandchildren from Dawang Primary School.

A major highway along the coast has also been closed as a precaution.

Koinu - which has been charting a jagged course for Taiwan’s southern tip - is currently just 200km (125 miles) east of the island, moving towards it at 10km per hour.

The typhoon has already brought heavy rains to the mountainous northeast regions of Yilan and New Taipei City.

“We forecast that its centre will pass through the Hengchun Peninsula at the southern tip of Taiwan tomorrow morning,” said Lu Kuo-chen, head of Taiwan’s Central Weather Administration.

After making landfall in Taiwan, Typhoon Koinu is forecast to move towards the eastern coast of China’s Guangdong province, said the weather observatory in nearby Hong Kong.

AFP

Farmers turn to solar power in Syria’s former breadbasket

Al-Haddadiya, Syria - At his farm in Syria’s northeast, Abdullah al-Mohammed adjusts a large solar panel, one of hundreds that have cropped up over the years as farmers seek to stave off electricity shortages in the war-ravaged region.

Solar energy has offered a lifeline for the farmers amid drought and power shortages, but some warn the boom also has environmental costs in the once-fertile region. ‘We are trying to revive our land’, despite dwindling groundwater reserves, said Mohammed, 38, as he oriented the panel towards the sun near his cotton fields.

In his village of Al-Haddadiya in Hasakeh province, farmers are using solar energy to power irrigation systems for



People stand in a watermelon patch employing solar panels used to power field irrigation at a farm in the village of Haddadiya, about 44km south of Hasakeh in northeastern Syria, on September 24 (AFP)

all kinds of crops, from vegetables to wheat, barley and cotton. The father of three said he needs a reliable power supply to pump groundwater around 60 metres deep (nearly 200 feet)

now - compared to just 30 metres a few years back.

Northeast Syria is about 0.8 degrees Celsius (two degrees Fahrenheit) hotter today than it was 100 years ago and likely to

experience drought every three years, according to a report last year by iMMAP, a Washington-based, data-focused non-profit.

The area was the country’s breadbasket before 2011, when

the government repressed peaceful protests, triggering a conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions. The war has battered the country’s infrastructure and industry, and the state barely supplies a few hours of electricity per day.

Farmers in the now Kurdish-held region used to rely on state electricity and subsidised generator fuel for water pumps and irrigation, but power outages and rising fuel costs have compounded the climate-related challenges. “Solar energy has saved agriculture and farmers from extinction,” Mohammed said, near a patch of waist-high plants and sunflowers swaying gently in the wind.

AFP

Republican hardliners oust US House Speaker McCarthy

McCarthy's was the first ouster of a speaker in the House's 234-year history

Washington, US - Kevin McCarthy was axed on Tuesday as speaker of the US House of Representatives in a brutal, historic rebellion by far-right Republicans accusing him of a string of broken promises and furious at his cooperation with Democrats.

The manoeuvre laid bare the chaotic levels of infighting among Republicans heading into the 2024 presidential election, with its likely candidate Donald Trump making history of his own as the only former or sitting president to face criminal indictment.

The first ouster of a speaker in the House's 234-year history was supported by only a handful of right-wing Republican hardliners. However, the House is almost evenly divided and with Democrats joining eight rebel Republicans rather than riding to McCarthy's rescue, he had no way to survive.

"I ended up being the 55th speaker of the House - one of the greatest honours. I loved every minute," a circumspect McCarthy told reporters after the vote, making clear he did not plan to stand again. "And the one thing I will tell you is doing the right thing isn't always easy, but it is necessary. I don't regret standing up for choosing governance over grievance."

The 58-year-old former entrepreneur had sparked fury among conservatives when he passed a bipartisan stopgap



Kevin McCarthy walks from the House chamber after he was ousted as speaker at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

I ended up being the 55th speaker of the House - one of the greatest honours. I loved every minute

KEVIN MCCARTHY

funding measure at the weekend backed by the White House to avert a government shutdown.

Florida conservative Matt Gaetz, who forced the removal vote, gambled that he could oust McCarthy with just a few Republicans, helped by Democrats loath

to bail out a speaker who only recently opened a highly politicised impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden. "The reason Kevin McCarthy went down today is because nobody trusts Kevin McCarthy," Gaetz said. "Kevin McCarthy has made multiple

contradictory promises, and when they all came due, he lost."

South Carolina Republican Nancy Mace revealed she, too, had soured on McCarthy over promises to put legislation up for a vote that were never honoured. Democrats pointed to his decision to renege on a deal with Biden on spending limits agreed earlier this year in high-stakes talks over the federal budget.

Biden issued a statement through his press secretary after McCarthy's overthrow urging

the House to quickly choose a replacement, arguing that the urgent challenges facing the country 'will not wait'.

The New Democrat Coalition, a bloc of pro-business Democratic lawmakers, described McCarthy as 'simply not trustworthy'. And Congressional Progressive Caucus chairwoman Pramila Jayapal, a leading leftist, vowed to let Republicans 'wallow in their pigsty of incompetence' rather than rescue McCarthy.

AFP

Canada elects first Indigenous provincial head

Montreal, Canada - Canada's province of Manitoba elected First Nations politician Wab Kinew as its leader on Tuesday, making him the first Indigenous person voted in to head a provincial government.

Kinew, of the New Democratic Party, will take power with a majority government. "This is a great victory for all of us in Manitoba," Kinew told a crowd of cheering supporters in provincial capital Winnipeg.

"I know a lot of people in the big cities they looked down on us here in Manitoba. But look what little old Manitoba did tonight. Manitoba did something more progressive than any of those big cities ever did."

Kinew, originally from the Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation in northern Ontario, is a former journalist and author. "He's a great communicator and knows how to navigate the media universe," University of Winnipeg professor Felix Mathieu told AFP, adding that Kinew had 'stood out for his political ease' in a televised debate, where he had 'unquestionably' emerged victorious. Canada recognises three groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Metis.

About 18 per cent of Manitoba's population is Indigenous, and the province was

led by a Metis premier in the late 1800s. The country's First Nations people gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1960.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs hailed Kinew's win as 'a powerful affirmation of increased inclusivity and First Nations' participation and representation within Manitoba's political landscape.'

About 18 per cent of Manitoba's population is Indigenous. The country's First Nations people gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1960

In recent years, Canada's treatment of its Indigenous peoples has come under scrutiny. The discovery of the graves of Indigenous children in 2021 prompted rebukes of the Catholic Church and the government.

Between the late 19th century and the mid-1990s about 150,000 aboriginal children were forced into 139 residential schools across the country, where they were cut off from their families, language and culture.

AFP

Russian reporter handed over 8 years jail in absentia

Moscow, Russia - An exiled Russian reporter who protested Moscow's offensive in Ukraine live on state TV was handed over eight years jail in absentia on Wednesday for spreading disinformation about Moscow's army.

Marina Ovsyannikova, 45, held up a protest placard during an evening news programme in March 2022, but was sentenced for a separate protest she made outside the Kremlin four months later. "The court sentenced Ovsyannikova to eight years and six months' imprisonment, to be served in a general regime penal colony," the Moscow prosecutor's office said.

It also said she would be barred from running social media accounts for four years.

Ovsyannikova was not present for the sentencing. She fled the country last year after escap-



I made a very hard, but the only right moral choice in my life, and I have already paid a high enough price for it

MARINA OVSYANNIKOVA

ing house arrest with her then 11-year-old daughter.

In a statement ahead of the sentencing, she called the charges against her 'absurd and politically motivated'.

"They decided to flog me for not being afraid and for calling things by their names," she said.

"Of course I do not admit my guilt. And I do not deny any of my words. I made a very hard, but the only right moral choice in my life, and I have already paid a high enough price for it," she said.

According to her Instagram page, Ovsyannikova lives in France.

Paris condemned the sentencing, with its Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna slamming 'repression carried out by the Russian authorities against voices critical of power'.

AFP

Venice: 21 killed in bus accident

Venice, Italy - Flags flew at half-mast over Venice on Wednesday after 21 people including a toddler were killed when a bus careered off an overpass and caught fire.

"The bus flipped upside down. The impact was terrible because it fell from over 10 metres (32 feet) landing next to railway tracks below, said Mauro Luongo, Venice's fire brigade commander. The dead are thought to be mostly tourists returned from Venice's historic centre to a camping site on Tuesday evening. Fifteen others were injured in what Venice Mayor Luigi Brugnaro described as 'an apocalyptic scene'.

Firefighters said the bus was electric, despite the Italian interior minister earlier saying it ran on methane.

They spent hours extracting bodies from the charred remains of the bus, which was finally removed from the site in the early



Firefighters work on the site of a bus accident in Mestre, near Venice on Tuesday (AFP)

hours of Wednesday.

"Among the difficulties was the fact that the bus was electric so it had batteries. Unfortunately, they caught fire on impact," said Luongo. "That's why operations took a little longer to remove the

vehicle." Luca Zaia, the governor of the Venice region, confirmed the official death toll was 21, 'including a one-year-old child and a teenager'.

Five Ukrainians were among the dead identified so far, along-

side a German, a Croatian, a Frenchman and the Italian driver, he said. Five of the 15 injured are in a 'very serious condition', and some were still being identified, he said.

AFP

Thai prime minister vows action on guns after deadly mall shooting

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's prime minister on Wednesday vowed 'preventive measures' after a shooting at a Bangkok shopping mall left two people dead and raised fresh questions about the kingdom's gun control.

Shoppers returned in dribs and drabs as the Siam Paragon mall reopened less than 24 hours after the shooting - Thailand's third high-profile deadly gun attack in four years.

The shooting at one of Bangkok's biggest, most upmarket malls will come as a fresh blow to Thailand's efforts to rebuild its vital tourism industry after the pandemic.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin joined a minute's silence at the mall before offering the government's condolences to the

families of the two female victims - one Chinese and one from Myanmar.

"I am confident Siam Paragon and government officials did their best to minimise the casualties and damage," he said.

"Let this be the only time this happens. My government insists we will give priority to preventive measures," he added, without giving details.

Police have charged a 14-year-old suspect with premeditated murder, attempted murder, carrying and firing a gun in a public place and owning an unlicensed firearm.

Police Major General Nakarin Sukontawit said the boy, a student at a US\$4,000-a-term private school just metres from Siam Paragon, was undergoing



Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin answers questions at the Siam Paragon shopping centre in Bangkok on Wednesday (AFP)

psychiatric tests to see if he would be fit to stand trial.

Investigators said on Tuesday the boy had been undergoing treatment for mental illness but had stopped taking his medica-

tion and reported hearing voices telling him to shoot people. UNICEF Thailand deputy representative Severine Leonardi said the incident should accelerate efforts to improve the kingdom's

youth mental health services.

Past promises

Samran Nuanma, Assistant National Police Chief, told a news conference on Wednesday that the weapon used in the attack was a blank-firing pistol.

"But the barrel was modified for live shooting," Samran said.

"We will increase regulations and laws to control the use of firearms."

But past promises of tightening gun laws have not prevented tragedies.

The Siam Paragon shooting came just days before the anniversary of a massacre at a nursery in northern Thailand that left 36 people dead.

And in 2020, a former army officer gunned down 29 people

in a rampage at a mall in the northeastern city of Nakhon Ratchasima. By one estimate, Thailand has 10mn guns in circulation - one for every seven citizens, and one of the highest rates of ownership in the region.

Many firearms are smuggled into the country, but Kritsanapong Phutrakul, a former police officer and now academic, said internet sales were becoming a problem.

"Only a small number of police officers have the knowledge, capabilities and experience to track the gun market online," he told AFP.

After talks with the PM, National Police Chief Torsak Sukwimol said he had ordered specialist officers to investigate online gun sales.

Tourism impact

Thailand is desperate to rebuild its tourism sector after travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic saw visitors dwindle.

China - which sent around 10mn visitors a year to the kingdom before the pandemic - is a crucial market, but numbers are not returning as fast as Thai officials would wish.

This is partly because of fears in China about whether Thailand is safe, and the fact that one of the mall shooting victims was Chinese is unlikely to improve this situation. Srettha spoke to the Chinese ambassador on Tuesday and issued a statement saying the government would implement 'the highest safety measures' for tourists.

AFP

Pope Francis warns of ‘irreversible’ climate change, urges for UN action

He urged participants of COP28 climate talks to agree to binding policies on phasing out fossil fuels

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis warned on Wednesday the world ‘is collapsing’ due to global warming, urging participants of the upcoming COP28 climate talks to agree to binding policies on phasing out fossil fuels.

Eight years after his landmark thesis outlined the devastation of manmade climate change, the 86-year-old pontiff published a follow-up that warned that some damage was ‘already irreversible’.

“With the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point,” he wrote in the 12-page letter.

But he said the next round of UN climate talks opening in Dubai on November 30 ‘can represent a change of direction’, if participants make binding agreements on moving from fossil fuels to clean energy sources such as wind and solar.

Only a real commitment to change ‘can enable international politics to recover its credibility’, wrote the pope.

Climate sceptics

His 200-page encyclical in 2015, entitled *Laudato Si*



Pope Francis leaves after a holy mass on the opening day of the Synod of Bishops, at St Peter's square in The Vatican, on Wednesday (AFP)

(‘Praise Be To You’), was a global call to arms to protect the Earth, and sparked debate unprecedented for a religious text, including commentaries in scientific journals.

Months later, there was a breakthrough in UN climate talks in Paris, with nearly every

nation on Earth committing to limit warming to ‘well below’ two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

But the UN warned last month the world is not on track to meet these goals, while climate monitors predict 2023 will be the hottest in human history,

with the Northern Hemisphere’s summer marked by heatwaves, droughts and wildfires.

In Wednesday’s document, entitled *Laudate Deum* (Praise God), Francis expressed hope that the forthcoming COP28 ‘will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition,

with effective commitments subject to ongoing monitoring’.

He referenced concerns about the UN talks being held in oil-rich United Arab Emirates, noting that while it was a ‘great exporter of fossil fuels’ it also made ‘significant investments’ in renewable energy sources.

With the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point

POPE FRANCIS

“To say that there is nothing to hope for would be suicidal, for it would mean exposing all humanity, especially the poorest, to the worst impacts of climate change,” wrote Francis.

The 2015 text stated clearly that humanity was to blame for global warming - a message the pope said he felt required to repeat due to the power of climate scepticism.

On Wednesday, he described ‘certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions that I encounter, even within the Catholic Church’.

“Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident,” he wrote.

‘Irresponsible lifestyle’

Climate change has been a major theme of Pope Francis’ tenure of ten years as head of the world’s 1.3bn Catholics, and he has drawn on science but also offered a strong moral message.

In his 2015 text, the pope blamed a pursuit of economic growth for the destruction of the planet and warned rich countries must lead the way in repairing the damage.

In Wednesday’s text, he said that ‘regrettably, the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit’.

He also repeated a call for changes in the ‘irresponsible lifestyle’ of rich countries, saying relying on technological innovation is not enough.

He noted that ‘emissions per individual in the United States are about two times greater than those of individuals living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries’.

Many doubt the new document, originally written in Spanish, can have the same impact as the first.

AFP

Five killed by India glacial lake burst flood, 23 soldiers missing

Guwahati, India - At least five people have been killed and dozens including 23 soldiers are missing in India after intense rains burst a glacial lake and triggered a torrential flash flood, officials said on Wednesday.

Violent flooding from glacier lakes dammed by loose rock has become more frequent as global temperatures rise and ice melts, with scientists on Wednesday warning the deadly flood was a taste of further extreme weather events to come.

A video released by an Indian army spokesman showed a thick torrent of raging brown water sweeping down a densely forested valley in mountainous northeast Sikkim state, with roads washed away and power lines ripped down.

“Due to sudden cloud burst over Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim, a flash flood occurred in the Teesta River... 23 personnel have been reported missing and some vehicles are reported submerged under the slush,” the army said in a statement. “Search operations



A flooded street is seen in Lachen Valley, in India's Sikkim state on Wednesday (AFP)

are underway.”

The Sikkim state government said at least five people had been reported killed, with three bodies recovered.

As well as the 23 soldiers, more than a dozen civilians are missing, it said. Sikkim is close to

India’s border with Nepal and China and boasts a sizeable military presence.

India has been wary of China’s growing military assertiveness and their 3,500km (2,200-mile) shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension, with parts

of Sikkim claimed by Beijing.

The water surge was caused by a burst of the high-altitude Lhonak Lake - which sits at the base of a glacier in peaks surrounding the world’s third-highest mountain, Kangchenjunga.

AFP

Sunak kickstarts campaign with promise of ‘change’

Manchester, UK - Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday rallied his ruling Conservatives for the next general election, positioning them as a force for change, even after 13 years in power and increasing disaffection among voters.

In a speech lasting more than an hour to the party’s annual conference, he promised that the Tories - on course for defeat at the next vote, according to opinion polls - would break the mould of the last 30 years of government. “We will be bold, we will be radical. We will face resistance and we will meet it,” he told delegates.

“We will give the country what it sorely needs and yet too often has been denied. “It’s time for change and we are it.”

Sunak’s speech - peppered with major policy announcements including the widely expected scrapping of part of a high-speed rail project - effectively fires the starting gun on the election campaign.

The conference, which began



Britain's PM Rishi Sunak (AFP)

on Sunday, has seen the Conservatives try to put clear water between themselves and the main opposition Labour party. That has included stoking ‘culture war’ issues such as the environment and trans rights.

But the latest opinion polls indicate that the Tories have a mountain to climb if they are to secure a sixth term of office.

A new Savanta poll published before Sunak took to the stage put Labour out in front by 20 percentage points, with Sunak trailing Labour’s Keir Starmer in the personal popularity stakes by 12

points.

Sunak, a former finance minister who was only voted in as Tory leader last October by party members, has to call an election by January 2025 at the latest.

Speculation is rife about when he might seek to confirm his party’s mandate with the wider electorate, as he tries to bring down sky-high inflation that has caused a cost-of-living crisis and industrial unrest.

As expected, Sunak confirmed rumours that he would scrap the second leg of the HS2 rail project between Birmingham in central England and Manchester.

“I’m cancelling the rest of the HS2 project and in its place we will reinvest every single penny, £36bn (US\$43.6bn), in hundreds of new transport projects in the north, in the Midlands, across the country,” he said.

Manchester had been due to be a terminus for the massive infrastructure project, which has been plagued by huge cost and delivery overruns.

AFP

Thousands of Afghan refugees in Tajikistan dream of a new beginning

Vakhdat, Tajikistan - For Bibikhawa Zaki, whose orange football boots match her headscarf, training on the pitch is the highlight of her complicated life.

Like many fellow Afghan refugees in Tajikistan, the 25-year-old dreams of moving on from the poor Central Asian country to a new life in Canada.

A few months before the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in summer 2021, she and her family followed thousands of other Afghans across the mountainous border into neighbouring Tajikistan.

“The Taliban attacked my sister-in-law. They issued death threats against my family. We

had to leave,” the former English teacher told AFP.

“But when we play football, I’m happy. I don’t think about the other stuff,” she said.

Bibikhawa Zaki trains with about 50 other young Afghan women at a club set up by her female compatriots in Vakhdat, about half an hour from the capital, Dushanbe.

Most of the country’s Afghan community live in the city, where lampposts and shop windows are plastered with small ads offering Tajiks jobs in Russia.

Although Tajikistan has been taking in Afghan refugees since the mid 1990s, they are not allowed to live in any of the major



Bibikhawa Zaki, the 25-year-old Afghan refugee in Tajikistan (AFP)

cities.

The government says it fears the Taliban government’s rule might eventually spark instability

in Tajikistan.

It is the Taliban authorities’ strongest critic in Central Asia and has, for years, had to con-

Taliban attacked my sister-in-law. They issued death threats against my family. We had to leave

BIBIKHAWA ZAKI

tend with numerous skirmishes along the Afghan border.

Pakistan and Iran, which also neighbour Afghanistan, have also historically taken in large numbers of Afghan refugees, but their patience with the influx is also wearing thin.

Bibikhawa Zaki is among the more recent arrivals in Tajikistan, though many others have been navigating the country’s red tape for years.

The United Nations’ refugee agency UNHCR estimates around 10,000 Afghan refugees, often extremely poor, live in Tajikistan, the poorest of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

In a country that struggles to provide the basics for its own population, Afghans are often forced to fend for themselves.

Asserting your rights is not always easy in Tajikistan, where

freedom of expression is limited.

And they cannot rely on help from their embassy, which still represents the government chased from power by the Taliban in 2021.

Colonel Boimakhmad Radjzoda, who heads the refugee department in the Tajik interior ministry, insists that his country is doing all it can for the displaced. “Refugees have many of the same rights Tajik citizens,” he told AFP.

“They have access to medical care, we’ve opened a school for Afghans and we can provide them with clothes, food and medicines.”

AFP

DOUBLE DELIGHT

India's Chopra wins javelin gold while Jena claims silver; Barshim leaps to record

Hangzhou, China - India's javelin king Neeraj Chopra produced a giant throw to strike gold at the Asian Games on Wednesday and cap a gruelling season, with Olympic high-jump champion Mutaz Essa Barshim joining him as a winner.

They were among seven finalists on day six of the track and field in Hangzhou with just the men's and women's marathons left on Thursday, concluding an event dominated by hosts China.

Reigning Olympic and world champion Chopra was under pressure after Indian teammate Kishore Kumar Jena produced a huge personal best 86.77 metres.

But Chopra responded emphatically with a season-best 88.88m to retain his Asian Games crown in style.

It was a massive statement and longer than the 88.17m that won him the world title at Budapest in August and the 87.58m that earned gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

His title defence opened controversially.

He hurled close to the 85m line on his first throw and pumped the air in celebration, but his score didn't register and a lengthy delay followed.

Chopra eventually threw again, making 82.38m, then improved to 84.49m.

But Kumar Jena, who was fifth in Budapest, then produced his all-time best to put the pressure on, before Chopra hit back.

"I had some issues in the first throw. There may have been a technical problem or they may not have measured my first throw properly," he said of the delay.



India's Neeraj Chopra competes in the men's javelin throw final at the Asian Games in Hangzhou on Wednesday (AFP)

We are very greedy as athletes and always want more, more. That's the nature of it and I love it. You need to push yourself to the limit

MUTAZ ESSA BARSHIM

Chopra's job was made easier after his chief rival, Pakistan ace Arshad Nadeem, pulled out on Tuesday with a knee injury.

Qatar's Barshim skipped the season-ending Diamond League event at Eugene last month to prepare to add to his 2010 and 2014 Asiad titles, and it paid div-

idends.

He entered on the fourth jump at 2.19m and it turned into a battle with South Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok, who won the Diamond League in Eugene that Barshim skipped.

The Qatari prevailed, clearing a new Games record 2.35m with

Woo unable to match it.

"It feels amazing to be honest. Winning today my third gold, I should be really happy and satisfied," said Barshim, who owns the second-highest jump in history at 2.43m.

"We are very greedy as athletes and always want more, more, more. That's the nature of it and I love it. You need to push yourself to the limit."

Barshim had extra motivation to get back on top after being shocked in Budapest by Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi, who denied him a fourth consecutive title.

In other action, China's Wang Chunyu was dethroned as women's 800m champion by Sri Lanka's Tharushi Karunaratna, who ran a storming 2:03.20.

It was enough to edge India's Harmilan Bains with Wang taking bronze. In contrast, Bahrain's Birhanu Balew, who was sixth at the Tokyo Olympics, was a successful title defender with his 13:17.41 in the 5,000m, a new Games record.

India won the men's 4x400m relay and Bahrain took out the women's race.

AFP

India claim first archery gold

Hangzhou, China - India defeated powerhouses South Korea to win the first archery gold of the 19th Asian Games on Wednesday, before two world stars of track and field look to end their seasons with a bang.

Gold medals were up for grabs on the 11th day in an overcast Hangzhou in everything from athletics and boxing to roller skating and dragon-boat racing.

South Korea dominated archery at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics in 2021, snaring four of the five golds, with Turkey winning the other.

But the Koreans were no match for India in the gold-medal match of the mixed-team compound event on

Wednesday, the Indian duo of Ojas Deotale and Jyothi Surekha Vennam squeezing to victory 159-158.

India are also guaranteed at least silver in the women's compound individual, while gold will also go to India in the men's compound with two Indians in the final.

Abhishek Verma will face Deotale on Saturday, the penultimate day of the Games. "I'm not surprised by the result. We knew that we could do this," the 21-year-old Deotale, the men's compound world champion, said after playing his part in India's gold on Wednesday.

South Korea hit back with a 6-0 thrashing of Japan to win mixed team recurve gold.

Two failed doping tests hit Asian Games in 24 hours

Hangzhou, China - Philippine mountain-bike rider Ariana Evangelista on Wednesday became the second reported doping case in 24 hours at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, and third overall.

The 27-year-old has been provisionally suspended after failing a drugs test for the banned substance erythropoietin (EPO), which enhances performances, the International Testing Agency said.

"Two samples (blood and urine) were collected by the ITA at the Asian Games Hangzhou 2022 during an out-of-competition anti-dop-

ing control performed on September 24," the ITA, which is handling dope-testing at the Games, said.

"The athlete has been informed of the case and has been provisionally suspended with immediate effect. She has the right to request the analysis of the B-sample."

News of her suspension came less than a day after the ITA and Olympic Council of Asia said that Saudi distance runner Mohammed Yousef Alasiri had also been provisionally suspended for failing a drugs test.

AFP

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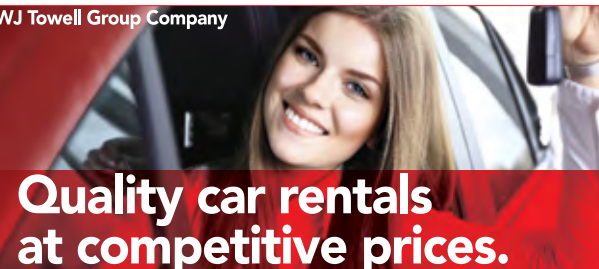
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Bellingham steals limelight

England midfielder scores again as Meret own goal hands Real Madrid victory against Napoli

Naples, Italy - Alex Meret's unfortunate own goal handed Real Madrid a 3-2 win at Napoli on Wednesday which moved the Spanish giants top in Champions League Group C.

Italian international goalkeeper Meret could do nothing to stop Federico Valverde's powerful, deflected shot crashing out off the bar and back into the goal off his outstretched arm 12 minutes from the end of an entertaining clash in Naples.

That unlucky rebound maintained Madrid's perfect start to the group stage and moved them three points clear of both the Italian champions and Braga, 3-2 winners over bottom side Union Berlin earlier on Tuesday.

"It was a difficult match, very hard-fought right until the last minute," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti to Sky Sport in Italy. "It seems absurd to me that that goal is given as a Meret own goal... Valverde is a great player and a great midfielder, he creates a lot and that was a great strike."

Vinicius Junior and Jude Bellingham scored the away side's other goals on former Napoli coach Ancelotti's return to southern Italy, giving Madrid a half-time lead after Leo Ostigard headed the hosts in front in the 19th minute.

England midfielder Bellingham, who also set up Vinicius' smart low finish, has now scored eight times in his first nine Madrid matches in all competitions and looked a class above most of the other players on the



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Napoli in their Champions League match on Tuesday (AFP)

pitch.

"What's so amazing about Bellingham is that he's only 20. He has great quality, a strong personality and character," added Ancelotti.

"He's a young man of 20 who's showing everyone what extraordinary talent he has." Piotr Zielinski had given Napoli hope that they could build on a recent burst of good form

when he smashed in a 54th-minute penalty harshly given for a Nacho handball while challenging Victor Osimhen.

Nigeria forward Osimhen was playing for Napoli after backing

supporters following a row with the club over an insulting video on social media, telling his countrymen that they were not racist.

Tuesday's match took place in a city shaken by a series of earth-

quakes in recent days and the Stadio Maradona rocked as the two teams went straight at it from kick-off.

Madrid were more dangerous in the opening exchanges, Rodrygo and Bellingham having respective efforts stopped by Meret and Mathias Olivera in the first 11 minutes.

But shortly afterwards Ostigard struck first blood for Napoli, powering in a header after Kepa Arrizabalaga flapped at Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's cross and Natan looped an effort of his own off

thumping home.

Kepa made up for his error for Napoli's goal six minutes before the break when he pulled off a super stop to deny Osimhen's bullet header from Matteo Politano's whipped cross.

Napoli were not downhearted and were rewarded for their enterprising play when referee Clement Turpin decided after checking the pitch-side monitor that Nacho had handled while challenging Osimhen.

Ancelotti was dumbfounded while Zielinski crashed his

It seems absurd to me that that goal is given as a Meret own goal... Valverde is a great player and a great midfielder, he creates a lot and that was a great strike

CARLO ANCELOTTI

the crossbar.

Napoli had their tails up but a sloppy pass from captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo allowed Bellingham to pounce and help bring Real level in the 27th minute.

Bellingham nipped in to intercept Di Lorenzo's ball into midfield from the right flank and only had to make a couple of steps before feeding Vinicius who calmly slotted home his first goal since mid-August.

And Bellingham silenced the previously boisterous crowd seven minutes later with a touch of pure class, collecting a pass in midfield before bursting forward, brushing off Ostigard and

penalty past Kepa and in off the post, and not long after the Pole stung the Madrid keeper's gloves with a powerful drive from just outside the area.

The introduction of Luka Modric helped turn the match in Madrid's favour, and Bellingham should have put them back in the lead when he headed wide after Vinicius' stinging shot was well saved by Meret.

But Meret could only look on in horror as Valverde was bundled by his teammates in celebration following a goal which gave Madrid the initiative in what looks to be a tight group.

AFP



Morocco, Portugal and Spain win race to host 2030 World Cup: FIFA

Lausanne, Switzerland - Morocco, Portugal and Spain will be joint hosts for the 2030 World Cup but games will also be played in Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay as the footballing showpiece celebrates its centenary, FIFA announced on Wednesday.

FIFA said in a statement that the matches in South America, one each in Montevideo, Buenos Aires and Asuncion, were part of the celebration to mark 100 years since the first World Cup in Uruguay. The bulk of games will be played in the three host countries.

The announcement puts an end to competition between two major bids, one led by Spain and Portugal and the other from Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay.

Once the technical criteria have been validated, the governing body of world football will make official the award of its flagship event in 2024.

But, following the "unanimous" approval by the FIFA Council, the way seems clear for this unprecedented intercontinental format, which promises

complex political and logistical challenges and raises further questions about the environmental impact of major sporting events.

At one stage, Spain and Portugal had included Ukraine in their bid, saying they wanted to send "a message of solidarity and hope" and pay tribute to the "tenacity and resilience" of a country invaded by Russia in February 2022.

Morocco, a five-time unsuccessful candidate to host the tournament, joined them in mid-March.

Saudi Arabia bid

Saudi Arabia announced on Wednesday it plans to bid to host the 2034 World Cup, the latest step in a campaign to turn the kingdom into a global sports powerhouse.

The bid "intends to deliver a world-class tournament and will draw inspiration from Saudi Arabia's ongoing social and economic transformation and the country's deep-rooted passion for football", said a statement from the Saudi Arabian football federation.

Man Utd, Arsenal rocked in Champions League

Paris, France - Manchester United crashed to a second successive Champions League defeat on Tuesday, losing 3-2 at home to Galatasaray, while Lens stunned Arsenal.

Mauro Icardi made amends for a missed penalty by scoring the winner for Galatasaray as the Turkish club twice came from behind at Old Trafford to pile more misery onto a deeply troubled United side.

United have lost their first two games of a Champions League group for the first time, leaving Erik ten Hag's men in danger of an early exit.

"The mental errors we make, you cannot allow them at this level. You get punished. This is difficult to control," Ten Hag told TNT Sports. "We are all in this together. We were twice up and in control of the game. We expect more together."

Rasmus Hojlund was one of



Galatasaray's Mauro Icardi celebrates after scoring against Manchester United (AFP)

the rare bright spots for United, scoring two well-taken goals, but Galatasaray responded both times as Wilfried Zaha netted against his old side before Kerem

Akturkoglu struck.

Icardi dragged a penalty wide after Casemiro was sent off for a desperate lunge following a dreadful ball out from goalkeeper

Andre Onana, but the Argentine had the last laugh when he chipped home on 81 minutes.

United are bottom of Group A, six points adrift of Bayern Munich

Klopp wants Spurs-Liverpool match to be replayed after VAR blunder

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp wants Liverpool's match at Tottenham to be replayed due to the VAR error that cost them an opening goal at the weekend.

Spurs went on to win the Premier League game 2-1 as nine-man Liverpool's unbeaten start to the season came to an end due to a 96th-minute own goal from Joel Matip.

The fallout from the VAR failure in Saturday's defeat, in which officials wrongly disallowed Luis Diaz's goal due to a misunderstanding over the on-field decision, is still being felt.

Referees body Professional Game Match Officials Ltd released a statement admitting a



Jurgen Klopp

"significant human error".

PGMOL released the audio conversation between the match officials after a request from Liverpool, but Klopp said that had made little difference to their thinking.

"The audio didn't change it at

all," he told a press conference on Wednesday. "It is an obvious mistake. I think there should be solutions for that. I think the outcome should be a replay.

"The argument against that would be it opens the gates. It is unprecedented. It has not happened before.

"I'm used to wrong and difficult decisions, but something like this never happened and so that is why I think a replay is the right thing to do."

Questioned over whether the club had asked or would formally ask the Premier League for a replay, Klopp added: "At this stage we are still going through the information we have."

AFP

Neymar scores first Al Hilal goal in AFC Champions League

Tehran, Iran - Brazil star Neymar opened his account for Al Hilal finally on Tuesday, scoring in his side's 3-0 victory in the Asian Champions League against Iran's Nassaji Mazandaran in Tehran.

The former Paris Saint-Germain forward, signed in August for a reported 90 million euros (\$94 million), grabbed the second in the record Asian champions' win at the Azadi Stadium.

The goal, a sweeping left-footed finish on 58 minutes, represented Neymar's first for

Hilal in five matches. Former Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic had opened the scoring on 18 minutes with a header, with substitute Saleh Al Shehri securing the result in injury-time to lift the four-time winners, runners-up last year, top of Group D.

Navbahor, 2022 Uzbekistan Super League runners-up and Champions League debutants, had earlier on Tuesday secured a 3-0 win at home to India's Mumbai City in Namangan.

AFP





Ben Stokes

Stokes doubtful for World Cup opener with hip injury

Ahmedabad, India - England star Ben Stokes could miss the World Cup opener against New Zealand due to a hip injury with captain Jos Buttler admitting Wednesday "it's not the time to take risks".

Defending champions England and the Black Caps will begin the 10-nation, 45-day showpiece tournament at Ahmedabad's 132,000-capacity stadium on Thursday.

"He (Stokes) has got a slight niggle in his hip. Fingers crossed that it'll be good news for us," Buttler told reporters.

"He is working hard with the physios and we'll know more when the guys arrive for training today. We'll make the right call: if he's not fit to play, he's not fit to play.

He added: "It's not the time to take big risks at the start of the tournament. It's going to be a long tournament."

The 32-year-old Stokes was selected for the World Cup as a specialist batsman

after a long-standing knee injury ruled out his role as a bowler.

Harry Brook could be included in the team for his seventh ODI since his 50-over debut in January if Stokes misses out.

Buttler praised the swash-buckling batsman.

"We all know what a fantastic player he is. The start of an international career that's been outstanding - in T20 cricket and the Test format," Buttler said of the 24-year-old Brook.

"He's not played loads of ODI cricket, but it's a format that should suit him perfectly. It will allow him to bat for a long time and make big runs and that's something he enjoys doing."

Thursday's game will be a rematch of the 2019 final at Lord's which was decided on boundary countback after the scores were level after a super over.

JOS BUTTLER, THE QUIET LEADER

Dashing batsman aims to defend England's ODI World Cup crown

London, United Kingdom - Jos Buttler already has a special place in English cricket given his fame and reputation owe far more to his exploits in white-ball cricket than the traditional Test-match game.

But he will cement his status as an England limited-overs great if he leads the side to a successful defence of their one-day international World Cup title in India, having helped them be crowned 50-over global champions for the first time on home soil four years ago.

Renowned as a gifted shot-maker right from his time as a promising schoolboy cricketer, the 33-year-old Buttler has flourished in an era where Twenty20 cricket has led to batting innovations such as the ramp and the scoop. The Somerset-born Buttler found Test cricket a tougher nut to crack, seemingly uncertain as to whether to stick to his natural game or play in more conservative fashion.

England, meanwhile, were sometimes unclear over whether they wanted to play him as a specialist batsman or wicketkeeper. To his credit, Buttler gave Test



Jos buttler

cricket a good go, playing 57 matches long before he effectively gave himself over to the shorter formats. But just two hundreds from 100 Test innings told its own story.

By contrast his 11 ODI hundreds are the most of any active player who bats at No.4 or lower, with nine of those hundreds coming in victories.

And when Eoin Morgan, the driving force behind England's white-ball revolution stood down from international duty last year,

obvious steel of Morgan or the gambling leadership instincts of Stokes.

But the modern 50-over game, with its powerplays and fielding restrictions, limits the scope of most captains.

And Buttler is quite happy to leave any visible flamboyance to his batting.

"At school, the louder guys are the cooler ones or have the most friends or seem to be most popular," he said last year.

"You leave school and realise

Jos has been an unbelievably good vice-captain while I've been captain. When he's stepped in he's been an exceptional leader and commands tremendous respect

EOIN MORGAN

Buttler was the obvious choice to take the reins.

'Respect'

He had been vice-captain for seven years and with England desperate not to over-burden multi-format stars such as Ben Stokes, it made sense to put Buttler in charge given he had already led England in 14 matches.

"Jos has been an unbelievably good vice-captain while I've been captain," Morgan said. "When he's stepped in he's been an exceptional leader, and within the group he commands tremendous respect."

A calming influence within the squad, Buttler may not have the

what a load of rubbish that is. Some of the best leaders I've played for are incredibly inspiring, even if they're not loud."

Buttler heads into this year's showpiece in India, a country he knows well from his time in the Indian Premier League, having already led England to the 2022 T20 World Cup title.

And for Buttler it is the immediate challenge posed by the tournament rather than what it means for his place in cricket history, that is the driving force.

"A lot of us have played a lot of cricket together for a long period of time...we've had some really good memories along the way already."

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The 'Top Three' most fascinating photographs will be published in Muscat Daily, on October 10, and will win a one-night stay for two persons each at Barceló Mussanah Resort

New Zealand pacer Southee 'unavailable' for opening match

Ahmedabad, India - New Zealand's Tim Southee will miss the World Cup's opening match against holders England and potentially some of the following matches due to an injured thumb, stand-in-skipper Tom Latham said Wednesday.

The Black Caps will be without regular captain Kane Williamson (knee injury) and Southee (thumb injury) at the tournament's opening match in the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday.

Williamson played the team's first warm-up purely as a batsman and then fielded as well in the second warm-up, but Southee still awaits his first outing in India.

"No Kane and no Tim as well," Latham told reporters ahead of the opener.

"He (Southee) is unavailable for selection. He is recovering nicely, it has been nearly two weeks post-surgery, so fingers



Tim Southee (C)

crossed he keeps recovering.

"It's a bit of a day-by-day process. But fingers crossed he'll be available sooner rather than later as well."

Southee, who dislocated his thumb in a one-day against England more than three weeks ago, underwent surgery and said doctors had to "chuck in some screws and a plate" to boost his

chances of playing in the 50-over showpiece event.

Southee played a key role in his team's runners-up finish in the 2019 edition but missed the dramatic final defeat to hosts England at Lord's.

The Kiwis are still hunting for their first World Cup title after making eight semi-final appearances in 12 editions.

Pakistan eye easier ride on World Cup rollercoaster

Hyderabad, India - Pakistan tackle outsiders Netherlands in their opening match of the World Cup on Friday desperate to avoid a repeat of the disastrous start of four years ago which undermined their campaign.

In 2019, Pakistan lost to the West Indies first up in Nottingham. They eventually missed out on a semi-final spot on net run-rate. Four years on and Pakistan are already riding a familiar tournament rollercoaster.

They crashed out of last month's Asia Cup after a big defeat against arch-rivals India be-

fore being ousted by Sri Lanka in the Super Four stage.

They also lost both their recent World Cup warm-ups against New Zealand and Australia.

Despite the sketchy form, captain Babar Azam insists his team are ready for the World Cup in a country which only two of the squad have ever visited.

Pakistan last played in India in 2016 at the Twenty20 World Cup. "We had good practice in the last week since our arrival and two useful workouts in the warm-up games," said Azam.

'It's like we're at home'

Ahmedabad, India - Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said Wednesday his team "was not expecting" the warm reception they have received in India, claiming "it's like we are at home".

"I think the hospitality was nice - we were not expecting this, but I think the way people are responding towards our team, everyone enjoyed it," Azam said on Wednesday.

Pakistan will take on India in Ahmedabad on October 14.



14

SPIN ON SPAGHETTI
Bring in some colour and dynamism on your dinner plate with spaghetti



15

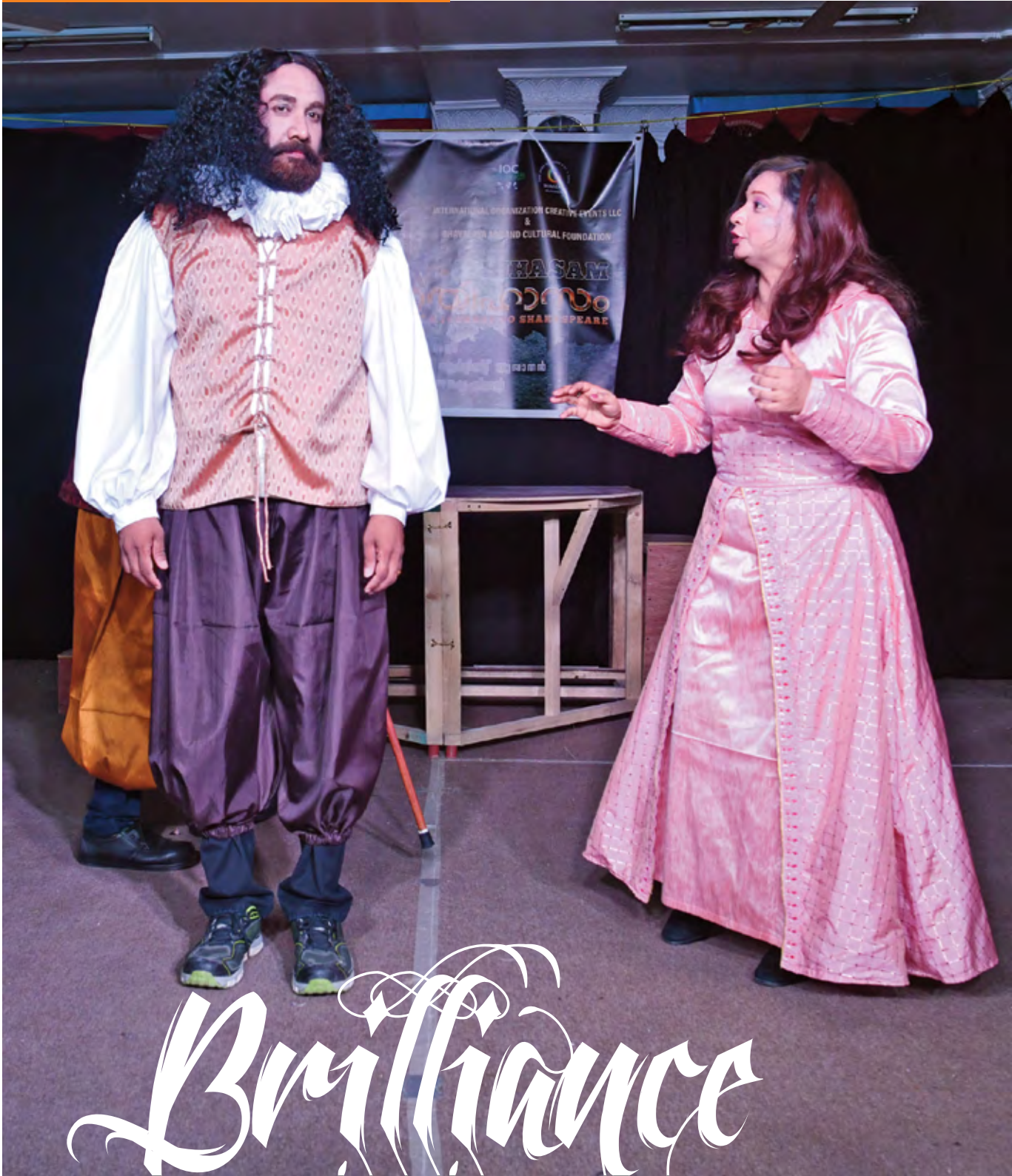
IN TOWN
Receptions held to mark National Day of Nepal and Saudi Arabia



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

SHAKESPEARE IN OMAN



ITHIHASAM – A SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA IN MALAYALAM TO BE STAGED IN QURUM NATURAL PARK ON OCTOBER 27 - IS POISED TO BECOME ONE OF THE BIGGEST PRODUCTIONS IN OMAN

Brilliance of the bard

Anirban Ray

All the world's a stage and men and women are merely players' - this sentiment seemed to echo through the clammy interior of a dingy rehearsal hall in CBD Ruwi... Ophelia, Desdemona, ran around in gorgeous attire while royal family members from England decked in flowing gowns and

garters danced to the tunes of daffodils and tulips. Oman's theatrical arena is now getting set for an extraordinary portrayal of the life of William Shakespeare - in Malayalam. Let that not make you squirm or shudder in disillusionment, for language is no barrier in any epic theatrical presentation wherein the message is conveyed with many a non-verbal cues, and the grandeur of the entire production transcends cultures and races in overwhelm-

ing the audience, The play, set to be staged on October 27 at Qurum Natural Park, will feature over 40 artists and extras who have been grooving to old anglo saxon music, costumes and stages for the past few weeks. The two hour play will have sub-titles in English and Arabic displayed on screens and is set to become one of the biggest productions in recent times. It is presented by International Organisation Creative Events and Bhavalaya Art and Cutral Foundation.

Tension and emotion
Muscat Daily managed to take a peek at one of the dress rehearsals last weekend and the experience seemed praiseworthy. The air was charged with an extraordinary blend of tension and emotion. Amidst the confusion of blocking, costume changes, and

the lead as Shakespeare, come into his own self once the director's voice commanded the lights to dim. Emerging out of his own personality, one could see that Biju he had an uncanniness of stepping into the shoes of the bard and getting consumed by the spirit of Shakespeare and the world he had brought to life. Balakrishnan said, "Crafting the drama Ithihasam was an epic journey filled with immense struggle. Our greatest challenge was managing the time of our dedicated working professional actors, who rehearsed tirelessly for six months. Each character was fashioned considering the depths of their voices and appearances, a testament to their commitment.

Celebrity greed
"In moments when rehearsals faltered, I refrained from losing



The Ithihasam artistes and crew with Dr Ratnakumar (centre)



(Photos: V K Shafer)

my temper, knowing it would only add to the overall stress. Instead, I sought to inspire them with a sense of 'celebrity greed' after each performance, reminding them of the extraordinary work they were part of. "I encourage many actors to transform physically, working out to change their looks, embodying different characters.

the cause. "We faced the monumental task of recreating the old English world on stage, and we were fortunate to have special stage craft experts join us from India. Ithihasam is our labour of love, a testament to the power of collaboration and the unwavering belief in the transformative magic of theatre."



Crafting a play centred around the complex character of William Shakespeare was both a daunting and enriching task

RAJESH BALAKRISHNAN

lighting adjustments, remarkable transformations took place. Oman got transformed to an Elizabethan realm, transporting the audience to a time of quills and candlelight, of passion and melodrama. There were shouts from the director, Rajesh Balakrishnan, who kept intervening to instruct the actors and the technical hands as the play artfully unveiled Shakespeare's inner sanctum, revealing how his own life experiences ignited the flames of creativity. The characters he etched were not mere ink on parchment, they were an extension of lively reflections of his own journey. As the actors portraying characters like Desdemona and Ophelia delved into their roles, the atmosphere grew charged with intensity. Sweat poured from their brows as they put their hearts and souls into their performances. You notice, that their voices underwent a profound transformation, abandoning normalcy as they wept, laughed, screamed, making each emotion appear larger than life. As the final curtain fell, the actors could be seen drawing deep sighs of relief in the wings, their exhaustion mingling with triumph. It was a surreal sight to witness the gentle Biju, who played

Crafting a play centred around the complex character like William Shakespeare was both, a daunting and enriching, task. Night after night, I delved deep into the psyche of William, striving to feel and understand his profound consciousness and the intricacies of the story. In the end, Ithihasam became a testament to the dedication and resilience of our remarkable cast and the enduring power of storytelling." Dr J Retnakumar, president and founder of Bhavalaya Art and Cultural Foundation, said, "The inspiration to bring Shakespearean theatre to Oman was born from a deep desire to infuse our culture with the timeless brilliance of the Bard. It was a journey marked by relentless struggle, assembling a vast cast and crew dedicated to



cook-up

ITALIAN FARE

Spaghetti with Pesto Sauce

- Ingredients**
- 400g spaghetti
 - 60g Parmesan cheese - cut into 1 inch cubes, plus more for serving
 - 100g½ spinach - washed, dried and thick stems removed
 - ½ handful fresh basil - washed and dried
 - ½ cup pistachios - roasted
 - 3 cloves garlic
 - 2 - 3tbsp lemon juice
 - Zest of 1 lemon
 - 1tsp fine kosher salt
 - ½tsp freshly-ground black pepper
 - ½ cup olive oil

Method
Bring a large pot of salted water to a roaring boil. Add spaghetti and cook to al dente or your pre-



ferred doneness. Reserve 1 cup of starchy pasta water.
For the pesto sauce, in a food processor, add cubes of Parmesan cheese. Process on high speed for 20 - 30 seconds or until finely grated. Add spinach, basil, pistachios, garlic, lemon zest and juice, salt, black pepper and chilli flakes to the food processor. Pulse 20 - 30 times, scraping the bowl as necessary, until well incorporated and ground to the texture of coarse sand.
While processing on low or medium speed, slowly stream in olive oil until the desired consistency is reached. Adjust seasonings, as desired.
Transfer about 1 cup of the pesto into a large bowl, away from any heat sources. Add the freshly cooked, drained pasta to the bowl. Add a generous splash of pasta water and stir vigorously. While stirring, add additional pasta water, as needed, until the pesto sauce and pasta water have emulsified into a rich sauce that coats the noodles.
Serve immediately with extra Parmesan cheese.

Spin on spaghetti

Spaghetti with Meat Sauce



- Ingredients**
- 400g lean ground beef/mutton
 - 3tbsp olive oil
 - 1 cup chopped onion
 - 3 garlic cloves - minced
 - 2tbsp tomato paste
 - ½tsp dried oregano
 - Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
 - 1 cup water/broth
 - 1 can crushed tomatoes
 - Salt and fresh ground black pepper
 - Handful fresh basil leaves, plus more for serving
 - 400g dried spaghetti
 - ½ cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Method
For the sauce
Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat and add the meat and cook until browned - about 8 minutes. As the meat cooks, use a wooden spoon to break it up into smaller crumbles. Add the onions and cook, stirring, until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic, tomato paste, oregano, and red pepper flakes and cook, stirring continuously for about 1 minute. Pour in the water and use a wooden spoon to scrape up any bits of meat or onion stuck to the bottom of the pot. Stir in the tomatoes, ¾tsp of salt, and a generous pinch of black pepper. Bring the sauce to a low simmer. Cook, uncovered, at a low simmer for 25 minutes. As it cooks, stir and taste the sauce a few times so you can adjust the seasoning accordingly

For the spaghetti
Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil, and then cook spaghetti. Check for doneness a minute or two before the suggested cooking time.
Now, take the sauce off the heat, and then stir in the basil. Toss in the cooked pasta, and then leave for a minute so that the pasta absorbs some of the sauce. Toss again, and then serve with Parmesan sprinkled on top.

Have a different spin for dinner, conjure up some spaghetti to suit your own liking. You can also add your personal touch with any favourite ingredients

Spaghetti Carbonara

- Ingredients**
- 250g spaghetti
 - 1tbsp butter
 - 1 shallot - finely chopped
 - 2 cloves garlic - finely chopped
 - 6 strips of beef bacon - chopped
 - 2 eggs
 - 150ml single cream
 - 25g Parmesan - finely grated

Method
Boil a large pan of water and cook the spaghetti following the packet instructions. Meanwhile, heat a

knob of butter in a small frying pan and cook the shallot, garlic and beef bacon for 5-7 minutes until golden. Beat together the eggs, cream, most of the Parmesan and plenty of ground black pepper. Drain the spaghetti and return to the pan, off the heat. Add the shallot and egg mixtures and toss together.
Divide between two bowls then scatter the rest of the Parmesan over, with a grinding of black pepper to serve.



Spaghetti alle Vongole



- Ingredients**
- 1.5kg fresh live baby clams - cleaned and scrubbed
 - 6tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
 - 2tsp chopped fresh rosemary leaves
 - 3 garlic cloves - finely chopped
 - 6tbsp white grape juice
 - 400g spaghetti
 - 4tbsp chopped fresh flatleaf parsley

Method
Clean the clams thoroughly, drain and put them in a wide, deep frying pan with 2tbsp of the oil and half the rosemary. Cover and heat. When the pan is very hot, shake it regularly over the heat to help the clams open up.
After 6-7 minutes, any clams that are going to open should have done

so. Discard any closed clams, drain the rest, then reserve the clams and their liquid.
Heat the remaining oil in the deep frying pan with the garlic and remaining rosemary for a few minutes. Add the clams, strain over the reserved liquid, then add the grape juice. Mix everything together and bring to the boil, then cover and immediately take off the heat.
Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil and cook the spaghetti. Then drain and return to the pot.
Pour the clams and any juices over the spaghetti, then toss together. Add the parsley and plenty of freshly ground black pepper, toss again, and transfer to a warmed platter or bowl. Drizzle with oil and serve at once.

عالي البروتين
و قليل السكر

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take a break

IN TOWN

NATIONAL DAY OF NEPAL



Embassy of Nepal hosted a reception to celebrate the National Day and Constitution Day of Nepal on September 19



Photos: V K Shafeer



Saudi Arabia National Day



Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted a reception to mark its National Day on September 23



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

I	Y	W	S
S	H	S	S
E	T	T	E
H	R	O	B

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

	8	2	5	7	1			
			2			6	7	
		9			3	5		
	6				9		3	
1		5		3		8		6
	3		8				5	
		6	4			2		
	5	8			6			
			3	8	5	9	6	

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS



1. How many keys are there on a standard piano?
A 56
B 70
C 88
D 44
2. What was the name of Long John Silver's pet parrot?
A Captain Flint
B Captain Haddock
C Mr Hook
D Sergeant Green
3. How many minutes are there in one week?
A 10,000
B 10,800
C 10,080
D 10,808

Answer :
1. C
2. A
3. C

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

4	9	6	5	8	1	7	2	
1	2	7	9	3	6	8	5	4
5	8	2	4	1	7	9	6	3
7	5	1	2	9	8	4	3	6
9	6	8	4	3	7	5	2	1
2	3	4	6	5	1	7	9	8
8	2	5	3	4	9	6	1	7
1	7	7	6	8	2	3	4	5
6	3	4						

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You might not be a very impetuous person, but would it do you any harm to act more spontaneously? The answer is no! You can achieve your goals just as efficiently when you just run out and act on them. You don't have to spend days or weeks researching every little possible factor. There are only so many situations you can anticipate, so why try to cover all the bases?



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You have great insight into the big events going on right now, and people are depending on you for help. You have the answers that will fire up their minds and get them moving in the right direction. But in trying to get these answers, people might start acting a bit weird. Be prepared for unexpected responses.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Say it all or don't say anything today. Right now, there's no point in sharing your deep thoughts unless you share every single one of them, so don't hold back! It's not about oversharing or wearing your heart on your sleeve. It's about being honest and trusting other people enough to hear you without judgment.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You are firing on all cylinders today! Your brain is sharper than ever right now, and you're able to learn new and difficult things extremely quickly. It's the perfect time to sign up for that language class, begin a challenging novel, or try your hand at learning a new skill. However, while mental tasks offer no challenge, you could be tripped up when it comes to physical activities.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Desiring change in your life and making changes both require patience. If someone else holds the power over a big promotion, job change, or other kind of role change, you can't force them to make their decisions any faster. And if you're working at creating new change, you have to understand that all don't move on your timetable.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Let your curiosity guide you today. Be open-minded and follow wherever that curiosity leads you. Wondering if that person is already romantically attached? Step up and ask them! Wondering what it would be like to try a new look? Search online for styles and looks you'd usually pass right by. It's so much fun to push things in a new direction that you just might want to make it a habit.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your creativity has been on a roll lately, and all you have to do today is just let it keep on rolling! Don't think things through too closely. Leave enough messiness and open spaces in your schedule to encourage last-minute thinking and improvisation. Make sure you have some breathing room. Let your imagination ignite and take you to new places.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today, it's important to devote some serious energy toward finding a balance between your home life and your public life. Going out with friends and having fun is a perfectly fine thing to do, but you shouldn't be doing it every night. There could be problems at home you're ignoring, so start staying in more often to balance your time.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone who has power over your schedule is willing to make certain adjustments that will make you very happy, and today is a great day to connect with them and make it happen. Get to it as early as you can. You will excel at any kind of negotiation today, from getting extra time on a tricky project to getting the best seat at a restaurant.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The best way to make sure that you have more money later is to start saving more of it now. This simple rule seems logical, but logic usually flies out the window when you're standing in front of a new gadget you want. Today, start a new trend. When you're tempted by a new goodie in a store, just say no. It might feel like the gravitational pull of the earth is forcing you to plunk down your cash.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

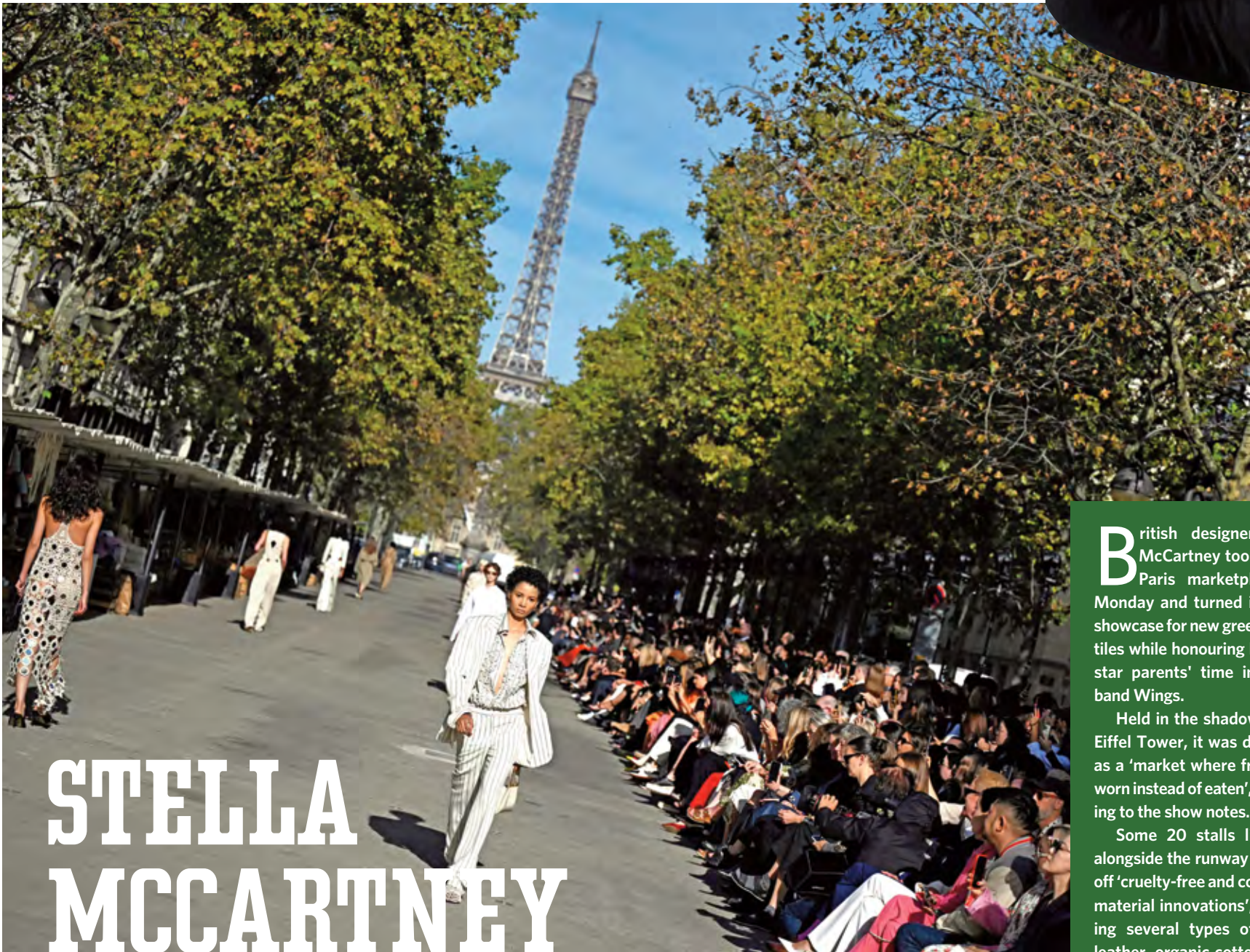
Your brilliance will always shine through, so why are you nervous about that big speech or presentation you have to make? Rest assured that your audience, no matter how big, will be impressed by your performance. Instead of using all your energy stressing out, use it to envision the warm reception you'll receive.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Sure, your energy may be flagging a bit now, but so what? Give yourself a break and stop pushing so hard to be everything to everyone. All you really need is some rest. If you can, take a nap. Reschedule a meeting or appointment that you're dreading. Ask for some help to get things done. The presence of another person will be enjoyable, plus it might even perk up your energy.

entertainment



STELLA MCCARTNEY
TURNS FASHION SHOW
INTO GREEN TECH
MARKETPLACE

ACTOR TOM HANKS WARNS
OF AD WITH AI IMPOSTER

Actor Tom Hanks and CBS talk show co-host Gayle King on Monday were warning fans about ads featuring imposters generated by artificial intelligence.

"Beware," Hanks said in an Instagram post that evidently showed a copy of an unauthorised digital version of him. "There is a video out there promoting some dental plan with an AI version of me. I have nothing to do with it."

The message had received more than 111,700 'likes' since the Academy Award winning actor posted it to his 9.5 million followers on Instagram on Sunday. King, a co-host of *CBS Mornings* talk show, posted what she said was a bogus video clip of her enticing viewers to click a link to learn about her weight loss.



HOLLYWOOD
WRITERS' GUILD
LEADERS CALL OFF
MONTHS-LONG STRIKE

The leaders of the Writers Guild of America on Tuesday called off a months-long strike that has paralysed Hollywood, accepting a pay deal hammered out with production studios.

The powerful writers' union's board of directors "voted unanimously to recommend the agreement," it said in a statement, adding "the strike ends at 12:01 am" Los Angeles time on Wednesday.

The union's 11,500 members will have final say on whether or not to accept the offer, with a vote to take place between October 2 and 9, the group said.

SELENA
GOMEZ ON
HOW HER BEAUTY
BRAND OVERLAPS WITH
HER MENTAL HEALTH
ADVOCACY

Selena Gomez is known for a lot of things: her music, beloved acting roles, mental health advocacy and, in the last few years, *Rare Beauty*.

Through the beauty line, the *Only Murders in the Building* actress found a way to intertwine beauty products with mental health initiatives.

"I wanted there to be a conversation started," Gomez told Fast Company about her desire to start *Rare Beauty* following her bipolar diagnosis. "I wasn't ashamed, and I wanted it to lead to something healing."



SOPHIA LOREN, 89,
RECOVERING AFTER
A FALL

Italian screen legend Sophia Loren was recovering Monday after undergoing hip surgery following a fall at her Geneva home.

The star suffered fractures when she fell on Sunday just days after her 89th birthday, but a subsequent operation was successful, according to a statement from Loren's eponymous chain of restaurants.

"Now she will have to observe a short period of convalescence followed by a course of rehabilitation," it said.

"Fortunately, everything went well and the Signora will be back with us very soon."

Born into poverty in Naples, Loren had risen to become a Hollywood star, earning two Oscars along the way. She was also one of the great 'sex symbols' of the 1950s and 1960s, and Italy's best known cinematic export.

TALK SHOWS
COMING BACK AFTER
HOLLYWOOD WRITERS'
STRIKE ENDS

Late-night talk shows, a mainstay of the US TV schedule, will be back on the air within a week, hosts said Wednesday, after leaders of the Writers Guild of America called off a paralysing strike.

The densely written shows - fronted by Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, Seth Meyers and John Oliver - have been a glaring absence since writers downed pens in May over demands for better pay and guarantees against the threat from artificial intelligence.



RELEASING TODAY



SAW X

John Kramer (Tobin Bell) is back. The most chilling installment of the SAW franchise yet explores the untold chapter of Jigsaw's most personal game. Set between the events of *SAW I* and *II*, a sick and desperate John travels to Mexico for a risky medical procedure in hope of a miracle cure for his cancer but stumbles upon a scam.

Genre: **Horror**
Starring: **Tobin Bell, Shawnee Smith, Synnøve Macody Lund, Steven Brand**
Language: **English**

TAKING ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:

THE CREATOR

Genre: Science fiction Starring: John David Washington, Gemma Chan, Ken Watanabe, Sturgill Simpson

The *Creator* is a 2023 American science fiction film produced and directed by Gareth Edwards, who co-wrote the screenplay with Chris Weitz. Its plot, set in a future impacted by war between the human race and the forces of artificial intelligence, follows an ex-special forces agent, Joshua, who is recruited to hunt down and kill the

'Creator', who has developed a mysterious weapon with the power to end the war by destroying mankind itself, but must choose whose side he is on when he discovers what the weapon actually is.

In 2055, an artificial intelligence created by the US government detonates a nuclear warhead over Los Angeles, California. In response, the US and its



Western allies pledge to eradicate AI from the earth in order to prevent humanity's extinction. Their efforts are resisted by New Asia, a country in southeast Asia whose people continue to embrace AI despite outcry from the West. The US military launches an extensive military campaign against AI, seeking to assassinate 'Nirmata' - the mysterious chief architect behind New Asia's AI advancements.

Amid a future war between the human race and the forces of artificial intelligence, Joshua seeks to kill the Creator, the elusive architect of advanced AI who has developed a mys-

terious weapon with the power to end the war-and mankind itself.

It's also awkward for a movie to suggest that maybe the use of AI to replace humans in a variety of scenarios isn't such a terrible idea after all, given the current strike in Hollywood wherein the Writers Guild of America was striking against this issue, among others. In this futuristic setting, the technology comes in the form of a sweet-faced, even-tempered little girl nicknamed Alphie (Madeleine Yuna Voyles).

Hold on to your seats for this roller-coaster...you might leave the cinema feeling that the ride is not yet over. Sci-Fi buffs, have a splurge!

Rating ★★☆☆☆