



Oman stresses role of human rights at IPU General Assembly

The Council of Oman, under the leadership of Shaikh Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib al Hinai, Deputy Chairman of the State Council, participated in the 147th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and its accompanying meetings hosted by the Republic of Angola. **SEE P3**



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MARAFIQ INVESTS \$600M IN ELECTRICITY AND WATER PROJECTS IN DUQM



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AL DIN FESTIVAL'S DARING CAR DRIFT PERFORMANCES

P12

AUSTRALIA EDGE NEW ZEALAND BY FIVE RUNS IN RECORD EPIC



MUSCAT

OMAN, JORDAN CALL FOR PROTECTING GAZA

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Ayman Al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, over phone stressed the importance of continuing efforts at the United Nations and urging countries to vote for the draft resolution submitted to the United Nations by Jordan on the importance of protecting civilians and commitment to the legal and humanitarian obligations. They underscored the importance of urgently delivering relief and humanitarian aid as well as power and fuel to the inhabitants of Gaza.

KARAGANDA

32 PEOPLE KILLED IN MINE FIRE

Kazakhstan said on Saturday that 32 people died in a fire in yet another deadly accident at a mine owned by ArcelorMittal, with over a dozen still missing, in the Central Asian country's worst disaster in years. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called the Luxembourg-listed steel and mining giant the "worst" company "in our history" while the firm announced a preliminary deal on the nationalisation of its local operations. Tokayev had earlier ordered his government to take control of the Kazakh branch of the company. "ArcelorMittal can confirm that the two parties have... recently signed a preliminary agreement for a transaction that will transfer ownership to the Republic of Kazakhstan," the global steel giant said in a statement. **SEE P5**



A citizen votes using Intikhab for the municipal elections in 2022. – FILE PHOTO

OMAN GOES TO SHURA POLLS TODAY

MUSCAT: For the first time in the Arab world, Omanis will select their representatives to the Majlis Ash'shura through AI-enabled Intakhib mobile application.

Intakhib mobile, which was first successfully deployed in 2022 Municipal Council elections, has been updated with many new features like sign language and audio option making it easier for people who are visually and hearing impaired. These newly-introduced services made available by the Intakhib represent a quantum leap in the election history of the Sultanate of Oman.

The zero-paper poll will begin at 8:00 am and end at 7:00 pm.

A total of 753,690 registered voters are eligible to cast their votes via Intikhab and also on the website elections.om. As many as 13,843 Omanis living abroad

cast their vote last Sunday. The Ministry of Interior affirmed its full readiness for the administrative, technical, legal and media aspects related to the elections. Plans and working mechanisms have been laid down in coordination and integration with the relevant authorities. The Ministry of Interior sent awareness messages to citizens on the importance of voting in the Majlis Ash'shura elections. It said that the procedures have been simplified after the provision of 12 electronic electoral services that include a number of electoral services such as the availability of the initial and final candidate lists, the availability of the initial and final voter lists, checking registration at the electoral register, and following up the automated counting of votes. The application also provides numerical statistics showing the percentage of voting in each wilayat and other e-services. **TURN TO P4**

TOTAL SEATS **90**

TOTAL VOTERS **753,690**

TOTAL CANDIDATES **843**

1.4 million displaced inside Gaza as bombings rise

GAZA STRIP: The United Nations warned thousands more civilians could die as Israel escalated ground operations in Gaza, while the European Union called for hostilities to stop to enable aid deliveries.

The health ministry in Gaza said Israeli strikes had killed 7,703 people, mainly civilians, with more than 3,500 of them children.

The conflict is the fifth and deadliest in Gaza since Israel unilaterally withdrew troops and settlers from the Palestinian territory in 2005.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk warned of "the possibly catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in Gaza", saying "thousands more civilians" could die.

Gaza Civil Defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP "hundreds of buildings and houses were completely destroyed and thousands of other homes were damaged" in the overnight strikes.

Amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in Al-Shati refugee



People check the destruction following Israeli strikes on Al-Shatee camp in Gaza City on Saturday. – AFP

camp in the northern Gaza Strip, Alaa Mahdi likened Israel's bombardment to an "earthquake".

"If it were a natural earthquake, it would have been much easier than what happened last night," he said.

"What happened last night was more like a horror movie," Gaza City resident Jihad Mahdi said.

"People in the streets have become lifeless bodies walking."

Hamas said all internet connections and communications

across Gaza had been cut.

AFP journalists in Gaza confirmed they were only able to communicate in limited areas where they could connect to Israeli networks across the border.

SEE ALSO P6 and P7

Oman: Israeli attacks on Gaza are war crimes

MUSCAT: Oman affirmed that the continuation of dangerous escalations, the policy of collective punishment and the grave violations of international law and international humanitarian law practiced by the Israeli occupation forces during their brutal war on the Gaza Strip, are war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Oman cautioned against the ground operations that the Israeli occupation army intends to carry out as they portend serious catastrophic impacts on the region and the world and undermine chances of achieving peace and stability. Oman's Foreign Ministry called on an immediate intervention by the international community to end the Israeli war and violations in accordance with the resolution issued by the United Nations General Assembly on October 27 to spare the blood of innocent civilians. **SEE ALSO P2**

OPINION

P8



Dr Hamed Al Sinawi

You have been cancelled

P9



Noof A'Saidi

Is era of coexistence over?

RAINS LIKELY TODAY



Rains lashed some parts of the country as the effect of a low pressure system continued on Saturday. Rains of varying intensity fell on a number of wilayats and areas adjoining the Eastern Hajar Mountain Range. Met office said there are chances of rainfall today as the effect of the low pressure subsides gradually from today.



MoI hosts dinner for media persons

MEDIA CENTRE SET UP FOR POLLS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information hosted a dinner party in honour of journalists and media persons from brotherly and friendly countries who will be covering the Majlis Ash'shura elections.

The event was attended by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior and Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

Omanis will cast their votes today to elect 90 members of the tenth term of Majlis Ash'shura.



The Ministry of Information hosted a dinner party in honour of visiting journalists.

The Majlis Ash'shura Elections Media Committee has completed its preparations for the media coverage and the media centre has been set up at InterContinental Muscat hotel.

The Media Centre will provide media services to journalists and correspondents from local, regional and international media outlets to cover the Majlis Ash'shura elections.

The Media Centre provides journalists with data and pictures. It also coordinates press interviews and provides various publications, brochures to enable journalists to accomplish their missions. It comprises a photo gallery that showcases features of the Shura march.

— ONA

Conference on housing and urbanisation today

MUSCAT: The Urban October and the first GCC Gulf Housing Week Conference will kick off here today under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The conference is organised

by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning under the title 'Better city for better life'.

The three-day conference seeks to improve city planning and urban life, develop the housing and real estate sector, enhance sustainable urban economy, protect the environment and boost ecosystem.

— ONA

GCC condemns Israeli violence in Gaza

NEW YORK: The GCC countries condemned the violence in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli aggression on innocent civilians as these actions contravene the international law and the international humanitarian law and the principles set forth by the Fourth Geneva Convention adopted in 1949 which obligates Israel, as an occupying power, to protect civilians at times of war.

This came in a statement delivered by First Secretary Khalid bin Saleh al Rabkhi, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the United Nations in New York, on behalf of the GCC countries, within the framework of the tenth extraordinary session of the General Assembly, entitled: 'Illegal Israeli actions in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory'.

The statement said that the Security Council has been unable to take any unified position for several days regarding what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories particularly in the Gaza Strip and the aggression carried out by the Israeli occupation forces against the innocent and peaceful residents

which is a matter of concern to all of us and deserves condemnation by the international community.

The statement condemned the siege, starvation, collective punishment, cutting off water and electricity supplies, and preventing access to the most basic necessities of living.

The United Nations indicates that more than 6,500 Palestinian citizens have martyred in the Gaza Strip so far, including 2,300 children, 1,200 women, and a number of international employees working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and that the numbers of injured stands at around 17,000, the statement said.

During the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, a draft resolution submitted by Jordan on behalf of the Arab Group, calling for an immediate, permanent and sustainable humanitarian truce leading to the cessation of hostilities and the provision of basic goods and services to civilians throughout Gaza immediately and without hindrance, was adopted by a majority of 120 members.

— ONA



The high tech media centre is all ready for journalists covering the Majlis Ash'shura elections at the InterContinental Muscat hotel.

Al Maghsar market set to boost job opportunities in S Al Batinah

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, OCT 28

The Al Maghsar Market in Al Musannah is all set to open as the project is nearly complete and a grand opening is likely by the end of the year. Located in the heart of Al Musannah, the market promises a dynamic and service-oriented marketplace that will cater to the diverse needs of the governorate's residents.

This significant development encompasses a variety of commercial shops, different outlets, and a dedicated section for the sale of livestock and seasonal produce. The primary aim of this project is to revitalise and expand the existing market infrastructure to address the growing needs of the community and enhance the availability of essential services.

Al Maghsar market boasts a total of 27 commercial shops offering a wide range of goods and services. In addition, it provides dedicated areas



Al Maghsar Market in Al Musannah

for banking facilities and a marketplace for livestock and seasonal produce, making it a one-stop destination for the region's citizens.

The establishment of Al Maghsar market is a pivotal step towards boosting the economic growth of Al Batinah South Governorate. This project underscores the importance of service-oriented initiatives designed to foster development and support the region's economic prospects. It is expected to drive economic growth and contribute to an improved standard of living for the local population. For the first time, Al Musannah will have a large marketing

area like this suq, setting the stage for future projects in the area.

One notable feature of Al Maghsar market is its commitment to empowering Omani youth. Employment opportunities at the market will prioritise Omani citizens, ensuring that the local workforce plays a significant role in its day-to-day operations. This commitment to the nation's youth reflects the project's focus on inclusive development and the betterment of the local community, taking into account Al Musannah's cultural handicrafts, coastal beauty, and seasonal agricultural bounty.



Eng Badr bin Mohammed al Saidi

Badr bin Mohammed al Saidi, General Director of the Al Batinah South Municipality, affirms that this project is a promising initiative in the region. It will play a crucial role in achieving strategic objectives by enriching the economy, ensuring sustainability, and providing employment opportunities for Omanis. Moreover, ongoing developmental and investment projects in the neighbouring region will further bolster the province's economic prospects.

As Al Maghsar market prepares for its inauguration, it is set to become a bustling centre of commerce and a symbol of progress for Al Batinah South.

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Oman stresses role of human rights at IPU General Assembly

LUANDA: The Council of Oman, under the leadership of Shaikh Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib al Hinai, Deputy Chairman of the State Council, participated in the 147th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and its accompanying meetings hosted by the Republic of Angola.

In his address to the international parliamentary community, Shaikh Dr Al Khattab emphasised the importance of preserving and promoting human rights as a core priority for all nations.

He underscored this by upholding human rights, and societies progress, leading to the spread of peace and security, benefiting not only individuals but society as a whole, as well as the world at large.

Shaikh Dr Al Khattab also highlighted the grave consequences of rights violations, which breed animosity, injustice, and a climate of non-coexistence, tension, and discontent among diverse populations. Such violations disrupt peace and stability, resulting in chaos within societies and on a global scale.

Shaikh Dr Al Khattab also pointed out that the Inter-



Oman delegation at the 147th General Assembly of the IPU in Luanda.

Parliamentary Union's focus on discussions about peace, justice, and strong institutions underscores the organisation's deep commitment to human rights.

He also stressed that parliaments play a pivotal role in safeguarding the rights of the people they represent. Given their proximity to the public and their active role in listening to and working on behalf of their constituents, parliaments are often the first to respond to rights violations, working diligently to

find solutions that restore and uphold these rights.

As part of its engagement in the 147th General Assembly of the IPU, the Council of Oman's delegation actively participated in various committees, including those dedicated to democracy and human rights, United Nations affairs, sustainable development, international peace and security, and meetings of the Association of Secretaries-General of National Parliaments.

The discussions encompassed critical issues such as the United

Nations' role in supporting national development, the pursuit of gender equality, climate partnerships to promote environmentally friendly energy access, and initiatives to foster innovation, responsibility, and fairness.

The agenda also included preparations for the parliamentary meeting at the United Nations Climate Change Conference and deliberations on the reform of the Security Council to promote a more multilateral system. — ONA



SAND DUNE WALKING IN AL QABIL

The Department of Heritage and Tourism in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate recently organised a sand dune walking adventure in the 'Shajat Al Jawfa' area of Wilayat of Al Qabil. This event was conducted in collaboration with several specialised sports teams in adventure tourism coincided with Omani Youth Day and marked the beginning of the winter tourist season. The adventure event serves as the inaugural activity within the winter activities plan that extends from October to May of the following year. Mohammed bin Saif al Riyami, the organiser of tourism events, Heritage and Tourism Department, noted that the event aims to encourage Omani youth and sports teams to partake in adventure tourism events and to amplify the role of sports in promoting tourism. — ONA

Oman takes part in Al Nahham Festival

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, is actively participating in the Al Nahham Festival taking place in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, from October 27 to November 2.

Organised by the Theatre and Performing Arts Authority, this festival offers a diverse array of enrichment activities in various regions, live theatrical performances, art exhibitions, and a 'Nahma' art competition that draws participants from all Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

This initiative aims to showcase marine performing arts and bolster their presence in the cultural landscape.

Oman's engagement in the festival involves two distinguished folklore bands, namely Al Naseem Folklore Band and Fatah Al Khair



Folklore Band.

Oman is also represented by a jury member, Hamoud bin Hamad al Ghailani, a prominent researcher and writer. This participation underscores Oman's commitment to preserving and promoting marine performing arts in the Arabian Gulf, fostering collaboration in performing arts, strengthening the bonds between Gulf communities, shedding light on marine environments through accompanying events. — ONA

Manah hosts scientific symposium on sustainable cultural heritage

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, OCT 28

Oman Across Ages Museum organised a scientific symposium "Oman Across Ages Museum: a sustainable cultural heritage" under the auspices of Nasser bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, last week in Manah.

The symposium aimed to highlight the role of the museum in presenting the authenticity of the unique cultural heritage for thousands of years, raising awareness about heritage, fostering pride, and elucidating the museum's role in the process of sustainable cultural development.

The symposium contained several scientific papers.

These included a working paper on "The alphabet of Omani inscriptions: birth and spread" by Dr Asmahan Said al Jaru, a specialist in historical studies at the Oman Across Ages Museum.



A scientific symposium on sustainable cultural heritage was held at the Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah.

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, head of the Media Department, College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, shared a working paper on 'the history of Oman media at the Oman Across Ages Museum' and his personal experience.

Dr Abdullah bin Saif al Ghafri, Unesco Chair for Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa, discussed a working paper on 'guidelines for selecting the contents of the Aflaj corner in the museum'.

Dr Ali bin Hamad al Lawati,

assistant professor, Unesco Chair for Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa, also examined a working paper about "the knowledge content presented in embracing Islam: a reading of the sources and reasons for cultural connotations.

A working paper on 'the social content in Oman Across Ages Museum' was presented by Dr Nasser bin Saif al Saadi, assistant professor of history and culture at the Unesco Chair for Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa. Dr Najia bint Mohammed al Siyabiyah,

a senior research and studies administrator, at Oman Across Ages Museum, and Roqaya bint Khamis al Shukriyah, head of the Information Department at Oman Across Ages Museum, presented a paper on 'research writing for the Museum in the Renaissance Era'.

Farihah bint Almur al Majaaliyah, an administrator specialising in multimedia production and design, discussed a working paper on 'visual and interactive presentations at Oman Across Ages Museum'.

Tender

مدائن madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
12/2023/ PEIE/ HQ-12	MADAYN GENERAL INSURANCE FOR 2024-2025	09-11-2023	27-11-2023	INSURANCE AND FINANCE SERVICES	FIRST AND ABOVE	150

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200.

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

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TOTAL SEATS 90
(63 WILAYATS)

TOTAL NUMBER OF VOTERS 753,690

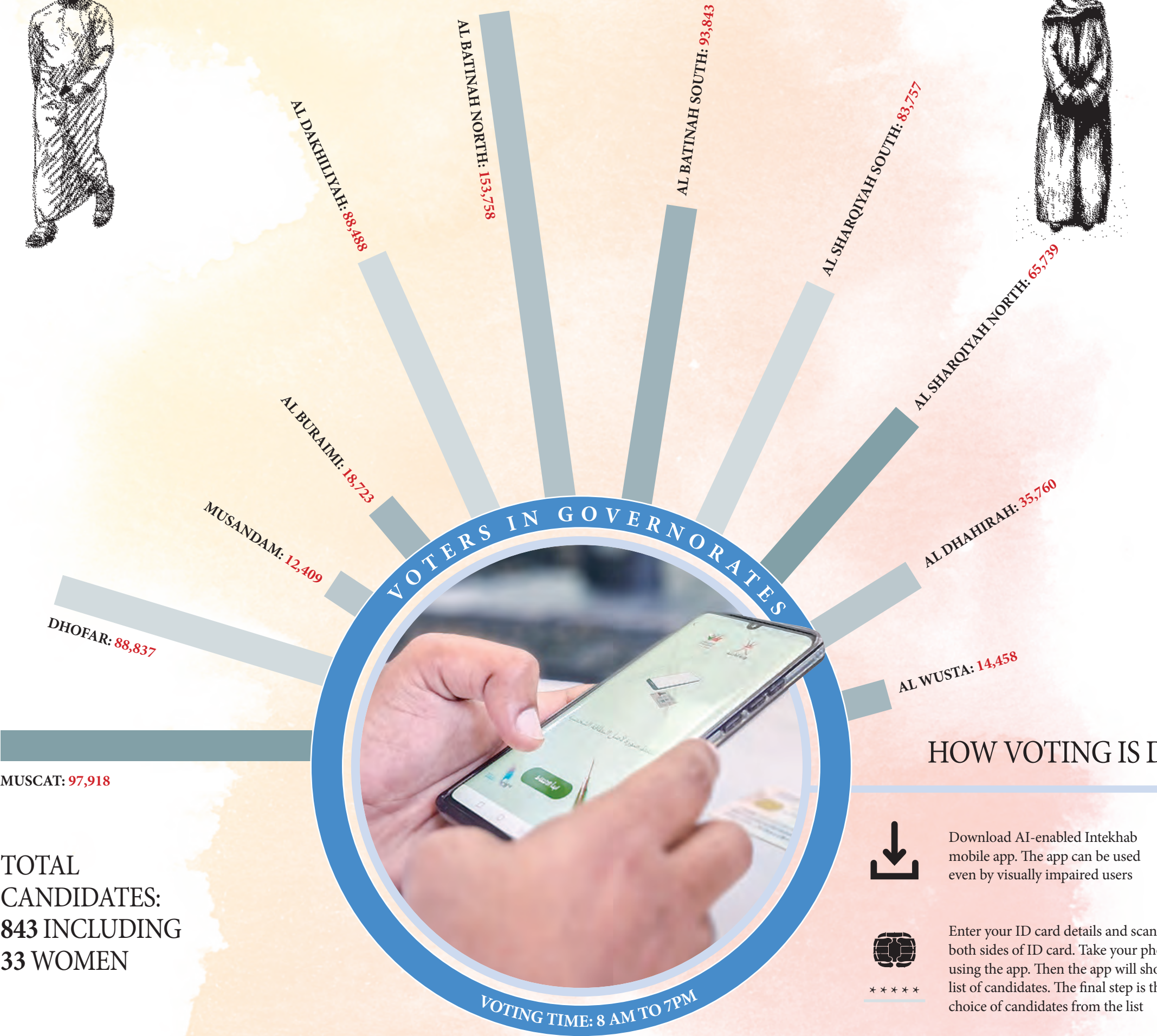
390,846 MEN



362,844 WOMEN



NEW VOTERS 139,963



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It expedites the process of capturing voters' photographs by incorporating an eye recognition feature.

Oman goes to shura polls today

FROM P1
The Ministry of Interior stated that data and information will be available in a transparent manner through live broadcast of the indicators and statistics during the voting day, stressing that the electoral process for the 10th term is characterised by accuracy and transparency especially after all electoral services were digitally transformed. The MoI is keen on digitising all services and programmes as part of its digital transformation plan and to realise this objective the ministry utilises the latest artificial intelligence products to facilitate the electoral process

for both voters and candidates.
A total of 843 candidates including 32 women are vying for 90 seats at Majlis Ash'shura.
The tenth term of Majlis Ash'shura will witness further activation and translation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040 at various economic, investment and development levels and fields as well as the goals of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan and the charting of the paths of the eleventh five-year plan.
The number of registered voters from Muscat Governorate stands at 97,918 with 93 candidates including 12 women.
The campaign for the election

ended on Friday.
The Ministry of Interior has called on all candidates to remove all billboards that were installed during the electoral propaganda period in accordance with the pledge and written acknowledgment.
A media centre designated for journalists will be opened at the Muscat InterContinental Hotel, which has been equipped with various facilities.
More than 50 journalists from outside the Sultanate of Oman have been invited to participate in reporting, covering, and recording the proceedings of the Majlis Ash'shura elections.
The number of new voters

Voters from outside Oman expressed their satisfaction over the e-voting process and the ease of using the application which saved their effort and time and praised the Sultanate of Oman's leadership in utilising technology in the electoral process

registered through the Intikhab application amounts to 91 per cent compared with 9 per cent of voters who registered via the election website.
Voters from outside Oman expressed their satisfaction over the e-voting process and the ease of using the application which saved their effort and time and praised the Sultanate of Oman's leadership in utilising technology in the electoral process.
The application is characterised by an easy and simple user interface and a high level of security using the latest encryption, which makes polling secure and transparent.

The voter's data will be verified in three basic steps, which are photographing the original ID card, reading the personal card data via the NFC feature, and taking a personal photo of the voter.
Voting takes place in easy and simple steps, where the voter takes a photo of the ID card from both sides and then places the original chip of the card next to the phone to read the data.
Then the voter takes a personal photo of himself, after which a list of photos of the candidates will appear to vote for their favourite candidate, followed by a confirmation button. — ONA



US, China agree to work towards Biden-Xi meeting

WASHINGTON: The United States and China agreed to work towards setting up a meeting between the two countries' leaders next month, after President Joe Biden met Beijing's top diplomat at the White House.

Biden has invited Xi Jinping to San Francisco in November for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Xi has not yet confirmed he will come.

After Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Biden and other senior US officials in Washington, the White House said both countries had agreed to keep up "high-level diplomacy" to try to smooth ties.

The two sides "reaffirmed" that they were "working together towards a meeting between President Biden



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (R) look on during a meeting at the US Department of State in Washington, DC. – AFP

and President Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November," the White House said in a statement.

A senior administration official

said the White House was leaving it to Beijing to confirm that Xi would come, but "we are making preparations for just such a meeting."

An official readout of talks between Wang and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan released by Beijing confirmed "both sides agreed to make joint efforts to realise a meeting between the two heads of state".

In a separate readout of his meeting with Biden, Wang was quoted as saying his visit was aimed at "working to stop the decline in China-US relations, stabilise them, and bring them back to the track of sound and steady development".

Biden told Wang that Washington and Beijing must "manage competition in the relationship responsibly and maintain open lines of communication," according to the White House.

With the conflict raging in

The two sides reaffirmed" that they were working together towards a meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November

the Middle East, Biden also "underscored that the United States and China must work together to address global challenges," it added in a statement.

US officials had "expressed our deep concern with the situation in the Middle East and pressed China to

take a more constructive approach," including talking to its allies there, the senior administration official added.

Wang has been on a two-day visit to Washington during which he also met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the latest in a series of high-level contacts between the United States and China.

His meeting with Biden had been expected after Blinken met Xi in Beijing in June, but it had not previously been confirmed.

US officials have repeatedly spoken of creating "guardrails" with China to prevent worst-case scenarios and have sought, without success, to restore contact between the two militaries.

— AFP

Kazakhstan says 32 killed in ArcelorMittal mine fire



This photograph shows a view of the Kostyenko ArcelorMittal coal mine in Karaganda, north-western Kazakhstan. – AFP

KARAGANDA: Kazakhstan said on Saturday that 32 people died in a fire in yet another deadly accident at a mine owned by ArcelorMittal, with over a dozen still missing, in the Central Asian country's worst disaster in years.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called the Luxembourg-listed steel and mining giant the "worst" company "in our history" while the firm announced

a preliminary deal on the nationalisation of its local operations.

Tokayev had earlier ordered his government to take control of the Kazakh branch of the company.

"ArcelorMittal can confirm that the two parties have... recently signed a preliminary agreement for a transaction that will transfer ownership to the Republic of Kazakhstan," the global steel giant said in a

statement.

At the mine, emergency workers comforted local community members, especially women, as they waited anxiously for news of those who had been working below the surface.

Dozens gathered in a waiting room, some with their heads in their hands and all looking anxious.

The fire was one of the deadliest in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet history and came just two months after five miners were killed in a blast at a site owned by the company.

"At the Kostenko mine as of four pm the bodies of 32 people have been found," the emergency situations ministry said in a statement. "The search for 14 miners is continuing."

"This is a tragedy," Tokayev said as he met with families of the victims in the Karaganda region.

He called for a day of national mourning on Sunday.

No cause of the accident had been announced, with

Tokayev saying an investigative commission would be set up.

There have been five other deadly accidents at ArcelorMittal in Kazakhstan since November last year, resulting in a total of 12 deaths.

Ambulances and police entered the mine compound on Saturday.

ArcelorMittal promised compensation and said it would cooperate with authorities.

"Our efforts are aimed at that compensation and on the tight cooperation with state authorities," it said.

Officials said 18 people had been hospitalised after the fire.

"Fifteen of them are in the toxicology department with carbon monoxide poisoning," said regional health department head Bibigul Tulegenova.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sent his condolences to his Kazakh ally.

"Please convey words of sympathy and support to the families of the killed miners," Putin said in a statement.

— AFP

S Korea, US troops hold drills with drones, laser



The South Korean and American flags fly next to each other at Yongin, South Korea. – Reuters file photo

INJE: South Korean and US troops held joint future combat drills involving drones, an unmanned vehicle and wearable laser sensors this week as part of efforts to modernise their militaries, Seoul's army said on Saturday.

The training came as South Korea's military conducts a series of annual Hoguk autumn exercises aimed at improving responses to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

More than 120 soldiers from both sides joined forces to fight against a trained team of opposing forces in a mock-up town that appeared similar to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, built at the Korea Combat Training Centre in the mountains in the eastern city of Inje.

The drills also mobilised various high-tech weapons systems aimed at beefing up future combat capabilities, with the troops wearing multiple integrated laser engagement systems (MILES), which uses lasers to simulate actual battle.

Several drones were flown for reconnaissance purposes, some also firing an assault rifle, while South Korea dispatched a multipurpose unmanned vehicle to carry wounded personnel.

Choi Jeong-II, a captain of

the South Korean army's 25th Infantry Division, nicknamed the TIGER brigade, said the unmanned assets and the MILES gear helped identify enemies and gauge the allied troops' casualties.

"We were able to confirm the enemy's movements using the drones, and hit them with the cutting-edge strike equipment, which allowed us to maximise the results of the operation while minimising damage to our forces," he said.

First Lieutenant Derek Chen from the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the US 4th Infantry Division said the drills offered an "eye-opening experience" and the assets would be beneficial in future combat operations.

South Korea's army launched the TIGER brigade last year as a pilot unit for future warfare operations using artificial intelligence-powered drones and highly mobile fighting vehicles. It aims to transform all combat units based on that model by 2040.

The army also held what it called its first international future warfare competition for five days until Saturday, participated by some 300 troops from five countries including Britain, Uzbekistan and Cambodia.

— Reuters

Ukrainian drone struck Russian nuclear waste facility, says ministry

MOSCOW: A Ukrainian drone crashed into a nuclear waste storage facility at the Kursk power plant in western Russia on Thursday, damaging its walls, Russia's foreign ministry said on Saturday, calling on other governments to condemn Kyiv.

Ukraine must have known that its actions could have caused a full-scale nuclear catastrophe, the ministry's statement said.

"We call on all governments to issue a strong condemnation of Kyiv's barbaric actions, which are extremely dangerous and could lead to irreparable consequences," said ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Moscow said on Friday that it had thwarted the drone attack and two news outlets said an explosion had damaged the facade of a warehouse storing nuclear waste.

Zakharova said one explosive-packed drone had damaged the nuclear waste facility's walls while another two had hit an administrative building complex.

"According to preliminary data, the drones used in the attack on the nuclear power plant used

components supplied by Western countries," she said, adding that such an attack must have had the permission or possibly of Ukraine's allies or possibly been ordered by them.

The Kursk plant said after the attack that there were no casualties and that radiation levels and operations were normal.

Ukraine generally declines to confirm or deny military operations inside Russian territory.

Thursday night's incident came a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said a Russian drone attack in Ukraine's western Khmelnytskyi region had probably targeted the area's nuclear power station.

The UN nuclear watchdog said that attack destroyed "numerous windows" at the site but did not affect the Ukrainian plant's operations or its connection to the electricity grid.

Meanwhile, Russian diplomats dismissed as lies a White House allegation that Moscow's military was executing its own soldiers if they refused to carry out battlefield orders in Ukraine.

"Whoever came up with these



Ukrainian servicemen of Ukrainian Air Defence unit of the 241st separate brigade of the Territorial Defence Forces take part in a training in Kyiv. – AFP

other-worldly lies could only have been a person with an imagination far into overdrive," the Russian embassy in Washington said in comments carried by the RIA Novosti news agency.

Ukraine has launched a counteroffensive, which has regained villages in the south and east, but is moving more slowly

than an advance last year through occupied northeastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Friday that Russian losses had grown significantly in the past week. These included, he said, at least a brigade worth of troops trying to advance on the eastern town of Avdiivka.

— Reuters



‘WORSE THAN

THOUSANDS OF
PRO-PALESTINIAN
PROTESTERS
DEMAND
CEASEFIRE
DURING
LONDON MARCH

LONDON: Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters marched in central London on Saturday calling for an immediate ceasefire in the deadly Mideast war.

It was the third consecutive weekend that the British capital had seen a large rally in support of Palestinians.

Saturday’s protest in London came as Israel’s army intensified its assault on the war-torn Gaza Strip late on Friday.

Many demonstrators waved Palestinian flags and chanted slogans including “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

They also held signs that read “Free Palestine” and “Gaza, stop the massacre,” while some protesters let off fireworks and red and green flares.

Dani Nadiri, 36, said UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s call for a “humanitarian pause” in the fighting to allow aid into Gaza and hostages to leave was not enough.

“A full ceasefire needs to happen,” the TV producer said, adding: “It’s time now to do something rather than let it escalate any further.”

Noori Butt, from Luton in southern England, said she just wanted the war “to end”.

“It can’t go on like this. The world is dying and I want lasting peace for everybody. That’s the way it should be,” the 38-year-old teacher said.

About 100,000 people were expected to join the “March for Palestine,” according to London’s Metropolitan Police, which said it had deployed more than 1,000 officers to patrol the march.

The demonstrators gathered at Victoria Embankment at midday, before making their way to the British parliament in Westminster.

Other rallies took place on Saturday in Manchester and Glasgow, Scotland.

The UK government’s stance on refraining from calling for a ceasefire is in line with the position of the United States — both say Israel has the right to defend itself within international law.

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said on Saturday that it has given no indication it “desires or would abide by calls for a ceasefire”.

— AFP

Israeli strikes destroy ‘hundreds’ of Gaza buildings

GAZA: Israel’s army relentlessly hammered Gaza on Saturday after fierce overnight bombardment that rescuers said destroyed hundreds of buildings three weeks into a war sparked by the deadliest attack in the country’s history.

The United Nations warned thousands more civilians could die as Israel escalated ground operations. Israel unleashed its bombing campaign after gunmen stormed across the Gaza border on October 7.

The health ministry in Gaza said Israeli strikes had killed 7,703 people, mainly civilians, with more than 3,500 of them children.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk warned of “the possibly catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in Gaza,” saying “thousands more civilians” could die.

“When these hostilities end, those who have survived will face the rubble of their homes and the graves of their family members,” Turk said.

“Hundreds of buildings and houses were completely destroyed and thousands of other homes were damaged,” said Gaza Civil Defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal.

The intense bombardment had “changed the landscape” of northern Gaza, he said.

In Shati refugee camp on the outskirts of Gaza City, widespread damage was visible.

“What happened in Shati is worse than an earthquake,” camp resident Alaa Mahdi said.

“There was bombing from everywhere, the navy, artillery and the planes,” he continued.

“Who are they striking, the resistance? No, the

poor people.”

Hamas’s armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said it targeted Israeli forces in an area of northern Gaza near the border on Saturday.

A thick haze of smoke covered Gaza and southern Israel after the night of heavy bombardment.

“There are a large number of martyrs and a large number of survivors under the rubble, and we cannot reach them,” a Gaza civil defence official said.

“The stench of death is everywhere, in every neighbourhood, every street and every house,” respiratory physician Raed al-Astal said from Khan Yunis in southern Gaza.

Journalists in Gaza confirmed they were only able to communicate in limited areas where they could connect to Israeli networks across the border.

Human Rights Watch warned the near-total telecommunications blackout in Gaza risked providing cover for “mass atrocities”.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said the outage had disrupted ambulance services.

The UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, Lynne Hastings, said on X that “hospitals & humanitarian operations can’t continue without communications”.

Between the bombardments and the fuel shortages, 12 of Gaza’s 35 hospitals have been forced to close.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said it has had to “significantly reduce its operations”. — AFP



A picture shows smoke rising during an Israeli air strike in the northern Gaza Strip. – AFP



Protesters hold placards and wave Palestinian flags as they walk over Westminster Bridge with the Palace of Westminster, home of the Houses of Parliament behind during a ‘March For Palestine’ in London. – AFP



BLACKOUT DISCONNECTS BOMBARDED C

GAZA: A telephone and internet blackout isolated people in the Gaza Strip from the world and from each other on Saturday, with calls to loved ones, ambulances or colleagues elsewhere all but impossible as Israel widened its air and ground assault.

International humanitarian organisations said the blackout was worsening an already desperate situation by impeding life-saving operations and preventing them from contacting their staff on the ground.

Three weeks into a war that has saturated global media coverage, the blackout also meant a previously constant flow of information, images

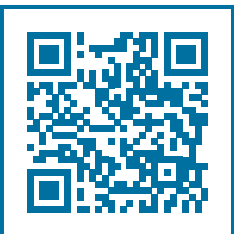
and videos from inside the strip had reduced to a trickle, making it difficult to understand the extent and impact of the latest strikes.

“My brain cannot fathom that things can get any worse. And here we are on Day 21, we have lost service. If you are dying, you can’t ring up the ambulance service. If you are struck, whatever happens, you can’t communicate with anyone,” said Plestia Alaqad, a freelance journalist in Gaza.

“I’m supposed to tell the world what is going on, well I am in Gaza and I don’t know what is going on. There is no internet, no network, no service, no fuel to move around by car, no electricity, nothing,” she said in a mix of



The Israeli military fires shells toward the Gaza Strip. – AFP



EARTHQUAKE'



A man pushes his push bike past a gas station destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Khan Yunis refugee camp, in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



Women walk past a destroyed building in the aftermath of Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



A man sits in front of buildings destroyed by Israeli strikes in Gaza City. – AFP

GAZANS FROM THE WORLD

I'm supposed to tell the world what is going on, well I am in Gaza and I don't know what is going on. There is no internet, no network, no service, no fuel to move around by car, no electricity, nothing

PLESTIA ALAQAD
a freelance journalist in Gaza

English and Arabic. The Palestinian health ministry said on Saturday at least 7,650 people had been killed and 19,450 injured in Gaza since Israel's bombardment began. It said 70 per cent of the dead there and in the West Bank, were women, children or the elderly.

The UN World Food Programme, World Health Organization and other agencies, as well as independent aid groups including Medecins Sans Frontieres and the Norwegian Refugee Council were among those saying they had lost contact with staff in Gaza.

Several humanitarian groups said Israel had deliberately cut off communications to the strip.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Reuters has been unable to independently verify what was causing the blackout.

"The Israeli authorities have cut off landline, cellular, and internet communications, severely affecting our essential emergency medical services," said the Palestine Red Crescent Society on social media platform X. For media organisations, the inability to maintain regular contact with teams in Gaza underlined concerns over the safety of their staff and made it much harder to report comprehensively on what was happening. — Reuters

ERDOGAN CALLS WEST 'MAIN CULPRIT' BEHIND GAZA 'MASSACRE'



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan speaks during a rally in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. – Reuters

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday called Western powers "the main culprit" behind the Israeli army's "massacre" of Palestinians in Gaza. The Turkish leader has been a leading international supporter of Palestinian rights during his two-decade rule.

The health ministry in Gaza said Israeli strikes had killed 7,650 people – mainly civilians – with more than 3,000 of them children.

Erdogan's party staged a massive pro-Palestinian rally in Istanbul on Saturday that the Turkish leader said had drawn a crowd of 1.5 million. He unleashed a scathing attack at Israel and its Western supporters after taking the stage with a microphone in his hand. – AFP



Flares are fired from northern Israel over the southern Lebanese border village of Aita al-Shaab. – AFP

NEARLY 29,000 DISPLACED IN LEBANON AMID CLASHES: UN

BEIRUT: Nearly 29,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon amid deadly exchanges between Lebanese fighters and the Israeli army, a United Nations agency said on Friday.

A total of 28,965 people have been displaced, mainly in the country's south, the International Organization for Migration said in an update, adding that the figure had risen by 37 per cent since October 23.

Some have found refuge with family members elsewhere in the country, while those who can afford it have been able to rent apartments on a short-term basis. But with Lebanon in the grips of an economic crisis that has plunged most of the population into poverty, some are living in makeshift shelters in the south's larger towns.

In Lebanon, at least 58 people have been killed in the cross-border exchanges of fire, most of them are fighters but also including at least four civilians, one of

them Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah.

On October 7, gunmen poured from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

In retaliatory Israeli air and artillery strikes, at least 7,650 people have been killed in Gaza, including more than 3,000 children, according to figures released by the health ministry in the territory.

The death toll in Gaza is the highest there since Israel withdrew from the Palestinian territory in 2005.

With tension climbing again, the Lebanese authorities issued precautionary guidance for evacuating the airport and surrounding installations in case of emergency. But the guidance did not indicate that there was any imminent threat to the site.

The conflict in Gaza, where Israel has stepped up its ground offensive, has raised fears that fighting could expand more widely in the region, including the flashpoint Lebanese border. – Agencies

SAUDI CONDEMNS 'UNJUSTIFIED' GAZA GROUND OPERATIONS

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Saturday warned Israel against any further ground operations in the embattled Gaza Strip over the threat to Palestinian civilians, denouncing an "unjustified" violation of international law.

The warning came after Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said on Friday night that the Israeli army was "extending" its ground operations after two straight nights of tank incursions.

Saudi Arabia "condemns and denounces any ground operations carried out by Israel due to the threat they pose to the lives of Palestinian civilians", the kingdom's foreign ministry said in a statement.

It warned against "the danger of continuing to carry out these blatant and unjustified violations of international law against the brotherly Palestinian people", saying it would have "serious repercussions for the stability of the region". Israel's army relentlessly hammered the territory on Saturday after fierce overnight bombardments that rescuers said destroyed hundreds of buildings, three weeks into a war sparked by the deadliest attack in the country's history.

"The kingdom calls on the international community to assume its responsibilities to immediately stop this military operation" and "enable humanitarian and relief organisations to deliver humanitarian aid" to civilians, the foreign ministry said. – AFP



Prince Faisal bin Farhan – Saudi Foreign Minister

You have been cancelled



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Greta Thunberg, the twenty-year-old Swedish environmental activist known for her campaign for an immediate action for climate change tweeted last week “Today we strike in solidarity with Palestine and Gaza. The world needs to speak up and call for an immediate ceasefire, justice and freedom for Palestinians and all civilians affected”.

This led Israel’s education ministry to remove any reference to Thunberg in its school curriculum as a protest to Thunberg’s statement.

This was an example of the cancel culture that is spreading mainly in the West but soon will reach elsewhere. So, what does cancel culture mean?

According to Wikipedia ‘Cancel culture’ is a phenomenon where a person is shunned or boycotted for speaking or acting in an unacceptable manner.

This shunning behaviour may extend to social or professional circles which could be in person or on social media or in person.

We often hear about a celebrity being cancelled

for expressing an opinion or acting in a certain way but more recently it has been reported outside the entertainment industry.

Put in simple words, cancel culture is nothing more than silencing people who disagree with the big power which is a clear attack on freedom of speech. Cancelling Thunberg is a good example of the double standards expressed by some Western countries since we have not seen a similar reaction when someone burnt the Quran or made offensive drawings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, such acts where considered freedom of speech and the perpetrator got away with it.

According to Research, people who are being cancelled feel isolated and rejected and may develop anxiety and depression. The cancelling behaviour teaches others not to voice their opinions for fear of being cancelled. We often see this during times of wars and political conflict where the mantra ‘you are either with us or against us’ becomes prominent.

This is where some TV interviews with Arab or Muslim politicians during the current war in Gaza start by asking the interviewee if he or she

‘CANCEL CULTURE’ IS A PHENOMENON WHERE A PERSON IS SHUNNED OR BOYCOTTED FOR SPEAKING OR ACTING IN AN UNACCEPTABLE MANNER

condemns Hamas while deliberately ignoring the impact of the war on the Palestinians.

This is a psychological move to distract the listeners from focusing on what the guest is going to say by directing attention to his personal opinion which although clear for many people who understand the history behind the conflict is not that clear to some people in the west who have been brainwashed over years about the promised land.

This tactic aims to discredit the guest in the eyes of the listeners even before he starts speaking.

People need to wake up and realise that cancel culture is not about an angry teenager who blocked his friend after an argument but a well-structured tactic from one party to dominate and tell others what to think and how to react.

In simple words, it’s a kind of return to the dark ages. Therefore we need to be aware of it and act in solidarity so we do not end up being brainwashed by big media outlets who have their own bias and only work for their interests regardless of any moral or ethical obligations toward other human beings.

Fears grow of tighter state grip on Serbian media

UNA SABLJAKOVIC

Two controversial bills backed by Serbian lawmakers this week have sparked fears of more state control over the media and another setback for press freedom in the Balkan nation.

Parliament approved a law on public information and the media as well as another on electronic media on Thursday.

If President Aleksandar Vucic signs the legislation into law, it will notably enable state-owned telecoms provider Telekom Srbija to acquire media outlets — something that was prohibited up to now.

The votes raise “fears of state influence and state pressure” on the media, the president of the European Federation of Journalists, Maja Sever, said.

The intention of the authorities is to “legalise the role of the state... in (the) media market”, opposition MP Robert Kozma, of the Green-Left Front party, said after the vote.

“And that means only one thing — the spread of media darkness,” he said.

The information and communications ministry called the adoption of the two laws an “important step towards the further improvement of the media scene in Serbia”.

The government said earlier this month that the new laws guaranteed freedom of opinion, expression and press “in line with the highest international standards”.

Telekom Srbija is the largest telecommunications operator in the country with nearly 53 per cent of users, official figures show.

But it does not offer the independent N1 or Nova S television channels.

The European Parliament in May voiced concern about the “dominant market position of Telekom Srbija, where the majority stakeholder is the state”.

It also noted allegations “that the ruling party is using it to increase its influence over the media market in Serbia”.

By allowing Telekom Srbija to establish and buy media outlets, Serbia, which aspires to join the European Union, has shown it still “selectively accepts European values and principles”, said the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia (NUNS). — AFP

Students on the run, schools taken by troops and a generation’s catastrophe



Abdi Latif Dahir

The writer is the East Africa correspondent for NYT

WITH AN ESTIMATED 19 MILLION CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL, SUDAN IS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING “THE WORST EDUCATION CRISIS IN THE WORLD,” UNICEF WARNED THIS MONTH.

The young girls and boys, wearing colourful scarves, tattered shirts and flip-flops, ran across the dusty ground to form jagged lines and face the teachers at the start of the school day.

The children, hundreds of them gathered in makeshift classrooms, had arrived in this aid camp in recent months after fleeing the war in their homeland of Sudan. But even as they began to gain a sense of normalcy in their schooling, many were still burdened with memories of the vicious conflict they endured, which had left loved ones dead and their homes destroyed.

“We know that pain is lasting inside their hearts,” said Mujahid Yaqub, 23, who fled Sudan and now teaches English at the school in the Wedwil refugee centre in Aweil in South Sudan. Many of the children, he said, were unable to focus in class and often cried over the memories of their terrifying escape from shellings and massacres. “We want to inform them that there’s hope,” he said, but “it is painful.”

Universities and primary and secondary schools across Sudan remain closed six months after the war began, jeopardising the future of an entire generation. With an estimated 19 million children out of school, Sudan is on the verge of becoming “the worst education crisis in the world,” UNICEF warned this month.

Teachers across the northeast African nation have gone unpaid and young people out of school have been exposed to physical and mental threats, including recruitment into armed groups. Universities and government educational offices have been destroyed or used as defence positions, and at least 171 schools have been turned into emergency shelters for displaced people, according to a spokesperson with Unesco.

“If this war continues, the damage to the education system will be irreparable,” said Munzoul Assal, who until April was a social anthropology professor at the Faculty of Economics and Social Studies at the University of



Students gathering outside makeshift classrooms at an aid camp in Aweil, South Sudan.

Khartoum.

The war between the Sudanese army, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led by Lt Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has killed up to 9,000 people and injured thousands more, according to the United Nations.

Both sides to the conflict said on Thursday that their delegates arrived for the cease-fire talks brokered by the United States and Saudi Arabia in Jeddah — though neither side agreed to a pause in the fighting. Representatives from the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, an eight-member regional bloc that Sudan belongs to, were also attending the talks.

With over 7 million people internally displaced, including more than 4.6 million since the conflict began, Sudan is now the largest internal displacement crisis in the world, the UN said.

More than 70 per cent of health care facilities nationwide have also been shuttered, even as the country confronts rising infections and deaths from cholera, dengue and malaria, and tens of thousands of pregnant women struggle to find lifesaving care. Aid efforts are also being encumbered by funding shortfalls, with the UN

receiving only 33 per cent of the \$2.6 billion it needs to deliver humanitarian assistance in Sudan this year.

The conflict has continued to intensify in recent weeks across the Darfur region in western Sudan, where ethnically motivated attacks have prompted investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court.

The UN Human Rights Council this month also established an independent fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations in the conflict, a move that was widely welcomed by rights groups.

For decades, the education system in Sudan suffered from under funding and a lack of teacher training, in addition to political interference by the government of ruler Omar al Bashir. But the hopes that many had that conditions would improve after he was ousted in 2019 were quickly dashed. The enduring political crises and the tumbling economy left students crammed into overcrowded classrooms and teachers going on strike over unpaid salaries and poor working conditions.

The war that has now convulsed the nation has only deepened those problems, leaving many students without any prospects.

— The New York Times

Rise of bigotry, fall of tolerance

“Tolerance,” said that most articulate of American statesmen, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, “implies no lack of commitment to one’s own beliefs, but rather condemns the oppression, or persecution, of others.”

Certainly, tolerance, or its alter ego intolerance, whether an issue of race, creed, or colour, is something that is being rudely flung in the face of contemporary society. So what have we done to deserve this? Certainly, there appears to also be a distinct lack of compassion around us too, a lack of care, of empathy, a simple concern for others that reeks of a lack of good grace, most noticeable among teens and young adults. It’s almost as if, with the aggressive nature of social media, its global accessibility, and the enabling tools of online communication and imagery, these young people feel they must commit to opinions or sentiments at the extremities of notion. That to be uncertain or uncommitted is a sign of weakness, of pervarication.

There is truth in Benjamin Franklin’s opinion that ‘there are no certainties other than death or taxes,’ wouldn’t be a bad sentiment to accept. Because not being negotiable actually puts one in a position of weakness. They are built on certainties that don’t exist, minimum standards and compliance, and therefore attach themselves to minimum standards of achievement, which is so incredibly wrong.

The uncomfortable reality though, is that such veiled dogmatism is a sign of significant weakness, for only in dogma do you ‘paint yourself into a corner,’ from which extraction can be so painful as to maintain a false defence of self, and so, not only is one’s social media persona questioned, but one’s opinion of, and confidence in themselves is called into question, and on such fragile foundations all long-held belief and judgement is called to question.

Young people, at this time of life, must have the confidence to express their opinions so we adults



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The writer is a media consultant

CERTAINLY, THERE APPEARS TO ALSO BE A DISTINCT LACK OF COMPASSION AROUND US TOO, A LACK OF CARE, OF EMPATHY, A SIMPLE CONCERN FOR OTHERS THAT REEKS OF A LACK OF GOOD GRACE, MOST NOTICEABLE AMONG TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

must similarly be wary of giving them the opportunities to express themselves, while at the same time offering examples of the wrong types of responses. One very clear element of social media that can be excessively harmful to the youthful generation is sarcasm, a weapon that we more mature adults have learned to use as a conversational or argumentative device, and it can cut like a knife, surgically, painless at first, but ultimately, cruelly.

We, the elder, more enlightened generation, unfettered by the myriad of restrictions imposed by an increasingly intolerant society, tended to express our opinions in what may be seen as an ‘unfiltered’ manner, yet one that had two key factors. The first was integrity, honesty, clarity, whatever you would call it now... the message would be understood by everyone who saw or heard it. However, even more importantly, there was an open-ness to discussion and debate, and opinions could change or be changed, without either party feeling like they had been slapped down.

The lack of tolerance, resilience, or flexibility in discussion, whether online or in person, contemporarily, is so alarming. What is it that forces anyone, especially young people, to become so fixed, so intransigent, so un-listening, so unwilling to see alternatives, or other perspectives in discussion? Are they intimidated, scared... I wonder, or are they simply encouraged to say nothing unless indoctrinated? There could be any number of answers, or none, and either is a scary thought.

The reality, as Robert C Gallagher said, is that “if we really do think the art of discussion is dead, we should try telling a kid to go to bed.” Just think about it... at that specific time they are able to conduct a negotiation, make relevant statements, become more articulate, vocalising so much more effectively than during any other time during the previous twenty-three and a half hours... They upskill so effectively that... upon reflection... we parents take comfort in the knowledge that they will survive, even in a bigoted, ‘dog eat dog world.’

ANCIENT MARTIAL ART



A boy performs ‘Gatka’, an ancient form of Sikh martial arts during a religious procession ahead of the birth anniversary of fourth Sikh Guru Ramdas near the Golden Temple in Amritsar on Saturday. – AFP

Is era of coexistence over?

Until recently, Europe was seen as the last refuge for young people in the Middle East or other countries of the world fleeing wars or from political, economic, and personal freedom restrictions.

However, today, it seems that immigrants lack a sense of security. They feel that their entire existence is at stake, and they can easily lose all of these or change their lives simply by expressing their opinion about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or showing any sign of sympathy with the Palestinians.

There is fierce intellectual terrorism, as levels of political correctness have reached unprecedented levels since the beginning of the Israeli war on Gaza, to the point where anti-Israelism (not even Semitism) has become an unforgivable sin. In fact, “contextualism” has also become unacceptable. It is unacceptable to say that what Hamas did came as a response to years of terrorism, injustice, and the siege imposed on Gaza. Any protest usually requires obtaining a permit, but this is no longer given if the demonstration is in support of the Palestinian people.

Now, I am concerned about the idea that coexistence between East and West is over, a coexistence I doubt has ever existed in the way we imagine. I am also worried that the discrimination that was hidden is becoming shamelessly apparent.



Noof A'Saidi

THE MASKS OF ARTIFICIAL NICENESS FALL, AND OUR GOOD AND EVIL EMERGE AND CLASH

Hostility towards non-European immigrants has long been present, but this week, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called for a reconsideration of immigration policies and threatened immediate deportation. In the German press, when the massacres taking place in Gaza are mentioned, it is always pointed out that this news is coming from Hamas in order to discredit it. You do not read that the Israeli raids have caused the death of more than 5,000 Palestinians so far, but rather they write that Hamas “claims” this, or that the hospital “run by Hamas” was bombed.

Using language that directly condemns Israel’s actions is seen as unforgivable sins. What the West does not understand about anti-Semitism is that the Arabic language does not in any way match that of the West because its context is completely different. When an Arab (or an Easterner, as long as we are talking about the East-West issue) says “the Jews,” he means those who settled in his land. He does not think of the hostility of the Jews as Europe knows it, because he was never part of it, and because his hostility to the Jew has nothing to do with his identity as a Jew, but rather with his being a settler in the land. Thus, what a German man says about Jews can be considered

anti-Semitic, while the same statement is not considered anti-Semitic when it comes from a Palestinian living in Germany.

Today, there is this narrative about East and West. There is also a narrative about the axis of evil and the axis of civilisation (led by the free and civilised world). While our academics (in both the West and the East) have been busy for a long time talking about postcolonialism and decolonialism, examining the long-term effects of colonialism, the forms of hidden colonialism (economic and cultural) or studying implicit racism (thinking that racism in its explicit form hardly has any existence), we now return to the narrative of the civilised man and the barbaric man, and the white

man once again places himself in a position of superiority, looking inferiorly to the other who does not resemble him, and allowing himself to treat them as a second-class human beings.

I don’t know what’s going on at this point, but I feel like the whole world is changing, going in an irreversible direction. Perhaps this clash between East and West, between the coloniser and the colonised, is not only necessary but also real. The masks of artificial niceness fall, and our good and evil emerge and clash. I do not want to admit that conflict is inevitable and will remain, but this appears to be the reality of the world that is now being exposed.

Even our identities and how we define and present ourselves are



A protester with a Palestinian flag on her face attends a ‘March for Palestine’ in Dortmund, Germany on Saturday, to call for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas. – AFP

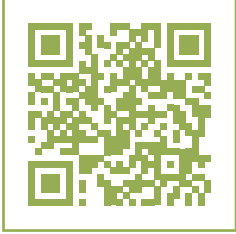
changing. Talking about global citizenship, about the human belonging to all of humanity, is an idea that has no place in the real world. Our definition of right and left has become confused, problematic, and difficult. The keffiyeh, which was associated with the left in Germany during the 1960s, has today become a symbol of the extreme right. Even we, who identify ourselves as belonging to the left, fail to find a Western leftist counterpart who agrees with us on this particular issue. This happens despite generally agreeing on the basic issues of social justice, the rights of the marginalised people, belief in the right of people to shape their future, opposition to privatisation, and opposition to the complete freedom of the market to determine the form of society. The idea of coexistence is today threatened with collapse.

There is a decline that brings people back to their first hobby, and pushes them to reject the idea of complex identity in favour of primary one. The immigrant, who sees himself as a mixture of this and that, is forced today to take one side against the other side, in light of polarisation and the shrinking of gray areas.

** This article first published in Arabic in Oman newspaper. Translated by Badar al Dhafari*

Sport

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Mohammed al Wahibi takes red in OCA League

CYCLE KOM RIDER WINS RACE 2 AT AIRPORT LOOP

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 28

Cycle KOM's Mohammed al Wahibi took the leader's red jersey after winning the second race of Oman Cycling Association (OCA) League Championship 2023-24 on Friday.

Mohammed came top in one hour 44 minutes and 41 seconds in the 97 km race at the Airport Loop in Seeb.

In a close finish, former champions Oman Royal Army's Said al Rahbi and Salalah Club's Mundher al Hasani claimed second and third positions respectively with the same time of 1:44:41.

Oman Royal Army's Mohammed al Shandoudi finished fourth while Salalah Club's Mazin al Riyami was fifth ahead of Oman Club's Islam Ayad – all in the same time.

Cycle KOM, led by Paul Willcox, had won the opening race of OCA League on October 5.

The Cycle KOM captain said it was a great start for their red jersey favourite Mohammed al Wahibi.

“The Airport Loop circuit is flat and fast. On Friday, it was without much wind that made it tricky for any clear breakaways. Mohammed is our red Jersey favourite and also a strong sprinter. So, without a break our fall back plan was to line-up on the front as a team for the final few kilometres for it to be fast and keep him for the sprint finish. This we did and Mohammed finished it off in style,” the British cyclist told Oman Daily Observer.

In the 40 plus category, Saud al Mandhari of Bahla Club (1:44:41) came top ahead of Paul Willcox of Cycle KOM (1:44:41).

In the Under-23 category, winner Mohammed al Wahibi, Mundher al Hasani and Islam Ayad finished in the top three spots respectively.

In the team section, Oman Royal Army collected 260 points, Salalah (250 points) and Cycle KOM gained 166 points in the second race.

AL WAHIBI ON TOP

In the overall classification after the first two races, Al Wahibi led



part of competition,Oman Cycling Association League Championship

with 120 points ahead of Said al Rahbi (110 points) of Oman Royal Army in second. Salalah Club's Mundher al Hasani is third with 100 points.

In U23, Al Wahibi, Al Hasani and Ayad (75 points) claimed the top three positions respectively.

In the 40 plus, Saud al Mandhari (30 points) led ahead of Willcox (24) and Mohammed al Kindi (21) of Bahla Club in third.

In the team level, Salalah Club

topped after the second race with 480 points. Oman Royal Army (470) were second and Cycle KOM (416) were third.

Willcox and his teammates had raced to the top in the season-opening team time trial at Al Sawadi in Barka.

CycleKOM – NRO clocked 57 minutes 16 seconds to top the 48 km race competed by 13 teams.

Salalah Club came second (00:59:41) while Oman Royal

Army (00:59:54) took a close third spot.

CycleKOM are winning the team time trial race for the fourth straight time in the OCA League.

CycleKOM featured a strong team line-up of captain Willcox, Oman national team rider Mohammed al Wahibi, Hashim al Farsi, Greg Pollard and David Hynes.

A total of 130 cyclists from 15 teams are in action in three

categories for the season-long league.

The Open category winner's red jersey is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, while the 40 plus winner will get a green jersey by Oman Cycling Association and the under-23 winner's white jersey is sponsored by Badr al Samaa.

The third race of OCA League 2023-24 returns to Al Sawadi for a 110 km road race on November 10.

Oman win four medals in the Asian Paralympics in China



Oman para athletics team celebrating after the achievement

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 28

The Oman para athletics team has achieved remarkable success at the fourth edition of the Asian Para Games held in Hangzhou, China, from October 22 to 28.

This event featured participation from 44 countries, with over 5,000 athletes competing in 566 competitions across 22 different sports at 19 sporting venues.

The Omani contingent clinched a total of four medals, underscoring their talent and determination. This includes two gold medals, both secured by star athlete Mohammed al Mashaikhi who won the lone medal for Oman in Paralympics.

Al Mashaikhi came supreme in the shot put and javelin

throw events in Hangzhou. Furthermore, Al Mashaikhi's outstanding performance also earned him a qualification in shot put event at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games in France.

Adding to the accolades, Mohammed al Qassmi contributed to the team's success with two well-deserved silver medals in shot put and javelin throw events.

These achievements not only highlight the prowess of the Omani para athletes but also mark a continuation of their consistent success at the Asian level. The Oman Paralympic Committee's relentless dedication to creating conducive training conditions and the unwavering support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth have played a pivotal role in enabling this remarkable success.

ORSC forum reviews challenges facing badminton

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 28

Badminton enthusiasts in the Sultanate of Oman discussed the challenges faced by badminton sport during a forum at Al Amal club on Saturday. Jaber bin Mohammed al Shabibi, Director of Teams Affairs in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Dr Abdulrahim bin Musallam al Daroushi, Chairman of Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) were the chief guests of the forum.

The one-day meet, organised by ORSC, addressed all the issues and challenges that are facing the badminton sport in Oman. The participants including coaches, referees and sports teachers from different parts of Oman attended the discussion and proposed several solutions, proposals and projects towards providing the necessary development of the sport. The common issues which were discussed by the participants in the forum could be summarised in the following areas: identifying and selecting appropriate talents through following proper methods, discussing the shortage of training facilities and venues for badminton as well as organising



Participants of the forum at Al Amal club

more local and international badminton events.

The participants were divided into several groups and each group discussed and reviewed the main challenges and presented the most prominent solutions and appropriate proposals to confront these challenges. The main challenges and observations of each group were the lack of sports knowledge by the local player and his awareness on the rules and regulations of the sport, shortage of human resources to hold training and umpiring courses

to graduate more Omani people in this field and lack of a suitable environment and venues to hold the competitions and events.

Later, the groups presented some proposals that will support the growth of badminton in Oman. The solutions included allocating technical committees to select talented players, coordinating with the relevant institutions and academies to utilise the existing venues and adding badminton facilities in the sporting complexes, organising more tournaments and competitions, coordinating

with the Oman Schools Sports Association (OSSA) to enhance the participation of male and female students in this sport, holding various training courses for players, coaches and umpires, and coordinating with the relevant authorities in making the proper use of the sports facilities in which the badminton facility is available.

Ruqiya al Omairi, Board member of ORSC, affirmed that the forum targeted all the badminton lovers to discuss different challenges and the best solutions towards developing the sport. “It was a beneficial session as all the participants shared their ideas and thoughts for developing the game in Oman. We are looking forward to having more of these sessions in the upcoming period,” she said.

Hilal al Maqarashi, one of the participants in the forum, said the forum highlighted a number of issues related to badminton in Oman. “It was a good event that shared all the strategic priorities and our future directions for developing the sport through a number of elements like the facilities, human resources and development of talents,” he concluded.

Bellingham brace earns Clasico win at Barcelona



Real Madrid team after scoring second goal during the Spanish league against FC Barcelona. – AFP

BARCELONA: Jude Bellingham's stunning double snatched Real Madrid a 2-1 comeback victory at Barcelona in his first La Liga Clasico on Saturday.

The England international, who has started his Madrid career in remarkable goalscoring form, unleashed a rocket into the top corner from distance after Ilkay Gundogan had sent hosts Barcelona ahead at the Olympic Stadium.

Bellingham then fired home a second in stoppage time to silence Barcelona fans and reach 10 goals in the top flight this season.

Barcelona hit the woodwork twice and had the better of the game but Bellingham, La Liga's top goalscorer, is in unstoppable form and inevitably made his mark in his first Clasico.

Bellingham's brace sent Madrid to the top of La Liga, ahead of Girona on goal difference, with both teams four points ahead of Barcelona in third.

The Catalans were boosted by the returns of Robert Lewandowski, Jules Kounde and Raphinha from injury, with Xavi naming them on the bench, but

Frenkie de Jong and Pedri did not recover in time.

His counterpart Carlo Ancelotti selected Ferland Mendy at left back over Eduardo Camavinga and Fran Garcia, once again deploying Bellingham in the number 10 role as he got his first taste of arguably the world's biggest club football match.

However it was another midfielder playing for the first time in the Clasico who broke the deadlock — Barcelona's summer arrival Gundogan.

The former Manchester City man was sharpest when Aurelien Tchouameni intercepted Ferran Torres' pass, diverting it back into his own area.

Centre-back David Alaba tried to clear but was thoroughly unconvincing and Gundogan read his intentions, hopped onto the ball and swept past Kepa Arrizabalaga in the sixth minute.

Post denies Barca

Fermin Lopez, one of the emerging young Barcelona La Masia academy products who has broken into the first team, slapped a shot against the post after the intense Gavi pressed high to win

the ball back.

Madrid defender Antonio Rudiger hammered wide from nearly 40 yards out as Madrid were held off by the hosts, with winger Vinicius Junior getting into tangles with Gavi and Ronald Araujo, deployed at right-back to try and shackle him.

After Araujo barged the Brazilian, he protested, with Xavi telling him it was just a shoulder charge, although the Barcelona coach could not defend Ferran Torres' rugby tackle on Vinicius just before half-time, which earned him a yellow card.

Gavi, Gundogan and Lopez controlled the midfield, with Joao Cancelo's more advanced position allowing Barcelona additional defensive security.

Barcelona struck the woodwork again when Inigo Martinez headed Lopez's inch-perfect cross against the post early in the second half, with Arrizabalaga thwarting Araujo on the follow-up.

Madrid were reduced to long-range efforts but eventually one ripped into the net to level the score, with just over 20 minutes remaining. —AFP



Estadi Olimpic Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham celebrates after the match. – Reuters

Sabalenka tries to seal year-end No 1 spot at WTA Finals



Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka reacts during the WTA China Open. – AFP

CANCÚN, Mexico: Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka will try to hold off Poland's second-placed Iga Swiatek for the year-end world number one spot when the WTA Finals begin on Sunday at Cancun, Mexico.

The \$9 million season-ending outdoor hardcourt showdown of eight top players features round-robin group matches to decide semi-final pairings ahead of the November 5 championship match.

Sabalenka, the reigning Australian Open champion, was the runner-up in last month's US Open and reached the semi-finals at Wimbledon and the French Open.

The 25-year-old from Belarus also won WTA titles this year at Madrid and Adelaide and enters the WTA Finals with a 630-point lead over 22-year-old reigning French Open champion Swiatek.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek, the 2022 year-end world number one, also took 2023 titles at Stuttgart, Qatar, Poland and earlier this month at Beijing.

Sabalenka can clinch the year-end top spot by reaching the final with a 2-1 group stage record no matter what Swiatek does.

"It's not just about becoming world number one," Sabalenka said last month in China.

"I think it's about finishing the year as world number one and staying there as long as you can."

If Swiatek loses a round-robin match, Sabalenka can secure the year-end number one by going unbeaten in group play or reaching the final.

Should Swiatek drop two matches in the group stage, a 2-1 round-robin record would be enough to make Sabalenka the year-end rankings leader.

Swiatek, this year's WTA match wins leader with 63, must make the final to have a chance at the year-end number one provided Sabalenka plays all her group matches. If Sabalenka wins even one group stage match, Swiatek would need to win the title for a chance at the throne.

Others in the field include 19-year-old US Open champion Coco Gauff, fellow American Jessica Pegula, Greece's Maria Sakkari, Ons Jabeur of Tunisia, Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina and Czech Marketa Vondrousova, the reigning Wimbledon champion.

Martin claims fifth straight sprint win at Thailand Grand Prix

BURIRAM, Thailand: Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin led from start to finish to win his fifth straight sprint of the season at the Thailand Grand Prix on Saturday to reduce the gap to championship leader Francesco Bagnaia to 18 points.

KTM's Brad Binder finished second, less than a second behind, while VR46 Racing's Luca Marini was third. Ducati's Bagnaia started on the second row but finished seventh.

Martin began the weekend 27 points behind the defending champion and gave himself a boost when he smashed the lap record to secure pole position to make it a perfect Saturday.

Martin had missed out on race victory and the podium at the Australian Grand Prix when he lost grip at the end of the race and the Spaniard said he was trying to conserve his tyres.

"But then I saw Brad and Luca (catching up) and decided maybe now it's time to pull away," he said in a post-race interview.

Martin had a flying start to fend off Marini and take the lead going into turn one while Bagnaia, who started sixth, fell to ninth by the end of the first lap.

Binder started fifth on the grid



Prima Pramac's Spanish rider Jorge Martin (C) leads the field as he rides in the Tissot Sprint race during the MotoGP Thailand Grand Prix at the Buriram International Circuit in Buriram. – AFP

but he managed to make up two places, moving past Aprilia's Aleix Espargaro and VR46 Racing's Marco Bezzecchi to sit third.

Binder has found more success in sprints this season with five previous podiums and the KTM rider eventually overtook Marini to move up to second when the VR46 rider struggled to get the best out of his tyres in hot track conditions. Martin extend his lead to 1.5 seconds with six laps to go and although Binder was able



Prima Pramac's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the Tissot Sprint race during the MotoGP Thailand Grand Prix. – AFP

to catch up, the Spaniard was in complete control as he crossed the line for his seventh sprint win of the season.

"Second place, we'll take it," a smiling Binder said. "In the beginning I struggled to get past Luca, it was a tricky one. Then Martin did a fantastic job."

Honda's Marc Marquez qualified eighth on the grid and the six-times MotoGP champion, who is moving to Gresini Ducati next season, finished fourth.

AUSTRALIA EDGE NEW ZEALAND BY FIVE RUNS WITH RECORD EPIC

DHARAMSALA: Five-time champions Australia edged out gallant New Zealand by just five runs in the highest-scoring World Cup game in history on Saturday.

Australia piled up 388 all out as Travis Head top scored with 109 and fellow opener David Warner made 81.

New Zealand battled hard with Rachin Ravindra making 116, Daryl Mitchell adding 54 and Jimmy Neesham supplying late fireworks with a 33-ball fifty before they finished on 383-9 in 50 overs.

With a total of 771 runs, it was the highest scoring game at a World Cup, beating the 754 scored in South Africa's win against Sri Lanka earlier in the tournament.

"That was awesome. Sometimes I have to remember I'm out in the field, not a spectator. A fantastic game, they kept coming at us," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

In a dramatic final over played out in the shadow of the Himalayas, New Zealand needed 19 to win.

Trent Boult scampered for a single before Mitchell Starc donated five wides.

Neesham, one of the stars of the 2019 final which New Zealand lost to England, then took six runs off the next three balls.

However, attempting another two, he was run out from a fine throw by Marnus Labuschagne from the fence.

That left Lockie Ferguson, who had injured his Achilles in

the field, needing to perform the heroics off the last ball.

Starc fired the ball in on a full length and Ferguson could only push it to the covers, leaving the Kiwis heartbroken.

"It was a fantastic game of cricket. There were ebbs and flows throughout the 100 overs," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham.

"To get so close hurts. It was a fantastic game."

The result left both sides with four wins and two defeats each and well-placed for the semifinals.

Earlier, Head, playing his first match of the tournament after being sidelined with a broken hand, reached his fourth one-day international hundred off 59 balls with 10 fours and six sixes.

The 29-year-old had brought up his 50 off 28 balls and then made the most of being dropped on 70 and 75.

He was eventually clean-bowled by off-spinner Glenn Phillips with Australia reaching 206-2 at the halfway stage.

With Warner, Head had put on 175 in the first 20 overs before his veteran partner was dismissed.

- Head, Warner blitz - Warner, who turned 37 on Friday, had been looking for a third successive century but eventually fell for 81 when he chipped a catch back to Phillips.

Phillips then accounted for Steve Smith (18) as he claimed career-best figures of 3-37 before fellow spinner Mitchell Santner got in on the act.

Santner beat the defences

of Mitchell Marsh (36) and the left-armed then dismissed Labuschagne (18) after the batsman had been dropped on one.

Neesham had middle-order dangerman Glenn Maxwell caught at long-off by Trent Boult for a 24-ball 41.

Maxwell had come into the match fresh from a World Cup record 40-ball hundred against the Netherlands.

Josh Inglis raced to a 28-ball 38, putting on 62 for the seventh wicket with skipper Pat Cummins (37).

In reply, New Zealand, runners-up in the last two World Cups, saw Will Young (32) and Devon Conway (28) put on 61 for the first wicket before both fell to Josh Hazlewood.

Mitchell hit his third fifty of the tournament to follow his 130 last time out against India but fell on 54 when leg-spinner Adam Zampa had him holing out to long-on with his team on 168-3 after 24 overs.

Mitchell put on 96 for the third wicket with Ravindra.

The 23-year-old Ravindra, who scored 123 in the opening win over England, reached three figures from 77 balls with seven fours and five sixes.

But with New Zealand needing 97 to win off 60 balls, Ravindra was caught in the deep off Australian skipper Pat Cummins for a fine 116. That left the Kiwis on 293-6 but they battled hard to take the game to the final over thriller.

— AFP



Travis Head in action

Edwards leads Netherlands' rout of Bangladesh



Netherlands team celebrating during the match against Bangladesh

KOLKATA: Netherlands captain Scott Edwards led from the front as his side enjoyed another World Cup success with an 87-run hammering of Bangladesh.

Saturday's victory in Kolkata followed the non-Test side's shock defeat of South Africa earlier in the tournament.

The Netherlands, as was the case against South Africa, were indebted to wicketkeeper-batsman Edwards, whose innings top-score of 68 led a recovery from 63-4 and 107-5 to 229 all out.

The Tigers, chasing a seemingly modest target of 230, collapsed to 70-6 and were eventually dismissed for 142 at Eden Gardens, despite their opponents being without ill spinner Roelof van der Merwe.

This latest reverse meant Bangladesh had suffered five defeats in six World Cup games.

The Netherlands' win was all the more creditable as it followed their World Cup record 309-run defeat by Australia.

Edwards, however, was dropped twice on nought in the same Mustafizur Rahman over, Liton Das flooring him in the gully before wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim grassed a tougher, diving chance.

Netherlands paceman Paul van Meekeren followed up with fine figures 4-23 as the Tigers were bowled out with more than seven overs remaining.

Bangladesh lost both their openers on 19. Edwards held a simple chance after Liton miscued a reverse sweep off spinner Aryan Dutt before taking another catch when Tanzid Hasan edged Logan van Beek.

Bangladesh were 63-4 when van Meekeren had Tigers captain Shakib Al Hasan caught behind for just five, the star all-rounder trying to cut a lifting ball that was too close to him.

The Tigers were all but beaten at 70-6 when Mushfiqur was bowled for one by a fine van Meekeren delivery that jagged back.

Fellow veteran Mahmudullah, fresh from a hundred against South Africa, only managed 20 before he was well caught by Dutt off Bas de Leede -- an example of the Netherlands' superior fielding.

Van Meekeren ended the match when he had Taskin Ahmed caught in the deep.

Earlier, the 27-year-old Edwards shared partnerships of 44 with de Leede and 78 with Sybrand Engelbrecht, who made a useful 35.

They were struggling at 4-2 following the loss of openers Vikramjit Singh and Max O'Dowd after Edwards won the toss.

But Wesley Barresi, 39, in his first match of the tournament, made a run-a-ball 41 before he was caught off a mistimed drive.

Edwards, who made 78 not out against South Africa, then overcame a faltering start to post a 78-ball fifty before he spooned Mustafizur to backward point.

— AFP





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MSX listings boost confidence in capital market

MUSCAT: Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), confirmed that the listings of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in the past period, especially the listing of 49 per cent of the shares of Abraaj Company and OQ Gas Networks Company, will undoubtedly help in activating the role of the capital market as an effective tool for financing economic projects, and enhances investor confidence in the economy as the Omani capital market is boosted by the high demand of domestic and foreign investors.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Salmi said that these listings will contribute to injecting new liquidity into the MSX, increasing trading volumes, and deepening the stock

exchange. This will help in better pricing of traded securities and attract new companies to list in it.

“The CMA is working to establish regulatory and procedural frameworks that facilitate and assist enterprises and companies dealing with the market on the one hand, protect investors and dealers on the other hand, maintain market stability and enable it to play its desired role in serving the economy and society.”

The Authority has put forward a number of initiatives to activate the role of the capital market and the institutions operating in it, represented by crowdfunding, market making, liquidity providers, lending and borrowing securities, marginal financing, creating a special market for promising companies, tripartite



Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi
Executive President
Capital Market Authority

governance, the liquidity fund, green financing and other initiatives, in coordination and cooperation with the financial sustainability and development programme.

The financial sector ‘Estidama’ granted approval to two companies to practice market making activity. With the aim of

providing liquidity in securities and maintaining a state of balance between supply and demand, Al Salmi expressed his hope that large companies listed on the stock exchange will appoint liquidity providers and market makers to provide liquidity and maintain price stability.

He pointed out that the Omani Investment Authority’s programme includes offering a number of its subsidiaries and preparing them for public subscription, and he expects that a timetable for offering a number of companies will be announced in the near future, noting that there is talk about offering Majis Industrial Services and Oman Shipping Company for public offering.

Al Salmi expressed the hope that he would see new

subscriptions for companies of appropriate sizes such as OQ and looks forward to the continued momentum created by recent issues so that the capital market will be used by the Government and the private sector as a tool to finance large projects and increase the issuance of diversified products listed on the MSX in the next phase, calling family and private companies in Oman to be listed on the stock exchange for the sustainability and governance of these companies.

The Authority is also working in cooperation with the MSX and through the ‘Sustainability’ programme to upgrade the Muscat Stock Exchange from a ‘start-up market’ to an ‘emerging market’, which is a necessary requirement to place the stock

exchange on the radar screens of global investors, and encourage them to invest in the Sultanate of Oman.

He said that what lacks the exchange to reach that level is liquidity and the volumes of listed companies, as the exchange needs two or three companies of large size.

He confirmed that the size of the stock market constituted only 19 per cent of the GDP according to 2022 statistics, which is a small percentage compared to the average ratio of the size of the market value of the GCC countries to the GDP, which amounted to about 163 per cent in 2022. The market value of the stock exchange represented 0.22 per cent of the total market value of the stock exchanges of the GCC countries. — ONA

Oman takes proactive steps to diversify funding sources

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 28



One of the standout features of Oman’s crowdfunding framework is its allowance for cross-border fundraising and investments. Image for illustration only.

In a move to boost its economic growth and attract foreign investment, Oman’s regulators, led by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), are taking proactive measures to diversify funding sources through innovative avenues such as crowdfunding and virtual assets.

With the recent issuance of its crowdfunding framework and the licensing of nine crowdfunding platforms, Oman is paving the way for a new era of financial opportunities.

The CMA’s crowdfunding framework has garnered significant interest, demonstrated by the licensing of nine crowdfunding platforms.

Mayan al Asfoor, the country manager of Beehive Oman, during the IFN Oman 2023 forum, said, “Demand for crowdfunding is growing rapidly, outpacing the platforms’ ability to meet the needs.

This surge in demand can be attributed to several factors, including accessible regulations that are supportive of Islamic financing.”

For crowdfunding to operate in Oman, platforms must have a Shariah advisor, ensuring compliance while fostering growth.

In a report by IFN, one of the standout features of Oman’s crowdfunding framework is its allowance for cross-border fundraising and investments, a first in the region.

This feature enables crowdfunding platforms to attract investors from all around the world, making Oman an

attractive hub for global investment.

Saleh al Tamami, the co-founder and CEO of Mamun, during the forum, highlighted this feature as a key differentiator.

He emphasised that the ability to bring in investors globally and deploy funds within the regulatory framework provides a significant advantage for the market.

Recognising the potential of digital assets, the CMA is working on finalising regulations for virtual asset service providers, aiming to introduce them before the year’s end.

This move is seen as forward-thinking and aligns with the growing interest in tokenisation and digital assets within the financial industry.

Kemal Rizadi Arbi, an expert/ advisor with the CMA, emphasised the importance of maintaining investor protection while simultaneously creating a favourable environment for market growth and attracting foreign investors.

These developments represent a glimpse into Islamic Finance 3.0, where digital assets play a crucial role.

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Board of Directors’ Report for the period ended 30 September 2023																																																																																																																						
	Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, I am pleased to present the un-audited financial statements for the period ended 30 September 2023.	UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023																																																																																																																				
	Performance Summary Gross portfolio registered a growth of 22.77 % YOY and stood at RO 362.808 million as on 30 September, 2023 (September 30, 2022: RO 295.521 million). Accumulated provisions as on September 30, 2023 were RO 30.061 million (September 30, 2022: RO 23.831 million) showing an increase of 26.14%. Total borrowings including corporate deposits and unsecured non-convertible bonds stood at RO 191.259 million (September 30, 2022: RO 149.307 million), an increase in 28.10%. Revenues for the period ended 30 September 2023 of RO 20.742 million were up 24.55% as compared to RO 16.653 million revenues for the same period last year. Interest Expenses for the period ended 30 September 2023 stood at RO 8.879 million as against RO 6.810 million for same period last year; an increase of 30.38%. Overheads during the period were RO 4.723 million as against RO 4.347 million for the same period last year, up by 8.65%. The Company registered Profit of RO 7.140 million before Expected Credit Losses (ECL) charge and taxation for the period which was higher by the same period profit of RO 5.496 million by 29.91 %. ECL was up from 3.135 million to RO 4.233 million during the period showing a 35.02% increase, reflecting prudence judgment. Net Profit for the period ended 30 September 2023 was RO 2.471 million as against net profit of RO 2.007 million as on 30 September, 2022 an increase of 23.12%.	<table><tr><th></th><th>Sep-2023 R'O'000</th><th>Sep-2022 R'O'000</th><th>Dec-2022 R'O'000</th></tr><tr><td>ASSETS</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Cash and bank balances</td><td>15,564</td><td>9,308</td><td>17,329</td></tr><tr><td>Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables</td><td>225,101</td><td>187,510</td><td>193,805</td></tr><tr><td>Other receivables and prepayments</td><td>514</td><td>729</td><td>646</td></tr><tr><td>Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets</td><td>683</td><td>587</td><td>852</td></tr><tr><td>Deferred tax asset – net</td><td>79</td><td>89</td><td>79</td></tr><tr><td>Statutory deposit</td><td>250</td><td>250</td><td>250</td></tr><tr><td>Total assets</td><td>242,191</td><td>198,473</td><td>212,961</td></tr><tr><td>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>LIABILITIES</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Creditors, accruals and other liabilities</td><td>2,072</td><td>2,975</td><td>2,895</td></tr><tr><td>Provision for employees’ end of service benefits</td><td>265</td><td>230</td><td>247</td></tr><tr><td>Short-term loans</td><td>56,281</td><td>55,167</td><td>40,040</td></tr><tr><td>Unsecured non-convertible bonds</td><td>28,579</td><td>13,585</td><td>28,088</td></tr><tr><td>Tax payable</td><td>451</td><td>368</td><td>600</td></tr><tr><td>Corporate and security deposits</td><td>32,594</td><td>13,459</td><td>21,911</td></tr><tr><td>Long-term loans</td><td>73,805</td><td>67,096</td><td>72,214</td></tr><tr><td>Total liabilities</td><td>194,047</td><td>152,880</td><td>165,995</td></tr><tr><td>EQUITY</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Share capital</td><td>26,384</td><td>25,866</td><td>25,866</td></tr><tr><td>Legal reserve</td><td>5,733</td><td>5,395</td><td>5,733</td></tr><tr><td>Impairment reserve</td><td>2,222</td><td>2,222</td><td>2,222</td></tr><tr><td>Fair value reserve</td><td>(441)</td><td>(441)</td><td>(441)</td></tr><tr><td>General reserve</td><td>152</td><td>-</td><td>152</td></tr><tr><td>Retained earnings</td><td>14,094</td><td>12,551</td><td>13,434</td></tr><tr><td>Total equity</td><td>48,144</td><td>45,593</td><td>46,966</td></tr><tr><td>Total equity and liabilities</td><td>242,191</td><td>198,473</td><td>212,961</td></tr><tr><td>Net assets per share (baizas)</td><td>182</td><td>176</td><td>182</td></tr></table>			Sep-2023 R'O'000	Sep-2022 R'O'000	Dec-2022 R'O'000	ASSETS				Cash and bank balances	15,564	9,308	17,329	Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	225,101	187,510	193,805	Other receivables and prepayments	514	729	646	Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets	683	587	852	Deferred tax asset – net	79	89	79	Statutory deposit	250	250	250	Total assets	242,191	198,473	212,961	LIABILITIES AND EQUITY				LIABILITIES				Creditors, accruals and other liabilities	2,072	2,975	2,895	Provision for employees’ end of service benefits	265	230	247	Short-term loans	56,281	55,167	40,040	Unsecured non-convertible bonds	28,579	13,585	28,088	Tax payable	451	368	600	Corporate and security deposits	32,594	13,459	21,911	Long-term loans	73,805	67,096	72,214	Total liabilities	194,047	152,880	165,995	EQUITY				Share capital	26,384	25,866	25,866	Legal reserve	5,733	5,395	5,733	Impairment reserve	2,222	2,222	2,222	Fair value reserve	(441)	(441)	(441)	General reserve	152	-	152	Retained earnings	14,094	12,551	13,434	Total equity	48,144	45,593	46,966	Total equity and liabilities	242,191	198,473	212,961	Net assets per share (baizas)	182	176
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Profit for the period	2,471	2,007																																																																																																																				

Acknowledgement
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to express sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimour for his vision and wise leadership. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement for the guidance and support from the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market. We are also grateful to our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Finally, the Board would like to appreciate and thank the management and the staff for all their hard work and efforts.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Rashid bin Saif Al Saadi
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Chery showcases over 26,000 patents



One of Chery's latest cars is displayed during the 2023 Chery TechDay.

MUSCAT: Recently, Chery hosted the ‘2023 Chery TechDay’ with the theme of ‘Technology Within Reach.’ The event featured multiple technical zones on-site, offering a comprehensive display of the latest advancements in Chery’s technological progression.

Notably, the dedicated ‘Chery Patent Wall’ served as a focal point for showcasing Chery’s concentrated technological prowess.

Chery’s steadfast adherence to an independent innovation strategy has resulted in autonomous R&D capabilities in complete vehicles, engines, and critical components.

Its portfolio of invention patents covers core technologies and key domains, encompassing traditional automobiles, new energy, intelligent connectivity, and autonomous driving. Chery has already applied for and accumulated over 26,000 patents, placing it prominently in the industry.

The company has received several ‘National Scientific and Technological Progress Awards’, and has been honoured three times as a national-level ‘Innovative Enterprise’, solidifying the designation of ‘Tech Chery’.

As per the information unveiled at the 2023 Chery Tech Day, Chery has outlined its strategic plans for the next five years. The company is set to allocate over 100 billion yuan towards R&D endeavours.

Simultaneously, Chery will establish 300 ‘Yao Guang Laboratories’ globally.

These initiatives will primarily focus on breakthroughs in strategic technologies related to intelligent cabins and autonomous driving. This concerted effort aims to establish the foundational elements necessary for crafting an internationally competitive brand with a global presence.

Chery’s integration of advanced technological achievements into its products has driven rapid sales growth. From January to September 2023, Chery’s cumulative sales reached 1.253 million vehicles, surpassing the total sales for the entire previous year, demonstrating a robust growth.

Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J D Power 2023 China Initial Quality Study SM (IQS). For more details please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>.

In Oman, Chery will soon be launched by Saud Bahwan Group.

be’ah gathers global leaders for Middle East debut of ISWA World Congress

MUSCAT: Oman Environmental Services Holding Company SAOC (be’ah) is making history by hosting the 39th International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) World Congress, marking the first time this prestigious event is being held in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

Scheduled from October 30 to November 1 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, the event carries the theme ‘Global Action towards a Net-Zero Future.’

This Congress will bring together an exceptional gathering of solid waste management professionals, government officials, industry leaders, policymakers, scientists, and emerging young professionals from around the world.

With a reputation for uniting over 1,000 delegates, the ISWA World Congress is known for fostering crucial discussions and collaborations necessary for addressing waste management challenges and sustainable development.

The 2023 edition will feature high-level plenaries and a comprehensive scientific programme.

Underlining the socioeconomic impacts of waste recycling, waste reduction, health, safety, policy regulation related to recycling, climate change, and the pursuit of sustainable development goals, this year’s Congress would cast a spotlight on these critical areas.

Oman’s selection as the event location emphasises the nation’s expertise and



A dhow cruise is seen in the fjords of Musandam in Oman, in this illustration photo.

leadership in waste management, positioning it as a hub for knowledge exchange and innovation in the field.

Eng Tariq bin Ali al Amri, CEO of Oman Environmental Services Holding Company SAOC (be’ah), emphasised the significance of Oman hosting this industry event: “Oman’s selection as the host country for the ISWA World Congress is a significant recognition of its leadership and expertise in waste management.

This accolade positions Oman as a hub for waste management innovation. As the world grapples with pressing

waste management challenges, Oman’s efforts in hosting this congress serve as an inspiration and catalyst for positive change on a global scale.”

be’ah’s role as the Congress host marks a groundbreaking achievement, establishing it as a trailblazer in sustainable waste management practices in the region. This platform will enable be’ah to share its best practices, foster knowledge exchange, and stimulate economic growth while demonstrating its dedication to environmental conservation.

In line with its commitment to

achieving Net-Zero targets, be’ah is actively driving the transition to a circular economy by minimising waste generation from the source and diverting waste away from landfills.

This approach creates promising opportunities for investors and SMEs in the waste management sector. The ISWA World Congress 2023 in Oman is a milestone event, set to shape the future of waste management and sustainability on a global scale.

For more information about the event and registrations, please visit www.iswa2023.com.

Asyad showcases integrated logistics ecosystem

MUSCAT: Asyad Group, Oman’s global integrated logistics provider, took part in the first Duqm Economic Forum, that was held recently, as a Strategic Partner.

The forum aimed at highlighting the remarkable potential and competitive advantages of Duqm as a major hub for investment and sustainability, where Asyad has been a pivotal player in supporting its development and growth.

Since the inception of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), Asyad Group has been at the heart of Duqm and the logistics lever for its vast expansion, primarily through the world-class Asyad Drydock as well as Asyad Terminal Duqm, and the Port of Duqm, a joint venture between Asyad and Consortium Antwerp Port.

The global logistics powerhouse showcased its integrated logistics ecosystem that SEZAD-hosted



Panelists speak during the first Duqm Economic Forum which was held recently.

businesses can seamlessly access and leverage to unlock opportunities regionally and globally.

As part of the Forum’s agenda, Omar al Mahrzi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port, joined industry leaders for a panel discussion titled “Opportunity in Supply Chain”.

Al Mahrzi highlighted Asyad’s

position as the main driver shaping Oman’s sustainable logistics future, in line with the Group’s unwavering commitment to decarbonisation. The forum’s attendees also had the unique opportunity of gaining valuable insight on the innovative initiatives and partnerships stimulating Duqm and Oman’s drive toward a green energy

future, presented by Reggy Vermeulen, CEO of Port of Duqm, during his participation in the “Duqm’s Green Energy Advantage” panel discussion.

In another activity of the forum, Asyad Group hosted a delegation of top diplomats, international business leaders and government officials at its state-of-the-art shipyard in Duqm, Asyad Drydock.

During the visit, the Group showcased its superior ship-servicing offering, cutting-edge facilities, and advanced shipbuilding and repair capabilities.

Leveraging its standing as a leading integrated logistics provider, Asyad Group continues to be at the forefront of development in Oman and beyond, actively promoting elite forums and events to open new avenues for collaboration and partnership that cement Oman as a global hub for logistics, trade, and investment.

Bank Muscat successfully manages OQGN IPO

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced that its investment banking division successfully acted as the Issue Manager and Joint Global Coordinator for the RO 288 million (c. \$748 million) initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

OQGN is the exclusive owner and operator of the company’s natural gas transportation network. OQGN offered a total of 49% of its total issued share capital equivalent to 2,122,005,720 shares at the top



Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi

end of the price range i.e. 140 baizas per share, implying a market capitalisation of c. RO 606 million (c. \$1.6 billion) and marking the Sultanate of Oman’s largest IPO ever.

The Offering included a Category I offer for institutional investors representing 40% of the



Bank Muscat headquarters is seen in this illustration image.

total offer size, a sale to anchor investors representing 30% of the total offer size, and a Category II to retail investors representing the remaining 30%.

Saudi Omani Investment Company, a wholly owned entity of the Kingdom Investment Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Falcon Investments LLC, a

subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, the Sovereign Wealth Fund of the State of Qatar, and Fluxys International SA/NV have each participated with a 10% share of the issue volume and are anchor investors for this offering.

Total demand for OQGN shares amounted to c. RO 4 billion (c. \$10 billion) from local, regional and international investors. Overall, the book for the IPO was c.14x subscribed led by marquee international investors including many first-time investors in Oman.

Expressing the success of the IPO, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager,

Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased to have successfully managed the largest IPO ever in Oman and continue to support the vital part of Government of Oman’s announced privatisation plan.

The unprecedented investor interest in this IPO further strengthens our strong track record in the investment banking business. OQGN is the biggest capital market event in Oman in over a decade and we look forward to further supporting the capital market activity in the Sultanate of Oman through our suite of integrated solutions.”



Marafiq invests \$600m in electricity and water projects in Duqm



MUSCAT: Marafiq, a joint venture owned by OQ (a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority), has implemented a number of projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) as part of agreements signed over the past years with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the Public Services Regulatory Authority, and Nama Group, with the aim of providing all types of industrial services to projects in the region, as part of joint efforts to enhance the investment environment in Duqm.

Eng Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, confirmed that the company has invested more than \$600 million in Duqm so far, explaining that the company has completed the integrated electricity and water station that provides electrical energy to Duqm Refinery and the Oman Tank Terminal Co (OTTTCO), which operates an oil storage station in Ras Markaz.

The company also implemented an 80-megawatt electricity production station SEZAD, stressing that this project is part of the company's commitment to sustainable projects.

He told the Oman News Agency (ONA) that the station, which serves SEZAD, contributed to significantly reducing carbon emissions and providing more reliable electricity services than before.

He added that Marafiq also manages the drinking water sector in SEZAD one by operating



Eng Abdullah al Hashimi
Managing Director of Marafiq

a drinking water desalination plant. The company has also expanded the water network to serve residential, commercial and tourist neighbourhoods and other investment areas, noting that the length of the pipelines that transport water in the region is about 50 km, while the length of the water distribution network pipes is more than 131 km.

Marafiq is currently constructing a line linking the main tanks to the fishing port and the fish industries area, after it had recently completed a number of projects to expand the water network in the region.

The company also recently completed a project to connect the Vulcan Green Iron Company to the water network, which is the first of its kind to connect an under-construction project to the water network in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

Al Hashimi confirmed that the company contributed approximately \$56 million in local value added through the integrated electricity and water plant, and also contributed another \$10 million in value added projects for the drinking water sector. — ONA

Leading Omani biodiesel producer plans regional expansion

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 28

Having pioneered the commercial-scale production of low-carbon biodiesel from used cooking oil (UCO), Omani start-up Wakud is embarking on the next phase of its growth entailing a capacity ramp-up of its flagship project in Khazaen Economic City, as well as significant forays into Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Wakud CEO and Co-Founder Maher bin Mohammed al Habsi said the expansion, envisioned over the next three years, will be supported by investments of around \$25 million.

Speaking at a recent forum focusing on the local potential for the production of zero-carbon Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) for the aviation sector, Al Habsi also added that the company, backed by environmental services startup X2E, is also weighing around \$630 million in investments in bio-refineries at Sohar and Salalah ports that will produce SAF from agri-oils.

The planned investments underscore Wakud's ambitions to scale up operations



Maher al Habsi, CEO & Co-Founder of Wakud, addressing a recent forum on Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) in Muscat.

notwithstanding a dismal uptake of its low-carbon fuel by energy companies and large corporate customers in Oman.

Until biodiesel use is mandated by authorities, as is the case in a number of countries globally, Wakud says it has little choice but to export its output to overseas markets, particularly the European Union.

First on its list of planned investments is the expansion of its existing plant at Khazaen, which was built in 2021 with a capacity of

7 million litres/year of biodiesel. Development of an adjoining plot of land, slated to commence this year at a cost of \$7 million, will add around 25 million litres/year of biodiesel production capacity.

Feedstock for the expansion phase will comprise a mix of used cooking oil (UCO), fish waste and even camelina, a plant species cultivated in many parts of the world for its high oil content of up to 40 per cent.

Next year, Wakud plans to set up its first overseas facility — a

25 million litres/year capacity biodiesel plant — in Bahrain with an investment of \$10 million. On its heels is planned the construction of a similar-sized plant at a cost of \$10 million in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) starting in 2025.

To support its sizable investments in biodiesel and SAF ventures, Wakud plans to recruit hundreds of Omani engineers and technical staff over the next several years. Nationals currently make up the bulk of Wakud's engineering staff at Khazaen. Their numbers are projected to grow exponentially from 21 presently to 400 – 600 by 2025, he said.

Further, to help with the collection of waste cooking oil from assorted generators, such as hotels, restaurants, industrial caterers and others, Wakud has outsourced that function to a network of Omani-owned SMEs.

Around nine SMEs are currently involved in UCO collection activities, with scores more planned as the company seeks to progressively capture volumes from other major cities and towns around Oman.

Broad money supply in Oman reaches RO 21.6 billion in August

MUSCAT: The broad money supply in Oman witnessed a growth of 5.1 per cent on an annual basis to reach RO 21.6 billion by end of August 2023.

Despite the decrease in cash in its narrow sense by 5.5 per cent, the increase witnessed in cash in its broad sense is due to the increase in quasi-cash by 9.4 per cent, which consists of the sum of savings and term deposits in Omani rials plus certificates of deposit issued by banks, in addition to security margin accounts and all deposits in foreign currency in the banking sector.

During the same period,



cash on hand with the public decreased by 2.4 per cent, and demand deposits also saw a decline of 6.3 per cent.

Regarding the interest rate structure of traditional commercial banks, the weighted average interest rates on deposits in Omani rials increased from

1.897 per cent in August 2022 to 2.410 per cent in August 2023.

The weighted average interest rates on loans in Omani rials also decreased from 5.447 per cent to 5.444 per cent during the same period, while the average interest rates in the overnight interbank lending market recorded an increase of 5.721 per cent in August 2023 compared to 2.854 per cent in August 2022.

This came as a result of the weighted average interest rates on repurchase operations rising to 6 per cent compared to 3 per cent during the same period last year, in line with the policies of the US Federal Reserve. — ONA

Oman takes proactive steps to diversify funding sources

FROM PAGE 13

While the energy-intensive nature of mining cryptocurrencies has raised concerns, experts at the IFN Oman Forum 2023 presented a sustainable case for digital assets. They explained that mining cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, can help make renewable energy sources viable.

Companies engaged in Bitcoin mining act as reliable customers for excess electricity generated from renewable sources. This excess electricity can be utilised during peak demand periods, ensuring efficient utilisation of energy resources. The profits generated from mining activities can then be reinvested into renewable energy infrastructure, establishing a self-sustaining mechanism for both energy production and capital generation.

Lastly, Dr Khalid Tahhan, co-founder of Easy Coins, disclosed that the company is on the verge of closing a deal on a renewable mine site that will be launched in the near future.

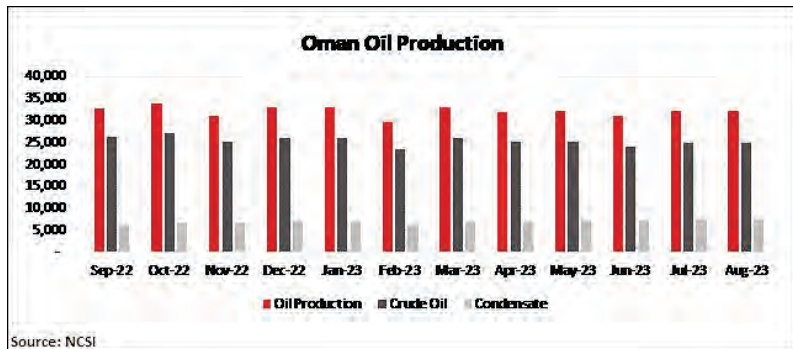
This innovative project will leverage a steam-producing factory to generate power, creating a new revenue stream from the production of cryptocurrencies. The excess cryptocurrencies can be sold internationally, thereby reversing the concept of capital flight risk. By fostering local consumption and exporting surplus, Oman can strengthen its economic position and promote sustainability.

MSX30 Index closes week lower by 2.19%

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange MSX30 Index closed last week at 4,681.31 points, down by 104.666 points and 2.19% down from the previous trading session, which stood at 4,785.98 points.

All financial and services sectors indices decreased: the financial index decreased by 2.79%, the services index by 2.47%, the sharia index by 2.37% and by 0.86% the industrial index decreased as well.

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) successfully listed on MSX and became Oman's largest-ever initial public offering (IPO). Investors began trading the shares of OQGN on last Tuesday after 49 % of the company's shares were listed on MSX. OQGN's market value upon listing reached RO 606 million, thus becoming the third biggest company listed on MSX. The listing price was 140 baisas per share.



Source: NCSI

The stock saw a great turnout from investors in Oman and beyond. OQGN successfully raised gross proceeds of RO 288 million (\$748 million).

Oman Telecommunications Co has postponed its Sukuk issuance to a later date. Furthermore, Omantel has obtained a bridge loan facility for a term not exceeding 6 months from an international bank to settle its outstanding bonds of \$457 million maturing on October 24, 2023.

Bank Muscat announced that Dubai Financial Group (DFG),

one of the shareholders in the bank, has recently sold a parcel of Bank Muscat shareholding as part of their current investment plan.

Oman's production of crude oil and condensate oil decreased by 5% YoY to reach 32.270 million barrels in August 2023 compared to August 2022, which amounted to 33.858 million barrels, according to NCSI data.

Crude oil production alone decreased by 9%, while oil condensate production increased by 13 % in August 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. The

average price of Omani crude oil decreased by 34 % in August 2023, to reach \$75 per barrel, compared to \$113 per barrel in August 2022. At the same time, the average daily oil production of the Sultanate of Oman decreased by 5% in August, compared to the same period in 2022.

The rate of job seekers increased in August by 4.0% compared to 3.8% in July this year. The rate of female job seekers reached 12.1%, surpassing the male, which reached 2.1% by a large margin, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to the data, the age group between 15-24 years is the most active among job seekers, at a rate of 17.2%, followed by the group between 25-29 years, at a rate of 7.3%. On the other hand, holders of higher education diploma and its equivalent a the highest category of job seekers in

terms of academic qualifications at 11.9%, followed by holders of a bachelor's degree at 9.3%, and a at general education diploma and its equivalent represent 6.7%.

The total deposits with traditional commercial banks in Oman increased by 5.1 % to reach RO 22.4 billion rials at the end of August 2023. Government's deposits with commercial banks increased by 5.5 % to reach RO 25.3 billion.

Private sector deposits increased by 7.3 % to reach RO 15.3 billion at the end of August 2023, constituting 68.1 % of the total deposits with traditional commercial banks. Oman's gross domestic product at current prices reached RO 20.4 billion at the end of the second quarter of this year compared to about RO 20.9 billion at the end of the second quarter of 2022, a decrease of 2.4 per cent.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Gaza war to cast shadow on Israeli economy



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

Despite the humanitarian catastrophes unleashed by Israel on Gaza with the full complicity of Western powers, the war has severe consequences for the Israeli economy in the long term.

There are many fears about how the prolonged fighting could affect the economy of Israel, which has achieved nothing from the war since October 7, except for its constant barrage of airstrikes that kill innocent civilians, destroy their homes and level their neighbourhoods.

The negative repercussions of this war on the Israeli economy stem from mobilisation of than 350,000 reserve soldiers into service. This number represents about 3 per cent of the total population of 9.8 million of Israel.

Recalling this huge number of

workers and removing them from the production process has a direct impact on the daily and economic level.

A sudden shortage occurs in the workforce and in the conditions of many Israeli companies, which constitutes a large financial cost to these institutions, and a delay in the completion of projects and an increase in levels of tension in Israeli society.

Hapoalim Bank expects that the cost of the war between Israel and Hamas will reach billions of dollars, as these costs could currently represent about 1.5 per cent of Israel's GDP and will increase the country's deficit.

The experts also believe that the main impact will be felt in the private consumption figures, and the tourism and knowledge sectors, creating other complications and making peace in the Middle East more distant and impossible.

WESTERN COUNTRIES DID NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT MORALITY IN THIS WAR, SINCE THEY USE DOUBLE STANDARDS, BUT THE FINAL RESULT WILL BE IN FAVOUR OF THE PALESTINIANS BECAUSE THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LAND, THEIR HONOUR, AND THEIR PRINCIPLES.

On other levels, since the beginning of this year, the Israeli currency has witnessed a decline in its value as a result of protests against the government's plan to reform the judiciary, while the current crisis increases the loss of this currency by about 3.1 per cent of its value.

The current crisis represents a major indicator of the decline in Israel's economic growth during the current year and the coming years and will create great difficulties.

'Al-Aqsa Flood' led the Israeli Central Bank to sell about \$30 billion in foreign currencies to support the shekel and prevent its collapse. Some experts believe that the foreign investments will flee, especially in well-known sectors if the war drags on, especially if its scope expands to include other countries.

'Al-Aqsa Flood' has led to

negative effects on local stock and bond markets, with many indicators declining. A number of international airlines have also stopped coming to Tel Aviv, which has direct effects on the tourism sector.

Finally, officials at the International Monetary Fund believe that the current war of Israel over Gaza will darken the already cloudy global economic prospects, and this war will have impacts on the economic and geopolitical conditions of Middle Eastern countries and others, especially on the oil, financial and trade, transportation, and other sectors.

Western countries did not take into account morality in this war, since they use double standards, but the final result will be in favour of the Palestinians because they are fighting for their land, their honour, and their principles.

The five main drivers of global economic uncertainty

Businesses, governments, and investors were already navigating a foggy global landscape before the tragic events unfolding in the Middle East.

But the horrible conflict between Hamas and Israel, which has already led to enormous suffering and claimed the lives of thousands of civilians, including so many children, has introduced a new layer of uncertainty for the global economy, the subject of this commentary.

Even in the highly unlikely event that the geopolitical situation improves rapidly in the region and beyond, a deep sense of uncertainty will remain, driven by five economic and financial factors.

First, the global economy's major growth engines are currently under strain. With Europe teetering on the brink of recession and China stalling, the US economy has emerged as the main driver of global growth.

This became particularly evident in the third quarter of 2023, with the United States' growth estimates impressing once again.

But even America's growth outlook is uncertain. Over the past 15 months, the consensus of analysts about the US economy's direction has oscillated wildly between four scenarios: soft landing, hard landing, crash landing, and no landing.

Although the prevailing view now is that the US is headed for a soft landing, forecasts may well shift toward a hard one over the coming weeks.

When the growth narrative of the world's largest economy, with its mature institutions and diversified productive base, can change so easily, it is no wonder that uncertainty in the rest of the world is even more pronounced.

Instead of resembling a normal bell-shaped distribution of potential outcomes with a single peak and slender tails, the global outlook looks like a multimodal distribution with fat tails on either end, suggesting a higher likelihood of extreme events.

On the positive side, as



MOHAMED A. EL-ERIAN

The writer, President of Queens' College at the University of Cambridge, is a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of *The Only Game in Town: Central Banks, Instability, and Avoiding the Next Collapse* (Random House, 2016).

THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS JUST ONE OF SEVERAL ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS DARKENING THE OUTLOOK FOR GLOBAL GROWTH. BUT WHILE THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE SEEMS BLEAK AND COULD GET BLEAKER, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO TURN TODAY'S VICIOUS CYCLES INTO VIRTUOUS ONES.



A man works on the trading floor at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. – Reuters

Gordon Brown, Michael Spence, Reid Lidow, and I argue in our new book *Permacrisis*, advances in generative artificial intelligence, life sciences, and clean energy have the potential to enhance productivity and boost potential GDP growth significantly.

On the other end of the distribution, there is the risk that a set of vicious cycles will aggravate cascading effects.

Second, the journey toward this uncertain future is fraught with peril.

The most immediate risk is the recent spike in global borrowing costs as markets adapt to the likelihood that the US Federal Reserve and other major central banks, having hiked interest rates aggressively – albeit belatedly – to counter inflation trends they initially misdiagnosed – will maintain elevated rates for an extended period.

Third, the persistence of this interest-rate outlook increases the risk of recessions and financial-market turbulence. We saw early signs of this in March when balance-sheet mismanagement and slippages in bank supervision led to the

failure of some regional US banks.

Fourth, the global economy and key financial markets like the one for benchmark US government bonds now lack key top-down anchors such as growth momentum, confidence in policymaking signals, and stabilising financial flows.

As economic-policy tools become more subordinate to political and geopolitical considerations, the already weak outlook for global growth may well deteriorate. Monetary policy faces a credibility threat and genuine structural uncertainties about the equilibrium level of interest rates and the delayed effects of a remarkably concentrated rate-hiking cycle.

Moreover, shrinking central-bank balance sheets and the absence of an effective policy framework compound the challenge of determining the right inflation targets in a world economy characterised by an insufficiently flexible supply side.

Amid growing deficits and rising interest payments, there is also the question of who will absorb the significant surge in government debt issuance. For more than a decade, the

Fed has been the most reliable buyer of US government bonds, owing to its seemingly limitless money-printing capabilities and minimal price sensitivity.

But, having been forced by inflation and other excesses to shift from quantitative easing to quantitative tightening, the Fed is now a reliable net seller. International buyers also appear more cautious, partly owing to geopolitical tensions.

Moreover, many domestic institutional investors, such as pension funds and insurance companies, have already accumulated significant bond holdings, incurring substantial mark-to-market losses.

Without these economic, policy, and technical anchors, the global economy and capital markets resemble boats in a rough and unpredictable sea. That brings us to the fifth driver of global uncertainty: the inadequate response to long-term crises like climate change and widening economic inequality.

The longer we wait to tackle these problems, the greater the eventual costs will be. Our insufficient actions today ensure that we will face more

complicated economic and political obstacles down the line.

As we write in *Permacrisis*, today's world has been shaped by three ongoing failures: the repeated inability to achieve consistent and inclusive growth that also respects our planet; recurrent domestic-policy errors; and the constant lack of effective global policy coordination at a time when shared challenges demand collective action.

Together, these failures have had profound economic, financial, institutional, sociopolitical, and geopolitical ramifications.

That is the bad news. The good news is that we have the capacity to solve these problems and turn today's vicious cycles into virtuous ones. But to implement the major shifts required to achieve this goal, we need visionary political leadership at the national level and increased global awareness of our shared challenges.

Absent such leadership, we risk leaving our children and grandchildren a world plagued by economic and financial instability, domestic political unrest, and geopolitical turmoil.

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UAE
UAE's streets come alive with theatrical brilliance at Al din International Theatre Festival.



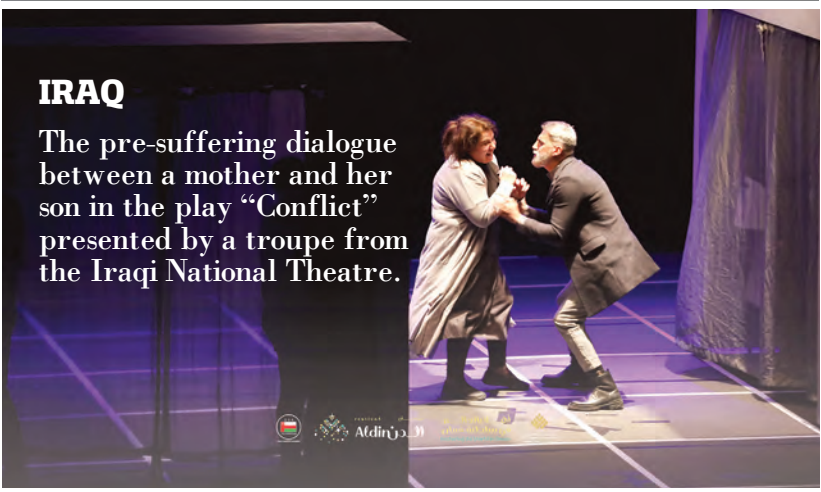
SPAIN
A snapshot from the Spanish show "Federico Entre los Dientes" presented by Higher School Dramatic Art.



OMAN
A team on the "Pink of Collapse" receives a commemorative shield from the festival after their street performance.



JORDAN
Jordan participates in a theatrical performance for children entitled "Golden Wishes," in which they teach children about the importance of contentment.



IRAQ
The pre-suffering dialogue between a mother and her son in the play "Conflict" presented by a troupe from the Iraqi National Theatre.

art & life

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Al Din Festival's daring car drift performances

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
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Thrill-seekers and culture enthusiasts will have plenty of opportunity to enjoy this year's edition of the Al Din Festival and with a collaborative partnership with Oman Automobile Association, they promise an adrenaline-packed ride on top of other exceptional experiences.

This year's festival theme is 'Gathering the World in Oman' with the main intent of bridging theatres from across the Arab world.

But beyond art, the Al Din organisers wanted to send the message that they also promote vibrant cultural tapestry, thus the inclusion of drifting performances which will electrify the celebration even more with a display of speed, skill and global unity.

Taha Ali al Mosawi from the Republic of Iraq shared his experience while watching a drifting show, expressing his amazement at the spectacle. He described it as incredibly impressive despite his fear of speed, which prevented him from participating in the event.

"Actually, what we saw was something very nice. I've seen performances like this before but only



ADIL AL DARWISH

on television and YouTube channels, and this was the first time I had seen drifting up close," he shared.

Taha added that he particularly admired the skill of the Omani young men who drove with such daring and talent, wishing he could join them if not for his phobia.

Adil al Darwish, hailing from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, served as a volunteer organiser in the previous three editions of the event.

In this current edition, he eagerly embraced the chance to be part of the international festival as a participant.



"As I sat in the car and the experiment began, I felt a mix of nervousness and excitement. I was astounded by the driver's confidence as they executed these slightly nerve-wracking manoeuvres. This was my first time, and I was thoroughly captivated. I hope for more experiences like this in the future. I am grateful to the organisers for granting us the opportunity to participate in this experiment," he said.

The festival's chairman, Mohammed al Nabhani, expressed, "The drifting sports event was intended to blend theatrical and sporting elements, thanks to the collaboration between Al Din Theater Troupe

and the Omani Automobile Association. It aimed to bridge the gap between theater and athletics, which has been partially achieved. With more time and space in our schedual, we could have further enhanced this integration and repeated it throughout the festival days."

The festival management pledges to transform this event into a magnificent artistic spectacle and a grand communal celebration. Designed to showcase the rich cultural, artistic, and sporting heritage of Oman, the festival serves as a unique platform to introduce our nation and its diverse cultural facets, as well as our vibrant youth activities.



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'Too hot outside': Saudis take to walking, jogging in malls

THE SHOPS HAVE not yet opened, but the air-conditioned concourse of a Riyadh shopping mall is crowded anyway — a haven for walkers and joggers grateful for somewhere cool to exercise.

The early-morning crowd includes 55-year-old engineer Mohammed Sultan, in a white T-shirt and black trainers, doing laps around the mall trailed by his niqab-wearing wife.

"It's too hot outside to exercise. The weather here is cold and does not cause thirst," Sultan says, noting that even in October, the end of the hot period in Saudi Arabia, daytime temperatures can still approach 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). "Walking in gyms (on a treadmill) is very boring," he adds with a laugh.

It is a scene replicated daily in malls across the Saudi capital, highlighting how a growing interest in physical fitness in the Gulf kingdom has collided with a dearth of suitable spaces for working out.

Long popular in the United States, another car-centric country with an obesity problem, mall-walking is increasingly becoming a Saudi sport.

Roughly one in five Saudi adults is obese, according to an in-depth study published by the World Bank last year that described the issue as "alarming".

To help bring that percentage down, the Saudi Sports for All Federation now organises races such as the Riyadh Marathon, which this year drew thousands of runners onto the capital's

streets.

But such events are fairly irregular, and new gyms sprouting up in Riyadh often charge steep fees — a turn-off for Saudis who spurn fancy machines and simply need space to stretch their legs.

Officials have begun work on a 135-kilometre (85-mile) Sports Boulevard in the capital featuring foot, cycle and horse-riding paths.

THE ONLY OPTION

However that project — billed by organisers as "a green spine through the city" with "cooling water features" and shaded football pitches — is still years from completion.

That makes malls "the only option" for many people — at least



for now, says Australian expat Zuzana Kalous, who formed a women's walking group in Riyadh in 2020 that meets four times per week in different shopping centres.

"The mall is safe for women, air-conditioned and controlled. No pollution, no dust, no traffic," she says as more than 20 members of her group jog past storefronts one recent morning.

The contained environment also guarantees people can exercise even in less-than-ideal weather, like spring sandstorms or winter rains, says Saudi nutritionist Laila al-Rifai, a member of Kalous's group.

"Commercial centres are the ideal solution to continue walking at any time of the day, at any time of year," she says.

Hassan Merhi, a Lebanese fitness trainer based in Riyadh, encourages his clients to walk outdoors as much as possible, noting that most studies show it offers a better workout than staying inside.

"It helps burn fat faster and reduces stress," he says.

But Batoul Zind al-Hadid, a 41-year-old from Syria, says a mall walk is "excellent for those who are still feeling out their first steps".

Not only does it tend to be more social, with groups gathered together in the same space, it also allows her to stay on top of the latest fashion trends by studying the display windows.

It is, she says, "a more comprehensive and entertaining experience". —AFP

THEATRE

Children's stories shine at Al Din Theatre Festival 2023

BY BALQEES AL HABSI

IN A CAPTIVATING SEGMENT of the Al Din International Theatre Festival 2023, renowned children's storyteller Ahmed al Rashdi took the stage, weaving enchanting tales for young audiences under the theme 'We See You Everywhere: Palestine.'

Al Rashdi presented two evocative stories titled 'Between the Broken Olive Branch' and 'The Stories of Proud Palestine.'

These tales were crafted to impart essential moral values, introduce children to the rich cultures and heritages of Palestine and Oman, and foster a sense of cultural identity, all in support of the Palestinian cause.

Al Rashdi used folk stories to make these lessons easily accessible and enjoyable for the young listeners, a timely message given the current events in Palestine and the challenges it faces due to ongoing conflicts.

Reflecting on his participation, Al Rashdi expressed the profound impact of the Al Din International Theatre Festival on his career.

He described it as a unique and invaluable experience with a global reach, further enhancing his literary and professional journey.

He also highlighted the opportunity to engage with distinguished figures in the artistic and theatrical realms, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and skills.

The Al Din International Theatre Festival stands as a pivotal event in the Omani artistic landscape, bringing together theatre artists from diverse nations to share their experiences, expertise, and cultural awareness.

The festival, running from October 22 to 31, is hosted at the Omani Automobile Association, serving as a significant platform for artistic exchange and cultural enrichment.

It's important to note that the Al Din Theatre Group, established in



1994, remains a breeding ground for the most prominent talents in Omani theatre, continuing to illuminate the stage with their creative brilliance.

TECHNOLOGY

Elon Musk teases audio and video calls at X

X IS TINKERING with video and audio calling at the platform formerly known as Twitter, according to a post on Wednesday by owner Elon Musk.

"Early version of video and audio calling on X," Musk wrote in a post that contained a screen capture showing how to turn the feature on in the platform's settings.

The screen capture showed options of enabling voice and audio calls to those in a user's address book, all verified users, and to people they "follow" at the service.

However, multiple users responded to Musk's post saying they did not see the feature in their app, which was also not visible in a version tested by AFP.

The tycoon announced in August that voice and video calls were in the works at X in what was seen as a step towards turning the former Twitter into an "everything app."

The calling features would work on iOS, Android, Mac and PC systems, and no phone number would be needed, he said at the time.



"X is the effective global address book," the billionaire added.

Musk in July rebranded Twitter as X, saying it would become an "everything app" inspired by China's WeChat that would allow users to socialise as well as handle their finances.

Since Musk bought Twitter last October, the platform's advertising business has collapsed as marketers soured on his management style and mass firings that gutted content moderation.

In response, the tycoon has moved towards building a subscriber base and pay model in a search for new revenue.

Audio and video calls are expected to be among features offered to X subscribers.

Many users and advertisers alike have responded adversely to the site's new charges for previously free services, as well as its changes to content moderation and the return of previously banned far-right accounts.

Musk also killed off the Twitter logo, replacing its globally recognised blue bird with a white X.

On Tuesday, multiple users responded to Musk's post saying they did not see the feature in their app, which was also not visible in a version tested by AFP. —AFP



SCIENCES

Brazil scientists developing new ‘vaccine’ for cocaine addiction



SCIENTISTS IN BRAZIL, the world's second-biggest consumer of cocaine, have announced the development of an innovative new treatment for addiction to the drug and its powerful derivative crack: a vaccine.

Dubbed “Calixcoca,” the test vaccine, which has shown promising results in trials on animals, triggers an immune response that blocks cocaine and crack from reaching the brain, which researchers hope will help users break the cycle of addiction.

Put simply, addicts would no longer get high from the drug.

If the treatment gets regulatory approval, it would be the first time cocaine addiction is treated using a vaccine, said psychiatrist Frederico Garcia, coordinator of the team that developed the treatment at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

The project won top prize last week — 500,000

euros (\$530,000) — at the Euro Health Innovation awards for Latin American medicine, sponsored by pharmaceutical firm Eurofarma.

The vaccine works by triggering patients’ immune systems to produce antibodies that bind to cocaine molecules in the bloodstream, making them too large to pass into the brain’s mesolimbic system, or “reward centre,” where the drug normally stimulates high levels of pleasure-inducing dopamine.

Similar studies have been carried out in the United States — the world’s top cocaine consumer, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. But they stalled when clinical trials did not demonstrate sufficient results, among other reasons, Garcia says.

Calixcoca has so far proven effective in testing on animals, producing significant levels of antibodies against cocaine and

few side effects.

It also protected rat foetuses against cocaine, researchers found, suggesting it could be used in humans to protect the unborn babies of pregnant addicts.

The vaccine is now set to enter the final stage of trials: testing on humans.

NO ‘PANACEA’

Garcia says Calixcoca could reshape addiction treatment.

“There’s no specific registered treatment for cocaine and crack addiction. We currently use a combination of psychological counselling, social assistance and rehabilitation, when necessary,” he says.

Calixcoca could add an important tool to that regimen, helping patients at critical stages of recovery, such as when they leave rehab, he says.

The vaccine is made with chemical compounds designed in the lab, rather than biological ingredients, meaning it would be

less expensive to produce than many vaccines and would not have to be stored at cold temperatures.

But it won’t be a “panacea” that can be administered to anyone, Garcia says.

The exact target group will depend on the outcome of clinical trials, but is theoretically meant to be recovering addicts “who are off (cocaine) and want to stay that way,” he says.

The goal is to change what Garcia calls a “sad statistic”: according to the US National Institute on Drug Abuse, one in four regular cocaine users becomes addicted.

And just one in four addicts manages to quit after five years of treatment.

Given the stakes, anticipation around the vaccine is high. More than 3,000 people have contacted Garcia’s team to volunteer to take part in the clinical trials. — **AFP**

Seoul creates memorial at site of deadly 2022 crowd crush



THE NARROW ALLEYWAY in South Korea’s capital where nearly 160 people were crushed to death during Halloween festivities a year ago was designated a “Memorial Alley” on Thursday, victims’ relatives said.

Tens of thousands of people — mostly in their 20s and 30s — had been out to enjoy the country’s first post-pandemic holiday celebrations but the night turned deadly in Seoul’s Itaewon district with no effective crowd control and bungled official responses to calls for help.

On Thursday, the site of the crush, now decorated with hundreds of paper notes filled with messages of grief and tribute for the victims, was designated the “October 29 Memorial Alley”.

“This is a place to remember the people who became stars in the sky in an alleyway in the middle of Seoul while enjoying their daily lives on the night of October 29, 2022,” said Lee Jung-min, a representative of bereaved families, at a ceremony unveiling a memorial street marker.

“It is also a place to pledge safety so that something like this does not happen again in the future,” he added.

One of the Post-it notes at the site read: “It’s been a year but I still sometimes think of you. I hope you can enjoy your youth in heaven, even though you could not enjoy it here.”

Lee, who lost his then 28-year-old daughter to the crowd crush, said families of the victims were still looking for answers since the disaster.

Lee and around 100 other bereaved relatives and activists are pushing for the passage of a law mandating an independent counsel investigation into what went wrong and who was responsible for the deadly crush.

Despite a formal investigation and ongoing prosecutions of local officials, no one has yet been legally convicted.

“Only by raising awareness through a clear investigation of the truth and pun-



ishment of those truly responsible will everyone be able to live their daily lives safely,” Lee said.

George from Seattle, who was visiting Seoul with his wife, said he had read about the deadly crush a year ago as he watched family members weep after Thursday’s event. He declined to give his full name.

“The designation of the alley is a wonderful gesture to remember the victims,” he said, adding, “When your children are dead you’re no longer alive.”



Local authorities this year banned Halloween parties in some popular party districts, but not Itaewon, with many shops and bars opting not to run promotions or decorate for the holiday. — **AFP**